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Engaging school leaders, empowering voices, & exposing strengths : lived experiences of the discipline gap and school-to-prison pipeline.

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ENGAGING SCHOOL LEADERS, EMPOWERING VOICES, & EXPOSING
STRENGTHS: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE DISCIPLINE GAP AND SCHOOL-
TO-PRISON PIPELINE

By

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A Capstone Project Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Human Development of the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation, & Organizational Development
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

August 2016

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A Capstone Project Approved on

June 29, 2016

by the following Capstone Project Committee

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William Kyle Ingle, PhD

Cherie Dawson-Edwards, PhD

Judi Vanderhaar, PhD

DEDICATION

This capstone is dedicated to my Higher Power, to whom I am so very thankful of the constant reminder that I am exactly where I am meant to be, when I am meant to be there. Nothing has been possible without Your presence in my life.

I dedicate this work to Lucas, my husband, who has kept me going during this process. You made me laugh when I wanted to cry, cared for me and our little family when I was too busy to do so, and most of all encouraged me to persevere when I wanted to quit. I am so grateful to be loved and supported by you. This work as much yours as it is mine.

I dedicate this work to my children, Madigan, Ione, Ellery, and my yet-to-be-born “graduation” baby. I am so thankful to be your Mama. Your unconditional love and understanding have propelled me forward. You are my heart. I do these things and ask these questions to make the world a better and more just place for you and your peers. I dedicate this work to my biological mother, Carol, and my foster mother, Shirley. One of you loved me enough to know when to let me go, and the other loved me enough to choose me. You believed in me before I believed in myself, and in different ways cemented in me why social justice work is so important. I would not be who I am, where I am today without your choices, love, and support. Finally, I dedicate this work to current and future school leaders. Your work is arduous and so very important to the lives of marginalized children and families. Aspire to not settle for what *is*, but always strive for what *ought* to be for all students.

Marcia Carmichael-Murphy

First, and most important, I want to give glory and honor to the Most High God, for this capstone is truly a testament of His unmerited favor. I am forever reminded, “He which have started a good work in you; will perform it to the day of Jesus Christ.” This journey took much prayer and perseverance; but I fought a good fight, I kept the faith, and with this, I finished the course. I dedicate this work to the center of my universe, my son, Michael Gene Mathies, III. Thank-You for your patience when I couldn’t be home because “mama gotta’ go to class.” I truly appreciate your support, none of this would have been possible without you. I love you Michael and I hope my sacrifices become an example of what happens when you refuse to give up.

I also dedicate this capstone to my mother and father, Rhonda Washington Mathies and Michael Gene Mathies, Sr. Thank-you for ALWAYS believing in me and pushing me even when I became uncomfortable. I am a “daddy’s girl”, yet I cannot escape being “my mothers’ daughter”- and for that, I am forever grateful. To my lil’ sister, Mikal, thank-

you for always reminding me to put God first and being an amazing auntie. Thank-you for keeping me sane.

Lastly, this capstone is dedicated to all the women who played a role in making me the woman I am today. It is the strength of the women in my life that kept me pushing till the end-my mother, sister, grandmother, aunts, female cousins and friends fueled my spirit during this journey. Your love, support, friendship, and commitment have been felt continuously throughout the years. Because of who you are to me, I enthusiastically pay it forward to the women of color who come behind me. Together, we will unapologetically challenge stereotypes that push girls to the margins of a master narrative. We will walk confidently in our Womanhood as we own our God given purpose to create a world where ALL girls can thrive as their true authentic self.

LaRhondolyn Mathies

I dedicate this capstone to the three young women who opened their lives and stories to me and whose courage, determination, and bright spirits inspire me to continue to advocate for social justice and equity.

Erica Young

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am forever grateful to Dr. Bradley W. Carpenter for his encouragement, guidance, probing questions, and mentorship throughout this doctoral process. I understand what it is to be transformative social justice leader because of your influence. Dr. Tiffanie Lewis-Durham, many thanks for showing me a living, breathing example of how to challenge the status quo through analysis and critical discourse. I am sowing the seeds you planted. Dr. Kyle Ingle, thank you for demanding excellence and precision in writing, for providing honest feedback, being dependable, and supportive during this process. Dr. Judi Vanderhaar, thank you for encouraging me to push the envelope of social justice as researcher and practitioner to improve the lives of students. Dr. Cherie Dawson-Edwards, your support and guidance throughout the IRB process was integral to executing this research. Thank you for pushing me to look at this research with a broader community lens. Dr. Glenn Baete, the ultimate teacher, thank you for setting the stage for me to grow into a great teacher and a life-long learner. So many years ago, you provided me learning opportunities that set the stage for my educational trajectory and I am tremendously grateful. Dr. Debbie Powers, I am grateful to you for exposing me to a side of education that fed my soul, and continuous to do so. Dr. Rebecca Nicolas, thank you for teasing out some of my best work in the classroom, asking hard questions, and reminding me daily that the business of school and learning is a mediating balance between situation and perspective. To my cohort-mates, Erica and LaRhonda, our fates were bound together when Providence placed us in that first class three years ago. Thank you for your critical conversations, feedback, laughter, tears, and most importantly friendship. I look forward to what our future holds!

Marcia Carmichael-Murphy

Philippians 4:13 reminds me that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” I praise God for bringing me to this point in my life and academic career. The journey has had its ups and downs, but through it all I have become a stronger person and professional. I thank Dr. Bradley W. Carpenter, for agreeing to serve as the chair for my capstone. Your continued support throughout my entire doctoral program is greatly appreciated. Thank you for “talking me off the ledge” and being an unwavering support system throughout this journey.

I am grateful to Dr. Cherie Dawson-Edwards for your help and suggestions, especially my methodology. I also express gratitude to Dr. Judith Vanderhaar for always offering words of encouragement and reminding me about the “importance of this work.” I am especially grateful to Dr. Kyle Ingle for your patience and giving up your time at the last minute. Thank-you Dr. Gaetene Jean-Marie for your leadership and offering nothing but

thought provoking feedback and guidance. Thank-you Dr. Tiffanie Lewis-Durham for your mentorship and completely changing my doctoral pathway- I truly appreciate you.

I am especially grateful for the “sisterhood”, Dr. Marcia Carmichael-Murphy and Dr. Erica Young. Although we have only known each other for three years, the bonds we share are strong. I am forever indebted to both of you for choosing me to take this crazy ride with you. I could not have asked for better accountability partners. We had our moments but at the end of the day, we believed in each other and our relationship became strengthened. As this chapter in our lives comes to a close, I pray we continue to lift as we climb, ladies. I love you both! A very special thanks to all of my friends, family, and colleagues who have supported and encouraged me throughout this capstone journey- special falcon shout-out to Principal Stroud.

Last, but definitely not least, I would be remiss if I did not take time to thank all of my participants. Without you, this research could not have been completed. Thank-you to Jane 1, Jane 2 and Jane 3 for allowing me tell your stories. I will keep the promise to magnify your narratives to help other girls who are trying to navigate public school discipline.

LaRhondolyn Mathies

To the influential adults interviewed in this work – you are amazing role models and your love, patience, understanding, and guidance have influenced many.

To the families, community members, staff, teachers, and principals who I connect with each day – the energy, passion, and dedication you have for the growth and development of young people drives me to continue to do better.

To my doctoral sisterhood through this process, Marcia and LaRhonda, you challenged me, inspired me, drank lots of coffee with me, reminded me what matters, and stuck with me to the end. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to learn, write, and live side by side.

To my Block '16 EdD cohort – I am thankful for your camaraderie and commiseration through the last three challenging years. Knowing you were all right there with me balancing work, family, and doctoral work kept me going when I thought I could not go anymore.

To my family – my mom, sister and late father whose academic pursuits set the bar high for me to research and write striving to leave the world better than I found it. Thank you for your love, encouragement and inspiration, and for teaching me compassion, empathy, perseverance, and the value of learning.

To my husband, Will – you have stood by me every step of the way, postponing your own ambitions and taking on extra responsibilities so I could pursue my goals. You give me the strength to be myself and you make me feel valued and loved every day.

To my children, Everett and [baby] – for your hugs and smiles, snuggles and cooperation sitting through doctoral classes in utero and through your early years of life. You give my life meaning, balance, and joy in ways no one else can.

And to my committee –

Bradley Carpenter – for continually pushing me to take risks and be open to new opportunities, for listening to me vent and sharing career advice, for teaching me the power of qualitative methods and voice, for keeping me entertained with texts, new apps and emoticons, and for sacrificing time with your loved ones and on your own pursuits to support me and our capstone team. You are an incredible mentor, advisor, and friend.

Judi Vanderhaar – for your guidance in navigating a complicated district and process, for leading the way with your own research that challenges and critically examines controversial issues, and for asking the questions that matter and will truly make a difference in children’s lives.

Cherie Dawson-Edwards – for blazing the path for the way we should treat young people in our communities when they have made mistakes and for sharing your expertise and guidance in this journey.

Kyle Ingle – for caring about the best interest of students, for providing critical feedback along the way, and for your excellent eye for details.

Erica Young

ABSTRACT

ENGAGING SCHOOL LEADERS, EMPOWERING VOICES, & EXPOSING STRENGTHS: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE DISCIPLINE GAP AND SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

Marcia F. Carmichael-Murphy, LaRhondolyn M. Mathies, & Erica E. Young

August 1, 2016

This capstone project includes three distinct studies that explore issues of race, discipline and education. Existing literature underscores the over disciplining of students of Color. Research indicates programs like Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are successful in decreasing disproportionate discipline for minority students in urban schools. No studies have addressed urban school leaders make sense of PBIS within the racialized context of their schools. The purpose of the first study is to explore ways principals make sense of PBIS policy in the racial context of their schools. This study also explores the role of racialized discourses in principal Sensemaking of the racialized context. A collective multiple case study was conducted applying Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Sensemaking Theory (ST) as a way to understand principals' cognition and action regarding disproportionate discipline in their schools. Data was collected through interviews, district data analysis, and document analysis. Results were interpreted using CRT and ST tenets. Findings indicated that two types of Sensemaking of policy and racialized discourses were exhibited by participants. Five priority areas were identified as implications for research, policy, and practice.

The following two studies address race, discipline, and education in regards to the experiences of black girls. The plight of black boys (e.g. high suspensions and drop-outs) has galvanized philanthropic efforts where private and public funding resources have prioritized black males without consideration for the black girls. The second study will add to the limited research on the experiences and perceptions of urban middle school black girls in the school-to-prison pipeline literature. The purpose of this study is to explore perceptions of urban, public school discipline by middle school black girls who are suspended from school. Greater insight into black girls' perspectives of discipline experiences could prepare better designed learning environments and educational experiences that will help decrease the disproportionate discipline gap. Inquiry into adolescent black girl's perceptions of discipline centers a student voice in why and how students are pushed from, or jump out of, urban public schools.

The final study fills a gap in the literature examining disproportionate discipline in regards to Black girls focusing on the strengths of this population to challenge negative conceptions. The purpose of this study is to discover the strengths of Black girls who have been persistently disciplined in high school. This study was framed as an embedded case study applying the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process in interviews and observations to gain insights into what inspires persistently disciplined Black girls to continue in education. The results incorporate the first two stages of AI: discover and dream. The researcher *discovers* core strengths of three Black girls within the conceptual framework of Strengths in Communities of Color: trust, love, spirituality, and resistance. After analyzing the data, this framework was revised to include independence as an additional

strength. These strengths were considered in *dreaming* what is possible in research, policy, and practice.

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CAPSTONE INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Glaring racial inequities exist in urban communities. These racial inequities are mirrored in the culture and climate of urban schools. The experiences of youth of Color in schools differ from those of their white peers. Minority students experience higher rates of exclusionary discipline and are more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system. Discipline disproportionalities experienced by students of Color impact their life trajectories. The majority of literature in this area has focused on Black males with only recent attention being given to the extreme disproportionality in discipline for Black girls. There is a critical need for research that addresses the discipline experiences of marginalized student populations in the school-to-prison pipeline literature, in particular from the perspectives of school leaders and the youth themselves.

Educators' engagement in the development of culturally conceptualized discipline and racialized discourses in schools is required to turn the tide of disproportionalities experienced by students of Color. It is imperative that educators and policy makers learn how persistently disciplined Black girls' perceptions of school discipline can impact their educational outcomes. Educators and community leaders must understand that marginalized students' experiences are different and not deficits. These youths hold untapped resources and strengths unique to communities of Color. To that end, there is a

critical need for the combined work of this capstone to inform research, policy, and practice in our schools.

Purpose of the Studies

The purpose of this capstone is to explore issues of race and education in relation to school discipline. We gained insights in these areas through a series of three independent but related studies that incorporate the perspectives of educators, families, and youth. The first study seeks to fill a gap in the school leadership literature by exploring the ways principals in urban schools make sense of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in the context of race in their schools. The second study explores urban, public school discipline through the perceptions of middle school Black girls who are suspended from school. The final study discovers the strengths of Black girls who have been persistently disciplined in high school. In a unique way, each of these studies addresses racial inequities and institutional racism in schools. By addressing the discipline gap and the school to prison pipeline we seek to add to the corpus of research valuing experiences of marginalized voices. Our collective research goal is to inform policy and practice in efforts to elevate social justice leadership in education.

Situating the Capstone in the Socio-political Context

The national media has drawn attention to the use of unnecessary force by police and security staff in schools (e.g. Spring Valley High School). In addition, the #BlackLivesMatter Movement has raised awareness of the unfair treatment of Black people in the criminal justice system as seen in the recent and tragic events associated with Black males Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner. Researchers have

identified a clear relationship between involvement in the juvenile and criminal justice systems and previous experiences with exclusionary discipline in school (e.g. out-of-school suspension), the school-to-prison pipeline, which disproportionately affects Black youth.

These issues of inequity and their connections with school discipline approaches not only anger us as private citizens, but also gravely concern us as social justice educators. As educators, specifically in Persistently Low Achieving (PLA) and Alternative schools, we have witnessed first-hand the inequities present in our students' lives, their communities, and our schools. As practitioners, we work to support and empower our students towards success. We recognize there are inequities we can address in our roles and in our research by choosing to delve deeply into issues of disproportionality in discipline, race, and education, with the intention of engaging marginalized voices and perspectives. With recent shifts in educational policy and practice recognizing the importance of culturally responsive and positive behavior practices, we find this as a valuable opportunity to raise our concerns about implementation of these practices in schools and the impacts specifically on students of Color.

Within the context of Metro City School District¹ (MCSD), the school district in which we conducted our research, our studies are especially pertinent at this moment in time. MCSD has demonstrated an awareness of disproportionality in discipline and an investment in addressing related issues. Our studies align with the current district vision, which includes the term “equity” in its core language. The MCSD vision highlights the

¹ A pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the school district.

importance of equitable access to learning for all students through an increase in participation in advanced programs and related interventions, in particular for minority students. This is not possible without attending to discipline practices that disproportionately affect and exclude this same group of students. The MCSD vision also focuses on building educators' capacity through developing a growth mindset and improving school culture and climate.

MCSD has made important efforts to continually revise the Code of Conduct and promote district initiatives related to culture and climate with the aforementioned areas in mind. These efforts include the prioritization of and investment in proactive school discipline approaches such as PBIS and Restorative Practices (RP).

We believe our research informs these policies and practices and can support the district in addressing public and professional criticism and misunderstanding of these initiatives. At the same time, our research seeks to value, elevate, and empower the marginalized voices of our students so they are provided with an education that allows them to reach their full potential as learners and citizens. To us, addressing these issues with student success in mind is educational social justice.

Methodology

Study One: Stumbling in the Dark: Principal Sensemaking of PBIS Policy and Practice in Racially Diverse Schools

In the first study, the researcher applied Sensemaking Theory (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) to understand how principals in diverse urban schools make sense of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in the context of racial disproportionality. The researcher also set out to understand what role racialized

discourses play in the development and implementation of PBIS. This study merges Weick et al.'s (2005) components of Sensemaking Theory with the tenets of Critical Race Theory. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) identified these tenets as a way to investigate the policy implementation practices and racialized discourses of school leaders. This collective multiple case study (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009) focuses on the PBIS policy implementation experiences of four principals in a medium-sized school district in the southeastern United States. A two-tiered analysis was conducted of cases - within-case and cross-case analyses (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Yin, 2009). Potential participants were identified from schools participating in the district's PBIS implementation initiative. There were four principal participants. Each principal participated in two semi-structured interviews that lasted one hour. Other data sources included Comprehensive School Improvement Planning documents, district discipline and achievement data sets, and documents provided by principals. The researcher conducted two levels of coding of interviews and documents, as well as repeated analysis for triangulation of data.

Study Two: The New Jane Crow: Case Studies of Black Girls' Perceptions of Urban Middle School Disciplinary Interactions

In the second study, the researcher applied the theories of Third Space (Venzant Chambers & McCready, 2011), Symbolic Interactionism (Blumler, 1969), and Labeling (Bernberg, 2009) to highlight the voices of middle school black girls who demonstrate a trajectory towards the school-to-prison pipeline. The combination of these frameworks provides a more comprehensive understanding of how public school settings foster social spaces with inequitable discipline interactions. To fully understand perceptions of the

discipline process, three middle school girls suspended from school were considered. This collective case study (Stake, 2005) examined perceptions of discipline interactions for three adolescent black girls who attend alternative school in MCSD. Participants were identified through purposeful sampling and three semi-structured interviews were audio recorded with each student. The researcher also collected journal entries and drawings from the students reflecting on self, peer and teacher interactions, and their experiences with the discipline process. The stories of middle school black girls magnify the sense of urgency needed in revamping policies and practices concerning school discipline. They provide the first hand perspective of how school suspension and placement in an alternative school affects students' personal identity, their expectations of education, and future aspirations.

Study Three: Fighting to Be Seen: (Re)Visioning the Power of Persistently Disciplined Black Girls

In the final study, the researcher applied Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider et al., 2005) to integrate a strengths-based approach to engaging with persistently disciplined Black girls within a new framework adapted by the researcher called Strengths in Communities of Color. This framework applies Hinton's (2015) critiques of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) to focus on trust, love, spirituality and resistance. This framework highlights community well-being rather than the capitalist concept of wealth. The embedded case study (Yin, 2014) focused on three Black girls who currently attend the same MCSD high school and have been suspended multiple times. Participants were identified and recruited through a review of student records searching for multiple out-of-school suspensions for students identified as Black females

in the school database. The researcher applied snowball sampling (Patton, 1990) to recruit influential adults in the girls' lives for additional perspectives. The researcher conducted two interviews and two direct observations with each girl and interviewed two influential adults for each of the youth participants. The researcher conducted multiple rounds of coding and triangulated findings with an analysis of student records and physical artifacts of student work.

Significance of the Studies

These studies address a gap in the literature related to race, discipline, and education. Within the existing research related to the discipline gap and school-to-prison pipeline, few studies explicitly examine the influence principal identity and racialized discourses have on discipline practices. A gap in the literature also exists regarding the perceptions and strengths of persistently disciplined Black girls. With the additional insight provided in these areas by the studies in this capstone, researchers, policymakers, and educators can be more attuned to the significance of race and racialized experiences, particularly as they relate to discipline and students of Color.

The first study addresses gaps in the literature in regards to racialized discourses between and among education leaders in relation to culturally responsive policy implementation. The second study addresses gaps in the literature in regards to students' own descriptions of the negative labels applied to them within disciplinary practices and how this shapes their educational experiences. The third study addresses gaps in the literature by focusing on the strengths and supports of students disproportionately affected by school discipline within a commonly deficit-minded field.

Addressing these gaps holds great significance for policy and practice. This research has direct implications for advancing more equitable practices in schools across multiple levels: district, school, and classroom. These changes have the potential to create opportunities for and improve the educational experiences of traditionally marginalized students.

Summary and Organization of Capstone

The purpose of this capstone is to provide researchers with an empirically rigorous vehicle to consider the importance of race as it relates to school discipline approaches, in particular for school leaders (racialized discourses) and Black girls (perceptions, strengths). Within the context of the achievement gap, the discipline gap, and the school-to-prison pipeline, this capstone provides important insights for effecting systemic change and creating a more equitable educational system. Each study is organized in the following manner. For each of the three studies, the researchers provide an overview of the purpose and significance of the study, a review of related literature, the methodological design, the results of the study, and a discussion of key findings and implications.

The first study explores the role identity and racialized experiences play in school leaders' implementation of discipline programs, namely Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. This study answers the following research questions:

1. How do principals in urban schools make sense of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) in the context of racial disproportionality in their schools?

2. What role might racialized discourses have in the development and implementation of PBIS?

The second study delves into the perceptions and experiences of persistently disciplined Black middle school girls related to their identity and interactions with educators within the discipline process. This study answers the following research questions:

1. How do middle school black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive themselves?
2. How do middle school black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive their behavior with peers and teachers?
3. How do middle school black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive school discipline and its possible future implications?

The third study focuses on reframing negative views of persistently disciplined Black high school girls by drawing out the strengths and supports they possess that inspire them to continue in education. This study answers the following research questions:

1. What strengths and supports do persistently disciplined Black girls draw on to continue in education?
2. What inspires persistently disciplined black adolescent girls to continue in education?

Finally, the Executive Summary synthesizes the results and implications of all three studies through the lens of race and approaches to school discipline. The Executive Summary focuses on the salience of race and approaches to school discipline within all of

the studies and the need to maintain race at the center of dialogue about equity, social justice and education.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION: STUDY ONE

Statement of the Problem

Urban schools have struggled since the 1960s to affirm the strengths and support the needs of students of Color. The onset of high-stakes accountability of the 1990s and the widened focus on test-scores highlighted an academic achievement gap between white students and Black and Hispanic students. Since then, discussion of the disparities between white students and those of Color has been a contentious issue. As educators and the media delved into the achievement gap, focus swung to an issue that in many schools is tied to student success and plaguing their students for decades: the disproportionate disciplining of youth of Color.

The disproportionate disciplining of Black, Latino, and Native American students has moved to the top of the agenda for many urban school districts and communities for a number of reasons. First, the disproportionate disciplining of students of Color is inextricably linked to decreased student achievement in urban schools (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). For many students of Color, being persistently disciplined is a key step in a pathway of disengagement that leads to dropping out of school, and for many eventually leads to entering the judicial system (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). Evidence indicates the more exclusionary discipline a student receives, the more instructional time lost, the lower the student achievement, the less likely the student is to graduate, the more likely the student is to be adjudicated (Muscott, Mann, & LeBrun, 2008; Skiba, et al., 2014). Students who do not graduate are more likely earn less income

than their peers (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997). This disproportionality in discipline between students of Color and their white peers is known as the discipline gap. If one of the goals of public education is to ensure students graduate prepared to be contributing citizens, schools should do whatever ever they can to support, affirm, and empower, not hinder traditionally marginalized students through exclusionary disciplinary practices. The disproportionate flaws of the school discipline gap are systemic and mirrored in the justice and correctional systems, adversely impacting the lives of people of Color and the health and well-being of their families and communities. This is the impetus to decrease disproportionate discipline, as schools and communities have a mutual desire to ensure that students remain in school and matriculate successfully creating positive outcomes for students, families, and communities.

A positive disciplinary culture and climate of a school has academic impacts for students. School leaders have many school behavior management programs to select from, but few offer research-based, positive, pro-active strategies that impact student behavior and achievement like Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is a behavior management and modification framework based in the field of applied behavior analytics. Research on school-wide positive behavior management programs, like PBIS, have shown to increase academic achievement and decrease disciplinary events (Horner, Sugai, Smolkowski, Eber, Nakasato, Todd, & Esperanza, 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2002). Schools that have utilized school-wide positive behaving management programs have seen reductions in exclusionary disciplinary events for students and increased overall attendance (Curtis, VanHorne, Robertson, & Karvonen, 2010; Sugai & Horner, 2006). Schools with high student attendance tend to have higher student

achievement (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Programs like PBIS offer positive frameworks for managing student discipline. When the majority of school leaders and teachers are white they often find themselves implementing discipline policies with students whom they share few common racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic experiences (Howard, 2007). White educators find themselves required to make conscious and unconscious choices about the educational and disciplinary trajectory of students of Color and are often ill-prepared for the tasks (Howard, 2007). This dissonance can leave school leaders grappling to make sense of, shape, communicate policy to staff, and support students with positive management and academic strategies. They are at times left stumbling in the dark trying to understand, communicate, and act in the best interests of their students. Exploring how these school administrators make sense of and make choices about discipline policy and the widespread PBIS initiative bolsters their ability to ensure educational equity for students of Color. At the same time, delving into how principals engage their staffs in racialized discourses practices serves the same purpose.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to fill a gap in the school leadership literature by exploring the ways principals in urban schools make sense of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) in the context of race in their schools. This study also seeks to explore what role racialized discourses might have in the development and implementation of PBIS. The practical goals of this study are to understand how principals make discipline equity policy decisions within their schools, what communicative and implementation leadership practices maximize or detract from the effectiveness of PBIS implementation, and how the positive capacities can be capitalized

upon by educators and policy makers to increase program fidelity and decrease the discipline gap in schools, and thus increase student achievement and graduation success of traditionally marginalized students. This study will address the following questions:

1. How do principals in urban schools make sense of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) in the context of racial disproportionality in their schools?
2. What role might racialized discourses have in the development and implementation of PBIS?

Data Sources and Analysis Methods

To answer this study's research questions this collective multiple case study (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009) is built upon the primary data sources of principal interviews regarding their personal experiences in the implementation of PBIS in addressing disproportionate discipline within their schools. Secondary data sources serve to help define the context of the principal participants and their schools. Secondary data sources from the participant district and schools included academic and non-cognitive data, longitudinal behavior trend data, Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (CSIP), and achievement test trend data to triangulate the level of implementation of PBIS. Document analysis was conducted on district and school documents regarding PBIS implementation, disproportionate discipline, or school and/or administrative efforts to address the discipline gap. Additionally, during analysis, care was taken to identify and code evidence of emergent themes, Sensemaking components, and both dialogues and silences about race.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be addressed in this study:

1. How do principals in urban schools make sense of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) in the context of racial disproportionality in their schools?
2. What role might racialized discourses have in the development and implementation of PBIS?

Definitions

Before delving into the issue of implementing PBIS and principal sensemaking, a series of terms must be defined for the reader. Academic, institutional, and personal definitions are included.

Person of Color

The term *person, people, or student(s) of Color* is used in this capstone to refer to any individual or group of people who identify either racially or ethnically as non-white, including those who are biracial or multiracial. The rationale for the use of this term is simple, yet layered. Historically, negative, subordinate connotations have been attached to the multitude of terms used for non-white people. Using the term, person of Color avoids the negative connotations. Second, discussing race and ethnicity is not a binary conversation of Black and white as it has been historically, but one reflecting diverse variations of race and ethnic identity of the populace of the United States. As a person of Color, I choose to use the term “of Color” in the same way that McKinnon (1982) uses “Black” because of its use as proper noun encompassing a common experience for those who are grouped under its umbrella of marginalization. Furthermore, I am inclined to

capitalize Color in the same way that Crenshaw (1991) chooses to capitalize “Black” as a term of inclusion, legitimation, and acknowledgement of marginalized experience. By choosing this verbiage focused on inclusion, this study adds legitimacy to members of this group who share the common experiences of being non-white and marginalized. Using the term *person, people, or student of Color* is a comprehensive way in which to refer to individuals with traditionally marginalized racial, cultural, ethnic experiences that are the antithesis to the white experience. In the same turn, I heed the suggestion of Crenshaw (1991) in choosing to not capitalize “white” because it is not a proper noun. The term “white” does not encompass the experience of those who identify as “white” in anyway except in its possession of the privilege of “whiteness” or does it share a marginalized experience unlike persons traditionally falling under the label of those of “Color”. To be clear, my use of this term does not negate or trivialize the construct of intersectionality, or the intersection of two components of an individual’s identity, but serves to recognize the similarities of non-white persons in the commonality of their marginalized experiences.

Discipline Gap

The discipline gap is defined in this study as the disparity in the use of school discipline measures on students of Color in comparison to their white peers. Recent literature describes the discipline gap as including student subgroups including persons of Color, economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and gender subgroups (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Michael, Morrison, & Belway, 2015). Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) identify it as the disparity in suspensions between students of Color and White students. Gregory et al. (2010) identify socioeconomic status, variances in district

and school policies and resource allocation, differences in student behavior, and variations of teacher behaviors as contributory factors to the racial discipline gap. For the purposes of this study, both definitions will be used.

Urban Schools

The participant schools in this study are all urban school. Jacob (2007) describes urban schools as usually located in large central cities, typically in disadvantaged, high-poverty communities both urban and suburban, possessing high rates of crime and joblessness, diverse both racially and linguistically, possessing high student mobility rates, a lack of social capital in student resides areas, under-resourced both structurally and in terms of teaching staff, possess high teacher turnover rates, and lower student achievement. Urban schools' student characteristics are described by Jacob (2007) as having greater populations of students of Color, Free and Reduced Priced meal recipients, students receiving special education services, and students identified as possessing limited English proficiency (LEP) than suburban schools, Academically, Urban schools have lower percentages of students achieving proficient or advanced ratings on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and about half of urban schools have a less than 90% graduation rate (Jacob, 2007). The participant district, Metro City School District (MCSD), fits these criteria.

Racialized Discourses

The term racialized discourses has been in use for the last fifteen years and was coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000). The most concise definition found rose from the field of linguistic anthropology in an article by Dick and Wirtz (2011) as “the actual language use (spoken and written) that sorts some people, things, places, and practices

into social categories marked as inherently dangerous and Other” (p. 2). Dick and Wirtz defined the symbolic and linguistic nature of racialized discourses. Ladson-Billings (2000) provides direction to academics to use antithetical discourses and epistemologies to challenge the prevailing world-view by participating in practical and theoretical conversations addressing issues of race in education and the world. According to Ladson-Billings, to further develop the body of research on racialized discourses, we can discern “well developed systems of knowledge...that stand in contrast to the dominant Euro-American epistemology” (p. 258). For the purposes of this study racialized discourses will be defined as practical and theoretical communication and conversations school stakeholders participate in regarding issues of racial and ethnic diversity, equity, and access. Racialized discourses are a facet of Critical Race Theory (CRT) that can help to address the conversations and the silences school administrators participate in about race in relation to disproportionate discipline of students of Color. Key findings of this study indicated several phenomena for the particular cases investigated. First, school leaders in urban schools made sense of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) with either full or limited contextual consideration for race or racial disproportionality in their schools. Additionally, principal participant’s identity and leadership impacted their sensemaking of PBIS and the context of racial factors in their schools. Finally, experiences with and understanding of Critical Race Theory and racialized discourses influenced their sensemaking and implementation of PBIS.

Organization of the Study

Chapter II of this study reviews the literature related to selected challenges of urban communities and their schools, racial differences between students and teachers,

the discipline gap, popular discipline programs and cultural responsiveness, and PBIS. Chapter III is a review of the collective multiple case study of the participants, discussion of the contexts of the participants' schools, data sources, and coding. I will outline in detail the rationale for selecting the case study methodology design, and as themes emerge, the research questions may develop sub-questions. Limitations of the study and controls will also be addressed. Chapter IV will be divided into individual participant and thematic findings. Chapter V will be a discussion the significance of the results for the participant district, schools, and principals and implications for practice and future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW: STUDY ONE

With the landmark desegregation ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, classrooms in the United States have become more multicultural and complex, mirroring the diversification of urban communities. Teachers and students of varied races and ethnicities have found themselves thrust together as a means to right the wrongs of a long, unequal, collective history many educators are still trying to understand. In the past 60 years, attempts have been made to address the technical challenges of desegregation and the equalization of both society and the education of minority students. In doing so, the documented achievement gap between students of Color and their white counterparts has decreased, but the discipline gap between those groups has historically persisted in its disproportionality since the 1970s (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Glackman, 1978; Gregory, 1995; Gregory et al., 2010; Kaeser, 1979; Lietz & Gregory, 1978; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986; Shaw & Braden, 1990; Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Taylor & Foster, 1986; Thornton & Trent, 1988; Wu, Pink, Crane, & Moles, 1982). Despite technical reforms, schools' and districts' efforts to address disproportionality have done little to impact the adaptive challenge of decreasing school personnel's use of exclusionary disciplinary practices and increasing the use of positive disciplinary practices with minority students (Skiba et al., 2014).

Most recently, concerns and conversations regarding racism, equality, equity, and bias made headlines as the result of the deaths of St. Louis teen Michael Brown, New York City man Eric Garner, Cleveland's young Tamir Rice, and Baltimore citizen Freddie Gray, all Black males who found themselves at odds with the police. Scenarios such as these play out in cities and towns across the United States. Data suggests

traditionally marginalized minorities are still experiencing blatant inequities and bias, and are disproportionately, and in some cases unjustly, disciplined and adjudicated the United States' educational and judicial systems (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The impetus for this discussion is an expectation placed on students of Color to reach academic proficiency without addressing the disproportionality in discipline in schools and the undercurrent of institutional and personal racism and bias. Without fostering systemic, systematic, authentic, and sustained policy reform in school discipline management we can only hope to deal with the inequities undergirding the American school system and wider society.

Post-*Brown* desegregation brought sweeping educational reform. Yet much of these changes focused on dealing with technical challenges that impact institutional policies, procedures, and the compliance efforts of schools in the way of funding equity and schooling adequacy for students of Color and those from impoverished communities over addressing issues of race (Baker & Green, 2005; *Rose v. Council for Better Education*, 1989; Ryan, 1999). Technical change has been heavily relied on as a remedy to support equality of schooling for minority children, such as the rearranging of funding, staffing, student placement. Technical change suffers as a prescription to address both subconscious institutional racism and the personal biases teachers and principals carry with them daily into schools and classrooms across the nation. Nor does technical change address cultural and behavioral disconnects students of Color experience as they navigate the culture of school. According to Heifetz and Linsky (2002), technical change is required to make short term and some long term reforms within an organization by changing the way the organization operates, but the most difficult and most necessary

type of change required to improve an organization is adaptive change. Technical change can compel actors to modify their behavior to align to organizational rules and policies but does not engage stakeholders' thinking and views.

Adaptive change requires organizational actors to change their thinking and behavior. In essence, organizational actors must include new thinking in their sensemaking and act congruently. Adaptive challenges are resistant to the solutions of technical challenges because they cannot be fixed with concrete measures as inherently "people are the problem" (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 65,). Heifetz and Linsky posit that "people are the problem", school principals' efforts to ensure equitable educational experiences requires them to understand policy and interpret it, as well as actively guide adaptive actions and attitudes to address issues of bias and inequity. For principals, in order to be the adaptive change catalyst, they first have must make sense of policy by sorting, categorizing, communicating, and eliciting feedback on policy in order to determine how to enact policy.

The institutional role of school in the fabric of society is integral, and school has become the natural place to inject social reforms such as educational equity with hopes that it impacts wider society. According to Tyack and Cuban (1995), schools have historically "followed a common pattern in devising education prescriptions for specific social or economic ills" (p.2). Although it is shortsighted to depend on schools or school leaders to be the panacea for the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic discord of American society, schools are the only public institution to which every American child has access and logically is the natural place to begin. If an expectation is placed on schools to address the continued marginalization of people of Color, there is a significant and

practical need for principal-facilitated racialized discourses in urban schools in concert with equity-minded administrative, instructional, and disciplinary practices. Deal and Peterson (1990) posited school principals shape the instructional and behavioral culture of a school, set the example for all stakeholders, and are simultaneously the practical and symbolic leaders. Yet, the work of principals is not always done in a linear fashion, especially when implementing disciplinarily progressive reform policies that are diametrically opposed to the status quo. If we can understand how principals make sense of, make choices about, communicate, and act out policy implementation, we can ensure greater policy fidelity – in this case the integration of practices of positive behavior management systems such as Positive Behavior Management Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

The central goal of this case study is to explore to what extent do principals in urban schools make sense of, communicate, and implement PBIS in diverse schools. This literature review utilized a thematic approach and is divided into seven sections: The Challenges of Urban Schools and Their Communities, Discipline Programs and Cultural Competence, Principal Identity and Leadership for Social Justice, Principals as Policy Implementers, Theoretical Lens, Conceptual Framework, and Summary of Literature Review Findings.

The Challenges of Urban Communities and Their Schools

Cities are growing, and urban sprawl presents unique challenges for communities and the schools they serve. The diversification of cities is one such issue. Galea and Vlahov (2005) noted that one of the primary challenges pertaining to the diversification of cities is that heterogeneity and segregation are present and both influence the scarcity

and inequity of resources and the health of urban inhabitants. Galea and Vlahov's (2005) notion of public health is wholly applicable to the discussion of diversification of schools, the issue of inequity, and the health of urban schools and communities. For the purpose of this discussion I have framed the challenges in two ways – community challenges and school challenges. Issues of communities are mirrored in schools and vice versa. However, the responses from communities and schools are not the same with the exception of how individuals of Color are policed or disciplined. Children of Color are criminalized in and out of school at alarming rates. Disproportionate poverty present in communities of Color adds another dimension to disproportionate discipline.

Community Challenges

Communities of Color have experienced a series of changes over time that have impacted their stability, and that of their families and schools. The challenge of poverty, blighted neighborhoods, struggling schools, and patchwork community programs make it difficult for all members to tap into the cultural resiliency communities of Color possess. The three challenges that I have chosen to address are themes that coursed through the literature – the criminalization of youth of Color, poverty, and community engagement

Criminalization of Persons of Color

National and regional data suggests historically marginalized individuals are still experiencing glaring inequities and bias both in their communities and their schools (Nesbit, 2015). Institutional racism has intertwined impacts of criminalization, reduced earning power, and poverty. Individuals of Color are more likely to make less money than their white counterparts, and experience poverty (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015; National Poverty Center, 2015). African Americans and Latinos are more likely to be

arrested, convicted, incarcerated than whites, more likely to be arrested for drug related offenses, and receive longer sentences than their white counterparts (Heath, 2014; Ingraham, 2014; Kerby, 2012). Adjudication and incarceration in communities of Color only further exacerbates earning power and deepens income inequality (Western, 2002). Such disproportionality presents as a challenge for communities of Color as it spills over into community-police relations, corrections, and local and state justice systems. Nationally, African Americans and Latinos are more likely to be arrested, convicted, and incarcerated than whites, more likely to be arrested for drug related offenses, and receive longer sentences than their white counterparts (Brame, Bushway, Panternoster, & Turner, 2014; Heath, 2014; Ingraham, 2014; Kerby, 2012; U.S. Bureau of Justice, 2013). However, African Americans and Latinos only comprise 13.2% and 17.1% of the United States population, respectively. Furthermore, African Americans and Latinos comprise 40% and 19%, respectively, of the prison population (Sakala, 2014). Unsurprisingly, at similar rates, this disproportionality contaminates the rate of school discipline and presents as a cycle that compounds problems for both schools and communities. The over disciplining and incarceration of people of Color has a devastating impact on the livelihood and financial security of families.

Poverty

Research and data suggests poverty impacts urban communities and urban schools in multiple ways. Poverty's ill effects are compounded on communities and children of Color in disproportionately. Individuals of Color are more likely to experience decreased income, increased poverty, and increased homelessness, all indicators of familial instability (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015; Elliot & Krivo, 1991; National Poverty

Center, 2015). Poverty for urban minorities in part may be attributed to the incarceration of family members who are wage earners. Research suggests the browning of the penal system weakens communities of Color economically (Comfort, 2007; Wildeman, 2009). Incarceration of family members is a traumatic event for families and children, and it also impacts the economic viability of families and the communities in which they live (Comfort, 2007; Wildeman, 2009). The tremendous loss of human capital to the criminal justice and penal system impacts the earning power of communities of Color, especially Black communities. Browne (1997) examined the black-white wage gap and labor market inequality focusing on Black females. Her research hypothesizes there are three explanations for this gap – disarticulation, or detachment from mainstream societal structures because of inequities, industrial restructuring of the division of labor and dislocation of jobs leaving out Black females of the workforce, and the lack of human capital withholds them from competing for higher wage jobs. Rose and Clear (1998) go further to suggest this lack of human capital is more a function of diminished earning power for Black families as a result of the disproportionate incarceration of Black males.

Western and Pettit's (2005) quantitative study indicated that progressive institutional changes such as desegregation and equal opportunity measures increased the earnings of Black Americans. However, Western and Pettit note the changes did not address inequality in the penal system, which only exacerbated the black/white wage gap. Economist Gradin (2012) posited different factors influence poverty within Black and Latino communities, but either directly or indirectly, the incarceration of Black males likely plays a role in the reduction of earning power of the Black family. The

intersectionality of poverty, race, and family composition of urban communities and students of Color impacts the climate and engagement of the communities and schools.

Urban School Challenges

Societal and neighborhood contextual factors are reflected in urban schools only serving to exacerbate the achievement and discipline gaps. Supreme Court rulings have made attempts to equalize schooling experiences of all students, but gaps still persist between students of Color and their white peers. Dealing with the achievement and discipline gaps, as they are closely related, are seen as ways to promote social and economic equality for minorities in the United States (Gregory et al., 2010).

Academically, students of Color have not received similar access to high level math and science curriculum to support college readiness (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Lubienski, 2002). Students of Color only represent 26% of gifted and talented classrooms but make up 40% enrollment in schools (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, Issue Brief 3, 2014). Minority students are more likely to be taught by first year and under certified teachers (Peske & Haycock, 2006). Students of Color are more likely to be identified for special education services (Artiles & Trent, 1994; NEA, 2008). Black students have made larger gains in reading and mathematics and Hispanic students have made larger gains in reading than their white peers, yet sizeable achievement gaps persist for both Black and Latino groups on the NAEP Mathematics and Reading (NAEP, 2012).

Recent data indicates 70% of Black students and 75% of Latino students graduate high school, yet students of Color continue to drop out of school at higher rates than white students (NAEP, 2012; NCES, 2013). In terms of discipline, African American and Latino students are more likely to be referred for discipline and arrested than their white

peers, and are more likely to be adjudicated as a result (Kerby, 2012; Males & Brown, 2013). Native American students do not fare much better, as they represent 1% of students but 3% percent of expulsions nationally (Sprague, Vincent, & Tobin, 2013; U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, Issue Brief 1, 2014). While not an exhaustive list of all the disparities people of Color experience, the provided data indicates an extreme urgency to address the issues of both the achievement and discipline gaps as internal challenges of urban schools. For the purposes of this study, I focused on racial differences between students and staff in relation to discipline and achievement gaps, as this is primarily an internal school issue dealt with by school personnel. The tone of teacher-student relations is determined by adults in schools. To be clear, the connection between achievement and discipline is this – students who experience more discipline events in school are more likely to experience less academic success, and are more likely to be from a historically marginalized population, which is an issue of equity.

Racial Differences Between Students and Staff

The teaching force is much different than it was 25 years ago. A study conducted by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE, 2014) found the teaching force is trending to be, “larger, grayer, greener, more female, more diverse by race-ethnicity, consistent in academic, and less stable” than it has ever been before. Each of these trends presents technical and adaptive challenges (p. 1). The trends of increasing size, diversity, and stability are mirrored in the urban population of students but with greater intensity. However, the constant trend in all parts of society is that of increasing diversity, both of race and ethnicity. According to Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey (2014) in 2011-2012, most teachers were female, under the age of 40, and most of them (82.7%)

were white. During the same time, 37% of the nation's population was minority, and 44% of students belonged to a minority group. Ferguson's qualitative study indicated that attracting individuals to the teaching profession who hail from diverse backgrounds may help fend off racial and ethnic isolation (Ferguson, 1998).

Since the 1960s progress has been made to diversify the teaching force. It is not enough merely training a more diverse teaching force, as it is neither a practical nor timely silver bullet for students in classrooms now. It is a lengthy process to educate, recruit, and retain teachers, especially in urban school settings where many of them find employment. Often teachers in urban schools find their educational and life experiences make them ill-prepared to teach with the socio-economic issues and cultural and racial differences of their students (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Sleeter, 2001; Bell, 2002; Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). Lack of experience and preparation, along with other factors, negatively impacts teacher turnover in the neediest schools. Teacher attrition plagues urban schools at a higher rate as compared to suburban schools. High-poverty (poverty enrollment of 50% or more) schools have higher staff turnover rates than do more affluent (poverty enrollment below 15%) schools (Ingersoll, 2001). Schools with large populations of low-income, minority, and academically struggling students are the most likely to have high teacher attrition (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). Interestingly, organizational culture and climate are key influences in the tenure of teachers in urban schools with high populations of low-income students (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wycott, 2011). Organizational factors influencing high teacher attrition include inadequate support from the school leaders, concerns over student discipline issues, limited faculty input into

decision-making, and to a lesser extent, low salaries (Ingersoll, 2001). Teacher attrition creates a revolving door scenario in urban schools across the nation.

Along with the lack of preparedness and cross-cultural and cross-racial differences, questions regarding teacher perception of students and students' perceptions of teachers have surfaced in the literature. Ferguson (2003) examined literature on how teachers' perceptions, expectations, and behaviors interacted with students' beliefs, behaviors, and work habits to perpetuate the achievement gap. In his article, Ferguson suggested teachers' biases are based on past student performance; minority students who perform poorly in the beginning of the year are judged to be low achieving because past performance and potential performance is not acknowledged. He also noted the phenomenon of stereotype threat, whereby students fear being labeled with a stereotype by the teacher, and thus develop anxiety that impacts their performance. These conscious and unconscious anxieties weigh heavy on students and impact their learning. Ferguson calls for professional development to guide an adaptive, strengths-based paradigm shift of empowering students to achieve instead of subconsciously labeling students.

Delpit (1988) took a similar view noting teachers' perceptions of cultural differences impact the learning outcomes of minority students. She posited the "culture of power" is present in school, meaning accessing, understanding, and using the cultural codes of the dominant individuals (mostly white teachers). Conforming to the culture of power is integral for students to access the learning that is taking place. Allusions could be made to Delpit's culture of power and Ferguson's discussion of stereotype threat; both are constructs placed on students by the classroom and the teacher. The student is left to grapple on their own, which could make learning difficult for students of Color. Delpit's

call to action is more nuanced. She suggests teachers be open to communicating with their students, willing to listen authentically, and understand that students are “experts of their own lives...the only chroniclers of their own experience” (p.297).

Dee (2005) sought to ask the question if teachers who were demographically the same (by race, ethnicity, and gender) impacted student achievement. He found classroom interactions based on teacher perceptions were likely related to low minority achievement. He negated the notion that recruiting more minority teachers is the solution as not every student is part of a minority group. Dee (2005) supported Delpit (1988) and Ferguson’s (1998) charge to provide opportunities to develop communication, widening thinking about bias, diversity, and integration of marginalized experiences.

In summary, hiring teachers who are demographically similar to students may not be enough. Professional development that teaches and requires school leaders and teachers to use culturally conceptualized discipline practices are key to improving the situations of students of Color. Improving the communication and interaction strategies of both teachers and students will support PBIS. Addressing the issues of bias and perception are key to improving the situations of students of Color. Including and honoring the voices of students of Color helps rectify marginalization by empowering students in their educational experience. These are likely more effective strategies to dealing with differences in teacher-student communication than merely hiring more teachers of Color.

The Discipline Gap

Several themes emerged from the literature regarding the disciplining of students of Color that will be addressed in this section. The first theme that arose was discussion

of the discipline gap, or the disproportionate difference in discipline events between students of Color and their white peers. The discipline gap has been studied, but only recently, as a concerted effort has been made to address it in policy-making circles. A tremendous body of research indicates this is not a recent issue, but one that indicates a historical negative trend for students of Color (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Glackman, 1978; Gregory et al., 2010; Kaeser, 1979; Lietz & Gregory, 1978; Losen & Skiba, 2010; McFadden, et al., 1992; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008; Skiba et al., 1997; Skiba & Knesting, 2001).

The second theme found in the literature indicated underlying issues with teacher subjectivity and biased school policies and practices that governed teacher-student interactions. Subjective discipline policy practices such as zero-tolerance policies widely used in American schools do not make schools safer and concurrently subject students of Color to disproportionate exclusionary discipline and entering the school to prison pipeline (Gregory, 1997; Skiba, 2014). Sheets and Gay (1996) found in student interviews on perceptions of school discipline that both white students and those of Color perceived racism and teacher subjectivity in the application of discipline. The only difference was that white students perceived racial discrimination in discipline as unintentional or unconscious, while students of Color saw it as conscious and deliberate, arguing teachers often apply classroom rules and guidelines to gain control, or to remove students they do not like. White teachers were found to focus most of their discipline on their low-performing Black students, held low expectations of their students of Color, exhibited bias, and ignored school climate as a classroom and school issue (Gregory & Moesley, 2004). Less than 50% of the teacher participants indicated their beliefs' or

pedagogy's influence on their classroom practices. In their national longitudinal study, Wallace et al. (2008) found African American, Latino, and Native American students are more likely to be referred for subjective discipline such as "disrespect" or being a "perceived threat" while white students were disciplined for defined delinquent behaviors such as smoking or vandalism. Skiba et al. (1997) similarly found in their analysis of middle school discipline infractions, Black students were more likely to receive discipline and receive consequences for issues like "insubordination" and "non-compliance". This study suggested that perhaps teachers have low tolerance for certain classroom behaviors exhibited by Black students. Some research indicates that teacher and administrator bias or discrimination might be a possible explanation of racial and ethnic disproportionality in school discipline (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Townsend, 2000; Wallace et al., 2008). In essence, teachers and administrators perceive and respond to students of Color differently in comparison to their white counterparts. This is likely a root cause of disproportionate discipline.

The third theme that arose was the role of discipline policies that are progressive with predetermined consequences, regardless of individual student situations. These zero tolerance policies have played a role in disproportionate disciplining of students of Color. Research indicates blanket and uniform discipline policies are connected to higher rates of exclusionary discipline, and typically do not decrease the discipline incidents for schools. Sheets and Gay (1996) and Gregory (1997) approached the issue of disproportionate discipline as critical of zero tolerance policies. Gregory was concerned how the policy was implemented school and system wide. He noted zero tolerance policies do little to make schools safer, and charged that broad policies punishing minor

and major disciplinary incidents equally result in the punishment of a few serious infractions and many comparatively minor discipline infractions. Gregory predicted “trivial incidents” connected with zero tolerance would not decrease but accelerate disproportionate discipline. Disproportionate discipline born out of zero tolerance is a phenomenon that has reached fruition in many districts in this study’s participant state, including MCSD. Sheets and Gay (1996) and Rafelle-Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron (2002) focused on how the zero tolerance shaped classroom interactions between teachers and students. They offered suggestions for classroom level behavior modification strategies and school-wide professional development geared towards strengthening teachers’ classroom management practices. Losen and Skiba (2010) were heavier handed in their criticism of zero tolerance, and encouraged states and districts to practice more oversight into the disciplinary practices of schools where disproportionate discipline was taking place. Losen and Skiba (2010) view zero tolerance as a civil rights issue. Out of the literature reviewed, only Rafelle-Mendez et al. (2002) discussed administrative views. However, any discussion of how school leaders make sense of these policies or the roles that administrators play were not addressed. Understanding how administrators incorporate their own experiences and identity in the implementation of discipline policy is key to closing the discipline gap.

The fourth theme that arose in the literature was a need for addressing culturally responsive practices – both teaching and discipline practices. Sheets and Gay (1996), Skiba et al. (1997), Townsend (2000), and Gregory and Mosely (2004) all agree that cultural contexts of students and the school should be taken into consideration. Singularly, Skiba et al. (1997) suggested differentiation of practices based on student

race, ethnicity, and cultural responsiveness, but was not action-specific. Townsend (2000) was offered practitioner suggestions and strategies, calling for utilizing student and parent strengths-based strategies, and addressing biases and inequities in policies and practices. Administrators were mentioned as policy implementers; however, discussion on how they shape or make sense of policy was limited. Again, understanding how school leaders incorporate cultural responsiveness into positive school discipline frameworks is required to move forward in closing the discipline gap.

Discipline Programs and Cultural Responsiveness

School discipline is a contentious topic for classroom teachers, administrators, parents, and especially for students. Around school discipline swirls concerns for student safety, order, control, and developmentally appropriate management practices, all with the goal increased instructional time and student achievement. Various programs have been used in the past 40 years, but for the purposes of this literature review, I chose to focus on those programs used in the district of study. The programs discussed in this section have some similarities and some differences. In some cases, these have been blended together. One key difference is they are all void of the discussion of cultural responsiveness.

Developed in the 1970s the Kounin (1970) model focused on teacher control of the classroom and direct instruction of both learning objectives and behavior expectations. Ideas persisting from Kounin include “withitness” (heightened teacher awareness), momentum (decreased downtime in instruction and efficient transitions between activities), smoothness of transitions, dealing with student interferences, and overlapping (monitoring multiple student interactions at the same time). Focusing on

teacher behaviors enhanced teachers' ability to monitor their classrooms for situations that required early intervention, and encouraged explicit expectations. Research from the 1970s (Arlin, 1979; Borg, Langer, & Wilson, 1975) indicates there are some components of this that are effective; however, the model possesses a rigidity that might not honor all cultures and learning styles. Additionally, there is a lack of evidence as to its overall effectiveness at deterring unwanted behaviors. The Fred Jones model (1987) encouraged clear expectations and non-verbal preventative measures such as the use of proximity control, or moving nearer to students who were misbehaving. While non-verbal cues are a key component of this management plan, threats and warnings are encouraged, even though research indicates the use of both can escalate inappropriate behavior (Nelson, 1996). Research does not confirm its effectiveness. Canter and Canter's (1976) Assertive Discipline model focused on explicit rules and expectations. This model encouraged reteaching student routines as necessary and making the teacher the leader of the classroom. Similar to the Jones model, this approach relies on threats and warnings. Both Assertive Discipline and Fred Jones espouse a power dynamic of teacher as oppressor and student as oppressed, thus students may be inclined to rebel. Character education has been present since the common schools' use of Protestant moral teachings. It has taken various forms since the 1700s, but contemporary Character Education coalesced around the conservative values and civic-mindedness of the 1980s. The key facets of this management model are that it relies on promotion of ethical behavior, moral actions, teaching and reteaching positive interactions through modeling, development a positive school community, preventative measures, and the democratic process of community developed expectations. The What Works Clearing House (WWC, 2007) surveyed 93

studies of 41 character education programs in their annual review of programs (as cited in Martella, Nelson, Marchand-Martella, & O'Reilly, 2011). Only 18 out of 93 studies met the WWC evidence, and 18 studies represented 13 programs. Of the 13 programs, two had enough evidence to indicate effectiveness – Positive Action and Caring School Community. Both focused on developing positive sense of self and peers and belongingness to their peer groups, school, and family. Two key components of both programs that likely support effectiveness are focus on socio-emotional competencies such as care and empathy, and organized structures that encourage the positive interactions. One key criticism of character education is that it is geared towards the average student, not those who struggle behaviorally, and outside of the WWC study, little evidence indicates total effectiveness.

Each of these programs has benefits and drawbacks to implementation and continued use. These programs is that they are culture neutral, meaning they do not address cultural differences urban students possess, nor do they address cultural differences that might occur between teachers and students. Moreover, evidence was not found indicating that they bolster the cultural competence of staff members. Inclusion of culturally responsive pedagogy to a school-wide behavior management system is integral to increasing the plan's effectiveness with diverse populations.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) is a school-wide positive behavior management system that is established and administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and The

Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. OSEP's purpose is to:

Define, develop, implement, and evaluate a multi-tiered approach to Technical Assistance that improves the capacity of states, districts and schools to establish, scale-up and sustain the PBIS framework with emphasis is given to the impact of implementing PBIS on the social, emotional and academic outcomes for students with disabilities. (OSEP PBIS Website, 2015)

According to OSEP, PBIS is based on the principles of applied behavior analysis and prevention for the purpose to ensure safe, supportive, inclusive, and equitable learning environments for students in the nation's schools. It is not a prepackaged curriculum or set of strategies, but is a "prevention-oriented way for school personnel to (a) organize evidence-based practices, (b) improve their implementation of those practices, and (c) maximize academic and social behavior outcomes for students (PBIS Website, 2015).

PBIS began as a grant funded program in 1988 originally to support the needs of special education students. OSEP and The Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports cites PBIS' logic in five ways:

- a) A documented need for improving the social behavior of students in U.S. schools
- b) The demonstrated success of PBIS to improve both student social behavior and academic performance
- c) Demonstrated effectiveness of PBIS as a practical technology that can be implemented at socially important scales by actual implementers
- d) The value of school-wide behavior support systems on the education of children with disabilities

- e) A current need to extend PBIS practices to a broader range of students, schools, and contexts

Many states have implemented PBIS as a way to support inclusion of special education students. Most recently PBIS has been incorporated by states, districts, and schools to support the non-cognitive success indicators for regular education and special education students such as decreased attendance, decreased discipline, and decreased dropout rates for students in urban schools. Every state and territory within the United States has a PBIS affiliated organization. PBIS is touted as successfully using “evidence-based” practices that: (a) are tiered to be developmentally appropriate, (b) are geared to all learners, and, (c) have particular strategy sets for those who have special needs (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010). Essentially, it is a behavior management framework that is strategies-based and geared towards learner needs. In the participant state, in the past three years, PBIS has been incorporated in schools to try close the achievement gap between special education and regular education students and minority students and white students. Additionally, PBIS has been employed as a strategy to address state and federally sanctioned Corrective Action Plans (referred to as CAP plans) geared towards righting gross and widespread Individual Education Plan implementation errors in many districts.

Research supports the linkages between student discipline referrals, suspensions, low academic achievement, disproportionalities experienced by students of Color. Minority students are more likely to be disciplined, suspended from school, and score lower than their white peers on standardized tests (Noguera, 2003; Skiba, et al., 2002; Gregory et al., 2010). There is some evidence that PBIS is successful in changing the

behavioral culture of urban schools (for both teachers and students); however, students of Color are still disciplined more frequently and more harshly than their white peers (Skiba & Sprague, 2008). There are some indications that the discipline gap is a result of classroom teachers' cultural dissonance or lack of exposure and training in culturally responsive instructional and management practices (Townsend, 2000; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). In review of the literature, only three articles were found critical of PBIS. Two were questioning its inclusion into the field of applied behavior analysis, not about the framework or its ability to support positive student behavior (Critchfield, 2015; Jarmolowicz & Tetreault, 2015). One article addressed the lack of cultural considerations in PBIS. PBIS shares many positive aspects of the behavior management frameworks mentioned and one key drawback. PBIS shares in their cultural neutrality – meaning they ignore the influence of culture on student and teacher behavior and interactions. Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin and Swain-Bradway (2011) were the only scholars found to be critical of George Sugai's work, acknowledging the lack of consideration for culture within PBIS. Vincent et al. (2011) argued that PBIS is culturally neutral, and PBIS implementation in schools “clearly never happens in a cultural vacuum” (p. 222). Vincent et al. (2011) suggest culturally responsive or competent practices be conceptualized within the PBIS structure as “culturally responsive practices affect the manner and extent to which implementation of the key features of SWPBS achieves the intended goals of supporting staff, students, decision making, and students' social and academic success” (p. 223). As a likely response to this criticism, Fallon, O'Keeffe, and Sugai (2012), began to reconceptualize PBIS to include cultural considerations in presentations given since 2012. This concept of a culturally conceptualized PBIS is key to changing the discipline

culture in diverse school buildings. In many schools, leaders do not include culture or race in the contextual conversations regarding decreasing the discipline. This is an area that must be addressed.

The planning, development, implementation, progress monitoring, evaluation, and refinement of any school policy initiative are dependent upon the inclinations of a school principal. Each principal must make decisions about policy implementation, interjecting their experiences into the sensemaking process, keeping their personal and professional contexts, and the context of their school and stakeholders in mind. The role of the principal in the implementation of PBIS is integral in creating a positive and inclusive environment. The role can manifest as distributed leadership from the top down or in a collaborative leadership model (Riehl, 2000; Sugai & Horner, 2002). Either way, staff and stakeholder buy-in are important, but the responsibility of achieving policy fidelity regardless of leadership style is the task of the principal. Schools within the Metropolitan Public School District, the site of this study, are mostly PBIS participants, but with various fidelity and implementation levels as indicated in district and school PBIS evaluations and self-assessments. Concerns over the discipline gap and culturally responsiveness in schools have led educators to implement PBIS with the assumption that if PBIS works on decreasing negative behavior in special education students, it will work on all “at-risk” students, ignoring the fact that it is culturally neutral like the discipline management plans used previously. This is deficit thinking. PBIS is not inherently culturally responsive. With culturally responsive discipline in mind, questions center on understanding the sensemaking processes of school leaders in the context of the racial

disproportionalities of their schools and what role racialized discourses have in implementing PBIS.

Principal Identity and Leadership for Social Justice

Leadership and decision-making styles are influenced by life, work, and identity experiences, and individual experiences both impact and are impacted by how one identifies themselves. Searching for literature on principal identity yielded results regarding leadership characteristics, preparation for administration, and identity construction and transformation, but did not answer questions about how principals' race and gender identity influenced sensemaking and decision-making about discipline policy. Modifying search results to include social justice and race was more fruitful, and it became clear that principal identity, meaning who and how a principal identifies themselves based on their lived experience, is a discussion centered on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Literature on social justice leadership and education was also informative as the discussion of identity and lived experiences were explicitly and implicitly discussed (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007; Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009; Theoharis, 2008; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). The absence of research literature on how the race and gender identity of school leaders impacts their sensemaking and implementation of culturally responsive discipline management strategies necessitates the need for future research.

Implications of Identity and Identity of Leadership

Brooks and Jean-Marie (2007) found the interplay between racial leadership subcultures in schools may influence the ability to enact social justice-oriented conversations and thus the effectiveness of leadership. Although they did not directly

address identity, Brooks and Jean-Marie (2007) discuss Black leaders' insistence at being role models for Black students and thus acknowledging their identity as Black educators as an influence on their role in schools. This study also suggested school leaders "construct leadership norms and beliefs based on race, and that these are intertwined with other social dynamics such as gender and social class" (p. 765). Theoharis (2008) and Theoharis and Haddix (2011) similarly found lived experiences impact the capacity to enact social justice leadership and engage in conversations about equity for marginalized groups in schools. While only one of the leaders profiled in Theoharis' (2008) study reported race as a factor that informed her leadership style, another noted ethnicity impacted his work, and another reported sexual orientation as factor that led her to development of social justice practices). In their 2011 work, Theoharis and Haddix profiled 6 white principals identified as social justice leaders, who, through acknowledging their "whiteness" and developing a Critical Race Theory and activist leadership style, sought to create more just and equitable schools for their students of color. Theoharis and Haddix (2011) posited the principals in their study exhibited five key characteristics that impacted the achievement and discipline gaps for their students: (1) principals conducted emotional and intellectual work on race, (2) they talked about race openly with their staffs, (3) they learned about race, and examined their own privilege, (4) they infused race into data informed decision making, and (5) they had practice communicating with families of Color. Jean-Marie et al. (2009) addressed issues of intersectionality of race and gender for Black women in leadership roles in higher education and the challenges they experienced as many women of Color experience as they strive to excel. Jean-Marie et al.(2009) identified their study's subjects, all Black

women, as adherents to social justice who were able to overcome barriers and oppression to reach their career goals. This struggle was integral in the construction of their leadership styles. Most importantly, Evans (2007) examined how school leaders' integrated their identities and sensemaking into their leadership to deal with race issues in their schools. These few examples of qualitative research indicated leaders from marginalized groups derive some of their leadership style from their personal identity, and this likely bleeds into their ability to implement culturally responsive policy.

Theoretical Lens

Two overarching theoretical lenses will be applied to this research: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and racialized discourses. Critical Race Theory was selected because the conversation about cultural competency implementation in schools is fundamentally rooted in empowerment of marginalized individuals (Creswell, 2013). Racialized discourses was selected as a way to discuss questions about the control and production of knowledge of people and communities of Color (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Critical Race Theory and Principals as Policy Implementers

Literature suggests one of the most important roles of a school principal is that of instructional leader (Cross & Rice, 2000; De Bevoise, 1984; Dufour, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003; Rigby, 2013). However, no research was found regarding how principals make sense of and enact culturally responsive discipline policies. The job of creating an instructional setting serving the needs of all students rests with school leaders. The responsibility to enact equity-increasing curricular and instructional changes, improving classroom instructional practices, and fostering a positive climate lies with school leaders. Discussion of curricular and instructional pedagogy reform is rooted in technical

and adaptive change. Curricular, instructional, and behavior management practices that do not elevate the consciousness of marginalized individuals further subjugate them. Administrators viewing the world through Critical Race Theory (CRT) as social justice leaders cultivate school curricular and instructional climates of inclusion, but gaps in literature are present regarding racialized conversations principals might have as leaders regarding the behavioral climate and policy related to their students of Color.

Some academics in the field of CRT focus on and offer suggestions for curriculum and instruction, but do not offer practical, tangible leadership implementation plans to narrow the discipline gap. Ladson-Billings (1998) approaches the issue of curriculum from a CRT standpoint. She posits that curriculum that does not embrace marginalized views supports the “white supremacist master script” (p. 18). According to Ladson-Billings (1998), colorblind curriculum leads to feelings of guilt for marginalized students for “failing to rise above their immigrant status” (p.18). The same could be said for colorblind behavior management practices; students may feel denigrated or lacking. She notes many current instructional practices are based on addressing deficits, not strengths of students and educators who embody this mindset are on a never-ending quest for the “right strategy or technique” (p. 19, Ladson-Billings, 1998). Delpit (1988) also critiques traditional instructional practices suggesting students actually do not lack the cognition to learn skills, but the processes employed to teach the skills are part of a culture of learning that students of Color have no access to unless they are taught the culture or granted access. Ladson-Billings (1998) suggests counterpedagogical instruction be employed to remind marginalized students of society’s expectations of them for failure while pushing them to be successful. Both focus on instruction, with little

discussion of practical plans for how principals can have racialized discourses with hopes of improving both academic and non-cognitive outcomes for students.

While Delpit (1988) and Ladson-Billings (1998) address the culture of classroom community as a vehicle for CRT, Theoharis (2007) takes another view. He contends curriculum and classroom practices inherently cannot be equitable in classrooms that do not embrace inclusion and social justice (Theoharis, 2007). Theoharis (2007) encourages school leaders to set the precedence for changes supporting inclusion of all students. To embrace inclusion, teachers and principals must be willing to put aside punitive discipline management systems. School leaders must participate in racialized discourses with their staffs and students and incorporate positive behavior management if they are truly interested in dealing with the discipline gap. Other research further suggests inclusive teaching should be encouraged and supporting classroom diversity is an opportunity for all parties as opposed to a problem, and instructional and curricular shifts must be made to ensure inclusion and equity (Ball, Williams & Cooks, 1997; Foster, 1995; Ladson-Billings 1992, 1995, 2001; Riehl, 2000; Theoharis, 2007). In the words of Ladson-Billings, making these curricular and instructional pedagogical shifts is “just good teaching” (p. 159, 1995), but little research was found offering a plan for how principals should attempt the same pedagogical shift with school-wide behavior management policies such as PBIS.

CRT literature provides a theoretical frame for principals to develop their vision and mission for their schools. However, with the exception of Singleton’s (2014) *Courageous Conversations*, a gap is present in the literature regarding practical assistance to principals in understanding how to participate in racialized discourses. Outside of

Courageous Conversations no other guides were found to help principals prepare teachers to enter into racialized discourses. Issues like school culture and climate, discipline, and classroom management are contentious topics without adding the uncomfortable topic of race to the fray. Current events and demographic shifts point to the need for research in to racialized discourses and disproportionate discipline. However, no literature was found regarding the how cultural responsive policy initiatives such as culturally conceptualized PBIS are communicated from districts to principals. Moreover, research was not found regarding how principals use sensemaking to understand culturally responsive policies, communicate them to stakeholders, and implement these policy initiatives on the school level.

Racialized Discourses. Insufficient literature was found that focused on the racialized discourses taking place between school districts, administrators, and schools in relation to culturally responsive policy implementation. Qualitative literature, however, suggests the linkage between racialized discourses and silences and policy implementation in leadership preparation programs, schools, and classrooms (Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Singleton, 2014). District policy determines what happens in schools and an administrator's skill, will, knowledge, capacity to have conversations about race determines what tenor a school's race related discourses become (Singleton, 2014). During the drafting of this study, literature regarding the implementation of district policy to support race-related discourses was limited to work done by Singleton (2014) in North Carolina. According to Delpit (1988), related discourses are as much about who is in power and who possesses power in schools as they are about policy implementation within schools and classrooms. According to the National Center for Education Statistics

(NCES), in 2003-2004 (the most recent data found) 84.1% of principals in the United States were white while only 15.9% were minority. In 2012, 52% of public school students were white, while 49% of them were minorities (NCES, 2012). With the skewed state of principal demographics, conversations about race are difficult or non-existent for white educators. Data indicates districts must work to recruit and retain minority administrators and may help encourage the conversation about the discipline gap; however, mirroring administrative staff to the pupil population is long-term endeavor.

During the review of literature, research was found describing the phenomena of racialized discourses among teachers, but little addressing racialized dialogues. Arciniega (1977), Darling-Hammond (1997), Milner (2007) and Singleton (2014), note the act of putting off the conversation about racial inequities, bias, and racism while simultaneously placing blame on students and communities of Color for the achievement gap as only exacerbating the issues of equity and exclusion. Castagno (2008) posits in her ethnographic study of two schools that the status quo maintains the overt and covert support for race related silences of educators. Castagno (2008), Diem and Carpenter (2012), Ladson-Billings (1998), Singleton (2014), and West (1993) all note conversations about race are especially uncomfortable, difficult, and raw for white educators to participate in but are necessary because they may require them to acknowledge their privilege and power, which is part of the process of developing cultural competency. Singham (1998) notes that instead of entering into authentic racialized discourses, educators instead often use three superficial explanations of the achievement gap – the liberal interpretation, the conservative or sociopathological model, and the genetic model. The liberal interpretation stipulates that educational gaps are based on socioeconomic

gaps. The conservative or sociopathological model says that legal changes of Civil Rights supported advancement for Black Americans and social nuances of Black culture are the cause for disparities. The genetic model described by Singham (1998) posits educational disparities arise from evolution – natural selection deeming Blacks unable compete intellectually with whites. Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, and Campbell (2005) sought to determine how Canadian pre-service teachers thought about race and how they discussed race and found similar avoidance tactics. Their study found the teacher participants actively avoided discussing issues of race utilizing three different avoidance mechanisms - ideological incongruence, liberalist notions of individualism and meritocracy, and the negation of white capital. Milner (2007) offered a guide on how to move the racial dialogue away from deficit-based discourses to strengths-based dialogues. He implores researchers, teachers, practitioners, and policy makers to change the dialogue from the deficit mind-set to a more positive strengths-based approach noting that, “different, in this sense, does not necessarily mean deficit or deficient” (p. 389).

Conversely, Dlamini (2002) noted that educators’ struggle mediating discourses racism and institutional racism, and thus tend to focus on the individual when dialogical energies would yield better results if aimed at racist institutions. Such thinking is an impediment to looking at the larger situation. In terms of PBIS, this research will seek to understand how racialized dialogue plays a role in policy implementation and communication. During my review of the literature, research was not found addressing sensemaking and racialized discourses and discipline policy. What remains to be explored is how school districts articulate cultural competence policy initiatives and racialized discourses to schools, and how school administrators implement and address

those policies and discourses, if at all. Ample research exists addressing racialized discourses among teachers as a foundation of culturally responsive pedagogy (Delpit, 2006a, 2006b; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2008, 2009; Solomona et al. 2005; Vaught & Castagano, 2008; Villegas, 1991; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) but Singleton's *Courageous Conversations* (2014) was the only source reviewed that offers a user-friendly, step-by-step guide for school leaders and teachers to address the race talks required to effectively implement culturally responsive PBIS.

A robust body of literature exists that addresses social justice leadership, but it much of it is focused on ways to cultivate social justice leaders in administrative preparation programs (Carpenter & Diem, 2012, 2013; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; McKenzie, Christman, Hernandez, Fierro, Capper, Dantley, Gonzalez, Cambron-McCabe, Scheurich, 2008), characteristics of social justice leaders (Furman, 2012; Theoharis, 2007, 2008, 2009), strategies for social justice leaders (Leithwood, Harris, Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Riester, Pursch, & Skrla, 2002), and documenting the work they have done to implement culturally relevant pedagogical measures in their schools (Furman & Shields, 2005). Discussion of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and racialized discourses and their articulation into practice proliferate literature on educational leadership. CRT literature is centered on acknowledging and addressing inherent racial and ethnic inequities. Racialized discourses provide Critical Race Theory a way to elevate debates and discussions about and around race issues from analyzing demographics to dialoguing about perception, biases, and inequities. CRT is an integral in to creating culturally responsive schools and just policies. Discussion defining the administrative sensemaking process of

communication and implementation of cultural competency policies was not found (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Tate, 1997; Yosso, 2005). Ultimately, the goal of this research is to understand how school leaders make sense of, make choices about, and implement PBIS in the racial context of urban schools, and what role racialized discourses play in PBIS implementation.

The tenets of CRT guided the conceptual framework of this study in conjunction with Sensemaking Theory. Borrowing from the fields of communication and organizational studies, Sensemaking Theory is used as the second component of conceptual framework to understand how school leaders make sense of and implement culturally responsive discipline policy, in this case culturally conceptualized PBIS.

Several definitions of Sensemaking exist. As defined by Acona (2012), Sensemaking is how we structure the unknown so as to be able to act in it. Sensemaking involves coming up with a plausible understanding—a map—of a shifting world; testing this map with others through data collection, action, and conversation; and then refining, or abandoning, the map depending on how credible it is (p. 3).

Evans (2007) called it “the cognitive act of taking in information, framing it, and using it to determine actions and behaviors in a way that manages meaning for individuals (p. 161). To Weick (1995) Sensemaking is “the ways people generate what they interpret” (p. 13). Sensemaking is “to connect the abstract to the concrete” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). Sensemaking functions under the premise that “there is an inherent intertwined connection between how you look a situation and what sense you are able to construct of it” (p. 39, Dervin, 1998). More importantly Sensemaking helps individuals

determine how and when to act. According to Weick et al. (2005), Sensemaking allows organizations the ability to turn “circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action” (p. 409). Sensemaking is cognitive and action-orientated. It is integral to thinking about and acting on organizational policies and at the heart of policy implementation.

Research has been conducted on how teachers make sense of curriculum and instructional policy, but there is a gap in the literature regarding how principals make sense of Cultural Competent policies such as PBIS. Coburn (2001) outlines Sensemaking processes teachers follow regarding curricular policy. She notes that Sensemaking as a series of cognitive and practical actions that lead to policy implementation where actors deliberate on policy, adopt or adapt the policy, combine it with current policy, and/or ignore some or all parts of the policy. The next component that Coburn (2001) identifies is how individuals notice and/or select information, make meaning from it, and use those interpretations to develop an organizational culture and structures. Actors’ understanding of events, contexts, and issues leads to the development of new understandings and the assimilation of old understandings by which final meaning is made. This same process can be applied to how principals deliberate about and make choices on policy implementation, especially policy that has historically varied from overlooked to controversial in nature. Coburn (2001) addresses how teacher autonomy impacted curricular choices teachers made regarding reading instruction. Specifically, she notes how policy implementation was impacted as teachers grappled with both their Sensemaking and their “professional autonomy” to make curricular and instructional

decisions. Sensemaking theory will provide a way to determine how principals understand, interpret, make decisions about, and implement PBIS.

Weick et al. (2005) descriptively articulate the process of Sensemaking through eight iterative, recursive, components of cognition, communication, and action. For the purpose of this study, these components concisely provide me a way to investigate the thinking and action of my participants. They are as follows: *Flux, Noticing and Bracketing, Labeling, Retrospective, Presumption, Social and Systematic, Action, and Organization through Communication*. From this point forward I will capitalize these terms when used proper noun to draw attention to their characteristics. In the cases where I do not capitalize but use these words as verbs and adjectives, it is to describe actual events or participant actions.

These eight components of Sensemaking are incited by a period of perceived chaos on the part of the sensemaker. Chia (2000) identifies this chaos, as “an undifferentiated Flux of fleeting sense-impressions and it is out of the brute aboriginal Flux of lived experiences that attention carves out and conception names” (p. 517). Weick et al. (2005) notes that Sensemaking happens amidst a current of potential antecedents and consequences. Some of this data informs the sensemaker anecdotally or empirically. During this period of Flux, the sensemaker becomes aware of events that are abnormal and acknowledges the Flux. Per Weick et al. (2005) this awareness stage, or Noticing and Bracketing, Noticing involves understanding what normality is, and being able to compare and contrast it with the abnormal state of affairs. Sensemaking is activated by the question, “*is this this the same, or different?*” Bracketing happens simultaneously, as the sensemaker begins to categorize areas of concern. When an

organizational actor makes sense of events, they must be able to sift the beneficial from the harmful, and simplify the complex. The next stage of Sensemaking is Labeling, which simply put is the act of labeling and categorizing events and behaviors to “stabilize the streaming of experience” and utilizes functional deployment, or the “imposing labels on interdependent events in ways that suggest plausible acts of managing, coordinating, and distributing” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 411). The next component of Sensemaking is the use of Retrospective, or the act of looking back at previous thoughts, speech, action, and events to understand the present problems. Retrospective to the sensemaker is looking back at where we have been to know where we are going, honoring the past to make sense of the present, and acknowledging past errors and triumphs to make decisions in the here and now. Following Retrospective, is Presumption. In this stage, the connection to the concrete events and stimuli a sensemaker experiences and abstract, cerebral cognition takes place. This is where the sensemaker begins to act as if something is wrong, or an error has occurred. Presumption is where the existing state and desired states are defined based on a series of approximations and projections from information inputs. From Presumption, the sensemaker moves to the Social Systematic stage. During this stage the sensemaker takes into consideration communication with other organizational actors, both informal and formal, feedback loops, technical structures built on communication. Weick et al. (2005, p.412) reference the work of a neonatal nurse’s Sensemaking. In this stage, the authors discuss the social and systematic nature of the participant nurse’s Sensemaking:

if knowledge about the correctness of treatment unfolds gradually, then knowledge of this unfolding sense is not located just inside the head of the nurse

or physician. Instead, the locus is system wide and is realized in stronger or weaker coordination and information distribution among interdependent healthcare workers.”

While hospitals and schools are different organizations, some similarities exist. Both seek to improve the condition of the subject, either patient or student, and in this endeavor a team of staff are often responsible in creating and executing a plan for successful outcomes. In either setting, communication is key to successful outcomes. Next is the Action stage. In this stage, Weick et al. (2005, p. 412) posits that the sensemaker asks, “what’s going on here?” and “what do I do next?”. Weick et al. (2005) note that the act of talking leads to action and should be “treated as cycles rather than linear sequence...occurring both early and late...” (2005, p. 412). Thinking is often acted out conversationally, informally and formally and this is where knowledge and technique are actively applied to the world. Sensemakers “make sense by acting thinkingly, which means that they simultaneously interpret their knowledge with trusted frameworks, yet mistrust those very same frameworks by testing new frameworks and new interpretations” (2005, p. 412) Communication and action work in concert with one another, and in social organizations are inseparable. Sensemakers seek advice, input, and the ability to test their hypotheses with peers, those they deem experts, and even contrarians. Sensemakers, both consciously and unconsciously, assume that “ignorance and knowledge coexist” (Weick, 2005, p.412). The final stage of Weick et al.’s (2005) stages of Sensemaking is Organizing through Communication. Weick et al. (2005) acknowledges that central to Sensemaking Theory is communication, as it is the “activity that talks events and organization into existence suggest that patters of organizing are

located in the actions and conversations that occur on behalf of the presumed organization and in the tests of those activities that preserved in social structures” (p. 413). Organizing through communication is an ongoing multi-way process, including both formal and informal communicative demonstration. Sensemaking is a cognitive and physical act that takes place in concert and in relation to others.

Summary of Literature Review and Findings

Historically, race relations in the United States have been a contentious issue. Desegregation has moved society forward but glaring inequities exist still, especially in communities and schools of color that are disproportionately policed and disciplined. Poverty and low levels of community engagement converge to exacerbate historical disenfranchisement. The difference in race and cultural dissonance between a largely white, young, female body of teachers and their students of color, sets the stage for miscommunication and discipline issues in school. In many ways, the pattern of discipline interactions in schools mirrors the disproportionate criminalization of adults of Color. Programs utilizing applied behavior analysis have been tapped into over the years to rectify behavioral problems of students, without any attention paid to the silenced dialogues about race and culture, biases, and racism that have played out in teacher-student interactions. Schools across the nation have looked to PBIS with its research-based record of success to solve the discipline gap, but critiques point to its status as culturally neutral. Compounding this, principals' race and gender identity play into how they and what policies they implement. What remains to be seen is how Sensemaking and principal identity lead to implementation fidelity of policy that supports equitable, culturally responsive discipline.

CHAPTER III

METHODS: STUDY ONE

This chapter provides information on how I made methodological choices for this study, how I acted upon those decisions in the field during participant interviews, and how I chose to approach the analysis of data. First, I provide a detailed outline of the research design and rationale used to explore the research questions. Next, I describe the target population and the setting. Then, I outline the sampling and participant recruitment strategies, as well as selected data collection and data analysis methods. Finally, I end the chapter discussing reflexivity, positionality, limitations, and ethical concerns.

In review, this study seeks to explore two research questions:

- 1) How do principals in urban schools make sense of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) in the context of race in their schools, if at all?
- 2) What role does racialized discourses have in the development and implementation of culturally responsive PBIS, if at all?

Conceptual Framework

For the purposes of this study, I used Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Sensemaking Theory (SMT) to understand how principals think, act, participate in, and conduct dialogue about PBIS in the context of race. CRT questions traditional notions of racism, race, and power in the contexts of history, economics, and social institutions that have traditionally marginalized individuals of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT possesses six key tenets: ordinariness of racism, interest convergence, social construction, differential racialization, intersectionality, and the voice of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The concept of ordinariness accepts racism is a normal institution encountered daily for people of Color. Racism is conscious and unconscious, perceived and tangible in its manifestations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Interest convergence acknowledges

racism exists to serve the interests of white individuals, thus there is no desire to discard racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Social construction stipulates race and racism are outgrowths of man-made categories created out of human need to both sort individuals and govern social interactions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Differential racialization addresses how historically dominant groups have alternately racialized and de-racialized minority groups in response to their needs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Intersectionality accepts there is no one facet of a person's experience or identity; intersections are present between and within race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and a multitude of other identities one might ascribe to themselves. Intersectionality acknowledges and appreciates the simultaneous conflict and concert of the lived experience (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The final component of CRT is the voice of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Possessing a voice of Color allows a person of Color to convey their experiences to white people in a way that is unique and wholly authentic to each individual's experience. Using their voice empowers persons of Color to speak about situations of race and racism with first-hand counter-narratives.

The tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as outlined by Delgado & Stefancic (2001) guided the conceptual framework of this study in conjunction with Sensemaking Theory. Sensemaking Theory hails from the fields of communication and organizational studies, and is the second component of this study's conceptual framework. Weick et al.'s (2005) components of Sensemaking were utilized to identify and analyze the ways principals as sensemakers think about, communicate, and act on PBIS policy in the context of race in their schools. Sensemaking Theory will provide a way to explore and understand how principals understand, interpret, make decisions about, and implement

PBIS in a racialized context. CRT sets the contextual foundation for thinking about race and disproportionate discipline in schools, while Sensemaking Theory incorporates a principal's cognition and communication about race and discipline policy in schools. The tenets of Critical Race Theory and Sensemaking Theory can and should be melded together to conceptualize how principals in diverse schools think as they address the discipline gap. The following discussion will illustrate apparent connections between CRT and SM by readdressing Weick et al's (2005) stages of Sensemaking. Prior to engaging in sensemaking, principals must be able to understand the existing state of chaos, or Flux, regarding the state of disproportionalities in their buildings as sets the stage for PBIS implementation in their buildings. For a principal encountering Flux in a diverse school he or she must ask the activating Sensemaking question "is this the same or different?". When dealing with PBIS in the contexts of diversity, race, and equity, the question shifts to "I know the existing state must change/improve, but how so?". By asking and answering these questions each principal must address the ordinariness of racism present in the institutional over-disciplining of students of Color. Whether they profess it or not engaging in the Flux of disproportionalities requires leaders to take on the mantle of social justice leadership. In the Noticing and Bracketing stage, principals implementing PBIS with diverse populations juxtapose the existing state of normality and chaos they encounter (institutional racism and bias) with abnormality (equity of discipline decreased bias) and the vision of their desired state of school culture and climate. In recognizing Flux, an equity minded principal also must acknowledge racism exists to serve the interests of white individuals, and there is no embedded desire to do away with it. Social construction is evident in Sensemaking when a sensemaking

principal notices, brackets, and labels the information they take in so they can organize it in efforts to support equitable treatment. Instead of merely categorizing individuals based on perceived deficits, sensemaking principals become more aware of how stakeholders might be grouped formally or informally based on growth areas. Principals implementing PBIS devote time and attention to building leadership and management structures focused on stakeholder strengths, increasing equity and access, and alleviating suffering when and where possible. Social construction also requires sensemaking school leaders to address and honor the Retrospective and history of their schools, students and their families, and the communities and cultures they represent. Social construction also addresses the requirement of school principals to utilize Presumption to connect the abstract perceptions, feelings, and history with the concrete data and stakeholder interactions the encounter and have to anticipate and work through. In many diverse schools, leaders and teachers do not look like the students and parents they serve. With that in mind, sensemaking leaders seek to address the discipline gap within their schools. They must pay special attention to the social and systematic nature of Sensemaking. Principals must use available channels of discussion and feedback to inform their implementation of policy and ensure they hear, understand, empower, and promote the voices of Color in their school communities. By doing so, principals are able to understand how others make sense of their experiences of intersectionality in relation to school issues like the discipline gap. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is transformative, and principals who actively utilize CRT-influenced Sensemaking, understand they are to be reflective change agents who utilize praxis (Freire, 1970), and thus are action-focused. They implement just and equitable policies. These principals focus on inclusion, access,

and equity of traditionally marginalized populations, and the legitimation of the voices of Color in their schools. By doing so, they are able to support Organization through Communication. Principals who are able to practice this critical sensemaking create organizational cultures and climates built on the counternarrative a culturally conceptualized PBIS espouses. I have provided a visual representation of the connections I make between Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) and Sensemaking Theory (Weick et al., 2005).

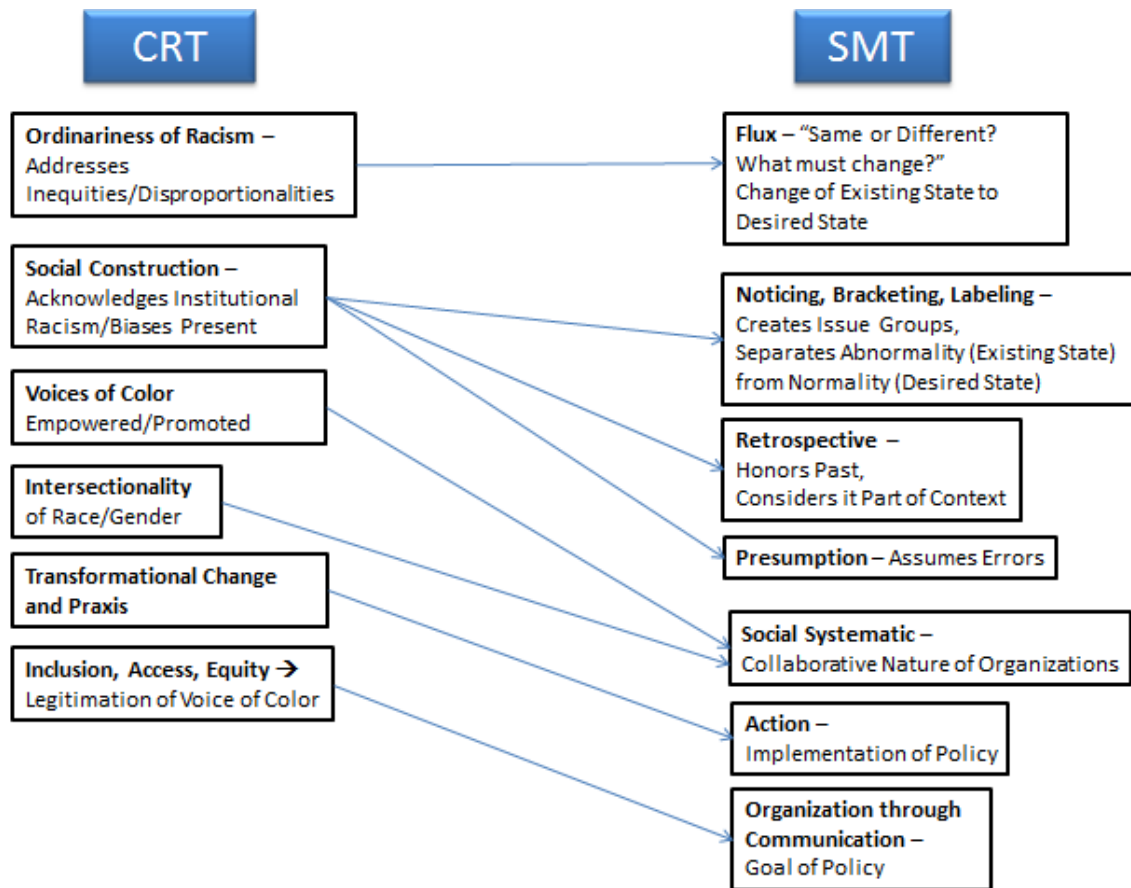


Figure 1. Theoretical connections.

Sensemaking as a Process

Sensemaking Theory (Weick et al., 2005) was chosen as a way to understand how principals think about, communicate, and act on policy as school leaders. To be clear, sensemaking is a process that is not ethereal; it has identifiable, tangible, components that leave impressions on the culture and climate of a school and the lives of school stakeholders. Drawing from Weick et al.’s (2005) stages of Sensemaking as a conceptual framework, codes were developed based the concepts of *Flux*, *Noticing and Bracketing, Labeling*, *Retrospective*, *Presumption*, *Social and Systematic*, *Action*, and *Organizing through Communication*. Based on the data collected I identified actionable events, protocols, or actions that corresponded to each Sensemaking component. These

components were evident in the interviews and secondary data sources. Flux appeared for all participants as the pressure of the Corrective Action Plans and PLA status. Noticing and Bracketing presented as data driven inquiry processes that acknowledged disorder, understood normalcy, and categorized and analyzed data for areas of concern. Labeling appeared when principals had to fit new policy issues into their schema of school leadership by using functional deployment to ask and answer “What does this mean for me and my school?” Participants utilized Retrospective when they honored the past – past events, past leadership, and past culture as they determined future goals and vision. Presumption manifested in principals articulating the abstract concepts of PBIS policy into actionable steps for their stakeholders. Those actionable steps in turn became the principal’s policy interpretation. Those interpretations were enacted and became accepted school-based practices. Action coalesced into Organizing through Communication as they all utilized feedback loops and participated in two-way communication with stakeholder groups.

Sensemaking is an iterative process of cognition and action. Each component may be touched on multiple times when making a decision in an organization. When a principal implements policy, they do in a way that they understand first. They must fit the new idea, change in thinking, or policy into their existing schema. As the school leaders, their role stipulates that they make sense of policy first. Their sensemaking leads the sensemaking of their staff. Principals in this study are active sensemakers of the work they do in their schools. Only two of the principal participants were found to actively consider their experiences as leaders and individuals as they make sense of PBIS in their

school's racialized context. Several implications of these findings were present and will be addressed in the final chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions drove the selection of methods for this study. This study used a qualitative multiple case study design (Yin, 2009). Multiple case study design was used because it lends itself to CRT's focus on capturing the lived experiences of participants, and the narrative nature of documenting both racialized dialogues and evidence of sensemaking. An advantage of multiple case study design is the compelling and robust nature of the evidence. My desire was to compare cases (Yin, 2009).

Utilizing the comparative multi-case methodology, I was able to explore and compare how principals in an urban school district were able to make sense of PBIS in the racial contexts of their schools. In addition, I was able to examine what role racialized discourses play in the implementation of PBIS. Participants were located within schools that were both identified as Persistently Low Achieving and Corrective Action Plan (CAP) schools as based on the state accountability system and federal designations. Persistently low-achieving schools, or PLA schools, are defined as

- 1) based on state reading and mathematics tests Title I schools that either scored the in the lowest five percent (5%) of schools of identified schools under No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(2001) that have failed to make adequate yearly progress for three (3) consecutive years
- 2) based on state reading and mathematics tests Title I schools in the lowest five percent (5%) of schools of the non-Title I schools and has at least thirty-five percent (35%) or greater poverty as identified in the federal No

Child Left Behind Act of 2001 that have failed to make adequately yearly progress for three (3) consecutive years;

- 3) A high school whose graduation rate, based on the state's approved graduation rate calculation, has been sixty percent (60%) for three (3) or more consecutive years;
- 4) Beginning with the state assessment results for the school year 2011-2012, a school that is in the lowest five percent (5%) of all schools that fail to meet the achievement targets of the state accountability system under state law for at least three (3) or more consecutive years. For school years 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, the three (3) consecutive years (Participant State Educational Law, 2013)

Schools designated as CAP schools, were those identified as a result of having higher rates of disproportionate discipline between students of Color and white students. In this particular case, prior to the issuing of the CAP, the sample district's Black students on average were twice as likely to receive a discipline referral than their white counterparts (Office of Civil Rights Report, p. 10, 2011).

The goal of this study was to examine the sensemaking and perceptions of PBIS in the context of race and the discipline gap of the participants in relation to their identification as PLA and CAP schools. I compared and contrasted sensemaking and perceptions of participant principals as a way to understand how principals think about, act upon, and communicate discipline policies geared towards decreasing both the discipline and achievement gaps between students of Color and their white peers.

Qualitative methods were selected for this study. Quantitative methods could have been used, however qualitative methodology was chosen because of my interest in developing a robust depiction of the experiences of each participant. Other qualitative methods were considered, but I chose multi-case methodology was due to its theoretical replication logic. I expected disparate results from the participants and was interested in potential depth and breadth of inquiry in a smaller, representative number of cases (Yin, 2009).

Participant Selection

The target participants for this study were principals from schools identified as a part of the initial PBIS district CAP Cohort. These principals had participated in a required managed roll-out of PBIS due to their schools' historical disproportionate discipline of students of Color. Three of these schools were required to create a Corrective Action Plan to rectify disproportionality, while one was strongly encouraged to volunteer. Participants were divided into two implementation groups based on whether the schools were mandated PBIS participants because of state and federal Corrective Action Plan guidelines (CAP), or if they participated as volunteers. Data collection drew from school and district level documents and direct observation and interviews of principal participants.

The work of a principal can be stressful and complex with internal and external leadership considerations (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Spillane & Lee, 2013). Various factors impacted who and how the participants came to the principalship, and how long they have held the role in the MCSD district. Additionally, the nature of the culture and climate of a school can be a factor in how long a school leader remains in the role of

principal and how successful he or she might be (Engels, Hotton, Devos, Bouchkenooghe, & Aelterman, 2008; Fuller & Young, 2009). Some of these culture and climate factors were present in the principals' schools, therefore there is variation in the years of experience from new to veteran principals.

I sought to examine how participant principals made sense of PBIS policy in relation to the discipline gap within their schools. I was also interested in how they chose to implement PBIS within their buildings. I was also curious as to how, if at all, they chose to incorporate racialized discourses into the implementation and dialogue in relation to PBIS implementation and closing the discipline gap. My findings addressed both of these questions and indicated that personal experience with marginalization shaped the work principals engaged in regarding discipline gap reduction.

Setting

This study was conducted in Metro City School District (MCSD), an urban, public, diverse, Pre-K through 12 grade school district in the Southeast region of the United States. MCSD had an enrollment of 101,243 during the 2015-2016 school year. 54.1 percent of the students identified as of Color, 36.7% identified as Black, 9.4% as Hispanic, and 7.7% identified as Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, or two or more races. In terms of gender, 49.1 percent identified as female, and 50.9% male. In 2011, MCSD was identified as disproportionately disciplining students of Color per a United States Commission on Civil Rights report. Findings from this report were consistent with the literature on disproportionality. Students of Color and their communities and families are presented a particular set of challenges that adversely impact the schooling, achievement, and equitable access that their white peers enjoy.

Recommendations included strongly encouraging the MCS D system to evaluate its disciplinary system, observe districts that have implemented positive disciplinary practices, and plan to emulate those positive behavior systems and practices.

This district was selected for a few reasons. First, convenience was a key factor as this is the district in which I am employed. I have a vested interest in the community, schools, and students. Second, this large school district is willing to innovate based on findings in research. Third, this community has a lengthy desegregation history, and was one of the first in the state to comply with *Brown v. Board* (1954) in the 1950s. Despite commitments to utilizing research-based innovations and a willingness to desegregate its schools, the Metropolitan Public School District is still plagued by discipline disproportionalities. The challenge of the tackling the school to prison pipeline is more nuanced, discrete, and adaptive. Institutional racism itself is an adaptive challenge that urban school districts must purposefully address as an impediment to student equity and the overall progression of urban communities.

Sampling Procedures and Participant Recruitment

While various types of sampling techniques could be used in qualitative research (Patton, 1990), I chose to use purposive sampling (Miles, et al., 2014) because I was interested in learning more about the specific schools and principals who have been identified as both PLA and CAP schools. These schools had been mandated or encouraged to volunteer in a PBIS training cohort as a response to racially disproportionate discipline rates. To be clear, identification as a CAP school placed the requisite on principals to assemble and send a team of teachers and administrators to be trained in PBIS, yet there was no requirement for the principal to be in attendance at

these trainings. Some schools had principals who attended all the PBIS trainings, and some only attended a few, while some principals attended none. In this case, I sought to employ purposeful critical case sampling to exemplify the findings of PLA schools (Miles et al., 2014). My rationale for this kind of purposeful sampling was to "yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" (Patton, 2001, p. 236). Purposeful sampling allowed me to focus on cases that fit my research questions.

To ensure that this complex study offered rich and robust data of the lived experiences of the participants, yet did not become unwieldy, only four participants were selected for the sample – three high school principals, and one middle school principal. The primary sample of this study is the principal, or lead administrator at each of the schools selected as they are the main determinant of what policies and procedures are enacted on the building level.

Participant Recruitment

Seventeen principals were referred to participate in this study, however not all of them fit the criteria for participation. For this study I initially sought principals who were the school leader at PLA middle and high schools. These schools were chosen because schools in this state are often identified as PLA based on deficits in academic and achievement indicators. PLA schools typically had higher levels of disproportionate discipline. Next, I looked at schools mandated to participate in PBIS as part of the district and federal Corrective Action Plans for racially disproportionate discipline, hence identification as CAP schools. From that group I narrowed potential participants down to schools' who had leaders with at least two years of building leadership at their current

site so they would have had experience with PBIS and its implementation. Of the schools invited to participate, only three PLA/CAP schools met selection criteria. A fourth PLA/Non-CAP participant school was willing to participate. This school was part of the first cohort (Cohort 1) and this school was strongly encouraged to participate in the district sponsored PBIS trainings, but was not sanctioned with a Corrective Action Plan . All participant schools were PBIS participants for the 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2015-16 school years.

Once IRB approval was obtained for this study, MCSD in-district data and research requests were completed. When approval was received from MCSD, I contacted the lead administrator of data management and their data specialist for names of the schools that fit the criteria for this study. They obliged and provided me with school data sets and names of principals and school site administrators who I could invite to participate in this study. The data sets I received included all MCSD schools and their PBIS implementation status. Data sets also included year of PBIS implementation, demographics, discipline data, number of referrals, types of referrals, and student and teacher satisfaction survey data. I contacted the administrators via email, (see Appendix A) and followed up with those who responded back with an additional email to set up interviews. Of the 17 potential participants, only 4 responded back for participation – three high school principals and one middle school principal. One principal who I contacted through a gatekeeper was very concerned about the content of my research study. I previously had shared the goal of the study with the gatekeeper. This school was a non-Persistently Low Achieving School and a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) school. This principal requested access to the interview questions and my research questions

before granting an interview. I was hesitant to share these for a few reasons. Initially, I was concerned that interviewing this principal would skew my data by “throwing” the interview and being dishonest about their thoughts and practices. While I knew I would still be able to sift emergent themes of Sensemaking Theory and racialized discourses, I was still concerned that my data would lack authenticity. I was concerned that by having access to these questions, the principal would provide canned or scripted answers that might be generated by someone other than themselves. This principal also asked if I could interview an assistant principal instead of themselves. Because I wanted to understand the sensemaking of the principal, interviewing someone else did not match my questions or my participant sample. I also wanted my participants to trust me as the researcher. I politely emailed the gatekeeper that interview questions would not be available prior to the interviews. In the end, this principal declined participation, citing a “busy schedule” as the reason. Initially I had hoped that I would have several principals from both middle and high schools respond to my invitation to participate. With several principals from each level, I had hoped to compare cases both with-in and across cases. But requests for participation went unanswered by all but the 4 principals who responded. Comparing principals of middle and high schools in other contextual settings may have presented issues for analysis of results. Yet, I was able to avoid such issues by narrowing my selection criteria to only PLA and/or CAP schools. The schools in the sample had similar data points for both student achievement as indicated by PLA status and disproportionate discipline. Traditionally, middle and high schools have many differences. For all intents and purposes, the sample schools were more similar than different. As it happened, the 4 respondents filled if not one then both of the

identification criteria. Principal Anderson did not indicate that he had attended PBIS trainings, while Principals Jones, Owens, and Washington indicated they had attended at least some PBIS trainings.

This interaction gave me some insights as to why many principals in MCSD chose not to participate. In my experience in several different MCSD schools, not every principal is open to sharing. Many of them are wary of answering questions about their practices for fear of additional oversight from individuals outside of their schools. Some of them likely did not answer for fear that district leaders might discover they do not follow the PBIS script. Some may not have responded out of fear that sharing their best practices might help schools that they compete with for market share. Additionally, time is a premium for a busy principal. Two hour-long interviews on separate days could be hard to commit to for a principal with evaluations to complete, testing to plan for, and parents and student needs to satiate. In the end, only 4 participants responded.

Interviews with those four participants who responded were scheduled during the months of March, April, and May 2016. Before the interviews took place, principals and lead administrators were provided a copy of the Informed Consent to participate in the study. A copy of their informed consent with their signature was provided to them. They completed a short verbally administered demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) to generate context, followed by the first of two interviews. Four participants completed both the demographic questionnaire and two interviews. No incentive was provided to the participants.

All four principals had spent bulk of their careers in MCSD as teachers and administrators, and all of them were products of the MCSD district. Three were high

school principals, and one was a middle school principal. One identified as an African American, and three identified as White. Two identified as men and two identified as women. The principals' ages ranged from the late 30s to late 50s. While some aspects of this group were diverse, the group itself was not racially diverse, which is typical of teachers and administration in this district. Of the 17 potential participants referred as participants, only three were of Color, with only one responding for participation. Table 1 includes school location, principal names, and principal demographics.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Participant	School	Gender	Race	Age	Highest Degree	Years of Service	Years of Service as Principal	Prior Leadership experience	Product of MCSD
Principal Anderson	Freetown HS	Male	Caucasian	Late 30s	Master's	16	3	AP, same school	Yes
Principal Jones	Parkerville HS	Male	White	Late 40s	Specialist	23	5	AP, same school	Yes
Principal Owens	Lincoln HS	Female	White	Late 30s	Specialist	16	3	AP, same school	Yes
Principal Washington	Morningside MS	Female	Black, African American	Late 30s	Specialist	16	2	Principal, 3 years prior, AP several schools	Yes

Data Collection

Because of the nature of this study being concurrently descriptive, confirmatory, multi-case, and complex, prior instrumentation was conducted in a pre-research qualitative methods course (Miles et al., 2014). Personal contacts of administrators I knew were utilized for development of questions as part of qualitative coursework. They provided verbal consent. While their data is not included they offered insight to refining and development of both the interview instrument, served to assess the degrees of observer bias, frame questions, collect contextual information, modify if necessary

research procedures, and validated the interview protocols as instruments (Miles et al., 2014; Sampson, 2004).

The primary data collection technique was semi-structured interviews. I was interested in determining how the participants undertook Sensemaking processes, how PBIS was implemented, the steps that were undertaken to implement PBIS, how it was communicated in a racial context, and what about the principal's identity and/or leadership led to implementation, if at all. Individual interviews were conducted in the principals' schools. Locations and times were selected based on the convenience for the principal, and ultimately allowed them to share their experiences, stories, and work in a manner that maintained a level of comfort and level of control for each principal.

Interviews were conducted between March 2016 and May 2016. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to over an hour. Study protocol was utilized to guide each interview in the study. All interviews were digitally recorded and stored on a password protected computer. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. I took field notes during each interview of key words, phrases, and observations. An IRB approved study protocol (see Appendix C) was followed (Creswell, 2013).

Before each interview was conducted the interview protocol was reviewed with each participant, informed consent was reviewed, and an overview of the study was shared. Consent forms were signed in duplicate, one for the administrator and one for my documentation purposes (see Appendix D). During the interview, key words or phrases were written down in my field notes, and speech patterns and mannerisms were also documented. All notes were kept in a locked location accessible to only myself. All email correspondence between myself and participants were conducted via a private email

account, and all digital recordings were kept on a password-protected computer and encrypted cloud drive.

Secondary data collection took place utilizing primary and secondary school PBIS documents generated by the school. These documents were gathered from the MCSD website, Data Management Center requests, the principals themselves, Google searches, and through visual and auditory observation during my interview visits. These artifacts included Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (CSIPs), school-based protocols (posters, signage, parent-student handbook excerpts, discipline frameworks), sample communication regarding PBIS (parent emails), posters and visuals geared towards students, and communication between school and student caregivers. Using these additional data sources allowed for the triangulation of data (Creswell, 2013).

Data Analysis

Data analysis continued the iterative qualitative research process with the coding of the interviews for both deductive and inductive codes. Following Yin's (2009) suggestion, I let the study's theoretical propositions of Critical Race Theory and Sensemaking Theory guide my analysis for the deductive codes. One of the goals of this study is to provide a comparative picture of the complexities of how principals in several diverse schools think about, act on, and communicate PBIS policy in the context of race in their schools. I followed Creswell's suggestion to utilize case analysis strategies of within-case analysis and cross-case analysis so as to better compare each sub-case based on themes that emerge from coded data (Creswell, 2013). Each transcript was read multiple times. The initial cycle of coding utilized simultaneous coding, which was selected because embedded multiple meanings and themes present in each utterance of

the principal participants (Miles et al., 2014). Thematic codes of leadership and CRT were surfaced during first cycle coding; however, a second cycle of coding was undertaken to ensure that I was surfacing evidence of sensemaking and developing a “coherent metasynthesis of the data corpus” (p. 207, Saldaña, 2013). The second coding cycle was deductive in nature as the tenets of SMT were used to create codes. This further documented the complexity of the emergent themes and theoretical connections of CRT and SM.

Reflexivity and Positionality

Creswell (2013) refers to the concept of reflexivity as being two-pronged. First, a researcher should discuss their experiences with the phenomenon being explored and make connections from their experiences to the phenomenon. Second, the researcher should discuss how their experiences shape their view of what they are studying. Previously I had mentioned my position in the context of MCSD. I am a partial product of an education in this district, attending MCSD for more than half of my schooling. I live in the community this district serves and I am touched by products of MCSD in my personal life – friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues. In the MCSD community, often one of the first questions a person asks after meeting someone new for the first time is, “What high school did you go to?”. This is a way for acquaintances to develop some context about each other; never mind how biased one’s views of the opposing person’s alma mater of the new acquaintance might be. This question props up community and school stereotypes of conjured contexts of high schools in the district.

Several factors influence my researcher positionality. The most prominent factor in my personal positionality in relation to this study is the fact that I am in the employ of

MCS D and have been my entire career. Even as I acknowledge this, in the same turn I recognize that I am part of the organization but do not share the subconscious organizational values that many who work in the MCS D system possess. I am influenced by the fact that I believe that institutional racism is still rife in this system that has made tremendous technical strides to increase equity and inclusion, hence my partiality to CRT. This comes from what I have seen as an educator in the district, but also from my own racial identity. Another factor in my researcher positionality is my intersectionality as a biracial woman who identifies as a person of Color. Being biracial alternately has provided me access or relegation to networks privilege or marginalization. My positionality is also built on hope and social justice. Within the MCS D community, there are educators who are like-minded in their pursuit of social justice. My personal goal of this research is that this will tease out and bolster social justice in this community. Another factor that influences my positionality is that I was an over-disciplined student who attended some of MCS D's most struggling schools. I had first-hand experiences with punitive discipline, teacher and administrator biases, overt racism and classism, and the low expectations of adults in the schools I attended. I have seen the best MCS D has to offer to students and their families and the worst. My experiences as student, teacher, and community member of Color influence my thinking of school leadership and disproportionalities.

Limitations

This qualitative multiple case study focused on the sensemaking and racialized discourses of four school leaders and their experiences implementing PBIS policy in diverse schools. My rationale for interviewing so few participants was I felt I could spend

my time interviewing the participants and researching the contextual factors of each school. At the beginning of this study my plan was to interview at least nine participants. However, I experienced several barriers that kept me from executing my initial plan. Initially, I had 17 potential participants that fit the selection criteria of CAP schools. When the data were reviewed six principals were invited, with only three responding as willing participants. One principal refused, citing scheduling conflicts, and two others never responded back. That led me to seek additional participants who were not CAP schools, but were strongly encouraged to participate. When all my participants were finalized, PLA school principals were the only ones choosing to participate. That added a new dimension to my study, noting the linkages between the discipline gap and the achievement gap, which I felt was promising. Finally, I was able to interview and observe four of school leaders. This process took four months.

My sample size ($n=4$) and the lack of variation of my respondents (two white males, a white female, and a Black female) is a limitation of this study because it is not wholly representative of diversity present in the MCSD district. It is representative of the absence of the lack of the voice of Color and marginalized individuals. Regardless, I was still able to extrapolate meaningful qualitative data that provides valuable information about how principals make sense of the policies they encounter and the implementation and communication of those policies within the context of race. This research can inform principal sensemaking and discipline policy practice. These findings provide valuable information for the Metropolitan District and the schools involved.

Ethical Concerns

The research design employed for this study had minimal impact on the participants involved. Questions about how decisions are made can be uncomfortable for any leader, and I acknowledged questions about how PBIS is implemented discussed in a racialized context could add further complexities and challenges to exploring the lived experiences of the participants and their practices. Pseudonyms were provided for all principals, schools, and communities involved. Colloquially used terms for policies were also changed to ensure the confidentiality of the district and schools involved. As previously mentioned, digital recordings were stored on a password-protected computer, and all electronic transcripts were stored on a web-based drive. Field notes will be shredded within three years of completion of this research.

Special care was taken to ensure trustworthiness, according to Creswell's (2013, p. 250-253) suggestions. Two, hour long interviews were conducted to prolong my engagement and observation of my participants. Interviews, Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (CSIPS), school-based protocols (posters, signage, parent-student handbook excerpts, discipline frameworks), sample communication regarding PBIS (parent emails), posters and visuals geared towards students, and communication between school and student caregivers were all used to triangulate data. The Capstone model of research and collaboration with my Capstone chair provided plentiful opportunities for debriefing and review. The Capstone process itself was an external audit. Negative case analysis was addressed. As I conducted this study, it became clear that not all data collected confirmed my hunches about principal sensemaking, nor did all data collected fit a pattern or code. At times positive and negative codes overlapped.

In the previous section, I addressed my own personal bias. As the study progressed I found that I had to check and recheck my assertions for my personal bias. Member checking was conducted with each participant after interviews had been transcribed. The goal was to ensure that each participant's message, meaning, and voice was authentically captured. Member checking allowed the participant time for the interviews to settle and reflect on their words for additions or deletions. I chose to write each case so that it was contextually tiered. Each case was written to provide a rich description to the reader so they could develop an interconnected orientation of each community, school, and principal involved.

Conclusion

In this chapter I offered a detailed outline of how I conducted this research. The qualitative methods allowed me to conduct a robust and in-depth exploration of how principals make sense of PBIS policy and race. I acknowledged reflexivity and my personal positionality as a researcher. All participants, both persons and institutions, were kept confidential as well as the raw interview data, both audio and transcriptions. The following chapters will address the analysis and findings and contexts of the four principal participants, Sensemaking Theory and Critical Race Theory themes that arose, analysis, and implications of principal sensemaking about PBIS in the context of race.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS: STUDY ONE

In this chapter, I present the analysis and findings of my study, which sought to understand how principals in the Metropolitan Public School District make sense of PBIS implementation in the context of their diverse racial contexts of their schools. The study asked school principals how they communicate policy to stakeholders; what their role is in the development of policy and implementation; how they make sense of PBIS in their schools; how they communicate PBIS policy to stakeholders; how PBIS manifests in their buildings; and how they look at, talk about, and deal with issues of disproportionalities and equity in their schools. To that end, I undertook data collection that consisted of primary data sources of principal interviews regarding their experiences in implementation of PBIS to address disproportionate discipline within their schools. I also collected secondary data sources to help define the context of the principal participants and their schools. Secondary data sources from the participant district and schools included academic and non-cognitive data, longitudinal behavior trend data, Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (CSIP), and achievement test trend data to triangulate the level of implementation of PBIS. Website and document analysis was conducted on district and school documents regarding PBIS implementation, disproportionate discipline, or school and/or administrative efforts to address the discipline gap. Additionally, during analysis, care was taken to identify and code evidence of emergent themes, sensemaking components, and both dialogues and silences about race. Data was simultaneously coded two ways. During the first cycle of coding participant's interviews were analyzed for inductive emergent codes that were grouped thematically. During the second cycle of coding, deductive codes were generated based on Sensemaking Theory. Participant cases are provided to give context of the individuals

as school leaders and as policy sensemakers. Participants' data was analyzed and compared using a modified checklist-conceptual cluster matrix (Miles et al., 2014).

Before I present my findings, I will remind the reader of the data collection and analysis processes, share individual case summaries of principals and their schools, and provide a detailed overview of research findings.

Data Collection and Analysis

Both Miles et al. (2014) and Creswell (2013) acknowledge the living nature of data analysis, meaning data analysis is an iterative process, or spiraling. The qualitative research process should happen simultaneously with data collection. The unit of analysis for this multi-case study was both the school and the school principal. With this iterative process in mind, data analysis began prior to the interviews, as data about participant schools was accessible online. This iterative process continued during the interviews and review of primary and secondary documents. Interviews were recorded digitally, and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were taken during each interview to make notes of mannerisms and affect of each participant. Member checks were conducted ensure that each participants experience was captured as they meant it to be, and to confirm or extend analyses and conclusions to avoid issues with anonymity (Miles et al., 2014).

Data analysis continued with the coding of the interviews. Following Yin's (2009) suggestion, I let the study's theoretical propositions of CRT and Sensemaking Theory guide my analysis. One of the goals of this study is to provide a comparative picture of the complexities of how principals in several diverse schools think about, act on, and communicate PBIS policy in the context of race in their schools. This study followed Creswell's suggestion to utilize case analysis strategies of within-case analysis and cross-

case analysis so as to better compare each sub-case based on themes that emerge from coded data (Creswell, 2013). Each transcript was read multiple times. The initial cycle of coding utilized simultaneous coding. Simultaneous coding was selected to tease out embedded multiple meanings and themes present in each utterance of the principal participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thematic codes of leadership and CRT were sifted out of the first cycle of coding; however, a second cycle of coding was undertaken to ensure I was culling evidence of sensemaking and developing a “coherent metasynthesis of the data corpus” (p. 207, Saldaña, 2013). The second coding cycle was deductive in nature as the tenets of SMT were used to create codes. This further documented the complexity of the emergent themes and theoretical connections of CRT and SM. A third cycle of coding for racial silences and dialogues were also undertaken. I chose the strategy of analysis of themes (p. 101, Creswell, 2013) because I was not seeking to generalize beyond the cases of the participant district and schools; instead, my purpose was to better understand the complexity of Sensemaking present in each case.

Participant Case Analysis

In the pages that follow, each individual participant’s case is articulated to provide context for them as leaders and sensemakers and their schools. Each case summary is similarly laid out to coherently share participants’ experiences as educators and individuals. Each participant’s school context is described contextually – historically, racially, and geographically - within the context of the neighborhood, city community, and within the institution of the Metropolitan Public School District. Next, my general impressions of the principal participants’ sensemaking process will be addressed. Last,

salient areas of Sensemaking will be addressed in conjunction with emergent themes of social justice leadership and Critical Race Theory.

Principal Anderson

Principal Anderson has been an educator for over 16 years. He graduated from one of the oldest and most coveted magnet school programs within the district. Principal Anderson prides himself on being an alumnus of this school. At the time of the interview he was in his late 30s and identified himself as a Caucasian male. He has been the principal of Freeman High School for three years. Prior to becoming principal, he was an assistant principal and teacher at Freeman. He has worked his entire career in PLA schools. He was an only child, raised by a single working mother who placed a high value on education and expected him to attend college. His path to becoming an educator was not a direct one. In college he studied engineering, but did not feel fulfilled. As he surveyed his life, he noticed activities that filled his spare time all had the same thing in common – he was teaching, mentoring, leading, and serving in various groups and organizations. These reflections on life led him to become an English Teacher. He holds a Master’s degree in Education Administration.

From the classroom he enjoyed teaching English, using relevant activities and real-world instruction to engage his students. More than teaching English, he enjoyed mentoring his students and noted that he “could reach them at their level...with culturally relevant instruction.” The sense of community of the classroom and school drew him to teaching, as the feeling of community was something that was somewhat absent in his youth. Teaching offered him a constructive way to give back, to offer guidance to students without support, and provide a model of resiliency. Principal Anderson did not

want someone else to “fall through the crack.” As time progressed he realized he might be able to do more to help students avoid “falling through the crack” by stepping into the role of administrator. Principal Anderson is passionate about supporting student learning and helping students find their purpose.

Upon entering Freeman, I found a clean, well-lit, modernly decorated building. The mascot, the Fighting Falcon, was prominently displayed. Principal Anderson was welcoming and both of our interviews took place in his office. During our first interview it was a non-work day, but Principal Anderson was still at school. Our second interview took place one day after school. His desk was covered in documents and binders. One binder he referenced as the BGB, or the Big Gold Binder, held approximately 13 different improvement focus areas he referenced throughout our interviews.

Freeman High School

Freeman High School is located in Macon, a suburb of a large city in the Southeast United States. Macon, while part of the larger city, is incorporated with its own government, police, and town center. Until the 1960s, Macon was primarily inhabited by middle class and working class white families. With desegregation of the 1960s and 1970s, middle class Black families began to move in to the town. The MCSD has instituted various iterations of busing to support integration, and many students who currently attend Freeman live in a predominately Black adjacent neighborhood. One of the smallest high school student bodies in the Metropolitan district, Freeman’s enrollment averages about 800 students and for the 2015-16 SY, 76.9% of students identify as being of Color.

Based on 2016 demographic data, Freeman High School's racial makeup is 23% white, 71.5% Black, 3.0% Hispanic, and 2.4% Other. In 2009, as result of an audit, Freeman was deemed a PLA school after several years of not meeting achievement goals. Freeman received a federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) to undertake school turnaround efforts. Per local and federal designations, Freeman's entire student population has been deemed "at-risk" for several years because of socioeconomic and achievement factors. In recent years, approximately 80% of students at Freeman received free or reduced price meals. In 2015, Freeman's overall accountability score was 59.3, an increase from 57.3. In 2011, Freeman was identified as a school that was disproportionately disciplining students of Color and students receiving special education services. Personnel from MCSD and Freeman were required to draft a Corrective Action Plan, as well as institute Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as part of their climate and culture improvements. While the town of Macon supports the school, many in the community have considered Freeman an unsafe school for years. Prior to the 2009-2010 turnaround efforts (2008-09 SY), Freeman had 900 suspensions. During the 2015 school year, Freeman had 404 student suspensions, with 322 of those suspensions attributed to students of Color who made up 80.5% of the student population. According to the District School Survey, since 2012 parent satisfaction has averaged 82%, while student satisfaction has averaged 74%.

Principal Anderson's Sensemaking and Freeman High School

Much of Principal Anderson's work focused on striving to create systems that are organic and exhibit distributed leadership. He sought to create an environment where individuals know their roles and feel empowered to act and students are successful. Much

of this thinking drew on the organizational Retrospective from the previous principal. The vestiges of the former principal's punitive discipline management and leadership overshadowed the early days of Principal Anderson's tenure at Freeman. Anderson realized his leadership style was not that of his predecessor – he could not manage all improvement areas, or “cogs”, on his own. Subsequently, he sought to create a culture among the staff where they knew their role and were empowered to act:

And one of the things that I've worked hard on over the past three years is to identify leaders in the building that can be autonomous in running the cog, all right. And operating the cog. Where, when I first took over as a leader, I think I wanted to operate every cog myself. And I just realized really quickly that I couldn't.

Most of his first interview focused on how he seeks to implement a series of “cogs” or organizational components that were based on 13 improvement priorities interacting in structured and transparent symbiosis. He referenced implementing, documenting, and monitoring these organizational cogs as a process that guides the work in the following passage:

So procedures and processes can help guide our work... And with new things that come down the pipe we need to do and implement you can really quickly lose sight of things that worked in the past because you're having to implement something new. And if nothing was documented or there wasn't a process to continue its history -- like if -- if a teacher leaves and a new teacher comes in. And all of a sudden, you have a missed opportunity to teach them the system that worked. All of a sudden you've got a fractured system.

As he works toward this role-orientated system, he seeks greater alignment, more efficiency, and greater student achievement. In terms of his sensemaking, Principal Anderson exhibited all components Sensemaking to a degree, however he spent most of his time collaboratively Noticing, Bracketing, and Labeling issues as they arose. How and to what extent Principal Anderson made sense of the discipline gap in his school as well as the role of racialized discourses will be addressed in the following sections.

Noticing, Bracketing, and Labeling. Principal Anderson's efforts to create systems focused on data driven inquiry. It was clear that the ability to notice, bracket, and label the issues in his school were easy for him. Principal Anderson excelled at the technical aspects of instructional leadership, however little evidence was found that he had the ability to incite adaptive changes, or changes in thinking, acting, or believing on the part of those in his building. He was very aware of the demographic data, what it meant to the school and its stakeholders, and whose role and responsibility it was to manage each "cog". Based on district suspension, referral, achievement and accountability data Freeman remained essentially stagnant for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years, which leaves one to wonder if his analysis halted at the basic identifying and categorizing of school issues. In the 2013-14 school year, per the CSIP, the PBIS team was founded. Based on CSIP documented activities for both years, the focus was on academic interventions and supports, with RTI used to focus on academic interventions over behavior interventions. The CSIP virtually remained unchanged from one year to the next, with few direct PBIS strategies identified. Those strategies identified were student mentoring by Family Resource Center (FRC) staff, Freshman Academy behavior data analysis, development and refinement of a Student Response Team (SRT)

for students in crisis, and recognizing students with increased attendance. During triangulation of CSIPs and interviews it became clear the lack of overt PBIS planning, activities, or attention to specific demographic groups were represented in both. Principal Anderson was unable to directly identify PBIS activities outside of the meeting of the PBIS team. This lack of intentional focus was corroborated during interviews with Principal Anderson. When asked about PBIS practices in his building he acknowledged the he was not an “actual part of the team”, and that his efforts had to be focused on other areas. He also noted that while PBIS had been present in his building for about two years, there were no systematic processes, procedures, or policies in his building regarding PBIS but in the coming year he would become more involved and apply his “systems approach to PBIS.” With some irritation and defensiveness, he acknowledged that he did not adopt PBIS in the manner that the district suggested:

Again, I will say this, and I'll say this up front, I did not adopt the plan or the way they wanted us to develop a plan from the canned PBIS group. I looked at its core essentials, its core values. I looked at what its pluses could be for our building. Brought those back and said, do you we -- again, do we have a void? And then here's what I think this program can offer us if we're willing to put the work into developing it ourselves.

Principal Anderson’s lack of direct participation with PBIS in his building, no school-wide intentional focus on PBIS, and his refusal to implement PBIS as prescribed may have contributed to the stagnation of the achievement and discipline data. His novice status as principal working to reform Freeman’s paternalistic culture, a vestige of his predecessor, likely contributed to his inability to move on to the action-focused

components of Sensemaking. His inability to reach action-orientated sensemaking bled over into his understanding and ability to engage in racialized discourses in his work.

Racialized Discourses at Freeman. During our interviews Principal Anderson was willing to discuss racial disproportionalities present within his school. Yet, like many white educators (Castagno, 2008), his responses conveyed racial silences as he skirted direct questions on disproportionality, used coded language when referencing students of Color, addressed issues of race from a deficit mindset, and overtly conflated a number of equity issues associated with Freeman students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The conversation of race was discussed, but while Freeman has the second largest Black student population in the district, silences and coded language surrounded the topic. During the triangulation of Andersons' interviews and Freeman's CSIPS, no reference to specific strategies used to support Black students were found. CSIPs were void of references to students of Color. References to "Gap" students were present in both the CSIP and the interviews. The following quote captures the extent of Principal Anderson's silences around the majority of his students and their needs:

For Freeman, just so -- for my school, we're 94 percent gap. So our entire building -- matter of fact, I have disparities for the population from what we -- , what we're not doing is lifting them up higher. Because as a school model we -- we are really trying to treat all students with very specific gap strategies to move them to the proficiency mark.

One would surmise that a principal of a school as diverse as Freeman would actively acknowledge their students' race and intersectionality; however, Principal Anderson did not because as a white person this is a function of differential racialization, or the act of

alternately racialized and de-racialized minority groups in response to their needs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). When telling his leadership story and the story of Freeman, Principal Anderson controls the master narrative about his school and his students depending on the audience and their context. Anderson's over-attention to the early cognitive components of Sensemaking exacerbates his inability to move forward to the action-orientated stages of Sensemaking. As a school leader, Principal Anderson relies heavily on *Noticing and Bracketing* of data to make decisions, and cited data analysis as a key component to his leadership. However, when asked what the role of the discussion of race might play in conversations on disproportionalities at his school he responded:

The discussion of race in itself typically is brought up in terms of what does our data say? We get to identify "the who" based on demographical data. And then when it comes to trying to say, okay, does this policy meet the needs of our kids? We want to survey kids...survey the parents. We want communication from the demographic that a policy is going to represent...to ensure that there's some buy-in, in order to say it's an equitable policy. One that people can get behind and believe in. And that would it would treat everyone as intended. So too many times we set policy but then we don't have a discussion on whether or not it's going to be equitable when it's enforced... surveying the students, by surveying the parents we're able to get a little bit more discourse about whether or not a policy is best for the people that we intend it to be for.

This utterance is an example of Principal Anderson's Noticing, Bracketing, Labeling, and narrative shaping. It also is evidence of his deflecting and silencing of racialized conversations. It leaves the listener asking who is "the who", what does he perceive are

the “needs of our kids”, which “demographic are we trying to reach”, how does his school treat “everyone as intended” and ensure a policy “is best for the people we intend it to be for.”

Research indicates that white educators tend to conflate race with other equity issues such as culture, poverty, gender identity, and issues of special education and educational access (Castagano, 2008; Johnson, 2002; Vaught & Castagano, 2008). Principal Anderson behaved in a similar fashion during his interviews. When asked how he identified equity in his school it took several tries for him to generate a coherent response; however, in doing so racial silences bubbled to the surface. He overtly conflated several equity issues when asked about race:

For me equity boils down to more students achieving their goals. And I will be looking at that quantitatively, all right. I will. It's just who I am. And I will be saying, okay, talk to me about the achievement gaps that are going on inside this building. Tell me who's proficient. Tell me who's not. We're going to continue to name and claim. We're going to continue to get more kids to meet their goals, all right... Because I don't look at equity just in regards to race...I do look at it in terms of gender... I look at it in terms of social economical standpoints... I look at it in terms of LBGQTQ. I look at it from every angle that you can possibly say. So I'm almost a diversity is equity...or I should say there's equity in diversity...

Evidence of racial silences, coded language, deficit thinking, and conflation of equity were present in interviews with Principal Anderson. While he attempts to make sense of race in the context of the discipline gap in his school, his inability and unwillingness to talk frankly about race was evident. The presence of these factors are communicative

impediments to Principal Anderson's leadership sensemaking, leadership ability to support learning, and reduction of disproportionalities present in the experiences of students of Color at Freeman High School. This leads to further questions about how might Principal Anderson's identity as a white male impact his sensemaking about race and school discipline, could his sensemaking be altered with the introduction of a critical perspective, training, and support? Does he possess the will to understand race on a level deeper than simple demographic data analysis, yet lack the skills to have the conversation? Racialized discourses play a meager role in Principal Anderson's sensemaking of PBIS, the discipline gap, and race in the context of Freeman High School. As the reader will see, the next participant possessed the willingness to delve into race, but struggled with developing the skill set to deepen the conversation about race in their schools.

Principal Jones

Principal Jones has been an educator for 23 years and is a product of MCSD. At the time of the interview he was in his late 40s and identified himself as a white male. Prior to becoming principal, he was an assistant principal and teacher at Parkerville. He has worked his entire career in PLA schools and he has been the principal of Parkerville High School since 2011. Prior to becoming principal, he was an assistant principal and teacher at Parkerville. In college he studied electrical engineering, but was not satisfied. During that time, he also was a wrestling coach at a local high school and worked as a substitute teacher on all levels during college. Through his coaching, he developed a love of teaching and mentoring. Upon reflection, he felt the field of engineering did not allow him to directly impact lives and serve. He identified service to others a core value of his,

and it greatly impacted his decision to change his major from engineering to mathematics. Once he obtained his Bachelor's degree in mathematics, he pursued his Master's in teaching, and then later received his second Master's in educational administration.

As a Math teacher, Principal Jones cited his goals were to help students develop clarity and understanding of the content, especially for subject matter that could be especially complex. As a principal he recognizes his role is to aid stakeholders in developing clarity and understanding of teaching and learning. He cites the organizational interworking of a school can carry the same complexity for stakeholders as high-level mathematics can for the adolescent brain:

And I bring that same idea to leadership. I try to take this very complex dynamic, which is a school, and students, and learning, and identify the focus areas. And then really simplify those to a point where we can all have -- be really clear on what we're trying to accomplish... in a nutshell it's -- , it's -- education is very complex.

He believes one of his strengths is simplifying the complex and generating buy-in with his staff. Principal Jones noted empathy as another core value of his, and acknowledged he and his staff hail from more economically "blessed" backgrounds than many of their students. I interviewed Principal Jones twice during school hours at Parkerville High School. When I arrived I found a clean, well-kept school. Both days I was there I entered the building shortly after school had begun and found security staff congregating together in the main lobby. I proceeded to the main office where friendly staff greeted me and directed me to sign in using a computer. Principal Jones came out and warmly greeted me

and directed me to his office. His office was non-descript, but I noticed positioned on the wall behind his computer he had several documents and flow charts. On another wall he had some school-wide PBIS posters. One poster prominently read, “Parkerville Parrots Keep It REAL!” This poster had a series of behaviors attached to each letter of the word REAL as a kind of acrostic with each letter indicating a series of positively phrased expected behaviors. He would reference these flyers and posters regarding policy implementation during our interviews.

Parkerville High School

Parkerville High School is located in Parkerville, a semi-rural suburb of a large city in the Southeast United States. Parkerville, while part of the larger city, used to be incorporated with its own government and town center until a city-county merger about 15 years ago. Parkerville is primarily inhabited by middle to working class white families, and according to the U.S. Census is fairly homogenous with 96% of the community identifying as Caucasian (U.S. Census, 2010). The MCSD has instituted various iterations of busing to support integration. Due to the homogeneity of the Parkerville community and the state and federal desegregation mandates, most of Parkerville’s students of Color are bused in from predominately Black and mixed-race neighborhoods several miles away. One of the smallest high school student bodies in the Metropolitan district, Parkerville’s enrollment averages about 1,100 students, and for the 2015-16 SY, 38.7% of students identify as being of Color but do not live in the immediate Parkerville area.

Based on 2016 demographic data, Parkerville High School’s racial makeup is 61.4% white, 21.6% Black, 12.3% Hispanic, and 4.8% Other. In 2010, as result of an

audit, Parkerville was deemed a PLA school after several years of not meeting achievement goals. Parkerville received a federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) to undertake school turnaround efforts. Per local and federal designations, Parkerville's entire student population has been deemed "at-risk" for several years because of socioeconomic and achievement factors. In recent years, about 69% of students received free or reduced price meals.

In 2015, Parkerville's overall accountability score was 64.7, a decrease of 2.7 points from the year before. Parkerville was not identified as state or federal Corrective Action Plan school, or CAP, based on disproportionalities present school discipline data. However, the school administration was strongly encouraged to address discipline disproportionalities of its students of Color and those receiving special education services. School administration chose to participate in Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as part of their climate and culture improvements and school turnaround work. Parkerville for all intents and purposes, is a neighborhood school with two major resides areas. The majority of students reside in the Parkerville ZIP Code and the adjacent ZIP Code of the Oakmont neighborhood (MCSD, 2016a). The community supports the school. Many families, business leaders, and community officials are alumni of Parkerville High School. Many faculty and staff members are graduates who have come back to the community and school to work. During the 2015 school year, Parkerville had 266 student suspensions, with 184 of those suspensions attributed to students of Color. According to the District School Survey, since 2012 parent satisfaction has averaged 88%, while student satisfaction has been 74%.

Principal Jones' Sensemaking and Parkerville High School

Principal Jones utilized all areas of Sensemaking to a degree. However, during triangulation of data collected from interviews, CSIPs, and school documents, it is clear that Principal Jones utilizes the Labeling, Presumption, Social Systematic, and Organization through Communication components of Sensemaking. These four help him understand each policy he is required to enact and make abstract policies concrete for his stakeholders. For the purposes of the following analysis, I chose to focus on how Principal Jones utilized the Social Systematic and Organization through Communication components, as those were the richest Sensemaking themes that emerged.

Social Systematic and Organization through Communication. Where some leaders might get bogged down creating multi-layered policies, Principal Jones makes policy creation and implementation simple. Additionally, evidence social and collaborative sensemaking of policy was evident at Parkerville. Policy creating and implementation were social endeavors for Principal Jones. As he spoke, he did not focus on what data was used to determine where policy was needed, but depended on his staff to shape policies in an iterative process based on data, and shaped through the communication and expertise of his staff. He cited the collaborative, communicative process that he guides all collaborative teams through multiple times yearly in the following utterance:

We developed that as a staff. It's a real simple mission statement. We wanted it easy. Our vision statement was just what we wanted Parkerville High School to look like -- when we get to where we want to be. And then our collective commitments was what are we going to do [sic.]? What are our behaviors? Do

they need to be to make sure that this vision becomes a reality? We start with it at the beginning of every year. And then we have what we call PLC binder checks. They're basically just me sitting down with every collaborative team in the building. And generally we talk about, okay, last trimester what did your day look like? Where did students not do as well as you thought? And how are you going to rewrite instruction and try to do better next time? What are your priority, focus areas now?

His ability to guide his staff to develop their aligned mission and collective commitments is key to charting their policy course, and is a systematic and social process. Additionally, his participation periodically with all his collaborative teams is key in monitoring the work done by teams and is organization by communication, as this is the result of action. Much of what Principal Jones referenced in the way of his sensemaking focused on instruction and how he and his staff have built an instructional culture using the mission, vision, and a series of collective commitments as the foundation for the work done at Parkerville. The collective commitments, or expectations, he shared were either “tight” covenants that were non-negotiable, or “loose” frameworks where teachers and staff were allowed to personally interpret and innovate. The key to both the “tight” and “loose” commitments was the iterative process of developing staff buy-in through distributive policy creation. When asked about how he makes sense of PBIS, he shared how he guides the staff through an inquiry process similar to how they address instructional concerns using a positive slant:

One of our fundamental practices is we look at our classes...for walkthroughs is reinforcement and recognition of success and successful behaviors. And we talk

about that quite a bit. Because there's so much bang for your buck with that. It's going to help with school culture with recognizing positive behaviors. And through all Marzano's studies...his studies that shows that it increases learning big time. So something that we had total control of. That's totally an adult practice. It's totally under my control how often I recognize and reinforce your positive behaviors as a student and your success as a student. So we monitor that closely and we share that with teachers several times a year...teachers get their individual data, walkthrough data every trimester They get it as a collaborative team every trimester. And they get it in individual coaching sessions. Every teacher has an instructional coach that meets with them three times a year. We're always talking about that. We do a PD about feeding the "Positive Parrot"...Now, it just talks about feeding the Positive Parrot... making sure you're keeping things positive. And we talk about the importance of doing that with students. So we're focused on that.

This positivity coursed through the data. It is unclear if this is a personal or leadership characteristic of Principal Jones', a clever policy implementation device used to cajole staff into adaptive change, or simply his latching on to the positive and preemptive nature of PBIS as a framework. Regardless, this positivity was present in Parkerville's CSIPs for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. During that time, they created a positive student mentoring program for students targeting students with higher than average discipline and attendance issues, a system of rewards and incentives, and began implementing the PLASCOTrack behavior monitoring system. Principal Jones cited

PLASCOTrack as a game changer for encouraging positive behavior in Parkerville's students. He explained the positive tracking of student behavior:

We've got a, you can see behind you there on that poster to your right (indicating), "Parrots Keep It REAL". That -- that's our main PBIS initiative. We call it "Keep It REAL". And real stands for respect, effort, attitude, and leadership. So any time we see students demonstrating respect, effort, attitude, or leadership we ask teachers to recognize that in PLASCOTrack. And then at the end of the day, every day, I send emails to all the parents (of students) that were recognized that day... your student was recognized for demonstrating one of these traits today. Congratulations...it allows us to school wide recognize positive behaviors. And right now we're looking for some general routines Like starting class...As soon as the kids cross the threshold they're expected to start on that bell work. It's in the same place every day. The lesson frame's in the same place every day. And if kids come in, and get started on their bell work, and they're prepared for class teachers can recognize them for starting class on time. And you earn points for that.

While he noted there is not total implementation of PLASCOTrack by all teachers, it is making a difference especially with Freshman students and teachers – a grade that typically has the highest discipline numbers. His goal for the 2016-2017 school year was that every teacher use PLASCOTrack. Other overtly positive aspects of Parkerville's PBIS work are the mailing of "Keep it REAL" postcards from teachers to students, and *Kindness Revolution* wristbands for recognizing student and teacher random acts of kindness. Another PBIS policy implementation component that indicates a shift in

thinking at Parkerville is the gradual move from in-school suspension to the use of the Positive Action Center, or PAC. Instead of students exhibiting misbehavior being excluded from class for the entire period, or for days at a time, they are placed in PAC to cool down when agitated because of minor altercations, reflect on behavior, receive coaching on replacement behaviors from a behavior coach, all with the goal of being returned to class as quickly as possible. This is shift from the exclusionary discipline that used to be the norm at Parkerville. He explains the process:

We totally revamped our PAC [Positive Action Center] room. To make it more about behavior change than punishment. And that has been big this year. We wrote in our budget request a position of a behavior coach. And we've seen real success with that. We communicated to teachers - we need your cooperation with the focus being getting students back in the class, all right? So a student's who disruptive in class does that mean that that student needs to miss that entire day? Because that's kind of what our old PAC room was...you went there and you missed the rest of period four. You went on to the rest of your classes. But the next day you went back and try it again. Now, our goal is to talk to the behavior coach. We have six progressive packets that they work on. And it's all about self-reflection, . What happened? What could I have done differently? We're trying to get students to -- and this is not that there's never an adult, practice that contributed to this, but we're trying to get students to not always focus on, well, that teacher doesn't like me. Or that teacher did this. What did I do and what could I have done differently? And get it -- just get it in to reflect on that with a goal of being -- getting back in class as quickly as possible. And we've had a lot

of -- we've saved a lot of instructional time for individual students with that behavior coach. Because they can talk to the student.

Principal Jones articulated his sensemaking on dealing with disruptive students and the technical shift from a more punitive to less punitive behavior system. However, he concedes that while this behavior process is better than what they used before, there is still work needing to be done, especially with teacher perceptions of the process. This is where the adaptive Social Systematic process of Principal Jones' sensemaking comes into play. Not every teacher has a student's best interests at heart, and sometimes they must be reminded of the work they agreed to do. In times like those, he draws on the collective commitments his staff agreed upon several years ago:

We've got our vision...four sentences in our vision statement, what we want it to look like. And then we've got collective commitments that are our behaviors that are going to contribute to that. And we're just always talking about doing what's best for the student...and we accept that what's best for the student is to be in the classroom learning...we talk about that all the time and how we can do that. And over time, we've just put a staff together that really wants to do what's best for kids. And our professional development's always geared towards how do we do that? Here's why we want to do it. We want students to learn. We want to prepare them for postsecondary education. Now, how do we do that? , how can we deal with these behaviors that may have resulted in loss of instruction time for students in the past? And can we do that any differently?

Jones articulated the collaborative iterative process he regularly leads his staff through. This regular collective sensemaking leads to Organization through Communication.

Punitive disciplinary measures are still present at Parkerville's CSIP in the form of in-school suspension, but based on both the CSIP documentation and Jones' interviews it is likely that PAC has superseded it in its use. Discipline data indicates that Parkerville had a 16% (2264 to 1897) reduction of referrals, but a 6% (252 to 266) increase in suspensions from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015. These numbers represent an 8% overall reduction from pre-PBIS numbers. In 2012-2013 prior to the implementation of PBIS, Parkerville had 325 suspensions. Also during that time there was a 7% increase in discipline offenses described as violent by MCSD. It is the only school in the sample to experience such an increase. PBIS classroom practices likely have contributed to the decrease in referrals, and the increase in violent events such as fighting may be a cause of the increased suspensions.

Racialized Discourses at Parkerville. Unlike the first participant, Principal Anderson, Principal Jones was very open about discussing his leadership responses to disproportionality at Parkerville. While not defensive like Principal Anderson, but still like many white educators who subscribe consciously and subconsciously to the white master narrative, his responses conveyed racial silences as he skirted direct responses to questions on disproportionality, used coded language when referencing students of Color, and conflated racial and socioeconomic factors impacting his students. A general misunderstanding of how race plays a role in what happens to students of Color at Parkerville was observed. When asked what role race played in the policy conversations at his school he said there were no school based decision-making council policies regarding race, but acknowledged the PBIS team meets bi-weekly to monitor and address

discipline data points that include racial demographics. The use of racially coded language was present as he described the racialized context:

And we look at our high fliers as far as violations of the code of conduct. And we look at individual students. We look to see if they fall in any specific subgroup. And what we have found -- , we talked a little bit about this last time. What we have found at Parkerville is it's more a poverty issue than it is a race issue.

The emphasis on looking at “discipline high-fliers”, “individual students”, “subgroups”, and finally the conflation of race and poverty and apparent discounting of the intersectionality are interesting. First, Principal Jones gives dual meaning to the term “high-fliers”, individual students, and subgroups; he acknowledges them as Other, separate, and unique. Second, he conveys a message that grouping them and Labeling them is avoided, only to re-assign them as Other, a subgroup. Finally, to totally negate race as an issue, his words show that while willing to engage in sensemaking about race, Principal Jones struggles to break free of the master narrative of school discipline and acknowledge the intersectionality that race and poverty for his students might have for students who are of Color but racially different. When discussing racial disproportionalities, he did not just reference the discipline gap but also the achievement gap. He thought retrospectively about how in the past year his personal growth goal was to increase African American reading proficiency, an academic area that needed to be addressed. When I probed further regarding how race impacted his decision, he deflected in his remark:

In reality we have a lot of what we call “fragile learners”. So we're -- we're looking at every student and what's good -- what those students need. And we -- ,

I talked about it last time. We accept the fact that adult practices drive student achievement. And we also believe that if instructional practices are good for your fragile students they're good for everybody. So we're trying to pull those research based practices. We're trying to increase the frequency of those research based practices every day and every class. And monitor that...So on a day-to-day level it's just about continuing to improve instruction.

His reference to “fragile learners” is further evidence of his inability to broach or understand the intersectionality of his students of Color. Educators can and should champion his willingness to support every student, but it is shortsighted to address all student needs as the same. Principal Jones is making incremental steps to implement PBIS at his school, but as it becomes more diverse the adaptive challenge looms if he is not willing to directly address sensemaking in the racial context.

Principal Jones articulated evidence of characteristics that set him apart from Principal Anderson. As a school leader, Principal Jones is proficient in aligning the work of his school to the vision, mission, and collective commitments to ensure they are connected and adhered to at Parkerville. He is comfortable with true collaboration, encourages communication for the development of new policies in his school, and he monitors them authentically. Principal Jones’ sensemaking about race in his school is malleable. Given the right circumstances, critical pedagogical training, and opportunities to learn how to grapple with race issues and discourses, Principal Jones has the potential to become an ally of students of Color (Tatum, 1994). His insistence on focusing on the positive in Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports is a likely cause for decreased discipline issues in his building for students of Color. As a person, he is empathetic and

genuinely interested in the well-being of all the stakeholders of his school. Principal Jones' sensemaking as a leader is more developed than that of Anderson. Jones makes sense of PBIS through a lens of poverty, not race, and racialized discourses that openly address students of Color are absent. Additionally, many technical PBIS remedies are present, but there is no evidence that systemic adaptive work regarding race issues has been undertaken to address the discipline gap at Parkerville High School. Whereas Anderson and Jones either lacked the willingness or the skill to make complete sense of PBIS in the racialized contexts of their schools, the reader will find in the final two participant's sensemaking analyses individuals that possessed measures of both.

Principal Owens

Principal Owens has been an educator for 16 years and is product of MCSD. She has been the principal of Lincoln High School for 3 years. At the time of the interview she was in her late 30s. She identifies herself as a white female. Like other participants, education was not her first interest in college. She began as a Communications major, but during an internship at the college public relations office she found she was immensely unhappy and switched her major her junior year to English. Prior to becoming a principal she was an assistant principal in her current building, and prior to that she was a high school English teacher in another school. She has worked in both PLA and high-achieving schools in MCSD, but she mostly taught remedial English courses in both settings. Principal Owens holds a Master's in Teaching and Principal Certification in her state. She described her upbringing as one that was unpredictable with periods of turmoil related to domestic violence; as a result, school became her sanctuary. Principal Owens noted that she believes educators are key change agents – both on a micro level with

individual students, and on a macro level as catalysts to who can collectively change the world. As a result of her own experience, she felt as an educator it was her place to offer predictability and stability for her students as she acutely understood many of the challenging familial situations from which many of them hailed. She noted she had several teachers who instilled characteristics in her that she sought to embody in her classroom – building self-esteem in her students, passion for learning through instructional engagement, modeling the appropriate adult behaviors, and using positive relationships with students to support their intellectual and socio-emotional growth. These teachers influenced her enough that she felt that she needed to do the same for her own children, the students in her school, and generally for students whose educational and life paths are fraught with obstacles. As a teacher she was focused on making school a stimulating refuge for her students that was safe, predictable, and goal-orientated. As a teacher, she focused on making school and English relevant for her students and connecting the work they did in school to their vision for their lives. A defining moment was teaching a remedial English class of mostly African American male students:

And I learned a lot from a remedial class that I taught at Waldorf High School. . . . And they were double blocked. So I had them every day for 90 minutes. And they were below grade level readers. And there were 14 African-American males with high levels of energy and low levels of interest in school. They made me a great teacher... I had to be to survive. And I still keep in contact with many of them, Detrick, Anthony, Louis. They still talk to me...And they come and visit me when they're in town. But they were a handful. And what I learned from them stuck with me for the rest -- and still today, is that I cannot bait most kids

into doing well or believing in school. And believing that it's important by saying that, you can go to college and change your life, and change your family's life, and all that. Like with my story.

The same concept drives the work she does as principal. The vision and mission are the guiding precepts for Principal Owens and the work of her staff. Her leadership style is student-centered with high-expectations. She seeks to develop a culture where teachers empower students and students do not see themselves as victims:

But I think if I had to, sort of say what my leadership and teaching is about is very student centered. It's very much high expectation. One thing I always say to my kids, whether they're my kids as the principal or my kids in my classroom was you're not victims. You don't have to be victims of anything. You're not victims of your reading deficiency. You're not victims of your dad being in jail. Like you can be victorious. You don't have to be a victim. So we have high expectations...And that's what I ask of the teachers here...keep expectations high. And make sure that kids know that this is about them, and making their lives better, and we won't give up on them.

Principal Owens statement is telling of her own experience as well as that of her students. Her ability to understand some of the marginalizing life experiences of her students comes from her own. Owens' insistence on high expectations for her students of Color was a foundational capacity she developed in the classroom that she carried with her to her role as principal. Creating an environment of high expectations requires her to seek improvement and growth from all at Lincoln High School. One of her key focuses as a principal is ensuring continuous improvement, which is part of the PLA turnaround work.

Another focus is continuous learning in addition to the growth – not just for her students, or her teachers, but also for herself. Principal Owens intentionally creates collaborative structures and teams in her building to inform and offer feedback to the continuous improvement cycles she and her staff work through. I interviewed Principal Owens at Lincoln High School twice during the school day. Upon entering I noticed signage listing the “Lion Way – Respectful, Responsible, and Safe”, which is one of their main PBIS taglines. Down the hall there were expectations listed for specific offices that indicated what the Lion Way should look like in each particular location. On both occasions I was warmly welcomed into the main office by Principal Owens’ secretary who required me to sign in. I found the office stimulating with both the ambiance of the Lincoln Lion mascot and the school colors everywhere, but also the hustle and bustle of Assistant Principals and office staff working to get students into testing locations as our interviews took place during the state-wide testing window. Both times, Principal Owens had back-to-back meetings scheduled and she warmly ushered her prior appointments out and warmly ushered me in to her office.

Lincoln High School

Lincoln High School is located in the Banfield neighborhood of a medium sized city in the Southeast United States. Banfield is a historically middle-class suburban community. Banfield was built in the 1940s as a response to the housing needs of returning WWII veterans and their growing baby-boomer families. The neighborhood was divided by an interstate in the 1960s and this thoroughfare became a socio-economic divider as more affluent families moved north of the interstate, and less affluent families lived in adjacent neighborhoods to the south. Lincoln is one of three main high schools

that draw from a nearby historically Black neighborhood, Dresden. The MCSD has instituted various iterations of busing to support integration, and most of the students in Lincoln's resides area hail from three main ZIP Codes – with the Dresden and Banfield neighborhoods being part of the geographical area. Per the 2010 Census, Dresden is about 60% Black, and is working class. Many residents of both Banfield and Dresden work at one of several factories or warehouses clustered nearby the interstate and a large rail yard.

The participant city is a resettlement destination for many immigrant and refugee families, and many of these families have settled in the Lincoln resides area because of an abundance of low-cost housing and unskilled labor jobs at the local factories. Many of these families have school-aged children and the schools in this area have seen an upsurge of English Language Learners (ELL) students. This has added a new dimension to the student body at Lincoln, as it had the second largest ELL population out of the 14 regular high schools in the MPS District. Lincoln's enrollment averages about 1500 students, and for the 2015-16 SY, 61.9% of students identified as being of Color. Based on 2016 demographic data Lincoln's racial makeup is 38.1% white, 42.5% Black, 14% Hispanic, and 5.4% Other. In 2010-2011, as result of an audit, Lincoln was deemed a PLA school after several years of not meeting achievement goals. Prior to the arrival of Principal Owens, Lincoln had a strong, charismatic, African-American principal who was promoted to a board-level position mid-year. Principal Owens was promoted from her former role of Assistant Principal. In recent years, Lincoln has been plagued with above average staff turnover that has complicated the work of the administration.

As a result of the PLA designation, Lincoln received a federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) to undertake school turnaround efforts. Per local and federal designations, Lincoln's entire student population has been deemed "at-risk" for several years because of socioeconomic and achievement factors. In recent years, 70% of students received free or reduced price meals. In 2015, Lincoln's overall accountability score was 64.4, an increase of 1.2 points from the year before. Lincoln was identified as a school that was disproportionately disciplining students of Color and those receiving special education services. The MCSD and school personnel were required to draft a Corrective Action Plan, as well as institute Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as part of their climate and culture improvements. During the 2015 school year, Lincoln had 397 student suspensions, with 270 of those suspensions attributed to students of Color who made up 61.9% of the total student population. According to the District School Survey, since 2012 parent satisfaction has averaged 77%, while student satisfaction has been 82%.

Principal Owens' Sensemaking and Lincoln High School

Principal Owens utilized all areas of Sensemaking to a degree. However, based on triangulation of data collected from interviews, CSIPs, and school documents, it is clear that Principal Jones depends on the Social Systematic and Action components of Sensemaking as she implements PBIS policy in her building.

Social and Systematic and Action in Policy Implementation at Lincoln.

Principal Owens cited collaboration as one of her key leadership competencies. And like Principal Jones, she too uses her vision and mission as the underpinnings of all school endeavors at Lincoln. This communicative process is iterative, social and systematic, and

often times requires multiple stakeholder groups to be involved. She described a recent attendance issue that was documented on a giant handwritten poster paper on the wall behind her conference table. It was Plus/Delta T-chart about attendance. The collaborative activity of creating Plus/Delta charts allows a collaborative group to discuss and document the strengths (Pluses) and weaknesses of areas of growth (Deltas) of organizational work. She shared this process and talked about her stakeholders and how all work is connected to the vision and mission:

They need to be involved. But there also has to be clear direction. So what we use here is our mission and vision...if we have data that says we're not doing such a good job at, XYZ then, okay, we need to reflect on that. So oftentimes that might be a little subcommittee that I pull together of department chairs. It might be the administrative team. It might be my office staff who works with attendance. I mean, this just happened recently. Or it might be any number of stakeholder groups. It could be parents...it could be kids. But we take that data point and say is this reflecting what our mission is here...our scholars achieving? Do we have systems of support? Do we have high expectations? Is this a positive and caring place? And so when we say, oh, this data doesn't tell us that we're there. Okay, so what are we doing well? What do we want to keep doing? And then what do we need to get better on? So then that group will combine -- oftentimes it looks like this (indicating at a hand-written poster), these plus deltas. And then, I'll shape them up and then share them with the Instructional Leadership Team. Instructional Leadership Team says, oh, let's tweak this, or let's do that. And they go to their PLC leads in their department.

They get more feedback. And then we either make a step forward or we go back to the table.

Principal Owens indicated that maintaining collaboration and the social, systematic sensemaking is deliberate, intentional work with which she has struggled. In her first year as principal, she reflected retrospectively there were times she did not tap into the social nature of policy implementation and she paid for it later in the lack of staff buy-in and hurt relationships. She recognizes that in a school as large and diverse as hers, she must keep communication and collaboration at the forefront of any policy implementation because of the social and systematic nature of schools as organizations. Evidence of Principal Owens sensemaking efforts in the Action component was clear in her interview. She understands that after the cognitive, abstract components of Sensemaking are addressed, she as a sensemaker must act. She talked about how it is her responsibility as a principal to make determinations about what to do, even after all the collaboration, communication, and feedback:

I have to be paying attention and monitoring everything. So when I see a need for something or I anticipate a need for something then, I have to get that out there and I have to get the right people to the table. I have to make sure that anything we decide is aligned with the mission and the vision. And what I can live with because I am the leader of this school. So while collaboration is incredibly important, it's still has to be something that I wholeheartedly will support. And then hold others accountable for. And if I'm not a hundred percent in then that's hard to hold other people accountable. And then what's the point of the policy?

Evidence of the Sensemaking component Action was prevalent in Principal Owens interviews. One of her core values is service, in that she is determined to act to make a difference in the lives of her students, making them victors as opposed to victims. To that end, key to her Sensemaking of PBIS was Action. In her view, to implement PBIS in her building she has to marry it with culturally responsive teaching for it work for both teachers and students, take hold, and bring about positive outcomes for students. Of this situation she spoke:

My concern and our next steps are how do we determine that are going to make a difference? And the best approach right now we have is culturally responsive teaching. And just making people aware. And understanding how some things that we do, non -- mal-intention, whatever the case may be, can have impacts that we don't necessarily intend. And then also PBIS. Just trying to get some clear common expectation so that kids aren't adjusting seven different times, throughout the day to whomever the authority figure is. But just sort of trying to set them up for success versus setting them up to have to play the game of school.

Based on observations of the building, Lincoln High school is a place centered on taking actionable steps with PBIS to support students. For both 201-2014 and 2014-2015 school years, CSIP action items essentially remained the same. One CSIP activity, the Suspension Reduction Plan (SRP), was articulated as a collaborative plan to modify the culture and climate in the building do decrease suspensions. The SRP included “culturally responsive teaching, restorative discipline, a mentoring program, and student response teams” and would be evaluated monthly by Principal Owens and her leadership team. This was remarkable for two reasons. During my cross-case analysis, Lincoln was

the only participant school who addressed actual suspension reductions in their CSIP for either year in question, but was found to have an 11% increase in suspensions. Second, for the years in question, Lincoln did experience a 4% reduction in discipline referrals, which could likely be attributed to incorporating culturally relevant practices and PBIS in the classroom.

Racialized Discourses at Lincoln

Principal Owens' approach to talking about race is the antithesis of her white male peers and makes for an interesting juxtaposition. Principal Owens' core beliefs about race are grounded in school as a function of equity. She is a tenacious leader and is married and committed to her school's mission:

I'm grounded in that school needs to be a place of equity. Because we can't control anything else outside of these walls. But what we send out greatly impacts the future. So that's one thing. And then just the mission of the school is all scholars, not some. And so sometimes when we get frustrated or we get -- like "I cannot believe that Marcia is doing this again." It's like, okay, but we can't give up. Because it doesn't just say when the kid agrees or the kid does what we need them to do, as frustrating as that is sometimes. But that's what the mission says, all, [spelled out] *A-L-L*. So is it not easy. And we do not have the answers. And I certainly don't have the answers. But I think it's worth fighting for.

With this tenacity comes a courage and willingness to delve into racialized discourses that has been tempered over the past few years with expert guidance, tapping into her personal experiences as a professional, candid and collaborative relationships with her those on her administrative team of Color, and using data as a springboard for difficult

conversations about race. In the past three years, Principal Owens' administrative team participated in a series of book studies about race in schools and culturally relevant teaching and pedagogy. Of it she spoke:

So that's how we engaged in the conversations with Dr. Carter and his team. And started trying to kind of break that down. And he got us on a couple of book studies and talking about it. But even in even at a table a little bit bigger than this [indicating towards her conference table] with 12 people, who made up the extended leadership team, it was hard to have those conversations...people couldn't see -- and even myself as a Type-A person but who was totally in it, like I was *in* it, putting myself out there. Taking the time to do the readings and engaging. But sometimes I would be like what do we do? Where's the that practitioner piece? How do we change policy *right now*? How do we change behaviors *right now*? And so people will get frustrated with that and they didn't want to keep talking about it. And that's just with 13 leadership team members, much less, 150 staff members.

This was a foundational activity for her as a leader. In some ways it opened her eyes about what she had observed as a classroom teacher, and in other ways it gave her permission to critically think about, talk about, and act upon issues of race without feeling uneasy. This and her work with a diverse leadership team and their collaboration helped her to develop an understanding of how the presence or absence of racialized discourses shapes the climate and culture of the school. One of her Assistant Principals, Mr. Ericks, an African American male, is a close confidante of hers and someone she

turns to for answers about race. She expressed that his own experience has taught her much about how students of Color experience school, and life.

I think it takes a lot of courage and what we found as a leadership team is it takes a lot of courage for the leader. And you have these elephants in the room. As a white woman if I speak about race that may be perceived a little bit differently than say Mr. Ericks, who's an African-American male assistant principal, then when he speaks about it. And he's had his own frustrations with race for different reasons...it's so funny -- not funny. But it's so interesting how when we talk about race like everybody's got their own story...And it's perceived differently.

When probed about how she broaches these conversations she noted that she uses data to tell the story of students or to guide the asking of questions:

I think that you can't not talk about if you're really analyzing data. Because it's right there...so a lot of times it's couched in the form of a why question. Why do we have more African-American males being suspended? Why do we have more Hispanic males not coming to school? Why -- , why -- why are these things? And then from that point taking research and what we know and trying to answer the question so that we can develop the next step. But sometimes it's very formal. And that's all, reported, and recorded, and minutes, and team meetings.

Often, for those staff who find conversations of race too abstract, having concrete, undeniable numbers to base the conversations upon, helps change thinking. Principal Owens quipped that while concrete numbers work; she still depends on the anecdotal evidence of her and her staff's experience to understand how to talk about race at Lincoln:

Me walking down the hall and seeing a group of -- well, just the other day. A group of African-American males, ear buds in. They're not doing anything wrong but they're completely not doing what they're supposed to be doing. They're not walking and talking. They've got ear buds in, they're hanging out. The minute bell's already rung. They should be on their way to class. And, I've got a couple of our staff members just standing there not addressing them. Not saying anything to them. As soon as I come up I say come on, guys, let's go, we got to get to class, get those ear buds out, let's, hurry up, hurry up, your Champions are waiting for you. I'm getting them. I'm pushing them. And then I turn around and I say, hey, these guys were just standing here. I need your help to push them along to class. When I walk away from that I'm thinking, I wonder if it had been a group of little white girls, if that group would have been more approachable for these particular staff members? And I've asked that question. And I've gotten some pretty honest answers. Sometimes people will say, no, absolutely not. I was just not paying attention. But, somebody else might say, yeah, I was a little intimidated by that.

As a white person, she openly acknowledges the common retort many white individuals and educators alike have when dealing with issues of race –

Getting people to actually be honest about that is hard to do. Because nobody wants to be a bad person...nobody who's in this field like for real, has any sort of ill intention towards kids. And would never want to admit that they were uncomfortable around a kid or that they would treat kids differently.

Many white educators do not want to be perceived as racists, and so to avoid that feeling, they might avoid the conversation altogether. To them talking openly about race equates with being a racist. Castagano (2008) describes this avoidance of race talk as based in the belief “that talking about race is simply too conflict laden, tense, and hurtful and, perhaps more importantly, implies that one is racist” (p.329, 2008). During this study, Principal Owens was the only white participant who used the word bias. She was the only one willing to be candid about how racial dialogues or silences were enacted in her building. This finding was surprising and disconcerting for me as I reflected on the schools and their communities. This could be attributed to her search as a leader for answers about how to talk about race and her moral imperative as an educator to strive for equity. As a classroom teacher she found footing with her students by entering into conversations about race. These conversations piqued her students’ interest and they openly shared their lived experiences:

So they'd tell me all kinds of things. And because I taught English and we had the ability to write about things and read about race and we read about what it meant to be a man. And, what does it mean to be successful?

Years later, her Retrospective musings of her experience with these students, she was left with an impression of what they as Black males had to deal with at school. Clearly, this experience impacted her in ways she would not be aware of until much later. In terms of her ability to make sense of racialized discourses, a social and systematic collaboration has been paramount to her ability to chip away at questions of race and disproportionality in her school. While she is proud of how far she and her staff had come, she recognized that she and her school have much further to go to ensure all students’ needs are met. In

terms of coded language, there were no instances observed in the interview. Principal Owens was straightforward in her thinking and her talking about her thinking, and while this conversation was not easy for her to share, she understood the importance of sharing her experiences, successes, and struggles.

Principal Owens makes sense of PBIS within the context of racial disproportionalities in her building. She articulated evidence of some leadership characteristics that set her apart from Principal Anderson. Like Principal Jones, Principal Owens is intentional in aligning the work of Lincoln school to the vision, mission, and school-wide actions and seeks to ensure they function in concert. She encourages collaboration and stakeholder communication for the development of new policies in her school. Like her peer Principal Jones, she is willing to tackle issues and embraces a new way of doing things in despite Flux and chaos. She and Jones differ is how they choose to tackle is disproportionate discipline and increase equity in their schools. Whereas Anderson focused on the Noticing and Bracketing of data, Principal Owens focused much of her sensemaking on creating collaborative structures that are Social and Systematic and lead to Action. One characteristic Principal Owens articulated that was not present in the previous two participants' interviews was her insistence on continuous improvement, which is likely an outcropping of her sensemaking focus on Action. Principal Owens is further in her sensemaking about race than Anderson and Jones. She keeps continuous improvement at the forefront of her thinking. She possesses a sharper awareness and understanding of the interplay between race, schooling, and the discipline experiences of students in her building. She acknowledges the experiences of students of Color are those she must seek to understand and that her job as principal is to create

equitable conditions that empower students of Color. Racialized discourses play a key role in how she makes sense of the discipline gap at Lincoln. Owens acknowledges she and her school still have work to do to challenge conscious and unconscious biases, but it is work to which she is committed. Like Principal Jones, given the right circumstances, critical pedagogical training, and further opportunities to learn how to grapple with race issues and discourses, Principal Owens has the potential to increase her social justice reach as an exemplar principal in her district. Her perseverance to improve discipline in her school and include Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports likely helped decreased referrals in her building the past two years. Factors such as teacher and administrative turnover could be the cause of the 11% increase in suspensions. Like Jones, Owens is concerned with the well-being of all stakeholders at her school. The key difference between Owens and Anderson and Jones is that Owens acknowledged she did not possess the dialectical skills to broach the topic of race and the discipline gap, yet she personally sought those skills out and is intent on improving her ability to engage stakeholders in racialized discourses. Her journey to tackle the challenge of the discipline gap is far from finished, but she is committed to making PBIS a key mechanism in her school's battle against disproportionate discipline. In the final participant analysis, the reader will find a principal like Owens who is also insistent upon improving the discipline situations for her students of Color.

Principal Washington

Principal Washington has been an educator for 16 years and is a product of MCSD. At the time of the interview she was in her late 30s. She identifies herself interchangeably as an African American or Black female depending on the situation.

Prior to becoming a principal she was an assistant principal, teacher, and substitute in the MPS District. She has worked her entire career in PLA schools. She has been the principal of Morningside Middle School since 2014. She comes from a family of educators and public servants, her mother being a retired school principal and her father being a retired police officer. She described her childhood as one centering on school because of her mother's work. Through her own observations of her mother, she understood how difficult being a teacher and a principal could be, so she tried to avoid it as career choice. As a college student she pursued coursework in History and Pan-African studies because she enjoyed them. While in college she had a professor, Dr. Jackson, a well-known local provocateur, Civil Rights commentator, and activist who piqued her interest in becoming an educator by asking a rhetorical question. She told the story:

I'll call it a defining moment in my life, where during one of the classes he posed a question. And the question was, if you were to die tomorrow what would your legacy be? It just made me think. At that moment in time I don't see some true big civil rights movement where we're picketing and stuff like that occurring at that moment in time. Now, if I was a college student during this era of black lives matter something different might have come about in my path. But for the moment in time in my life when that question was posed and I got to thinking about, well, how could I make a difference, it led me towards the path of becoming a teacher. I'm a big believer...that education is a civil right.

This question hung with her as she moved forward. These experiences framed how she taught and later how she would lead.

Principal Washington taught middle school Social Studies in PLA schools. There she described her teaching style as one of warmth, empathy, high expectations, engaging, hands-on, and focusing on using and addressing the context of students' lives to help them learn and grow. As a principal she described her leadership style as initially command and control-centered. Principal Washington seeks to learn about her staff members and create a trusting relationship. Once trust develops between her and her teachers she shifts to a more collaborative and distributive leadership style. She seeks to first develop self-efficacy with her staff, and then generate collective efficacy. In her experience such leadership allows for more authentic work and positive results. She described why collective efficacy is foundational to her leadership:

When you have collective efficacy not only do you have to have that effect drive, know how, content knowledge, and all that, but you've got to be your brothers' and sisters' keeper. And ensure that the person on the left and right of you got it as well. Because we're all in this together...So it's developing your school to eventually have collective efficacy, where as a group, you problem solve together and do the work hand-in-hand. The reality is I cannot sustain this work by myself. I mean, I'm finally getting to a point where I've got off the blood pressure medicine, and losing weight, and managing my life better. But I manage better once everybody else is picking up other pieces. Because you can't do it all, you'll kill yourself in this position.

Principal Washington strongly believes in instilling and building efficacy and connecting the collective vision, mission, commitments, and expectations to the work of her and her staff.

My two interviews with Principal Washington took place when school was not in session, shortly before and during the statewide testing window. I found the staff pleasant upon entering, but the building was institutional in the way many public buildings built in the 1960s are – all grey and concrete. Upon entering the semi-open concept building, I immediately noticed the taped “walking lanes” on the tiled floor for students to walk both the left and the right sides of the hallways. The hallway walls were bare. The offices and classrooms were in the midst of dismantling décor and furniture as the entire contents of the building were planning on moving to a new location over the summer. Principal Washington welcomed me into her office and introduced me to her instructional leadership staff – instructional coordinator, and her assistant principal Mr. Burk. Both interviews were conducted in her office. During the second interview Principal Washington was multitasking as she worked on a time sensitive project, and thus the interview was conducted with Mr. Burk in the room.

Morningside Middle School Preparatory Academy

Morningside Middle School Preparatory Academy is located in the Town Estates, neighborhood of a large city in the Southeast United States. Town Estates, is a fading community, originally built as satellite housing for a nearby military base in the 1950s. Town Estates is primarily inhabited by working class families, and according to the U.S. Census, 95% of the community identify as Caucasian (U.S. Census, 2010). The MCSD has instituted various iterations of busing to support integration. Due to the homogeneity of the Town Estate community and the state and federal desegregation mandates, most of Morningside’s students of Color are bused in from predominately Black and mixed-race neighborhoods several miles away. The second smallest middle school in the MPS

District, Morningside's enrollment averages about 200 students, and for the 2015-16 SY, 53% of students identify as being of Color.

Based on 2016 demographic data, Morningside's racial makeup is 46.6% white, 44.8% Black, 5.2% Hispanic, and 3.4% Other. In 2008-2009, as result of an audit, Morningside was deemed a PLA school after several years of not meeting achievement goals. Prior to the arrival of Principal Washington, Morningside had two principals in five years. The first principal was removed and demoted due to a poor results of a state leadership audit. The second moved to another district and took a demotion. To complicate matters further, two years ago, the MSP District divided the student body of Morningside into two schools based on grade level – Morningside Middle School Preparatory Academy (sixth grade) and Pendleton Park High School Preparatory Academy (grades 7 and 8). Morningside's rising sixth graders attended school in the Morningside building, while rising seventh and eighth graders were relocated a few miles away at Pendleton Park High School campus. This move was contentious with both district and community stakeholders alternately supporting and denouncing the changes. For two school years, Morningside has only housed the sixth grade. As a result of the PLA designation, Morningside received a federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) to undertake school turnaround efforts. Per local and federal designations, Morningside's entire student population has been deemed "at-risk" for several years because of socioeconomic and achievement factors. In recent years, 89% of students received free or reduced price meals. In 2015, Morningside's overall accountability score was 45.7, an increase of 0.8 points from the year before. Morningside was identified as a school that was disproportionately disciplining students of Color and students receiving special

education services. The MCSD and school personnel were required to draft a Corrective Action Plan, as well as institute Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as part of their climate and culture improvements. Most of Morningside's students reside in three ZIP Codes – Town Estates, and two distant downtown ZIP Codes that are adjacent to historically Black neighborhoods (MCSD Data book, 2016). Town Estates has had a population decrease since the 1990s, and waning community support is a likely result. During the 2015 school year, Morningside had 152 student suspensions, with 124 of those suspensions attributed to students of Color. According to the District School Survey, since 2012 parent satisfaction has averaged 77%, while student satisfaction has been 65%.

Principal Washington's Sensemaking and Morningside Middle School

Two of the most prevalent components of Sensemaking that Principal Washington exhibited were Retrospective and Action. Principal Washington has the most experience as an administrator and principal. She has worked in several buildings in MCSD, and has participated in many leadership institutes. Out of all the principals interviewed, she had the most professional development, including being in her fourth year of a Ph.D. program. All of these experiences have led her to a place where she has developed a treasure trove of experiences, frameworks, programs, presentations, and points-of-view that she uses to work with her staff. This ability to draw from her own past experiences and make them work in the current context is evidence of her Retrospective sensemaking. She referenced her drawing from the Spence Rogers' PEAK Learning Systems Six Keys Framework, True Colors Temperament Assessment, and Thomas Guskey's (2006) standards based grading work to train, teach, and guide her staff. Not only does she draw

from her past experiences, she honors the experiences of her students and staff. She talked about the existing state of Morningside Middle School when she first visited it:

When I took over the school and I did a walkthrough...I didn't see a kid carrying a folder, barely had pencils. And when I asked one kid, where's your paper? He broke out one piece of paper that was folded up in his pocket.

Understanding where her students were coming from, and their past has been key to her reforming of the school culture and climate. Retrospective is the ability to understand what experiences, pedagogy, and history generates your staff's views. She referenced in the following passage how she personalizes teacher professional development on a weekly basis for her staff in an effort to deal with some of the Retrospective they possess:

You are dealing with somebody's mind-set on how they feel, what their role is in a school...As far as, am I the "all-mighty teacher on high", the authoritative figure, and you are to be submissive to me. Believing that, are you really here to help kids learn? Because if you are here to help kids learn then there's more effort in instilling into them proactive strategies to help them be successful. So you're dealing with the way people are raised, their beliefs about education. Do they believe in a punitive system versus a restorative system? And you have to take all the mini-adult personalities and try to come up with sometimes individualized PDs, sometimes systematic PD, on how do you really channel all that into moving into the right direction with your mission statement?

She acknowledged this is still an area of growth for her staff – creating culture and climate where everyone works toward the same common goal of supporting all students.

The second area of Sensemaking that was prevalent in the data was Principal Washington's exhibiting of Action. When triangulating the interviews with the CSIPs, and documents she shared, several observations were made. First, she said the CSIP is a living document she and her staff use to plan and conduct progress monitoring – both functions of Action. She describes her CSIP work:

I would tell you the biggest policy development process is the CSIP. Now, I don't know what other schools do but when I tell you the CSIP is our life here, like it's truly an organic kind of driver... And the budget and the [PEAK Learning Systems] Six Keys.

Washington's staff collaborates on the CSIP development and implementation and progress monitoring of their collective action. She indicated that inquiry and data drive the process:

The staff look at did we do what we said we were going to do? And then looking at Data Dashboard for like even on here [indicating towards an open computer screen] if you click this link this is my data scorecard for the school. So I can see how we're trending. And the staff can see how we're trending as far as our math and reading CFAs [common assessments].

Second, her documents she shared are congruent to what was documented in the CSIP and were used to triangulate interviews and CSIP data. Third, according to Weick et al. (2005) talk is action. It is clear that Principal Washington communicates what is to be accomplished or acted upon, elicits feedback, communications that she is monitoring

and what she is monitoring, and communicates the results. All of these observations are evidence of sensemaking Action. She puts her words to work, and her staff follows.

There are many moving parts to dealing with the technical challenges and adaptive challenges of working in a diverse, PLA school, yet somehow Principal Washington's intentionality and passion helps the school stay focused on improvement and student learning.

Racialized Discourses at Morningside. Racialized discourses are present at Morningside. Principal Washington is open about the state of interactions in her building, focuses on proactive strategies to support her teachers and students in dealing with their racial biases, and is committed to creating a culturally responsive environment for her students. Principal Washington is not afraid to address what she called the "Elephant in the room." During this portion of the interview she rose from her chair and walked behind her desk to grab a three-foot tall gray stuffed elephant. When she returned to her seat she nestled the elephant under her arm, patting it like an old friend and proceeded to talk about how she handled delicate conversations like race in her school – with a confident, transparent, communicative sensemaking:

But this is my elephant. And any time it's time to have a tough conversation they know in the building we're not ashamed to talk about the elephant. And when needed, that elephant will come out. Now, if you feel better holding the elephant literally, you can hold the elephant while we talk about it...but from day one of this school opening we periodically, it's time to talk about the elephants in the room. Because the elephant is what's going to stomp all over the climate and culture of this building. And so we have to address it if we want to move

forward...and so that's how I frame it. We have to have honest discourse. One of my favorite quotes that I use all the time with the staff -- I can't remember who said it, "politeness is the enemy to collaboration." I didn't say you could be rude or disrespectful. But if I keep on trying to skirt around and not tell you the truth that could help you grow than I'm doing a disservice ethically. Because in my standards it says I'm to be an advocate for kids, which means ethically we have to be able to have honest conversations.

One of the elephants at Morningside Middle School happens to be the discipline gap. Principal Washington shared that about 90% of her students qualify for free or reduced priced meals. She felt poverty impacted her students' academics and ability to achieve more than race. In her opinion, race had a greater impact on her students' discipline than poverty:

I think behaviorally we talk about race. It's not necessarily in a policy or anything like that. And then in general, especially for out here, with our school being 90 percent free and reduced lunch, we do end up having more conversations around poverty. But like I said, when we talk about behavior and address behavior issues we typically will have conversations that deal with race because that's where a lot of issues arise...when I look at academic data I don't see a huge disparity between white or Black kids on how they're being graded or treated academically. It's more in the behavior data that I see that.

To deal with this issue, she makes sure her teachers openly communicate about how biases interfere with the developing of positive teacher-student relationships, both those

of the teachers and those of the students. She commented on her noticing and bracketing of data to inform these conversations:

But every other month we drill down of the behavior data. And look at how does the numerical pattern with the data align with our enrollment pattern? So one of the things that we know about our school is that Black females tend to get in trouble more, written up more than other kids in the building. And one of the things that we had on this dialogue about is fact that for a lot of teachers there's power struggles with Black females. And so what happens is a white female or a white male could have performed that exact same behavior that would have got somebody in trouble but when the teacher was like, oh, no, this discussion is over, the discussion was over. Where a lot of the Black females in this school will come back to the teacher and then this argument escalates. And then when the argument escalates it leads to a referral. So we see more Black females being referred than any other race in the building.

Principal Washington's anecdotal observations of student-teacher relations corroborated research. Her awareness and willingness to address these issues of power and race are consistent with culturally relevant pedagogy. At this point, in the discourse about race at Morningside, Principal Washington, presumes that if the data indicates there are disparities, teachers must need some guidance. She draws on PBIS as policy source to direct and modify behavior by focusing on proactive professional development to deal with her students who struggle with conflict resolution:

And so one of the things that we do with that data is really use that to inform PD. Our biggest thing is working with teachers on proactive strategies. How do you

be preventive in keeping confrontation from occurring? Especially in a school where when we surveyed the kids 80 percent of them said their style of conflict resolution is, it's my way or the highway.

Principal Washington is African American, and this in some ways gives her more credence to open racialized discourses with her staff. Her lived experiences, and intersectionality as a Black, middle-class female, help her bridge some of the communicative gaps between her students and staff. The intersection of race and class legitimize her to Morningside's students and staff. Her mantra of building relationships is likely the most salient message in the content of her conversations about race taking place at her school. When probed about how she gets people to make sense of race in the context of her school she passionately responded:

That's one of my biggest strategies when it comes to dealing with disproportionality. If you don't take the time to build a relationship there's going to be a confrontation. Because part of that confrontation comes from what they're hearing at home. If kids are hearing at home that's why I can't stand "the man", the white man, the white woman, whoever, that makes it even more acceptable then when that kid comes to school to regurgitate what they've heard. So you cannot walk into this building assuming that they're going to love you or they're going to like just because you are a teacher. Get over it. It's just something you're going to have to get over. You have to humble yourself and say I want to earn my kids' respect. I'm going to prove to them that unlike other systems that have failed them and their family recently, historically, generationally I'm going to break that cycle. And you have to put a lot of effort in

to showing a kid that you are willing to break that cycle. But when they see that that's when a kid will work for you, perform you, and more importantly, will love you because they see that you love them.

Principal Washington reflected on a series of professional development sessions she conducted called “Real Talk.” This particular session was about the biases students of Color bring with them to school and some of the ways that teachers had to deal with them:

Even having those honest conversations and I was inspired because I wanted especially after the Eric Garner, with the “hands up, don't shoot”. I said you all need to be prepared because kids will come in because they're going to hear all this messaging at home. And it's going to impact school. And even the whole what is it? What was happening was teachers are coming to us because they felt like they could come to us, I guess being African American especially, the kids are saying we're racist. And I'm not racist. I mean, Mrs. Washington, , I have black friends.

Many of the issues that arise for other principals regarding PBIS, disproportionate discipline, and race are issues that Principal Washington has overcome; however, she still finds she must regularly conduct “Real Talks” because of misconceptions of white teachers. As a leader, these misconceptions pose a unique challenge, but luckily it is one that Washington boldly undertakes. Principal Washington openly embraces PBIS in conjunction with culturally relevant teaching and pedagogy. She sees value in culturally relevant teaching and pedagogy, and believes it has supported what she has been able to accomplish in two years at Morningside. During the two years Morningside has

implemented PBIS, the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years, Principal Washington has witnessed a decrease in discipline referrals by 54%, a suspension reduction of 36%, and an academic achievement increase of 0.8%. Despite these positive increases, Principal Washington is focused on continuous improvement and sees the connection between a safe, equitable environment, increased student achievement, and the greater likelihood of positive outcomes for her students.

Principal Washington contemplates the racial context of her school as she makes sense of PBIS. Her sensemaking of racialized discourses plays a key role in the work she does to address the discipline gap and equity at Morningside Middle School. Like her peer Principal Owens, Principal Washington articulated evidence of leadership characteristics that set her apart from Anderson and Jones. Like Principals Jones and Owens, Principal Washington possesses a laser-like focus on aligning the work conducted at Morningside to the vision, mission, and school-wide actions. Based on triangulation from CSIPs and interviews, there is cohesion in what Principal Washington says, and what transpires in her building. She encourages collaboration and stakeholder communication for the development of new policies in her school. Like Principal Owens, she is willing to tackle issues like disproportionate discipline and embraces a new way of doing things in despite Flux and chaos. Principal Washington focused much of her sensemaking on honoring and using Retrospective of the school, students, and staff as a way to understand how to implement Action.

One key difference between Washington and the other participants are her identity and experiences as a woman of Color. Her intersectionality as a Black woman is the foundation and her guiding precept of equity. Her personal and acute understanding

of inequities, racism, and marginalization provide her a unique leadership point-of-view. As a principal, she possesses a position of power that is laced with her lived experience. Her voice of Color has the ability to impact the sensemaking of race and discipline for her faculty and staff. Most importantly her sensemaking can decrease disproportionalities for the students at Morningside. The gravity of her position as a school leader is not lost on her. When discussing this point, she referenced the saying on the Spence Rogers poster that hangs above her office door, “Our kids are worth whatever it takes.” Sensemaking Retrospective and Action guide her to being committed to implement PBIS and address discipline disparities present in her building. Like Owens, Washington is committed to continuous improvement. However, Principal Washington possesses the most complete sensemaking about race. She clearly understands the interplay between race and the discipline experiences of students at Morningside. The advantage she possesses is her understanding of the marginalized experiences of her students of Color. Like Owens, Washington acknowledges she and her school still have work to do to regarding the adaptive challenge of student and teacher biases. She too is committed to the work. Principal Washington’s experiences and expertise in PBIS implementation, decreasing the discipline gap, and inciting racialized discourses presented in this case, serve as an exemplar for school leaders of Color. For white principals, her experience can serve as an example of what bold sensemaking and Action look like when implementing PBIS policies to attack the discipline gap.

Conclusion

Each participant in this study utilizes Weick et al.’s (2005) components of Sensemaking as they make choices about how to implement policies in their schools.

Sensemaking is a cognition-action continuum that is iterative and spiraling, meaning the components depend upon each other to inform the next step in thought, with each thought leading to choices and actions. Participants do not spend the same amount of time within each component, nor do they consider all of the contextual factors of their schools in each decision they make. One principal, Anderson makes sense of PBIS, but deflects race as a factor in its implementation. Frank conversations about racialized discourses are absent at Freeman. Principal Jones makes sense of PBIS and acknowledges there are differences in demographics, but conflates race and poverty as he tries to address gaps in discipline. He too deflects race and racialized discourses as key to integrating PBIS fully and tackling the discipline gap at Parkerville. Principals Owens and Washington make sense of PBIS in the racialized context of their schools, and both participate in racialized discourses, although utilizing different lens. The next section I will compare and contrast emergent themes sifted from the principal participants' sensemaking as well as the presence of racialized discourses and silences.

Cross Case Analysis

This study sought to address two questions: 1) How do principals in urban schools make sense of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) in the context of racial disproportionality in their schools, and, 2) what role racialized discourses might have in the development and implementation of PBIS in these schools. It is clear principals in this particular case do participate in the various components of Sensemaking regarding PBIS and there are some similarities present between each case. Race was considered in all the cases to a degree, but there were certainly gradations of silences and discourses. With qualitative research, multiple data sources are used for triangulation. A tremendous

amount of data is often generated and not all of it can be addressed. Not all emergent themes could be addressed in this study. For the purpose of this cross-case analysis, I chose Weick et al.'s (2005) eight Sensemaking components and conceptualized them as themes. Sensemaking components will be compared and contrasted in this section as a way to further address my first research question. The Sensemaking Theory components that will be addressed in the cross-cases analysis are *Labeling*, *Presumption*, *Social and Systematic*, and *Action* as they were the themes that I found to have the greatest impact of the sensemaking of both PBIS and racialized discourses. As a way to further address the second research question, an additional level of cross-case analysis was conducted on the racialized silences and dialogues that emerged in the participant cases. Below, Figure 2 concisely outlines the cross-case analysis of the participants' cases.

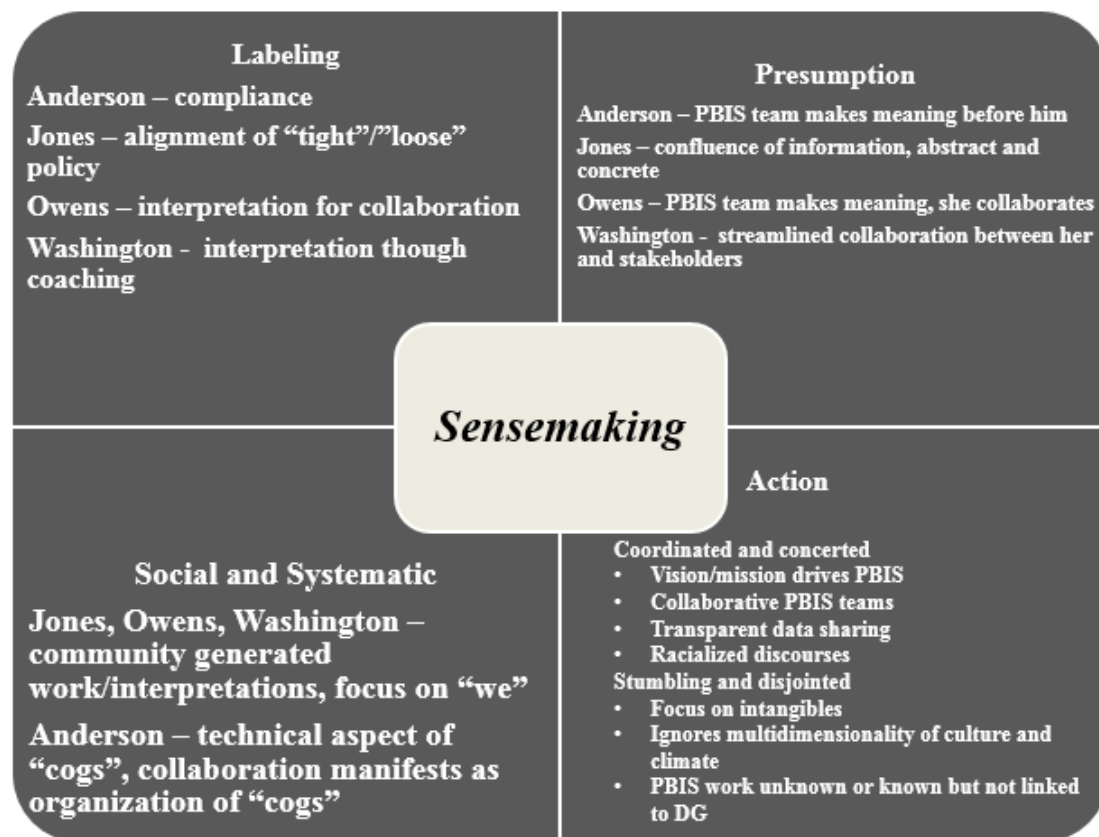


Figure 2. Cross case analysis of principals' sensemaking.

Sensemaking Similarities and Differences

Labeling

All principals participated in the Sensemaking component Labeling, which is the naming and categorizing of events as a way to “stabilize the streaming of experience...imposing labels on interdependent events in ways that suggest plausible acts of managing, coordinating, and distributing” (Weick et al., p. 411). Dealing with the Corrective Action Plan mandate of PBIS required principals to ask the fundamental question of functional deployment, “what does this mean for me and my school?” As sensemaking is an iterative process, Labeling happens with each behavior data point, communiqué, major behavior issue, pertinent teacher or staff question, and each technical and adaptive challenge of PBIS implementation presented. The goal is alignment of actors and actions, or to “generate common ground, Labeling ignores differences among actors and deploys cognitive representations that are able to generate recurring behaviors” (Weick et al., p. 411). As they labeled, each principal had to interpret the policy and its requirements individually, and analyze in the context of their school and communities. They had to solidify what PBIS policy meant to them, what it would look like, and what the desired state would be in their buildings. Once they labeled their version of PBIS, they then had to determine how would they implement and share PBIS with their staffs in a way that allowed for collective sensemaking.

For Anderson, much of the Labeling he exhibited was focused on aligning policy, action, and documentation. Much of his sensemaking on policy centered on compliance as can be seen in the following passage:

All the core policies that every school's supposed to have we've been trying to,

over the past two years, really do a deep dive on them. And make sure that they reflect all the changes that have happened since our initial priority status indicator and SBDM was removed. And I'd even say even before then. The policies were just basically pieces of paper.

Principal Jones' Labeling focused on the consistent alignment of cognition and action regarding his school's collective commitments and the "tight", or non-negotiable rules for teaching, learning, and behavior, and the "loose" structures that were left up to interpretation of stakeholders:

We have certain things that we're going to be "tight" on that we're going to do. And we may go over these several times a year every time we come together as a staff...we talk about these things [indicating towards a poster on the wall]...these things have to happen...are going to happen. These are what we're going to monitor. How you make these things happen might look different with your collaborative team than it does another collaborative team? As long as it as it's happening and we're having the outcome we're looking for.

For Owens, even Labeling was a collaborative effort for her. She sought to ensure that as she and her staff made meaning of policy, they had the opportunity to weigh in.

Discussing her views on collaboration she shared:

I think one thing is that they need to be involved. But there also has to be clear direction. So what we use here is our mission and vision. So if we -- if we have data that says we're not doing such a good job at, XYZ then, okay, we need to reflect on that.

For Washington, the alignment required for Labeling took place on the classroom level, as she and Mr. Burk coached teachers on how to make PBIS work in the classroom. Of it she commented:

But then as far as PBIS at the classroom level my assistant principal is working with the teachers on their individual classroom management plan... So that's the adaptive change that we're in the process of trying to work with the teachers on, is how do you implement that classroom management?

Each principal enacted Labeling in their sensemaking, but the difference was the depth of their thought and whether or not it led to any action. For Anderson and Jones Labeling was focused on compliance. Owens and Washington were focused on the adaptive nature of Labeling so they could move from cognition to action. For all of the principals, Labeling assisted in their interpretation of policy and events. This form of cognition is integral for moving towards Action.

Presumption

Labeling is key to personal interpretation. In order to interpret, individual sensemakers must be able to practice Presumption, as it is the way individuals “connect the abstract with the concrete” (Weick et al. 2005, p. 412). The act of Presumption, or the translating the abstract policy to concrete school-wide structures, systems, and language is integral to policy implementation. Presumption requires the sensemaker to “act as if something is the case” and to acknowledge the existing state or the previous state (Retrospective) as one where errors have taken place that necessitate change (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). Once the principals have affirmed this with themselves, then they must help their staffs interpret PBIS with various levels of guidance. In this study, guidance

and monitoring ranged from a laissez-faire lack of oversight to frequent and intentional monitoring. Every principal had a PBIS team they utilized to help devise, interpret, and teach PBIS to the rest of the staff, students, and parents. Principals Jones, Owens, and Washington as school leaders were key in insuring that PBIS, as a new, abstract policy, was translated into a concrete framework to address the discipline with the key difference in how meaning was made for the staff.

Anderson, conversely allowed his PBIS team to make meaning of the policy before he did:

And so we've established a pretty large PBIS Team in terms of a committee. It's one of the largest committees that we have. And its kind of interesting because while I have an administrator on it, I'm not the key administer on it. Because my energy has to -- has been focused elsewhere in some of those "cogs". And so it's interesting as PBIS has developed all the little kind of, we're going to try this, and we're going to try that, and we're going to try this, and we're going to try that.

There's been a lot of little things that we tried. But nothing systematically. And so as we move into next year I'm bringing my systems thinking to the PBIS work. Because I'm still seeing a disconnect between better behavior and better performance.

Anderson left the task of Presumption up to his PBIS team. They may have been unclear on the vision and mission of Principal Anderson. Anderson and his PBIS team may not have seen clear results, perhaps because Anderson made sense of the connection between improved behavior and better performance. His insistence in focusing on the other "cogs" shows there are some lapses in his sensemaking about PBIS and culture and climate as a

whole. PBIS as a function of culture and climate cannot be separated from instruction. To attempt to do so leaves Principal Anderson missing the policy implementation mark. When triangulating for cross-case analysis, CSIP documents corroborated Anderson's comments on the lack of a systematic policy implementation process, as the PBIS component were the same for both the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years.

Principal Jones integrates the work of his PBIS team in various ways in his building. He discussed the work of his collaborative teacher teams informing the PBIS team of data, needs, and observations to create and develop Parkerville's PBIS work. This flow of information was not one sided; the PBIS team, leadership team, and the collaborative teacher teams often overlap with members. There was a natural, required, and monitored confluence of information from and to all teams. This allowed for the teams to collectively make meaning of the abstract policies and turn them into concrete actions.

Owens allows her PBIS team to make their own meaning of abstract PBIS policy, and craft proposals for implementation, but she participates as a collaborator and provides the final rubberstamp on whether or not a policy will be implemented. Owens, undertakes many collaborative steps, which likely have benefits and drawbacks to policy implementation. Interestingly during the process of Presumption Owens trusts her staff to do the work collaboratively. Yet at the same time she is unafraid of asserting herself to ensure that the needs of students are met.

Principal Washington also relies on a collaborative process that she oversees to help her staff with the process of Presumption, but it is far more streamlined than Owens or Jones with seemingly fewer steps:

So the PBIS Team met. It consists of team leaders and other building leaders.

Then they went back to teachers, got their feedback. We developed a plan. Then we practiced the plan. Revamped it a little bit before we actually came up with like a written document saying, as a school, that collective, this is what we're going to do.

What is clear from these participants' cases is making sense of PBIS in a diverse school is not manageable without collaboration of their stakeholders and the ability of the principal to utilize Presumption.

Social and Systematic

Weick et al. (2005) describes Sensemaking as a “process that is ongoing, instrumental, subtle, swift, social and easily taken for granted” (p. 409). The sensemaking of principals in diverse schools could be characterized as “ongoing, instrumental, subtle, swift, social and easily taken for granted” daily. Working in a school is a social endeavor, where communication and collaboration are key. The social aspect of the principalship is key to implementing policies like PBIS. Weick et al. (2005) cites the social and systematic nature of the sensemaking of medical professionals. The authors posit knowledge about correct treatment “unfolds gradually, then knowledge of this unfolding sense is not located just inside the head of the nurse or physician” (Weick et al., p. 412, 2005). The same could be said about the work done in schools. Individual treatments, or interventions, can be applied to a student or students without making sense of the situation with other stakeholders – whether it is with the student(s), teacher(s), staff member(s), parent(s), or community member(s). Social interactions are required, and typically, social interactions in schools are systematic, mandated, and monitored with

regularity. Sensemaking in an organization is not a solitary cognitive or concrete activity. It requires the sensemaker to “acting thinkingly” (Weick et al., p.413, 2005). The principals in these cases understood the Social and Systematic component of Sensemaking which leads to the goal of Organization through Communication. Principal Jones, Owens, and Washington based all of their work on their vision and mission. Each school’s vision and mission was generated and crafted with the input and feedback of their staffs. Principal Jones, who has the longest tenure at his school, was there when Parkerville revised their vision statement. They based it the new vision on the mandates placed on Parkerville as part of PLA identification, and sought to ensure that there was alignment. As Principal Jones shared his work, he constantly referenced how “...we...” did the work. It was clear that he understood and valued the collaboration and input of his staff members.

Principal Owens helped outline the mission and vision with the previous principal and Lincoln’s staff. Their focus was to make sure they had a clear path to support student success and she is still committed to it, saying, “there also has to be clear direction. So what we use here is our mission and vision.” As the principal, Owens noted she acutely is aware of her responsibility for any and all of the work she and her staff do because she has “to make sure that anything we decide is aligned with the mission and the vision. And what I can live with because I am the leader of this school.” For Principal Washington, the mission and vision is posed as a series of questions she and her staff ask themselves as they work.

How are we communicating the mission and vision? How are we teaching kids school wide expectations and norms? And how are we empowering them to be

successful? Because part of the reason why this is so important -- our mission statement is: *In partnership with our community, the Morningside Middle School Prep Academy empowers our scholars to be 21st century learners who rise to new levels.* So at the core of our mission is to empower. You should have strategies and activities that are empowering them.

In each utterance, each of these three principals used the word “we”. This word choice is interesting for a few reasons. First, they understand the work they do at their schools is not done in isolation, even if they are the main bearer of responsibility. Second, the use of “we” is indicative of their commitment to collaborative efforts in their schools. It takes everyone to ensure success. Finally, the use of “we” indicates the principal is making sense of the work collectively done at the school. The use of “we” indicates there is an expectation that everyone is collectively making sense of and aligning their “thinkingly” actions to match the vision and mission. This alignment to the mission and vision, and the inclusion of “we”, are both important factors when implementing policy. Using the mission and vision as guideposts for the work done in each school allows the principals to have a foundational anchor and remind stakeholders of what the school is focused on. This foundational document becomes especially important when principals find themselves requiring staff to make difficult technical and adaptive changes such as those required by PBIS and addressing the discipline gap.

Another aspect of the Social and Systematic component of principal sensemaking is the development of social and collaborative structures to implement PBIS. Each principal mandated social structures, or PBIS teams created to devise each building’s PBIS framework and alternately teach and market it to stakeholders. Each PBIS team was

a little different in their complexity. Some had more policy development power than others, such as Lincoln. Parkerville and Morningside had a more abbreviated policy creation process. In the case of Freeman, the collaborative work of the PBIS team was in the fledgling stage at best. Yet, each PBIS team served the same purpose of collaborative, distributed leadership, focused on the implementation of PBIS in their buildings. PBIS teams also drove the actual work in each case. Principal Anderson understood the need for collaboration and communication. His efforts seemed to focus on the technical aspects of both – meetings, memos, informational binders, basic transparency, and managing the “cogs”. Technical work is important but it must lead to action-oriented sharing and true policy implementation.

Action

According to Weick et al. (2005) Sensemaking is an iterative process of cognition and action where the sensemaker is constantly “acting thoughtfully” (p. 413, 2005). The sensemaking outcome of policy is Action. Applying this sensemaking concept of “acting thoughtfully” to this collective case requires an analysis of participants’ actions. Policies are meant to compel behaviors, thinking, and can support change from the existing state to the desired state. Sensemaking is as much cognition as it is action. In each of the cases the theme of Action was present in one of two ways. Action was either coordinated and concerted, or stumbling and disjointed. In the cases of Principals Owens and Washington the PBIS sensemaking Action was concerted in how they policy was develop and implemented. As they implemented PBIS, Owens and Washington connected it to the vision and mission and the rest of the work done in their respective buildings. The interactive components of Flux, Noticing and Bracketing, Labeling, Retrospective,

Presumption, Social and Systematic, and Organization through Communication (collaborative communication) transpired. Because of the iterative process present in all policy decisions in Lincoln and Morningside, the collective visions and missions in place guided the work of the school, including PBIS policy work. Owens and Washington were well versed in PBIS and supported a truly collaborative PBIS team. These principals knew data was integral to the work of PBIS and they were transparent with their teams when sharing that data. They modeled and gave permission to their PBIS teams and staffs to engage in difficult conversations about discipline in the context of race.

Conversely, Principal Anderson and Jones stumbled when discussing the component of Action in regards to PBIS. Both of them focused on creating a more positive culture for their schools, but seemingly struggled to grasp that school culture and climate is multidimensional. Principal Anderson cited Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports' "whole goal is to be proactive", "teach students pride", and help them be more than "existing" successfully. When triangulated with Freeman's CSIPs and school website there was no mention of proactive measures or programs in place to support implementation of the PBIS framework school-wide. Another reference was found in the CSIPs regarding the development of pride through Advisory programming that all students and teachers participated in. It is unclear if any of this work is informed by Freeman's PBIS plan. When pointedly asked how he guides his staff to make these culturally relevant PBIS decisions regarding the discipline gap, he responded with little substance:

I guess, I made that a priority. Like I said that this cultural issue is a priority.

That this group there's something going on. Unfortunately, the data told me that

something is going on with this group of kids. And I just didn't let it go. Because I wanted to help -- of course, I'm going to -- I don't know. I want to help all groups. But I guess, when you say, okay, look here's the data. Here's what it's saying. And we can't ignore it because we want to get better. We want to improve. And we want to improve some of the biggest areas first. That we can get the most bang for our buck. I just don't let up on it. And we stick with it until we find a solution. And then we run that solution for a while to say does it work or does it not work? Then if it doesn't, we toss it. And then we go after it with something else. But I don't know, it's a great question.

One might speculate as to why Anderson was stumped. It could have been the question he was asked was one he had not prepared for. Perhaps he was unfamiliar with how to make sense and articulate his understanding and perception of PBIS, the discipline gap, or culturally relevant practices. What is clear, is that now he is aware he might not know how to respond.

Conversely, Principal Jones could cite specific examples of the work done in his building to build the culture and climate. It was clear that the Sensemaking component of Action regarding PBIS and the discipline gap was disjointed. When asked what role does the discussion of race play in the conversations he had about policy at Parkerville, he responded similarly to Anderson with deflections, conflation, and uncertainty:

It's -- it's just -- it's so complicated...if you look it goes back all the way to, , making students feel part of the community. When you want students to feel part of your school community a lot of that can be even harder to do when students are coming a long way to school. And for Parkerville High School most of our

African-American students are coming from three satellite areas that are good distance from the school...so we're always talking about what can we do to make those students feel a part of our community. Things like People of Purpose [African American male mentoring group]. We just had a People of Purpose meeting Tuesday. And we actually asked students about these things. What are some things that you would like to be involved in in school? On the district student survey, we still only have about a third of our students that participate in any kind of extracurricular or co-curricular activities. That's something we're focusing on next year...we're hoping we'll find in there is by engaging students in part of the community and feeling more a part of the school that we'll be able to reinforce more positive interactions in the school, which will impact positive behaviors, and less violations and code of conduct in all subgroups.

Mentoring programs are often able to support student engagement of at risk youth (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). However, Principal Jones shows misunderstandings about how PBIS can be an engaging mechanism at Parkerville for his students of color in conjunction with initiatives like mentoring groups.

Both Anderson and Jones focused on improving instruction and student achievement, which may have been a function of their status as turnaround school principals. Principal Jones was aware that creating a positive school culture and climate was a multilayered challenge. He indicated that was striving to make sense of and improve Parkerville's culture and climate but it was clear that he also had a limited understanding of what to do:

Education is very complex...But , it's one of those things, it's just -- schools are

so complex. You can't put your finger on any one thing. And I always have a real hard time putting my finger on any specific thing that we're doing...it's a lot of things that are coming together about just being good human beings.

Principal Anderson discussed how he spent most of his time focused on typical principalship tasks such as improving instruction and developing “instructional clarity”, specifically “raising the collegiate rigor, raising instructional expectations” and training people for their roles or “cogs”. As a leader, he described the necessity of aligning his staff in the “Freeman Way”. His goal was to, “eventually have an indoctrination, kind of new-teacher orientation, that -- training that will, one, include training of all policies...” Developing cohesion among the work of Freeman’s staff was integral work to Anderson. Anderson was the only principal who became defensive and openly discussed his sensemaking of PBIS as one that might put him at odds with the district’s expected implementation. Anderson felt that his staff should make their own meaning of “top down” district policy initiatives like PBIS. This sentiment was paramount to merely implementing the discipline framework. In reference to how he makes sense of district mandated policy initiatives and guides his staff in sensemaking he articulated thusly:

And matter of fact, I will say this about my leadership, and most people will know this, I rarely take anything that's coming down from above and just say, “Hey, by the way, we're going to do this.” It's just not going to happen. We're going to take, we're going to strip it apart, we're going to see what key parts are essential to Freeman.

This mind set is indicative of Anderson’s lack of attention to the PBIS mandates, process, and product. Referring back to Freeman’s CSIPs, only two references to actual PBIS

work were found. This indicates a lack of importance placed on PBIS implementation. This act of buffering (Honig & Hatch, 2004), or blocking of the external demands of program implementation, is a function of the autonomy that principals in the MCSD district have when making and implementing policy. Without any impetus from district officials to change, often times principals think and act in ways that they see fit which at times is diametrically opposed to what is best for students and schools.

Anderson and Jones focused their culture and climate efforts on activities geared towards developing school-wide capacities of citizenship, school pride, or kindness, all characteristics requiring technical and adaptive support. Anderson spoke of creating a more prideful school, one where students did not feel dejected about attending Freeman,

The next level of PBIS, the next word that we're trying to coach kids on, is how to have pride. But right now kids feel pride happens to them. But instead pride is what you do. And what you're proud of. And so that's why I need like the voice of our history to say what was Freeman proud of. And just like I said it, the challenge of being better than my parents. And being proud in the fact that I can create a better life for myself than my parents did. I want our students to say, I can create a better school than our alumni did. And it can be a better place. And so that's what we're working on as the next component of PBIS.

This goal is admirable, and most assuredly increased pride will positively impact student feelings about attending Freeman; however, this passage again indicates Anderson's sensemaking of PBIS lacks understanding about what PBIS is and how it can impact the discipline gap at Freeman High School.

Jones appeared to have a better grasp on the social justice underpinnings of creating a more equitable school. He talked about creating a more compassionate, empathetic school that he hoped would bleed over into the community:

The world needs just for everybody to be a little kinder to one another. And how can you be more compassionate, empathetic? And I even talk to students about reaching out. Reaching out to students that aren't like you. It's real easy to get along with people like us. It's not as easy to get along with people that aren't like you. That's just natural. You got to kind of make an effort. You got to try to spread kindness.

Efforts to develop citizenship, school pride, or kindness while interesting and positive, seem unlikely to have a lasting effect if conversations about equity, power dynamics, student-teacher interactions, and race are not part of the regular climate and culture dialogue with all stakeholders. Trying to make sense of PBIS in a diverse urban school requires the addressing of adaptive and technical implementation challenges and the developing of racialized discourses. Without addressing adaptive and technical challenges of engaging in racialized discourses leaves principals stumbling in the dark.

Racial Discourses or Silences

Two variations of evidence of racial discourse were sifted from the data – racial discourses and racial silences. As it happened, the sample was evenly divided between the two types of race talk. Principals Anderson and Jones enacted racial silences in their schools, while Principals Owens and Washington enacted racial discourses in their schools. In this section, Critical Race Theory was used to analyze emergent evidence of

racialized discourses and silences enacted by this study's principal participants will be addressed.

Racialized Silences

This study's second research question asks what role racialized discourse plays in the implementation of PBIS in diverse schools. Before discussing the racialized silences found in this study's data a working definition of racialized silences within Critical Race Theory needs to be established. To do so, I draw from the literature of educational social justice researchers. Delpit (1988) identifies the silenced dialogue of educators as generated by the "culture of power" present in schools that "explicitly and implicitly" influence race talk. She cites five rules that guide the "silenced dialogue" of CRT:

1. Issues of power are enacted in classrooms (and schools).
2. There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a "culture of power".
3. The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power.
4. If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier.
5. Those with power are frequently least aware of— or least willing to acknowledge — its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (p. 282)

Per Delpit, these rules govern how, when, and with whom race talk is silenced and is a function of maintaining the privilege of power, which lies with whiteness. In two different syntheses, Mazzei (2008, 2011) attributed silences of white teachers in race talk

as initially “fear; fear of offending, fear of being wrong, fear of appearing stupid and fear of being marginalized by peers” (p. 660, as cited in Mazzei, 2011). Later Mazzei (2011) surmises these silences are, “less a resistance to fear that is producing the silences and, instead, recognition of their need to maintain privilege, identity and comfort that is producing a ‘desiring silence’ ” (p.660). The idea that the silences of white educators is a result of fear and mechanism to maintain privilege coalesce for Mazzei (2011) as “consequences of what may result should they give voice to their conflicts and struggles to maintain power” (p. 663). The gravitation towards silences by white educators is an outcropping of the fear of losing privilege and the lack of skill to have “challenging, but necessary, conversations” connecting to issues of race (Rusch & Horsford, 2009, p. 303). For the purposes of this research I conceptualized racialized silences as explicit and implicit refusals to engage in discourses about race or deflecting conversations rooted in race talk. This avoidance is as a mechanism to avert discomfort, prop up privilege, maintain power, or support the status quo. In this study, Principals Anderson and Jones struggled to make sense of race as a contextual factor in the discipline gap and also to participate in racialized silences. Other tenets of Critical Race Theory were present in the data gleaned from Principals Anderson and Jones. Both principals alternately engaged or denied socially constructed racial groups, as they saw fit. Speaking in racially coded language of “gap groups”, “subgroups”, and “fragile learners” exhibited colorblindness and deficit thinking (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Milner, 2007). In those same utterances, I found examples of racializing and deracializing the context of their schools. The conflation of race and socio-economic was prevalent in both the cases

of Principal Jones and Principal Anderson. By doing so neither had to address racial issues or student-teacher conflict that often arises from the lack of racialized discourses.

Anderson circumvented conversations about race. He did not mention his students' race. He did not acknowledge the predominate race of Freeman's residence area. He did not share how he addressed race as a demographic factor with his staff in relation to PBIS implementation. Principal Anderson struggled to answer questions about race, the discipline gap, or how racialized conversations are had at Freeman High School without using his data analysis process as a shield. In one instance when asked how race is discussed at Freeman, Anderson responded that he focused on "the who" policy was intended for which showed an awareness of who the majority of his demographic was, but lack of understanding of the racial contexts of his school and his students. Reliance on data to inform the conversation is key; but, it seemed as though Anderson was absorbed by demographic data and data analysis. This kept him from truly addressing race issues at Freeman. This reliance and focus on data could be attributed to his sensemaking focus on Noticing and Bracketing, two data-oriented sensemaking components. This attention to data could also be a way for him to silence frank conversations about race with his staff, or acknowledging colorblindness (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Milner, 2007). "The who" in the previous passage was addressed early in this study, but again Anderson's unwillingness to physically say Black/Hispanic/Biracial students when addressing his student demographics is telling of his willingness or skill in having racialized discourses. In reference to how he examines data to enact policy, Anderson shares how data informs Freeman's work:

Data helps us keep our pulse. There you go. I guess, in my school the disparities are just there because of the demographic makeup of the building. Then it's just part of our culture. Our culture is to help our kids. Our kids just happen to be a high proportion compared to other schools. I mean, we have the second highest compared to the only magnet school in the county that has a natural draw for our demographics. All of a sudden we're 80 percent and the next one's 16 percent lower. Sixteen percent lower in terms of African-American population. That is huge inside our school district. When you look at the percent free or reduced lunch at 83 percent and look at 80 percent African-American you look at the statistics that are out there that say will success happen? And the reality, I mean, they're going to tell you no. But that doesn't mean we're going to give up. That doesn't mean we're not going to fight for the ones that we can draw across the line. And we're going to do it. And the teachers here know it's hard work. And we're going to do it and it's exhausting.

This passage is indicative a few things. First, it openly depicts Anderson's deficit mindset, or his automatic acceptance that one demographic, in this case Black students, are less likely to succeed. Critical Race theorists posit that deficit mindsets of educators can be detrimental to the work in high-minority, high-poverty schools (Milner, 2007). Second, his suggestion that Freeman's culture is to "help kids" was identified as coded language. It indicates that indicates a deficit mindset on the part of his leadership and leads to further questions. What does this "help" look like? If it requires students of Color to fit into the mold of whiteness, can it be called help? Is this help empathetic and empowering? Is this help formulated with the input of the voice of children of Color?

Additionally, the reference to “high proportion” as compared to other schools was identified as coded language. He never utters the words Black or African American, however when talking about demographics of Freeman compared to others, it became clear that he was talking about race. Third, that same utterance has connotations Anderson is resigned to accept the status quo for Freeman’s students. Lastly, the above passage was taken from Anderson’s second interview. It was clear he was uncomfortable with race as the topic, but there was also an undercurrent of exasperation in his voice and words. It is unclear if the exasperation heard was because he works in a PLA school with more than its share of challenges, because he was unprepared and unskilled in answering race-based questions, or because the questions did not fit with the narrative of his school he desired to shape.

In one instance when Principal Anderson was specifically asked about how he would define equity at Freeman, a school predominately composed of students of Color, he deflect his response from race and conflated it with gender identity equity by lumping LGBTQ and race issues under the umbrella of equity and diversity. Combining all equity issues in this way is not helpful for school leaders or their marginalized students. Each equity situation has its own unique features and to attempt to talk about them all does not honor the individual voice of the oppressed. In the above utterance, he neither honors persons of Color or those who identify as members of the LBGTQ community. Anderson’s inability to make sense of and conceptualize intersectionality and the voice of Color in his school will likely impact his ability to implement a culturally conceptualized PBIS at Freeman.

While Anderson's silences were rife with coded language, Jones was more passive in his avoidance. This was interpreted as interest convergence, differential racialization, and color blindness, (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Milner, 2007). Jones and Anderson are both white males, and as such they are possessors of power as socially and historically ascribed to their shared identity. The act of entering into a racialized discourse would not serve their power interests, or interest convergence, thus there is no conscious or subconscious reason for the principals to engage in these conversations or encourage their stakeholders to participate (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Milner, 2007). An example of Jones avoidance of racialized dialogues can be seen here, in his conflation of race and socio-economic status when specifically asked about how he talks about race in the light of policy:

Marcia: So in thinking about disproportionalities, what role does the discussion of race play in the conversations you have about policy in this school?

Jones: I mean; we don't have any formal SBDM policies that I'm aware of - I'm trying to think - that talks specifically race. Now, when our student response team gets together and our PBIS team meets every two weeks we look at our high fliers as far as violations of the code of conduct. And we look at individual students. We look to see if they fall in any specific subgroup. And what we have found, we talked a little bit about this last time...What we have found at Parkerville is it's more a poverty issue than it is a race issue.

Jones' immediate response led him to address tangible evidence of conversations of race – whether or not he could produce a site based decision-making council policy that addressed race. Jones claimed the PBIS team looked at student data, careful to note that

they look at individual students and “sub-groups”. The use of “sub-groups” I identified as racially coded language for students for marginalized students, specifically students of Color. Finally, he settles his response to my question about race in the conflation of socioeconomic status and race. This alternately racializing and deracializing minority groups in response to his needs and using coded language to do so is evidence of differential racialization (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Milner, 2007).

When specifically asked about his role in dealing with both the achievement and discipline gaps, Jones avoided discussing race as factor in explaining the differences between how some students performed and behaved compared to others. Another example of Jones’ avoidance, in the form of colorblindness was found in our conversations about “fragile learners” and “sub-groups”. Instead of acknowledging each of the “sub-groups” of students might have differing experiences and learning needs that require different approaches, he identified them as “fragile learners”. The inclusion of “white females” is interesting, but the inclusion of them as a “sub-group” is consistent with colorblind ideology; all students are the same, even when they are not.

Jones also talked about “fragile learners” and how he seeks to create an instructional setting to support their needs. Jones specifically cites how he addresses “fragile learners”:

We started talking about we need to focus more on individual fragile learners in our classroom. And not limit ourselves by any specific subgroup. Algebra II teachers are looking every day at who are students that are consistently struggling and are fragile learners in our classroom? Let's know those students by name.

Let's make sure we're constantly recognizing and reinforcing whatever we can with those students. The philosophy I have if it's good for our fragile learners, if it's good for these kids that are struggling and fall low in these gap groups it's good for everybody. It's just good instruction...And we also believe that if instructional practices are good for your fragile students they're good for everybody...Teachers are always looking for students that are struggling.

The term “fragile learner” is coded language and a doleful euphemism for the more clinical “at-risk” student. It is unclear why Principal Jones chose this term over other more popular terms. Perhaps the racial connotations of “at-risk” are too heavy for use by Jones, or “fragile learner” possesses the empathy that Jones identifies as one of his moral imperatives as an educator. Regardless, both terms exemplify Jones’ unwillingness and inability to engage in frank racialized discourses at Parkerville High School.

For both Principals Anderson and Jones, racialized discourses were silenced, avoided or deflected with conflation. Neither of them appeared to have the willingness or skill to address race in their schools in a frank productive fashion. Without engaging in racialized discourses it will be hard for them to make serious strides towards decreasing the discipline gap in their schools. Conversely, Principals Owens and Washington have different experiences with racialized discourses as race talk helps guide their sensemaking about PBIS and its implementation.

Racialized Discourses

Earlier in this study, I defined racialized discourses as practical and theoretical communication and conversations that school stakeholders participate in regarding issues of racial and ethnic diversity, equity, and access. Racialized discourses are a facet of

Critical Race Theory (CRT) that can help to address the conversations and the silences school administrators participate in and about race in relation to disproportionate discipline of students of Color. Converse to Principals Anderson and Jones, Principals Owens and Washington enacted racialized discourses in their schools.

Principal Washington's personal experiences as a Black educator made her acutely aware of the importance of engaging in racialized discourses. She shared her lived experience and explained how her voice of Color has prepared her to engage in race talk with her staff. This passage is a compelling example of Washington's ability to be frank about her experience and that of many of her students of Color:

As an African-American female I'm very upfront with my staff about how I was raised. How I was told you must give a 150 percent because "the Man" -- the white man is not going to give it to you on your own. And they [teachers] said huh? And I share with them how like I've personally been followed in department stores and different things like that. They're like "But, no, you have college degrees!" But I said, "This is life." So this adds to the texture. Now, luckily for me -- now to think about it, I'm middle class and I've been profiled by the police. My husband has been pulled over and detained for two hours because his car fit a description and all this. So now imagine if you live in a context of urban poverty where you might get stopped by the police every other day. Or have to see police on your street every day. And deal with various issues. And then you look at the political atmosphere we live in and things happening on the news. Black Lives Matter and different things like that. And sometimes we don't -- when you're aware but not always know, our kids sometimes will hear, "That's why I can't

stand white folks”. So I tell my staff, we have to build relationships. That's our -- that's one of my biggest strategies when it comes to dealing with disproportionality. If you don't take the time to build a relationship there's going to be a confrontation. Because part of that confrontation comes from what they're hearing at home. If kids are hearing at home, “That's why I can't stand the Man, the white Man, the white woman, whoever, that makes it even more acceptable then when that kid comes to school to regurgitate what they've heard.”

Washington did not directly reference racial biases of her white teachers or of her students of Color during her interviews. However, the previous passage indicates biases are at the forefront of her mind as she makes sense of how to engage her stakeholders in conversations about race.

Washington's lived experience necessitated a courageous commitment to engage in these discourses regardless of the institutional racism present in society or in the schools she has worked. Earlier in this study, I referenced Washington's stuffed elephant and her “Elephant in the Room” conversations she has with her staff. Even sitting with her during the two interviews, discussing some of the more difficult aspects of leadership, she exuded a warm honesty that was amplified when she referenced how she pulls out the elephant for tough conversations, including race related discussions. What was striking about her “Elephant in the Room” talks, was the courage shown to open race dialogue with her staff, pepper it with humor and warmth (the stuffed elephant and her mannerisms), and say what needed to be said about race.

Washington personally sought out professional development experiences that would bolster her as an educator and give her the skills sets necessary to have difficult

conversations about race. She referenced how being part of a regional National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) cohort has made her grow as a leader, and taught her concepts like “collective efficacy”. Being highly trained and experienced assuredly adds weight to the conversations she has with her staff, especially about race and discipline. Most of her professional development and learning she has pursued herself as part of her leadership institutes and her PhD work.

Washington made the discipline gap reduction in her school a priority.

Triangulating interviews with Morningside’s CSIPs, behavior, suspension reduction, and culture and climate activities were connected and cohesive activities that aligned with Morningside’s vision and mission. For the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years’ activities related to PBIS included, but were not limited to:

1. Creating a PBIS committee that meets bi-weekly.
2. Revising the Morningside Middle School vision and mission and aligning all procedures and activities to them.
3. Training on Restorative Practices for the whole staff.
4. Morning meetings to share with students and teachers daily expectations.
5. Creating common classroom/school-wide norms.
6. Creating and nominating students for the Safety Patrol Program.
7. Conducting Plus/Delta data review checkpoints on PBIS matters.
8. Conducting PBIS walkthroughs at regular intervals during the year.
9. Student recognitions at regular intervals for behavior and academics.
10. Creation and maintenance of a Token Economy for student rewards.
11. Conflict Resolution training for staff and students.

12. Classroom advisory lessons focusing on Spence Rogers' Six Keys.

13. Peer Mediation Program training and induction for students.

The components of PBIS indicated in Morningside's CSIPs did not directly reference race, however, Principal Washington cited these as research-based best practices for her students.

Principal Washington not only utilized data to inform her work, but she acted upon it. All of her actions were in alignment to her moral imperative and her commitment to social justice as principle. She felt that she had several leadership roles. These roles included data orientation, systematic strategic planning, developing and monitoring an inquiry-based data process, and create an environment conducive to student learning. She describes her role in the following passage:

I think my role is to make people aware of the data, to put systems in place, where they have to interact and act on the data. And that's regardless if it's achievement gap data or discipline gap data. It's my job to make people see the truth. And to put them in the position where morally they have to act upon it. And help them understand the moral imperative through messaging that I send out in my weekly newsletter or things of that nature. One of my sole responsibilities as a principal is to create the learning environment. Therefore, I create the norms basically. And over time as you gain more trust of people and you get more feedback it becomes more shared norms. But ultimately in the beginning I set the non-negotiables. It's about high expectations for all. It's about moving forward. It's about having a system of continuous improvement.

Unlike her counterpart, Principal Washington, Principal Owens drew from her personal experiences as a white female primarily teaching and working with students of Color to develop an understanding of why racialized discourses are required in an urban school. Previously in this study I shared her experience as a teacher in a remedial English class at Waldorf High School, she reminisced about several African American students who she had in a double-blocked 90-minute class for two years. These students, Detrick, Anthony, and Louis, taught her a lot about teaching in an urban school as a white, young, inexperienced educator. She became a culturally responsive educator because of her experiences. She learned she had built relationships with students and tap into their sense interests because school was not the first thing on their minds. She had to provide them a place where they belonged when all messages they heard indicated the contrary.

In our second interview she shared more about her time in the class with these boys. She shared how in order to engage them in learning she had to become a culturally relevant teacher. This included finding things relevant to them, specifically on the topics of race and what it meant to be a man. These experiences stayed with her as she developed a conceptual and practical understanding of what equity means in the context of a racially diverse school. She speaks of her experience in the following passage:

And I also shared with you the class that changed my life forever. I saw how so many times they could be misinterpreted. But because I had them 90 minutes a day I got to really know them and many facets of their personalities and their behaviors. And how they could so easily be misunderstood. And how they didn't recognize that they were being misunderstood. And trying to give them some power plays...like when you do this this may happen. So just know it's not fair

but I need you to be aware of it so you can use it to your advantage...take that power back. And just having those conversations with those 14- and 15-year-old boys just opened things for me. I always thought through my perspective that kids come to us from all different places but they can be successful no matter what. And then to walk with them through that and see it from their perspective and they were very open with me. So they'd tell me all kinds of things. And because I taught English and we had the ability to write about things and read about race ... We just had all these great conversations.

This experience taught her the importance of direct and honest communication. She became acutely observant of the miscommunication and misunderstandings her students of Color experienced. Sometimes because of teacher bias, and she became boldly committed to learning more about how to challenge these racial biases to support student learning and success. The same experiences that guided her as a classroom teacher are experiences she taps into to guide her staff, especially struggling teachers. Her lived experience helped her understand and share more culturally relevant approaches with teachers who might struggle in this area. Her experience has also helped her to understand proactive culture, climate, and routines greatly impact how students learn and behave in school.

Like Washington, Owens too made decreasing disproportionate discipline in her school a priority despite challenges she faced with staff turnover. Often this put her in the position where she had to have conversations about race. She was not necessarily prepared for these conversations, but it was a challenge that she took on nonetheless. Principal Owens is committed to a continuous improvement process, and utilizes data and

collaborative processes to support the culture and climate of her school. Her inquiry and her staff's collective inquiry process guide policy implementation. Like Washington, she uses data to paint an undeniable picture for her staff of racial disproportionalities present at Lincoln. When asked about her role in decreasing the discipline gap at Lincoln, she spoke to how she relied on data and collaborative conversations to support her staff's sensemaking and the schools collective action on the matter and found that asking why questions help guide her staff to ask and answer questions they are uncomfortable with.

Principal Owens, like Washington, is committed to racialized discourses, but for different reasons. While she had some eye-opening experiences as a classroom teacher, her commitment is based in her emancipatory desire to empower marginalized groups. As the principal at Lincoln High School, the largest group, where she is likely to affect the most change is with her racially diverse student body. She was the only white principal participant who espoused these kinds of views. Without uttering the word "intersectionality", she spoke of it and cemented herself as an ally of racially marginalized students. The following passage clearly depicts this sentiment and my observation:

All of our kids are so different. Even our white kids. You've got upper class kids that live in half million dollar homes. And then we've got the number one homeless population...we have the most homeless kids in the district. Just the span this range of all kinds of just humans. And I love that about us. But it makes PBIS policy even more important. And it makes that culturally responsive piece, which so many people just struggle to find a concrete way to explain that or to apply it, makes it so important. And it also makes policy even harder to write.

Not everything is literally Black and white...there's all these other factors, right? You have different attitudes towards school and work that you have to be aware of. You have to be very sensitive to what a kid might be hearing at home versus what you're telling them. And I don't think we've done a good job of that yet. We've jumped all over the achievement piece. But really understanding kids and cultures but not stereotyping them; you don't want to be like, well, every kid that is XYZ, this is their culture. I've started tackling this a little bit this year by simply talking about like the teenage brain, something they all have in common. And they're like developing differently. And then we've talked a little bit about what family relationships look like. Say in a middle-class home versus a lower-class or upper-class and how their experiences are different. We just barely scratched the surface of understanding.

Data indicates most of her students do not identify as white. The staff at Lincoln have done tremendous work developing culturally responsive practices and the engaged collaborative discourses about race. Yet Owens knows she still has to tackle white teachers' unwillingness, unpreparedness, fear, and adherence to the status quo (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). She shared a recent experience in dealing with some African American students and some white teachers during class change in the hallway at Lincoln. The teachers seemed unwilling to engage the African American students and Owens wondered if the race of the students had been different, how would the teachers have reacted – would they have engaged the students if they had been white girls? What is interesting about her musings is that she addressed this question with her staff, and got varied responses ranging from inattention of student behavior to actual feelings of

intimidation. Principal Owens is an astute, intuitive, observant educator. While she likely would identify herself as a proponent of social justice, as the term is more common vernacular, her personal reflection and observations invariably categorize her as an anti-racist leader. She mused further about having difficult racialized conversations and racism and how honesty must play a role. She acknowledged that many teachers do not have ill-intentions towards students of different races but they still are uncomfortable talking about race relations in school. She observed here:

So it's hard to get people to talk about that. But just then using that example in other places, and getting people to just be aware of it. And then to say, okay, okay, so you didn't feel comfortable. Okay, but now you're aware of that. And so now what are we going to do the next time?

Principal Owens has sought out professional development regarding racialized discourses in at Lincoln. Earlier in this study I shared Principal Owens' experience with Dr. Carter, a professor at a local university. Dr. Carter came to Lincoln to train the administrative team and selected staff on how to engage in racialized dialogues. Owens struggled how to make sense of these abstract ideas and turn them into concrete actions. In reflection upon her words in her second interview, it is clear these professional development sessions had a greater impact on her than maybe she realized. She shared that she felt talking about race "takes a lot of courage and what we found as a leadership team is it takes a lot of courage for the leader."

Summary of Findings

This case study sought to provide some insight into the extent principals in urban schools make sense of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) in the context

of racial disproportionality in their schools. Additionally, this study sought to understand what role racialized discourses have in the development and implementation of PBIS. Findings indicated that in the particular cases, all principals practiced Weick et al.'s (2005) Sensemaking components, with some parts of the framework being more prevalent than others. However, two main differences were apparent. Principals Owens and Washington made sense of PBIS within the racialized context of their schools, whereas Principals Anderson and Jones made sense of PBIS with limited consideration of the racialized context of their schools. Another key finding had to do with principal identity and leadership experiences. Owens and Washington's identity and leadership experiences were consistent with CRT and feminist counternarratives, and their experiences with CRT and racialized discourses influenced their sensemaking cognition and action. Both of them utilized the vision and mission to drive their school's collective thinking and action in articulated, concerted, and connected ways. Anderson and Jones's identity as white males impacted their sensemaking of PBIS with limited consideration of the racialized context of their schools. Their identities were based on those of relative privilege, and supported by their whiteness. While competent instructional leaders, they lacked experience in racialized discourses. They were found to conflate race with SES. They actively deflected and silenced conversations about race. Sensemaking cognition and action around PBIS policy was present, but appeared in discontinuous manner. Anderson and Jones they lacked the ability to understand how the halting, disassociated conversation and policy planning of PBIS impacted the implementation of the behavior management framework. Nor did they understand the impact racialized discourses and PBIS might have on the discipline gap as well as the achievement gap. Without the

inclusion of racialized discourses, these principals were left stumbling in the dark as they made policy decisions about the discipline trajectories of their students of Color. In the next chapter, I will discuss the findings and share five key implications for policy and practice.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS: STUDY ONE

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the key findings as they relate to answering the research questions and to share implications for practice and further research. This study meant to address two questions: (1) to what extent do principals in urban schools make sense of Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) in the context of racial disproportionality in their schools? and, (2) what role might racialized discourses have in the development and implementation of PBIS?

To answer these questions, I employed qualitative methodology of multiple case study design (Yin, 2009). Multiple case study design was chosen as it lends itself CRT and the capturing the lived experiences of participants. Multiple case study design supports the narrative nature of documenting both racialized discourses and evidence of sensemaking. Utilizing the comparative multi-case methodology, I was able to explore and compare how principals in an urban school district were able to make sense of PBIS in the racial contexts of their schools. Multi-case methodology allowed me to explore what role racialized discourses played in the implementation of PBIS in those schools with the principal participants.

Participants were identified based on a MCSD supplied data set, and of the 17 possible candidates, four participated – two white males, a white female, and a Black female. All candidates were educational products of the MCSD school system. They attended MCSD schools and were employed by the MCSD district. They were all established principals with at least 2 years' experience in the principalship. All participant principals served in schools identified as Persistently Low Achieving due to faltering standardized testing scores. Freeman, Lincoln, and Morningside were required to create a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) because of racially disproportionate student

discipline. Parkerville was a non-CAP school but was strongly encouraged to participate in the PBIS training cohort. After providing informed consent for their participation in this study, each principal completed a demographic survey and participated in two one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Data was collected from interviews, CSIP data, observations of the school and principal's office, documents that were shared by principals, school websites, and district databases available to the public.

Once data were collected, they were transcribed with precise verbatim to include speech patterns and word emphases (Miles et al., 2014; Seidman, 2005). Case analysis strategies of within-case analysis and cross-case analysis were utilized to compare each sub-case based on themes that emerged from coded data (Creswell, 2013). As qualitative research methodology is a recursive and iterative process, each transcript was read multiple times. I undertook two cycles of coding. During the first cycle of coding I used simultaneous coding to sift out embedded multiple meanings and themes present in each utterance of the principal participants (Miles et al., 2014). Thematic codes of leadership, identity, and CRT were sifted out of the first cycle of coding. During the second cycle of coding I was able to glean evidence of sensemaking and developing a “coherent metasynthesis of the data corpus” (p. 207, Saldaña, 2013). Deductive coding was used in the second coding cycle and Weick et al.'s (2005) components of Sensemaking were used to create codes. The second coding cycle further documented the complexity of the emergent themes and theoretical connections of CRT and SM. Databases, CSIPs, and other documents were used for triangulation purposes (Miles et al., 2014). Chapter IV centered on individual participants' cases as a way to provide context around their schools, their leadership, and their sensemaking. Each participant's school context is

described contextually – historically, racially, and geographically, within the context of the neighborhood, city community, and within the institution of the Metropolitan Public School District. Overall impressions of the principal participants’ sensemaking processes were addressed, as well as salient areas of sensemaking, and emergent themes of social justice leadership and Critical Race Theory.

Discussion of Key Findings

Key findings of this study are linked to two core concepts – sensemaking and the racial context and identity-shaped leadership. Both concepts were based on the coding used in the study. Constructs of Critical Race Theory such as racialized discourses, silences, and coded language were applied Weick et al.’s (2005) eight tenets of sensemaking to address and discuss how principals make sense of PBIS and talk about race in their schools.

Sensemaking and the Racial Context

Principals in this study either made sense of PBIS within the racial context of their diverse urban schools, or did so with limited attention to the racial context. Making sense of PBIS within the racialized contexts of their schools was based in the leader’s identity and/or their experiences in/with Critical Race Theory, culturally relevant pedagogy, and the enactment of racialized discourses. These characteristics bridged their sensemaking from cognition to action, and were characterized by concerted sensemaking thinking and action. Their identities, addressed in the next section, drove their thinking and action. Leaders who made sense of PBIS with limited consideration of the racialized context of their schools were found to possess divergent identity characteristics and experiences. Specifically, these leaders understood the lived experience of

marginalization, the practical understanding of some of the basic tenets of Critical Race Theory, and the adaptive and technical skills required to lead racialized discourses in their schools. In fact, this study found some leaders enacted racial silences and repelled race-based conversations. Enacting racial silences and repelling race dialogues was an impediment for articulation of their sensemaking from cognition to action and implementation of a culturally conceptualized PBIS. Instead of concerted, connected sensemaking and PBIS policy implementation, their sensemaking and implementation was static and stumbling. They struggled to progress smoothly from one sensemaking component to the next. Disarticulation was present in a general analysis of their policy implementation. To add the contextual factor of race further disjointed their sensemaking. Adding the requisite of discussing race was metaphorical equivalent to making them run an obstacle course in the dark. Principals Owens and Washington made sense of PBIS with the racial context of their schools in mind, while Principal Anderson and Jones made sense of PBIS with limited cognizance of the racial context of their schools.

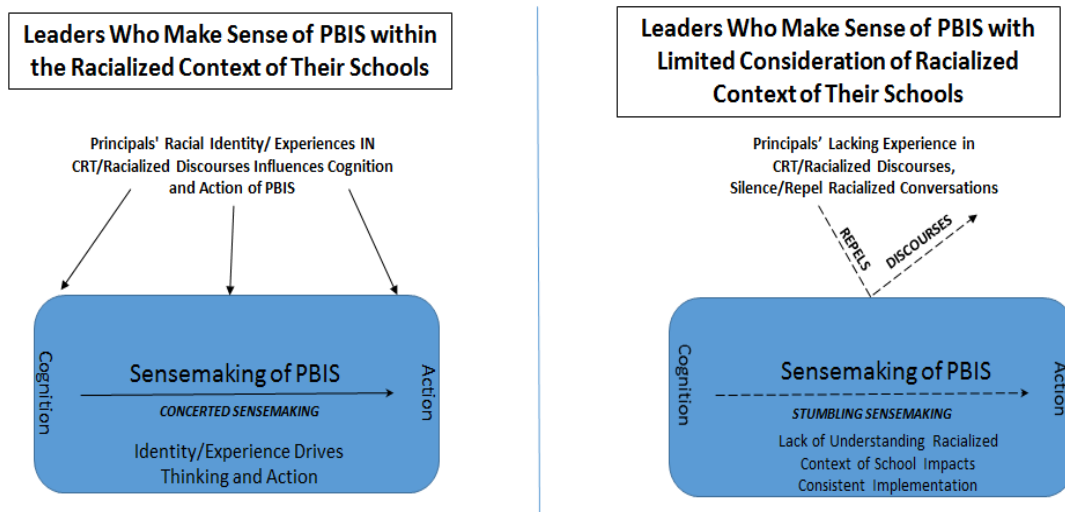


Figure 3. Conceptual map of principals' sensemaking.

Sensemaking within the Racial Context

Principals Owens and Washington made sense of PBIS within the racial contexts of their schools based on their identity and their personal and professional experiences. Both of them have experienced some level of marginalization as women, although differently because of race. Principal Owens is a white ally (Tatum, 1994) and activist principal who denies the white master script. She seeks to challenge the status quo of institutional racism in her school, by engaging in racialized discourses like the 6 principals from Theoharis and Haddix (2011) addressed. Principal Washington's intersectionality as a Black female leader (Crenshaw, 1989) adds another dimension to her sensemaking ability and is the impetus for her focus on culturally conceptualized discipline management and culturally relevant instruction. Her identity as a Black woman, educator, leader, mentor to both teachers and students, and school change agent coalesce in the same ways Black female principals were described by Jean-Marie & Brooks (2007).

Sensemaking with Limited Racial Context.

Principals Anderson and Jones made sense of PBIS with limited consideration of the racialized context of their schools. As white males, they kept in line with the white master script of CRT by acting in ways that supported interest convergence, differential racialization, and color blindness in their administrations (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Milner, 2007). Both participants were willing to discuss race in terms of their demographic analysis, but neither was willing to conduct a critical root-cause analysis, or truly engage in racialized discourses. This relates to Theoharis and

Haddix (2011) in that they did not fit the white activist mold by engaging in race conversations. Neither of the principals could answer direct questions about race in their schools, but deflected, conflated, or silenced the conversation. This relates to the work of Castagano (2008) regarding how teachers silence the race conversations in the classroom. A linear relationship was found in the ability, rationale, and lopsided power dynamic of white teachers silencing race conversations of students of Color and that of white principals silencing racialized discourses in diverse schools. Anderson conflated race and gender issues “LGBTQ”, and Jones conflated race and poverty, both functions of avoidance. The act of conflation gives white educators a safe way to approach race. Confounding race with other equity issues causes “slippage” according to Castagano (2008), that engages the educator’s whiteness and perpetuates it.

Looking at the speech patterns, it was clear there was some difficulty on the part of the principals in answering pointed race-focused questions, resulting in displays of discomfort evidenced by stuttering and hesitated articulation that can be seen in some of the passages. In our second interview, Anderson was uncomfortable to the point he became defensive specifically when discussing how he refuses to implement policy mandates from the district as they are packaged. Flushed-faced, he leaned forward as to assert his authority when asked about PBIS implementation. During triangulation, it became clear that his defensiveness likely stemmed from Freeman’s CSIP only have having two action items regarding PBIS.

Both interviews were rife with coded language. Their use of coded language relates to Delgado and Stefancic’s (2001) discussion of coded language as it persists as a form of micro-aggression or verbal “sudden, stunning, or dispiriting transactions... small

acts of racism, consciously or unconsciously perpetrated, welling up from the assumptions about racial matters most of us absorb from the cultural heritage in which we come of age in the United States..." (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While not as blatant as micro-aggressions, Anderson and Jones use microinvalidations, or "the interpersonal and environmental messages that negate, nullify, or undermine the experiences, feelings, and realities of marginalized groups" (p. 47, Allen, 2012). Anderson and Jones used language such as "gap groups", "sub-groups", discipline "high-flyers", and "fragile students" to describe their minority student populations. As a person of Color, that indicates to me the children who are included in these demographics are viewed as less than white.

Anderson and Jones focused on the technical aspects of their roles as the instructional leader of their buildings, specifically planning and coordinating instructional activities. Principal Jones did have some specific programs that aligned with PBIS, but only a few that addressed racially marginalized students, such as his school's People with Purpose mentoring group for African American males. Anderson on the other hand offered no specific programs or strategies for racially marginalized students. Focus on instruction and lack of attention the implementation of PBIS strategies appeared to be deflection tactics. Feigning PBIS progress was preferable to actual change because they could hang on to the status quo for a bit longer. In the case of Anderson's Freeman High School two years of CSIP documentation in a row only had two instances of PBIS activities. Additionally, Anderson cited relying on the old behavior system when the new one did not work. This lack of progress was present in the discipline data. From 2013-14 to 2014-2015, Freeman had no reduction in suspensions.

Identity-shaped Leadership

Identity shapes the leadership of educational leaders (Evans, 2007; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Consistent with findings from Evans' (2007) study of school leaders' sensemaking in the changing context of race, this study found racial identity matters when making sense of the racial context of a school. The present study confirmed that for all 4 principals involved. Different facets of identity and experience led them to either gravitate towards social justice as a guiding precept, or to ignore and repel it.

Feminist Experiences Inform PBIS

Feminist experiences helped shape the leadership identity of Principals Owens and Washington. This emergent experience was a surprise finding (Miles et al. 2014). Because I did not know who my participants would be, I did not factor in feminist experiences in my review of the literature outside of the work Jean-Marie et al. (2009). Both of these principals practice feminist ethics by practicing the ethics of care, seeking to alleviate oppression, and doing what ought to be done. This relates Nel Noddings (2012) discussion of how some feminists works to alleviate oppression birthed from marginalization of race, class, or gender. Owens and Washington's feminist ethics made them intent on creating a better reality for their students. They desire that school that would be so impactful it would change their academic and disciplinary trajectories. Their concern for transition from the existing state to the desired state, their interest in enacting their school missions to reach their visions, is related to Carol Gilligan's (1982) feminist ethics of care that calls for a "less violent and more caring way of life" (p.232, as cited in Noddings, 2012). These leader's interest in creating safe school communities embody feminist ethics of care. Feminist experiences of these principals is related to Noddings'

feminist iteration of the “*is* and *ought* pseudoproblem” (p. 232, Noddings, 2012). Those who live out the feminist ethics of care instead of languishing in the cognition of sensemaking of what they *ought* to do, simply make sense and decisively act. They do what *ought* to happen because it is right and just. Owens modeling how to sweep students from the hallway to nearby loafing teachers and addressing them was the *ought*, which in turn helps realize the desired state of a more cohesive culture and climate. Washington’s office poster and references to “doing whatever it takes” to support students affirms the feminist *ought* in her, as does her concerted and cohesive planning evident in her CSIPs. Creating a more just school, with decreased disproportionate discipline, improves outcomes for students of Color. Feminist ethics and the ethics of care, are not resigned to women alone, but do tap into the subtle maternal essence that both Owens and Washington exuded. They are both mothers, to their own natural born children and those in the schools they serve. Additionally, both of these women leaders sought to create environments that empower their students and their staffs to reflect and grow. For Owens, students becoming “victorious instead of victims” was integral. For Washington teasing out teacher strengths and transforming privileged teachers into social justice allies was key. These findings relate to Noddings (2012) position that the “major aim of the ethic of care is to prevent the very separation that induces the dualism of exploiter/exploited, oppressor/oppresed, moral agent/object” (p. 236). These women actively seek to change the power dynamic in their schools. By being proactive with a culturally conceptualized PBIS framework, working the CSIP component the “Suspension Reduction Plan”, implementing a Positive Action Center, and engaging her staff in training in racialized discourses, Owens’ is attempting to shake up the traditional classroom power dynamic of

teacher-oppressor student-oppressed. Washington's identifying students to become peer mediators and safety patrol members, and training teachers and students on Restorative Practices are integral in shifting power to students. Feminist ethics help these principals create leadership counternarratives in their schools that are entrenched with social justice. Other factors such as intersectionality and race led them to develop their social justice leadership identities.

Intersectionality and the Black Female Experience

Principal Washington's identity as a Black woman leader and her understanding of the facets of her intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) shaped how she made sense about and acted regarding the discipline gap. Because of her status as a Black woman her lived experience and her leadership give her a platform to share her voice of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). As the principal, she has the luxury of shaping the narrative of her work and how students of Color are to be cared for at Morningside. She noted that white teachers on her staff are often unaware of how their interactions impact the discipline occurrences in their classrooms. She sees it as her job to clarify the experiences of students of Color to white teachers. Her identity as a Black woman gives her the legitimacy and her position the authority to share and shape the sensemaking of race of her white staff members. This relates again to Brooks & Jean-Marie's (2007) observation of Black educators as role models and advocates to students of color. This facet of Washington's leadership is interesting. She exemplified herself not just as a representation of what students could be as a Black person, but she saw herself as a Black exemplar who was equipped to challenge adult and student biases. Race and gender impacted Washington's leadership and ability to contextualize race and discipline in her

building. Her intersectionality gave her a unique view that is no replicable for white school leaders. This is where CRT and social justice experiences are critical in sensemaking about the discipline gap reduction.

CRT and the White Ally Experience. Principal Owens, like many principals across the nation, is white. However, unlike many leaders of diverse urban schools she has sought out critical pedagogy as a way to understand the racial context of her school. In the process she has become an ally to and advocate for marginalized students. Her exposure to book studies from Dr. Carter on racialized discourses offered her a different way to look at how race impacts the lives of her students of Color and their schooling experiences. Principal Owens shared how she follows a collaborative stakeholder driven process for instructional and disciplinary policy decisions. She discussed the ways in which she constantly reflected with and without her staff members on improvement processes. She discussed how she was committed to making Lincoln High School a supportive environment for her marginalized students of Color. This stakeholder collaboration, attention to improvement of outcomes, and interest in the counternarrative of equity relates to Darder's (1997) views of critical pedagogy, which challenges educators to collaborate with stakeholders to "move beyond boundaries prescribed educational practice" (p. 350). Her words replete with hope as she challenges students to become "victorious instead of victims". This relates to Giroux's (2001) insistence on the gravity of instilling critical pedagogy in schools as a way to overcoming oppressive ideologies including racism and classism. Owens shared how her own upbringing was unstable. Weathering the challenge of familial instability in one's formative years can leave an indelible mark on an individual. As an adolescent, Principal Owens' experience

of insecurity and uncertainty at home made her crave the sanctuary of school, which ultimately changed her life. Struggles like this shaped who she was as an educator. She saw the potential in her students with similar backgrounds of disadvantage. These experiences allowed her to understand marginalization in a way that the white males in this study were not privy to, and served to shape her leadership and willingness to understand the marginalized racial context of her students of Color.

White Male Masternarrative as Counterintuitive. Two of the participants of this study identified as white males, but they were unaware of how the white privilege impacted them or those around them. The possession of “whiteness” allowed them a level of privilege consistent with CRT presuppositions about white privilege (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical Feminist and Women’s Studies scholars make similar claims about white male privilege, identifying it as an:

invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks (McIntosh, 1988, p. 3).

Principal Anderson shared his experience of being raised some time by a single parent for. Outside of that experience, he shared no other experiences that would lead him to understand any struggles tied to socioeconomic status. Principal Jones, identified himself as being “blessed”, which was found to be coded language that indicated his support and subscription to the Anglo-Saxon, Christian hegemony prevalent in the Southeastern United States. Both of these principals’ identities positioned them to ignore issues of race, race relations, inter-racial communications, and racialized discourses in their

buildings. Both professed to understand equity, but when asked pointed questions about how racial equity played out in their schools, they often floundered in their responses. Principal Anderson conflated the equity questions of poverty and LGBTQ. He also lumped equity and diversity as one and the same. The following passage depicts his sensemaking on the matter:

I don't look at equity just in regards to race. Because I do look at it in terms of gender. I do look at it in terms of social economical standpoints. I do look at it in terms of LBGTQ. I look at it from every angle that you can possibly say. So I'm almost a diversity is equity, . Or I should say there's equity in diversity...

Jones' conflation was subtler, as he suggested he could speak for the situation at Parkerville as a separate entity and he felt that he had, "found..., we talked a little bit about this last time...at Parkerville, is it's more a poverty issue than it is a race issue."

Both principals knew their students' and school's data. In contrast, when it came to understanding and looking at the issues of racial disparities in their student discipline data they were unsophisticated in their analyses. Anderson and Jones lacked a critical lens which is likely connected to their own identifies as white men. Their lack of understanding of the role they in institutional racism in their schools and lack of training in how to critically think about and talk about race impacted the depth of their analysis. If Principal Owens, in her "whiteness" can become a social justice ally, with training and support it is reasonable that the white males in this study could alter their sensemaking about race and school discipline to hold a more critical perspective with training and support.

Implications

The following section addresses implications for research, policy, and practice. Five priority areas were identified: social justice, training, coaching and sanctions, recruiting culturally responsive staff and principals, and creating stakeholder transparency.

Social Justice as a Priority

If school is to be an equalizer, or an agent of equity, MCSD must make social justice leadership a priority. The work of schools must become a function of social justice. MCSD has made some strides to incorporate PBIS, cultural competence, and restorative practices in its schools. Nevertheless, MCSD's efforts have not been systemic enough, and schools are often left to their own policy implementation devices. There is no mandate from central office regarding the inclusion of racialized discourses, which is a barrier to complete understanding and implementation of social justice in the district. Training in practical and theoretical communication and conversational tools will support school stakeholders' inclusion in problem solving issues of racial and ethnic diversity, equity, and access. If the discipline gap is a true concern for MCSD district and school leadership, systemic plans and policies regarding the implementation of these instruments of social justice must be incorporated more purposefully. MCSD's strategic plan must incorporate social justice in the same way some of the principal participant linked social justice to their CSIPs. The district has undertaken systemic efforts to impact the achievement gap and poverty. And yet, attention, training, efforts, and funds must be dispatched to attend the discipline gap with the same gusto. The district has exemplars leaders who are inclined toward the creed of social justice. They must be tapped into to

guide and mentor cohorts of administrators to support social justice policy implementation across the district. MCSD must be willing and ready to grow their own social justice leaders.

Further research is needed focusing on university preparation programs influence on generating social justice leaders. Qualitative, longitudinal research studies should be conducted on social justice leaders to learn more about how they make sense of and implement discipline policies like PBIS. States and districts must mandate, monitor, and support the implementation of policy geared towards decreasing the discipline gap with the same zeal and attention they attacked the achievement gap over the past 30 years. In terms of practice, districts must make a commitment to connect with local universities' teacher and administrative training programs to support the need for social justice leaders in diverse urban schools, and to hire professors who possess the tenets of social justice. Partnerships and collaboration with local universities can serve MCSD in a few ways. First, collaboration between the district and universities ensures that future educators are prepared to work in MCSD schools. With "grow our own" collaboration, universities and MCSD can help keep talent in the community and grow social justice educators. MCSD leaders must make the commitment to seek out and hire teachers who understand varied equity issues present in schools and communities. The district and local universities separately and collectively converge on individual students and impact the trajectories of their lives. Training is integral in building social justice frameworks for discipline.

Training of District and School Leadership as a Priority

PBIS training for both the district and school leadership must be made a priority in districts and schools to support sensemaking and successful implementation. The

principals involved in this study all have received extensive “turnaround”, or school improvement training. Much of this training focused on improvement of teaching and learning, with much of it being more technical than adaptive work. Reliance on “turnaround” training left knowledge gaps. Principals at turnaround schools know instructional best practices but little training was provided that addressed racial inequities and racialized discourses. To remedy this, Principal Owens and Washington both sought out additional leadership training and institutes on their own. They specifically sought out culturally responsive pedagogy, which likely impacted their sensemaking of PBIS and school culture and climate. Anderson and Jones did not report seeking outside training opportunities. The district did not mandate that principals attend PBIS trainings. The only requirement was they send a team with an administrator. This training was built upon the “train the trainer” model. With this model the trained team is to receive professional development and then go back to the school and conduct the training for the staff. This is counterintuitive when attempting to reform a struggling school’s culture and climate, as the principal is typically the voice and leader who guides all major school initiatives. If the principal is not trained in PBIS, or fails to have a conceptual understanding of it, how are they to make sense of it with depth and clarity? If district leadership does not insure principals are trained, it makes it difficult to hold them accountable for the policy change. Additionally, without active training in the adaptive challenge of participating in racialized discourses leaving principals to their own devices does not help principals lead diverse schools in the urban context. Expecting them to understand rationale for racialized discourses and prepared to undertake the challenge only leaves them to stumble

further in the dark. A basic, but intensive district-wide book study and training of Singleton's *Courageous Conversations* (2014), would be a way to start.

More research must be conducted on schools and districts that have participated in trainings on racialized dialogues to develop a greater body of knowledge and learn from these schools' experiences. For districts, diverse leaders with leanings towards social justice leadership must be found and developed. Principals and staff members who possess the skill of culturally responsive discipline and creating communicative frameworks of racialized discourses must be brought forward and given opportunities to train and mentor others. District-lead programs for social justice and increasing the diversity of school leaders must be created and supported. In terms of practice, individual schools, principals, and teachers must be trained and coached in the implementation of culturally relevant and responsive practices. Mandates for this work must be monitored and lack of implementation must have consequences.

Coaching, Monitoring, and Sanctions Must be a Priority

Training is a foundational step to implement PBIS and tackle the discipline gap, but individual coaching and sanctions must be part of the work. Data should guide this work. Schools all function a little differently in MCSD. Discipline data is collected, but what is placed in the district database may not always be accurate, timely, or complete. Schools should undergo data audits to ensure the same process and procedures are in place across the district. At the time this study was conducted, MCSD has PBIS reform coaches. However, amicability between the coaches and the principal determines how much true coaching takes place. Principals in the MCSD district have tremendous ability to bridge or buffer the external demands of program implementation in their schools

(Honig & Hatch, 2004). Some of the principals in this study were willing to bridge, or integrate new policies into their own and others chose to buffer, or selectively block policy implementation in their schools. Autonomy to make some policy decisions should be in the hands of principals but when principals buffer to the detriment of large swaths of their student bodies, the district must be responsible and step in.

Participatory action research (James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2008) must be conducted on coaching best practices of PBIS implementation. Policies regarding the implementation of PBIS must be clearly articulated and followed. While PBIS is touted as a framework or a menu of interventions to choose from, there are basic components that must be implemented for it yield results. PBIS requires common area procedures, the development of a common behavioral language or script, and the use of multiple proactive behavior analytic strategies. Allowing schools and principals leeway in choosing what and how to implement leaves room for error. With mandates, must come authentic coaching, monitoring, and sanctions. More must be done to improve coaching access on the school level, but such improvements will only be derived from mandates, monitoring, and district sanctions upon principals. There must be tangible incentives to change. Additionally, care must be taken so that principals are coached in how to begin racialized discourses.

Recruiting of Culturally Responsive Staff as a Priority

Recruiting of culturally responsive staff offers several implications for research, policy, and practice, as this is a key component to implementation of programs like PBIS and the reduction of the discipline gap. Recruiting principals and teachers of Color is key, but so is ensuring teachers who are hired are allies and advocates for children of Color.

MCSD must make it a priority for all staff working in diverse schools to be trained develop and cultural responsiveness. Principals, teachers, and staff must be trained in these practices. While PBIS is not culturally inherent, the district and its schools must create a framework for what a culturally conceptualized PBIS looks like. Principal and teacher preparation programs must offer more social justice focused courses, or at least create programmatic course offerings from a social justice lens. More research must be conducted on how school and districts identity, select, and hire culturally responsive staff. Additionally, there must be transparency of and for all stakeholders.

Creating Stakeholder Transparency as a Priority

Creating stakeholder transparency is key to the development and implementation of culturally conceptualized PBIS as a remedy to the discipline gap. Policy measures must be enacted that support stakeholder transparency. In terms of practice, districts like MCSD must make equity initiatives transparent to all stakeholders. All stakeholders need to know the status of all equity measures in each school. More research must be conducted on how districts communicate equity to their stakeholders.

Conclusion

Moving forward, the inclusion of racialized discourses in the implementation of PBIS can support diverse schools , their students, and their communities. Promoting social justice and elevating the tenets of Critical Race Theory from theory to practice for all for principals, classroom educators, their students can only serve to empower and emancipate students of Color and other marginalized groups. Schools and communities are becoming more diverse, and the ability to have the racialized discourses will aid in

the developing of culturally conceptualized PBIS. Schools that possess a culture and climate that understands who students are individually, where they come from, and provide them opportunities for voice will contribute to the growth of social justice in those school communities

CHAPTER VI
INTRODUCTION: STUDY TWO

Jane Crow

African American novelist and essayist James Baldwin references the simultaneous creation of hierarchically ordered status and spaces as “distance”. Through the intimate linking of social status and spatial differentiation, Baldwin (1965) wrote:

One can measure very neatly the white American’s distance from his conscience—from himself—by observing the distance between white America and black America. One has only to ask oneself who established this distance, who is this distance designed to protect, and from what is this distance designed to offer protection. (p. 48)

For Baldwin, the spatiality of life in segregated America raised uncomfortable questions: why, if we are equal, do we not live in the same neighborhoods, go to the same schools, work at the same jobs, and worship in the same churches? In effect, why, if there is no difference between us, is there so much distance between us? In posing these questions, Baldwin referenced not only the absolute distance between inner city and suburb, but also social positioning in which differentiated spaces are produced by, and productive of hierarchical status in race.

In March 2003, Goucher College hosted a symposium celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of James Baldwin’s book, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. The keynote address of the James Baldwin Conference (2003) was given by acclaimed scholar, feminist theorist and cultural critic-bell hooks. hooks talked about reading Baldwin when she was a young girl and commented on the role his work played in transforming education in a segregated America during the 1960s.

While describing a teaching experience in the keynote, hooks stated:

When I arrived at this liberal arts, predominately white college, the white people said there isn't any people of color here. I said wait a minute, I see all kinds of black and hispanic folks working in the cafeteria. Let's just start there and begin to look differently at the frame. Isn't our academic community everybody? We need to ask-why are all the people of color on the bottom?

hooks illustrated the importance of an academic community looking at the roles everyone plays and questioning why some people function in different places of that framework.

Both Baldwin and hooks' commentary on racialized distance is reminiscent of Jim Crow's racial segregation laws in the American South. Jim Crow is useful in explaining how school discipline disparities are rooted in racialized distance during student-teacher interactions. Exclusionary discipline practices reflect disconnected relationships framed by racial micro aggressions negatively influencing social spaces. Racial bias in the practice of school discipline is also part of a broader discourse concerning the continuing presence of institutional racism (Hannssen, 1998) or structural inequity (Nieto, 2000; Skiba, Bush, & Knesting, 2002) in education. In the case of black girls, a racial and gendered lens of social spaces characterizes a concept called, *Jane Crow*.

Reverend, Dr. Anna Pauline (Pauli) Murray coined term, *Jane Crow* while analyzing intersectionality and laws. Murray and Eastwood (1965) brings a historical context to the dual realities of intersectional oppression of racism and sexism experienced by black girls during discipline interactions. Dr. Murray's experience of racism and sexism influenced her conceptualization of *Jane Crow*, which she called the sister of Jim Crow. Murray distinguished Jane Crow from white women's and black men's concerns, "for within this framework of 'male supremacy' as well as 'White supremacy,' the Negro

woman finds herself at the bottom of the economic and social scale” (Azaransky, 2013). Murray realized the *Jim Crow* concept did not offer enough of an explanation for all that infringed upon her life as a Black female.

Jim Crow infringed differently upon the lives of African American males and females, and its differentiated effects were reflected in the ways in which females were marginalized in, excluded from, or included only anonymously in social, political, identity, and economic narratives. Murray would use Jane Crow in her legal and religious writing to explain how black women experience discrimination. She noted the quest for women’s and black Americans’ rights had historically run parallel and were in fact part of the same larger struggle for human rights. Murray affirmed that race and sex discrimination were connected and she invoked the experiences of black women to demonstrate overlapping and interconnected forms of inequality. In the case of black girls, institutional racism and sexism levy the power dynamics of discipline interactions in urban public schools. Within the constructs of female behavior is the perception of femininity shaped by possible biases and stereotypes that cultivate labels that foster oppressed student agency in exclusionary discipline.

On April 29th and 30th, 2016, the Anna Julia Cooper (AJC) Center hosted a national gathering focused on advancing justice for women and girls of color. It brought together researchers, practitioners, philanthropic leaders, policymakers, and young women leaders for an intensive series of discussions about the circumstances, challenges, and opportunities facing women and girls of color. The objective of the conference, “Know Her Truths: Advancing Justice for Women & Girls of Color” was to create an ongoing, collaborative initiative that extends the development of meaningful research

agendas addressing women and girls of color. The executive director of the AJC Center, Melissa Perry-Harris stated at the conference, “The pathologies causing inequality are not located in girls of color, the pathologies are in unjust systems” (AJC conference, 2016). Currently, black girls are experiencing an educational Jane Crow in school discipline- *The New Jane Crow*.

Current Reality

Since 1968, the United States Department of Education’s (USDOE) Office for Civil Rights has compiled information into a database called the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). The CRDC houses data on key education and civil rights issues in American public schools. March 2014, CRDC reported the most recent data regarding equity and educational opportunities for different subpopulations of students from 2011 to 2012. The response rate for the large national collection was 98.4 % of school districts and 99.2 % of schools, representing 99.6% of students in the nation. CRDC included all public schools and public school districts in the nation that serve students for at least 50% of the school day. The CRDC also includes long-term secure juvenile justice agencies, schools for the blind and deaf, and alternative schools (USDOE, 2014).

CRDC indicated black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than White students. Black students comprised 16% of the national sample of K–12 students, although they represented 33% of all students who were suspended once, 42% of those suspended more than once, and 34% of students expelled. Along with CRDC, a body of research has established the pervasive disproportionality use of school discipline with students of color. These studies chronicled the disproportionate representation of black students for school discipline- specifically in the area of

suspensions (Losen & Skiba, 2010), expulsions (KewelRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007), and office referrals (Skiba, et al., 2002). Research about public school discipline continues to document the existence of ethnic overrepresentation in exclusionary discipline (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

The disproportionate number of students of color who receive exclusionary discipline reflects a pressing social injustice perpetuated in today's schools. The *discipline gap* (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Monroe, 2009) reveals a national pandemic in which students of color, especially those with disabilities, are disciplined more frequently than peers from other backgrounds. Extensive investigations of school punishments have also been consistent in raising questions concerning socioeconomic and racial disproportionality in the administration of school discipline (e.g., Fenning & Rose, 2007; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Wallace, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008).

Despite the ubiquity of findings concerning the relationship between race and behavior-related consequences, investigations of behavior, race, and discipline have yet to provide evidence that black students misbehave at a significantly higher rate. Whether based on school surveys (Welch & Payne, 2010) or student interviews (Gregory & Mosely, 2004), studies have failed to find racial disparities in misbehavior sufficient to account for the typically wide racial differences in school punishment. Currently, there is no empirical data that supports factors internal to the student (e.g., severity of behavior). If anything, black students appear to receive more severe school punishments for less severe behavior (McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Shaw & Braden, 1990).

Black students make up the majority of students disciplined as a result of educators' uses of exclusionary strategies to punish subjectively defined behaviors such as "disruption" or "defiance" (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Fabelo, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Morris, 2007). A paradigm shift in attention is needed to focus on school factors as possible contributors to the long-standing and consistent disproportionality data. While black students represent 16% of student enrollment, they represent 27% of students referred to law enforcement and 31% of students subjected to a school-related arrest. In comparison, white students represent 51% of enrollment, 41% of students referred to law enforcement, and 39% of those arrested (USDOE, 2014). The discipline gap foreshadows a school-to-prison pipeline documenting school decisions and policies that push black students out of school and funnels them into the criminal justice system.

Research on black student achievement (Gregory, 1997; Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al. 2002) shed light on the discipline gap, but only to emphasize inequitable discipline experiences of Black male's disproportionate interactions with the "pipeline" metaphor. The school-to-prison pipeline analogy has become the dominant frame to discuss the disproportionate disciplinary interactions of school age black boys in urban public school settings. While black males are suspended or expelled more than any other group, punitive disciplinary policies have a disproportionate, negative impact on black females as well.

Statement of the Problem

On February 27, 2014, President Barack Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum to close opportunity gaps for boys and young men of color. Under the "My

Brother's Keeper" (MBK) initiative, one specific topic of dialogue is the disproportionality of exclusionary discipline among black boys and young men. School suspensions and expulsions precipitate dropping out of school, which in turn is a significant link in what is now called the *school to prison pipeline* (Wald & Losen 2003). The pipeline consists of "zero tolerance" policies that have been a major contributor to the dramatic increase in suspensions/expulsions. Thus, zero tolerance results in suspensions that increase the likelihood of dropping out and involvement in the juvenile or criminal justice system. Dropping out of school not only diminishes employment prospects; it increases the likelihood of winding up in jail or prison.

The school-to-prison pipeline is an increasingly problematic phenomenon particularly for youth of color. President Obama stated, "We will continue to study how disciplinary actions disproportionately derail boys and young men of color and other students, and may place them on the so-called school-to-prison pipeline" (p. 56). The President's call to action assessed federal policies, regulations, and programs to drive incentives and recommendations for national, state, and local public and private policy adoption (MBK, 2015). According to the MBK report, the vision and objectives of MBK are advanced by businesses, foundations, and nonprofit organizations who have committed hundreds of millions of dollars and resources to develop proposals intended to enhance positive outcomes and eliminate or reduce negative efforts affecting black males. More than 60 superintendents of the largest urban school districts, and nearly 200 local politicians pledged to develop targeted strategies for increasing black male achievement.

In response to highly publicized initiatives regarding Black male achievement such as President Obama's, My Brother's Keeper, Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda (2015)

analyzed gender disparities that exist within same-race cohorts as well as the racial disparities that exist within same-gender cohorts. The report developed out of a critical dialogue about the various ways women and girls of color are channeled onto pathways that lead to underachievement and criminalization. The report sought to elevate the voices of black girls and other girls of color affected by punitive policies. *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Over policed, and Under Protected* is based on a review of national data and personal interviews with young women in Boston and New York. The report seeks to increase awareness of the gendered consequences of disciplinary and push-out policies for girls of color, and, in particular, black girls.

The study confirmed a national pattern of racial disparity in the distribution of punitive discipline against black girls in New York and in Boston. It also summarized the push-out factors by highlighting types of disciplinary measures used in public schools, including in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion. In Boston, values for out-of-school suspension, expulsion, referral to law enforcement, and school-related arrests were considered. In New York City, in and out-of-school suspensions, expulsion, and referrals were examined. In Boston, black girls comprised 61 percent of all girls disciplined, compared to white girls, who represented only five percent of such girls. Even though there were about three times as many black girls as white girl's enrolled, black girls were eleven times more subjected to discipline than their white counterparts.

In New York City, black girls represented 56 percent of all girls disciplined, compared to white girls, who represented only five percent of such girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015). The enrollment of black girls was about twice the rate of white girls, but they were

subjected to school discipline at ten times the rate of their white female counterparts. During the same period, black girls in New York were nearly ten times more likely to be suspended than their white counterparts and in Boston, they were suspended at almost twelve times the rate of white girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Discipline, suspension, and expulsion data for the Boston and New York school districts reveal black girls are punished more than other girls. In addition, the relative risk for suspension is higher for black girls when compared to white girls than it is for black boys when compared to white boys.

Research of black female achievement identifies disproportionate interactions with the “pipeline” metaphor through teacher biases (Blake et al., 2011; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Grant, 1992; Morris, 2007; Murphy, Acosta, & Kennedy-Lewis, 2013; Thornberg, 2007). While, these studies highlight the subjectivity of teacher perception in discipline sanctions for black girls, there is lack of research that both captures and responds to the conditions causing black girls’ disproportionate interactions. Current literature regarding the discipline of black girls has discussed teacher bias leading to disproportionality rates, few studies focus primarily on the voices of students and even less focus on the stories of students who are in the vulnerable stages of middle school (Bland & Carrington, 2009; Doda & Knowles, 2008). There is a critical need for research that specifically addresses discipline experiences of urban middle school black girls independent of the boys in the school-to-prison pipeline literature.

Purpose of the Study

Losen and Skiba (2010) point out the racial gap in school suspensions has at least doubled since the early 1970’s; this being particularly true for black students. Out of

school suspensions are one of the most commonly used types of exclusionary discipline in the United States (Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003), and middle school students are the most likely recipients (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Middle school and early high school years present important opportunities for fashioning interventions to prevent dropping out of school and criminal justice system involvement. Preventing school suspensions and expulsions can reduce juvenile justice system involvement that becomes a gateway to incarceration.

To fully understand how inequitable discipline practices influence academic achievement and social adjustment outcomes of black children in totality; more information is needed on the discipline experiences of black girls. The plight of black boys (e.g. high suspensions and drop-outs) has galvanized philanthropic efforts where private and public funding resources have prioritized black males without consideration for the black girls.

The purpose of the study is to explore perceptions of urban, public school discipline by middle school black girls who are frequently suspended from school. This study will add to the limited research on the experiences and perceptions of urban middle school black girls in the school-to-prison pipeline literature. Greater insight into black girls' perspectives of discipline experiences could prepare better designed learning environments and educational experiences that will help decrease the disproportionate discipline gap. Inquiry into adolescent black girl's perceptions of discipline centers a student voice in why and how students are pushed from, or jump out of, urban public schools. Even more importantly, student voices are addressing explicit questions about whether or not they see the school environment as facilitating their move toward prison

or jail incarceration. Student voices in educational research have too often been ignored or simply reported through the perspective of the researcher, yet students are the ones who are living the schooling experience (Fine, 1991).

Further research is needed to understand how educators can use student voices to develop behavior management strategies that avoid an over reliance on exclusionary discipline methods. Such policies require educators to rethink how they interact with and discipline students, as they will no longer have the option of simply “getting rid of troublemakers” (Bowditch, 1993, p. 494). Vanderhaar et al. (2015) emphasized the link between exclusionary discipline in the form of alternative school placement and involvement in juvenile detention. The findings from this longitudinal study found alternative school placement having significantly more influence on juvenile justice involvement for black students. Black youth were five times more likely than white youth to be involved in juvenile detention after being placed in a disciplinary alternative school (Vanderhaar et al., 2015). Research makes clear that expulsions and out-of-school suspensions are strongly associated with subsequent participation in juvenile and criminal justice systems (Fabelo et al., 2011; Noguera, 2003; Toldson, 2011; Vanderhaar, Petrosko, & Munoz, 2015).

To further the understanding of school discipline through the voices of middle school black girls, the current study utilizes semi-structured interviews with participants who attend an alternative school. The interviews are semi-structured in order to provide opportunities for subjects to expand on questions in ways that are salient to their experiences and opinions about their disciplinary interactions. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, student drawings and journals were analyzed and serve such as

means of triangulation. Through the synthesis of interviews, drawings and journals, narratives will be constructed and interpreted to magnify the sense of urgency needed in revamping policies and practices concerning school discipline.

Definition of Key Terms

There is limited insight in discipline literature into how disproportionate discipline sanctions might differentially impact the urban black female school experience. For the purpose of this study, key terms will be defined to provide a common focal point and level of understanding. *African American* or *black* will be defined as all citizens or residents of the United States who have origins in any of the black populations of Africa. The terms “African American” and “black” are often used interchangeably in data sources. African Americans are generally direct descendants of captive Africans who survived the slavery era within the United States (Dodson, 2003).

The term, *alternative schools* will be defined as disciplinary alternatives for disruptive or disengaged students, with attendance being compulsory rather than optional and with the goal of returning students to traditional schools. In some states and districts, students are placed in alternative schools during their expulsion terms, and alternative placements are often touted by educators as desirable ways to remove challenging students from comprehensive schools while still keeping these students in a school setting (Carver, Lewis & Tice, 2010).

Bad will be defined as student behavior considered inappropriate and causing discipline events that lie within students’ actions rather than in the interactions between students and teachers (Collins, 2011). *Discipline* will be defined according to Tanner (1978) as a development toward inner control which enable the pupil to reach personal

and social maturity. Lastly, *urban schools* will be defined as schools that largely reflect neighborhood/residential environment and are typically in geographical areas characterized by a high concentration of people of color, higher per capita rates of poverty, and inequities in the educational system (Belfiore, Auld, & Lee, 2005).

Significance

All students deserve systematic programs in place that provide them opportunities to make meaningful connections to school (Fine, 1991; Kozol, 2005). The examination of students' descriptions of their school experience provides viewpoints from sources rarely heard in the discussion of school reform—the students themselves. Stevick and Levinson (2003) and Fine (1991) identify the lack of research about how students evaluate processes associated with zero tolerance and their impact on their future lives. Ongoing research must take place to uncover beneficial practices most effective in creating a climate in which all students, regardless of race and gender, can pursue their educational goals in a climate conducive to educational success.

As states usher in anti-exclusionary discipline policies, more research is needed to understand discipline events from both the students' and teachers' perspectives. Existing research informs us about the various forces that contribute to youth suspensions and expulsions, such as zero tolerance policies. We know less about how young people themselves evaluate processes associated with zero tolerance and their impact on their future lives (Stevick & Levinson, 2003). What educators, policy makers, and leaders do not fully understand is what it is like for students to go to school (Ayers, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2012; Noguera, 2003). While everyone goes to school, not everyone has the same experience of schooling. Assumptions about the

schooling experience affect policy decisions as well as the way schools are structured and operate. With greater insight into student perspectives of schooling, educators, and policymakers can be better prepared to design learning environments and educational experiences that will decrease the disproportionate discipline gap. While this study will only feature the experiences of a few middle school black girls enrolled in an alternative school, their descriptions of interactions during discipline events will provide counter-narratives in school discipline reform.

Research Questions

The voices of black girls experiencing exclusionary school practices can illuminate how suspension and alternative school placement is viewed from the student perspective. Growing quantitative evidence of the connections between school suspensions, dropouts and incarceration is lacking the voices of youth and their perceptions of the public school “discipline experience”. Most studies that explore the discipline gap apply a quantitative approach and statistical analysis (Blake et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 1997; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008); however, there are only a few qualitative studies that explore the experiences of disciplined Black girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Grant, 1992; Morris, 2007; Murphy et al., 2013).

While these studies examine black girls’ perceptions of disciplinary events, literature has been less rigorous or critical in its attention to issues of power and privilege. The current study seeks to fill the gap in literature of school discipline and student voice, but more specifically- empowerment of student voice. While studies have begun to establish how school and classroom contexts, including teachers’ implicit biases and culturally based miscommunications between educators and students contribute to

discipline events (see Bowditch, 1993; Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Collins, 2011; Vavrus & Cole, 2002), few focus on students' own descriptions of the process of being labeled "bad". This study investigates Black girls' experiences with be labeled bad to understand how they adopt educators' labels and how this label may shape their educational experiences.

This study also focuses on middle school, a time when educators consistently increase their reliance on office referrals and other exclusionary discipline strategies to respond to students' challenging behaviors (Murphy et al., 2013; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). Thus, the lived experiences of middle school as the "bad" student:

- 1) How do middle school black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive themselves?
- 2) How do middle school black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive their behavior with peers and teachers?
- 3) How do middle school black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive school discipline and its possible future implications?

Zero tolerance policies institutionalize exclusionary discipline as the preferred response to student non-compliance and disregard the role of the organization in shaping student behavior (Fox & Harding, 2005; McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). Students are removed from school, often with little recourse, with long-term expulsions being the most extreme instances of removal.

In some states and districts, students are placed in alternative schools during their expulsion terms, and alternative placements are often touted by educators as desirable

ways to remove challenging students from comprehensive schools while still keeping these students in a school setting (Carver et al., 2010). Since disciplined students are generally regarded as being at fault in disciplinary incidents and having forfeited their rights to an education (Kennedy-Lewis, 2014), little attention has been given to the conditions of their schooling after expulsion (Kennedy-Lewis, 2012; American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

Based on a review of the literature and the goals of this study, I decided to use three main theoretical frameworks to support this work: Third Space (Venzant Chambers & McCready, 2011), Symbolic Interactionism (Blumler, 1969) and Labeling (Bernburg, 2009). Collectively, the frameworks provide a better understanding of how public school settings foster social spaces with inequitable discipline interactions (see Figure 1). While discourse regarding disciplined students typically positions them as poor decision-makers who squander opportunities (Kennedy-Lewis, 2014), a growing number of studies examine how educators and social contexts play a role in student exclusion (see Bowditch, 1993; Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Rios, 2011; Thornberg, 2007). Black girls' accounts of their lived experiences within school spaces provide a counter narrative of the discipline process in public schools.

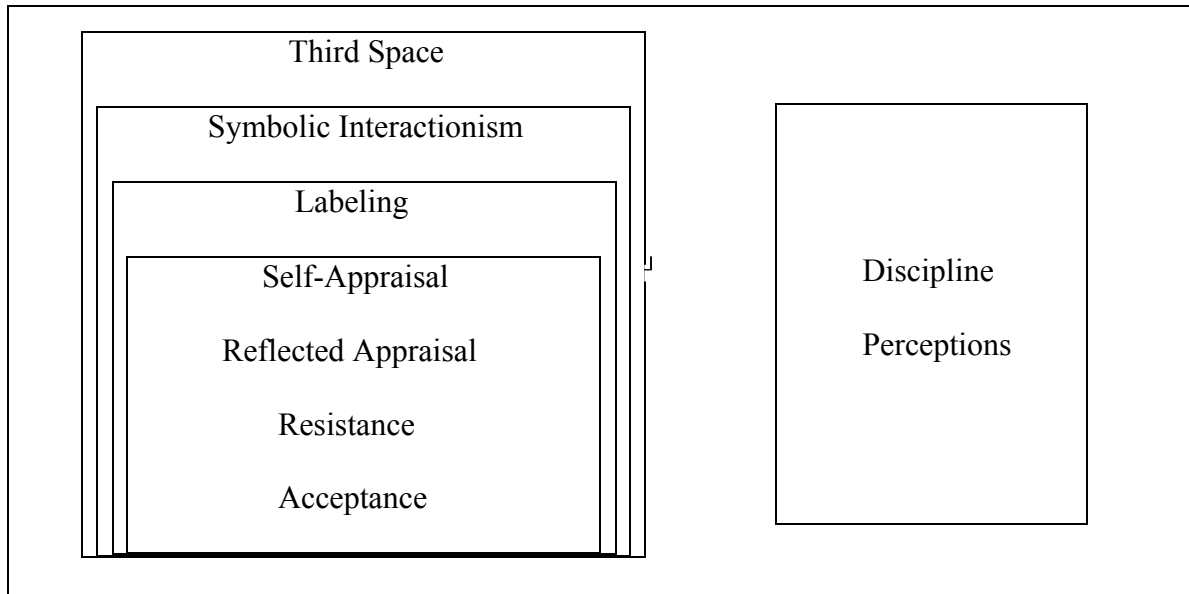


Figure 4. Conceptual framework of theories.

Third Space

Third Space theory has emerged in a wide range of areas, including city planning (Soja, 1996), learning ecologies (Gutiérrez, 2008), and school social environments (Venzant Chambers & McCready, 2011). The current study recognizes space as produced rather than given, indicating social relations are both producing space and shaped by it (Lefebvre, 1974). Third Space is relevant in school discipline reform because it requires student voices to be empowered. The inclusion of a counter narrative cultivates the dismantling of existing social and political processes of school reform that oppress and marginalize youth.

Venzant Chambers and McCready (2011) have used the phrase “making space” to reflect the practice of establishing spatial and discursive environments to involve youth in naming the organizational practices and values that excluded them. In making space to question existing policies and systems, distinctions must be made from the concrete

(what is) to the imagined (what could be). Soja (1996) provides a frame for this distinction in terms of First, Second, and Third Spaces. The First Space is the space of power, described as “the way it is,” and embodied in existing policies and systems constructed by those with the most power. In the First Space of school reform, for example, the decision and plan to turn around a school may be established by policy makers and education professionals and presented to the community as the best course of action for its school.

The Second Space can be described as “the way it could be,” and emerges when an individual or group responds to the existing policies and systems of the first space. In the second space of school reform, members of a community organization, for example, may articulate plans to increase their involvement in a low performing school in the community despite the district’s plans. In Third spaces, histories of exclusion and enactments of power are acknowledged and used to guide the construction of new practices.

The Third Space of school reform may be co-constructed by policy makers, teachers, family members, students, and other stakeholders, transcending the binary “us vs. them” approach, and used to re-imagine educative practices that are not limited by traditional or contemporary notions of school reform. Within the construction of inclusive spaces, a socio-spatial structure claims interconnectedness between equality and social relations. Third Space offers an alternative approach to understanding the negative consequences of leaving people out of policy decisions that affect them directly. Third Space provides a framework that includes school intervention decisions in a social space where youth are active participants in the process.

Symbolic Interactionism

According to Blumer (1969), “things” (p. 2) can be either physical or abstract objects to which individuals assign meaning based on their interactions with other people. Symbolic interactionism includes individuals’ interpretations of, and responses to, things in society motivating their choices about how they interact with others (Blumer, 1969). Within the third space framework, symbolic interactionism provides a lens for viewing students and teachers as autonomous meaning-makers who define school and classroom life through their interactions with each other (Herman-Kinney, 2003).

In reviewing school discipline and violence studies that use symbolic interactionism, Stevick and Levinson (2003) conclude that, “the behavior that appears to teachers and administrators as misconduct or irrational violence may in fact be a rational student response to a variety of school conditions” (p. 346). More specific to addressing the discipline gap and the plight of persistently disciplined black girls, symbolic interactionists examine the co-constructed nature of students’ and educators’ behaviors and responses to each other (Stevick & Levinson, 2003).

Using this framework, acts of school discipline—the primary mode by which students become persistent targets of consequences and punishments—occur as a result of choices made by individual actors within the structural confines of classrooms, schools, and school systems. Students and teachers, then, act as agents in the co-construction of these disciplinary acts (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Pane, 2010; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Students make decisions about their actions based upon contextual factors such as teachers’ behaviors (Supaporn, Dodds, & Griffin, 2003). Similarly, teachers make

decisions about how to respond to those students' acts based on factors in the school and classroom contexts (Thornberg, 2007).

Fine (1991) and Brown and Rodriguez (2009) examine the process of dropping out of school and find that while educators characterize students' missing school as a noncompliant act of truancy, the students are actually making conscious choices to miss school in response to hostile school environments and ineffective instructional practices. However, these studies do not focus on how students make sense of both their teachers' and their own participation in students' exclusion, or how students say they feel about, and respond to, discipline events and exclusion. For a closer look at this phenomenon, this study draws from the more specific theory of labeling.

Labeling

Labeling theory (Bernburg, 2009) asserts the social process of labeling people as deviants or delinquents impacts their future behavior through both self-exclusion and exclusion by others. To understand how the girls experience being labeled "bad kids" as well as how they respond to educators who label them, this study used labeling theory. Individuals labeled as deviants may face exclusion based on others' preconceived notions of those who have been labeled similarly. Individuals may also exclude themselves from social participation in anticipation of rejection.

Labeling theory contends that not all individuals are equally susceptible to negative social labels; marginalized populations are more likely to be labeled as a group, and more frequently labeled than others (Matsueda, 1992). Some educators' inequitable application of exclusionary discipline in schools constitutes responses to, and factors promoting the, labeling of student groups (Glass, 2014). Black and brown students are

both more likely to be punished and more likely to be labeled as “frequent flyers” than their white counterparts (Fenning & Rose, 2007).

In their study of the distribution of office referrals and suspensions, Skiba et al. (1997) found a small percentage of students received the majority of referrals and suspensions given by a small percentage of teachers and administrators. These students are most likely to be males of color from low-income urban communities (Noguera, 2003). Black students were disciplined more frequently and more harshly than their white peers who commit similar acts of noncompliance (Bowditch, 1993; Skiba et al., 2011). Rios (2011) documents how these disciplinary acts at school intersect with criminalization by police to result in a “labeling hype” (p. 45). The labeling hype plays a key role in the school-to-prison pipeline for girls of color (Blake et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2013). In studying the moments in which students get suspended in class, Vavrus and Cole (2002) found when an entire class was noncompliant, girls of color who tended to speak up for the group were the recipients of the teacher’s reprimand. The girls of color featured in this study were more likely to be labeled and treated as “bad” by school personnel, who then gave out even harsher punishments to these students.

Basing this work on the tradition of labeling theorists who examine labeling and its relation to deviance from the perspectives of those who are labeled (Herman-Kinney, 2003), this study focuses on students’ perceptions and descriptions of the process by which this labeling and punishment occur. In accounting for students’ responses to labeling and punishment, this study draws from reflected appraisals (Bernburg, 2009; Matsueda, 1992) and build upon Cooley’s (1902) metaphor of the looking-glass self. Cooley observed the reactions of others provide the viewpoint from which we come to

define our performances and attributes process: “the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance; and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification” (p. 184). Just like the reflection in a mirror, reflected appraisals is centered on the processes by which experiences of self are formed and changed in social transactions.

In studies examining correlations between reflected appraisals and delinquency the perceived opinions of caregivers and peers play key roles in influencing students’ behavior (Brownfield & Thompson, 2005). Reflected appraisals assert people respond to others based on what they believe others think of them. The reflected appraisals of others may shape students’ self-appraisals, or beliefs about their own characters and abilities, which also impact how they make sense of the choices they make. These perceived opinions might fuel acts of resistance, as demonstrated, for example, by D’Amato’s (1993) Hawaiian school children, which he describes as “acting” (p. 182). True to the theory of reflected appraisals, children “act” in order to maintain the respect of their peers and to be thought of as part of the group. The children’s “acting” takes on the nature of resistance when the style of instructional activities do not match the children’s cultural styles.

D’Amato (1993) frames resistance as children’s responses to “intermediate cultural discontinuities between the worlds of school as defined by adults and the world of school as defined by the children themselves” (pp. 187–188). In the context of classrooms, resistance may maintain cultural structures that differ from dominant institutional forms. While this study does not examine long-term consequences of students’ behaviors, I use the construct of resistance to understand students’ descriptions

of their behaviors in moments of conflict with adults at school. Understanding students' perceptions can potentially impact the choices educators make in their interactions with students.

Starting from the perspective of a socio-spatial approach in Third Space while utilizing the lenses of Symbolic Interactionism and Labeling theory, I specifically examined persistently disciplined black girls' accounts of their experiences. I wanted to highlight black girls' experiences of a phenomenon that typically gets defined and explained by adults. Third Space, Symbolic Interactionism and labeling theory provide lenses that magnify and make sense of how the girls understand and experience discipline.

The frameworks also clarify how the girls describe interactions with educators who label them, and the implications for their long-term success. The findings are based upon perceptions of three black girls who attend an alternative middle school. The narratives illustrate experiences affecting each girl in different ways, but also generally resulted in commonalities of self-appraisal, reflected appraisal, resistance and acceptance. Their voices resonate with experiences of social *distance* in school spaces. This distance is found in the resistance to perceived female behavior. Within the constructs of female behavior is the perception of femininity shaped by possible biases and stereotypes that cultivate labels. Subjective labeling of students has fostered oppressed student agency in excluded school spaces.

Summary and Organization of Remaining Chapters

In this chapter, I discussed the importance of exploring disciplinary interactions through the perspectives of middle school black girls attending school in an alternative

setting. This exploration of disciplinary interactions is situated within the following topics; the discipline gap, school-to-prison pipeline, zero tolerance and the theoretical framework of Third Space, Symbolic Interactionism and Labeling. In Chapter VII, I will review the relevant literature exploring the school-to-prison pipeline, the discipline gap, zero tolerance, and the disciplining of black girls. In Chapter VIII, I will describe the methodological approach to the research, the justification of participants, procedures for data collection, limitations, reflexivity, researcher positionality and a chapter summary. In Chapter IX, I will present findings for case studies and a cross-case analysis through theoretical frames of Third Space, Symbolic Interactionism and Labeling. In Chapter X, I will discuss relevant literature, findings and research questions to address implications for future research, policy and practice.

CHAPTER VII
LITERATURE REVIEW: STUDY TWO

This literature review will extend the inquiry into perceptions of disciplinary interactions of middle school black girls who are suspended to alternative educational settings. We know almost nothing about the extent to which middle school black girls experiencing exclusionary discipline perceive themselves to be driven not only out of school, but into the justice system and prison. The perceptions of middle school black girls' responses to the following research questions will be studied:

- 1) How do middle school black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive themselves?
- 2) How do middle school black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive their behavior with peers and teachers?
- 3) How do middle school black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive school discipline and its possible future implications?

In the current study, I address a deficiency in the literature regarding the voices of black adolescent girls in the middle school discipline process. Literature in school discipline has explored disproportionate high poverty, urban, minorities in the school-to-prison pipeline (Balfanz, Spiridakis, Neild, & Legters, 2003; Edelman, 2007; Wald & Losen, 2003), the discipline gap (Gregory et al., 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Monroe, 2009) and ethnic overrepresentation in exclusionary discipline (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

Additional research has also investigated the school experiences and perceptions of black girls who have experienced exclusionary discipline (Blake et al., 2011; Murphy et al., 2013; Morris, 2007; Thornberg 2007). These studies highlight the subjectivity of teacher perception in discipline sanctions for black girls. There is a gap in the literature

and need for research that directly explores the perceptions of middle school black girls who are most affected by the school-to-prison pipeline experience. This chapter will explore the following topics to understand the intersection of the criminal justice system and discipline practices in urban public schooling through the school-to-prison pipeline, zero tolerance policies, discipline gap and the discipline of black girls.

School-To-Prison Pipeline

The school-to-prison pipeline is a phrase that describes the connections between school policies and practices that result in more punitive approaches to student misbehavior. There is a central focus on the pathway from school suspension, to dropping out, to the criminal justice system. Edelman (2007), in an editorial call to action about the “cradle to prison pipeline” highlights generational adjudication. Edelman focuses on students who come from unhealthy communities and are tracked starting in kindergarten only to be labeled as behavior problems at early age. Edelman describes the pipeline as a virus of social, economic, political factors affecting black and Latino children. Edelman states that black and Latino mothers are more likely to have unhealthy babies in urban communities, with black youth being more likely to be arrested for subjective behaviors, disorderly conduct, and malicious mischief.

Balfanz et al. (2003) characterize the school-to-dropout-to- prison pipeline using individual-level record data obtained from over thirty high-poverty, urban, secondary schools. An analysis of survey results from a longitudinal study followed a random sample of about fifteen hundred students as they progressed from eighth grade through high school. The researchers triangulated data from their own observations and informal interviews of students, teachers, and administrators. Balfanz et al. found students who

become incarcerated at an early age are more likely minority males concentrated in a subset of the school district's nonselective, high-poverty neighborhood high schools.

Survey data further indicate these students are suspended at a higher rate in eighth grade and are more disengaged from schooling than their white peers. Balfanz et al. conducted qualitative interviews with students prior to their entrance into the juvenile justice system and revealed nearly all of the incarcerated high school students want to complete their high school education, and many aspire to go to college. This research shows the educational aspirations of vulnerable students are often ignored and outreach opportunities missed.

Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier and Valentine (2009) conducted an empirical study and explored how disciplinary decisions helped to explain disproportionate minority contact with juvenile courts. The research concluded black students are 8 times more likely to be in a detention center due to adult bias creating disproportionate exclusionary sanctions leading to adjudication. Findings suggest urban public schooling actually creates the conditions that exacerbate the problem (Balfanz et al., 2003; Edelman, 2007; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier & Valentine, 2009). In summary, a close analysis of the demographics, school location, and educational history of incarcerated students were primarily black males. Prior to their contact with the juvenile justice system, most were attending school barely half the time and failing most of their courses.

The role of school, in reproducing cultural and class relationships permeates literature until the late 1990s when scholars began describing schools as training grounds for prison. The Safe and Gun Free Schools (1994) action introduced "zero tolerance" laws leading to increased exclusionary school practices. Skiba and Rausch (2006)

describe how zero tolerance generates disciplinary actions meant for behaviors such as the possession of dangerous weapons. Students are suspended for behaviors that reflect subjective, sometimes racially biased, decision making by teachers. Also, the constant removal from and reentry into school, coupled with the loss of classroom instruction time, profoundly disrupts a student's academic progress and performance.

Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) reasonably argue racial disproportionality in school discipline contributes, at least in part, to lower rates of academic achievement among students of color. This argument is supported by an alarming finding in Fabelo et al.'s (2011) study: "Students who were suspended and/or expelled, particularly those who were repeatedly disciplined, were more likely to be held back a grade or to drop out than were students not involved in the disciplinary system" (p. xi). Balfanz, Brynes, and Fox (2015) found out-of-school suspensions in ninth grade are also significantly and negatively correlated with high school graduation, as well as postsecondary enrollment and persistence. Higher suspension rates are closely correlated with higher delinquency and high school dropout rates.

The school-to-dropout-to-prison pipeline derives from the educational and juvenile justice systems not working together to prevent the flow of students from entering prison. The Advancement Project (2010) states, "arrests in school represent the most direct route into the school-to-prison pipeline, but out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to alternative schools also push students out of school and closer to a future in the juvenile and criminal justice systems" (p. 4–5). There is a limited body of research rigorously examining the intersection between race and gender when

addressing young females placed in contact with the justice system as a result of inequities in disciplinary practices (Advancement Project, 2010).

Discipline policies and practices has incontestably helped sustain the school-to-prison pipeline. The absence of a rigorous intersectional and comparative analysis of girls who are disproportionately impacted by the discipline sanctions in urban public school environments is fertile ground for future research. Few studies have focused on the relationships between juvenile justice contact and the discipline of black girls.

Zero Tolerance Discipline

Bowling (1999) describe zero tolerance as a term that grew out of federal drug enforcement policies of the 1980s and was adapted to fit the aggressive quality of life in urban communities, notably in New York City during the Giuliani administration.

Western (2006) found education to have the most profound impact on the likelihood of incarceration, with high school dropouts 5 times more likely to go to prison than high school graduates regardless of race. At the close of the 20th century, school suspensions became the indirect link between American education and the U.S. prison system, as suspended students are more likely to drop out of school, and dropouts are at a higher risk of being incarcerated at some point in their lives.

Advancement Project, Padres and Jovenes Unidos, the Southwest Youth Collaborative, and Children & Family Justice Center of Northwestern University School of Law (2005) explores the “broken windows theory” used by many law enforcement agencies. This theory applies zero tolerance to all crimes, big and small, with the assumption that a swift and harsh response to minor misconduct will send the message that more serious crimes will not be tolerated. In many schools, students are subjected to

inflexible punishments without regard to circumstances, especially with regard to fights. Mandatory minimum sentences used in the criminal justice system are being used to punish students.

Through this theory, schools are described as profiling students in two ways; 1) students breaking school rules have the worse behavior, and, 2) the worse student behavior is perceived through stereotypes. The overlapping responses to behavior by judicial and public educational systems has even led to an increased police presence in many schools without assessing why discipline problems exist or how best to prevent them. Findings from investigations also reveal a strong correlation between youth contact with the justice system and a failure to complete high school, negative attitude about school, academic failure, and the racially disparate use of exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspensions and expulsions).

Skiba and Knesting (2001) describe the genesis of zero tolerance policies and discuss how zero tolerance policies of the criminal justice system trickled into the school setting for possession of a weapon. As much as zero tolerance policing increased the number of people brought into the criminal justice system, zero tolerance disciplinary policies have played a major role in the increase in school suspensions. Punitive zero tolerance policies have saturated urban school discipline and has proven to be neither individualized, nor effective. The rise in out-of-school suspensions has not caused a documented decline in violence and victimization.

According to Wald and Losen (2003), the U.S. Department of Education, OCR data found rates of suspension for black students were between two and three times higher than suspension rates for White students at the elementary, middle, and high

school levels. While 29 states suspended over 5 percent of their total black enrollment, only four states suspended over 5 percent of White students. Since that report, racial disproportionality in the use of school suspension has been a highly consistent finding. Much like arrest and incarceration, suspensions fall disproportionately on youth of color. Findings supports the notion that unequal application of exclusionary discipline may not be in response to differential classroom disruption patterns, but instead may be a function of differential treatment.

The application of zero tolerance has ultimately led to black students having disproportionate contacts with juvenile and criminal justice systems. While patterns of exclusionary discipline have found similar outcomes among black girls and black boys (Losen, Martinez, & Gillespie, 2012; Wallace, et al., 2008), few scholarly articles or published reports have been published on school discipline studies centered on juvenile black females or included substantive numbers of black females as subjects. To date, researchers such as Clark et al. (2003) have focused on black girls and relationships with exclusionary discipline in the context of increased risk of teen pregnancy and delinquency. Few have studied the relationship between educational attainment and school discipline as a critical component to the pathway of incarceration. Blake et al. (2011) note that, “due to limited research on the discipline experiences of girls, the types of behavior infractions in which black girls are disproportionately disciplined are not well understood” (p. 92). There is limited empirical data to explain the increased use of exclusionary discipline among black girls, and the extent to which these practices lead to increased contact with the justice system and ultimately, confinement.

Discipline Gap

The discipline gap has been documented for over 30 years. Recent attention has been given to a growing focus on zero tolerance discipline policies and schools' increased use of exclusionary discipline measures that remove students from the learning environment. Over time many school districts began to apply mandatory expulsion policies to other behaviors including drug possession and fighting, and lesser "offenses" such as swearing. The investigations of discipline gap studies have shown disciplinary events occurring according to teachers' subjective perceptions of student behavior (Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002; Thornberg, 2007), with a small number of teachers giving a large percentage of sanctions (Skiba et al., 1997). There is a disproportionate minority contact in school discipline is due in part to differential treatment by teachers and administrators.

Research suggests black students tend to receive harsher punishments than white students, and those harsher consequences may be administered for less severe offenses. More specifically, the research of Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, and Valentine (2009) observed patterns of racial disproportion that did not correlate with higher incidence of disruptive behavior by black students. Fabelo et al. (2011), Gregory and Weinstein (2008), Rocque (2010), Thornberg (2007) and Vavrus and Cole (2002) found black students make up the majority of students disciplined as a result of educators' uses of exclusionary strategies to punish subjectively defined behaviors such as "disruption" or "defiance."

Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) reviewed racial and gender disparities in school punishments in urban settings, and found white students were

referred to the office significantly more frequently for offenses that appear more capable of objective documentation (e.g., smoking, vandalism, leaving without permission, and obscene language). Black students were referred more often for disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering – behaviors that would seem to require more subjective judgment on the part of the person school personnel. A vast majority of scholarly investigations about school discipline have consistently found patterns of over-representation for black males and has focused on their conditions and experiences.

Researchers, Gregory et al. (2010), Lewis, Hancock, James and Larke (2008) and Skiba et al. (1997) found black males experience harsher disciplinary measures than other racial and ethnic groups. Current research in the school-to-prison pipeline such as Crenshaw (2011) and Losen and Skiba (2010) has articulated the critical need for a gender analysis in the deconstruction of racial exclusion. Taylor and Foster (1986) found black girls received higher suspension rates than white girls in elementary, junior high, and high school, but noted declines in suspension rates from junior high school to high school for all girls. Nearly two decades later, Raffaele-Mendez and Knoff (2003) replicated and extended these findings indicating black girls are still receiving higher suspension rates in comparison to white and Hispanic girls across primary and secondary schools. Discipline gap research has focused primarily on black males, but most studies fail to discuss discipline sanctions against black females independently of the males.

Discipline of Black Girls

With respect to black girls, discipline and zero tolerance policies are among the most researched of the education-system pipeline to incarceration. Losen et al. (2012) and Wallace et al. (2008) found patterns of exclusionary discipline that produced similar

outcomes among black girls and black boys. Blake et al. (2011) and Holsinger and Holsinger (2005) found black female disengagement from school to be a function of intersecting structures of inequality. Race, class and gender were brought together to shape the discussion of educational experiences being impacted by institutional racism, sexism, and classism. Skiba, et al. (2002) also investigated the discipline gap with regard to race and gender. An examination into the nature of girls' infractions revealed educators most often disciplined black girls for defiance, improper dress, and fighting with another student.

Blake et al. (2011) expands the scholarly literature by providing a detailed examination of black girls discipline patterns independent of black males and in comparison to their same gender peers, specifically hispanic and white girls. Blake et al. (2011) produced one of few studies that build on Skiba et al. (2002) work by disaggregating discipline data by race to inform the scholarly community about the impact of discipline practices on students of color. Blake et al. (2011) was specific to how discipline practices of black girls are disproportionate relative to white and hispanic girls across primary and secondary school. These findings demonstrate the necessity of comprehending race and gender simultaneously. Particular combinations of these factors tend to result in distinct educational perceptions and experiences that influence the perceptions and discipline of black girls.

Grant (1992) emphasized how teaching social skills were less apparent for White girls, black boys, and White boys. Grant's examinations of the intersections of race and gender for black girls in classrooms shows how teachers tend to treat black girls differently than White girls or Black boys. Grant highlights how educators express more

interest in promoting the social, rather than academic, skills of black girls. Jones (2009) examined how black females are affected by the stigma of having to participate in identity politics. This stigma marginalizes them or places them into polarizing categories—“good” girls, or girls that behave in a “ghetto” fashion. Stereotypes about black femininity are exacerbated, particularly in the context of socioeconomic status, crime, and punishment.

Morris (2007) studied how race, gender, and class shape black middle school girls’ educational experiences. Through participant observation and interviews with black and White educators, he noted teachers’ discipline towards black girls typically related to the girls’ demeanors, not objective actions. Teachers, mostly female, reprimanded black girls for what they perceived as a challenge to their authority, such as when the students called out answers or questioned teachers. They also most commonly criticized black girls for being too loud, which they perceived as unladylike. Morris further posits the power struggle between teachers and black girls exemplifies the “adulthoodification” (p. 14) of black females who teachers see as too controlling or aggressive at a young age. These infractions correspond with the stereotypical views of black women as “hypersexualized, angry, and hostile”, as these girls’ behaviors were not seen as “ladylike” (p. 100). Morris’s study explains how the cultural disconnection between female teachers and black girls leads to their disproportionate disciplining. A review of the literature on the discipline experiences of black females in K-12 schools reveals how black girls’ violations of traditional standards of femininity can influence their involvement in the school discipline system.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the relevant literature exploring the school-to-prison pipeline, the discipline gap, zero tolerance, and the disciplining of black girls. In the school-to-prison pipeline section I discussed how the overrepresentation of black students impacted by discipline policies and practices helps to sustain the school-to-prison pipeline. In the zero tolerance section I discussed how the application of zero tolerance has ultimately led to black students having disproportionate contacts with juvenile and criminal justice systems. In the discipline gap section I discussed how black students are disproportionately impacted by zero tolerance discipline policies and schools' increased use of exclusionary discipline measures. In the discipline of black girls section I discussed how black girls are situated in the school-to-prison pipeline through a discipline gap created by zero tolerance policies.

The extent to which black girls perceive themselves to be driven out of urban schools and possibly into the justice system offers insight into the application of zero tolerance policies that contribute to the discipline gap. To fully understand how black girls possibly perceive their discipline experience, recent literature postulate black girls' violation of traditional standards of femininity might shape their involvement in school discipline. There is limited research in how black girls themselves experience and understand suspension in urban schools and more specifically, whether they view suspension as step towards the pipeline to prison. Thus, there is a need to examine behavior infractions through the student voices of black girls.

The next chapter will discuss information regarding the methodology used to explore the research questions. The first section outlines the research design, along with

the rationale for this design. Next, a summary of the sampling is given. Then, data collection and data analysis techniques are described in detail. The chapter ends with information regarding reflexivity, limitations, ethical concerns, and positionality. In Chapter 4, I will present findings for case studies and a cross-case analysis through theoretical frames of Third Space, Symbolic Interactionism and Labeling. In Chapter 5, I will discuss relevant literature, findings and research questions to address implications for future research, policy and practice.

CHAPTER VIII
METHODOLOGY: STUDY TWO

In this chapter, I describe the methodological approach used to explore the research questions. I provide information regarding the research design and the procedures for sampling and recruitment. I follow with details of the data collection and justification for coding techniques to analyze the data. I conclude the chapter by addressing the limitations of the study, ethical considerations, and how I situated myself within the research.

Research Design

This is a qualitative study to highlight voices of middle school black girls who demonstrate a trajectory towards the school-to-prison pipeline. A collective case study design (Stake, 2006) was selected for this study because it allowed for the examination of multiple cases focused on adolescent black girls' perceptions of discipline interactions. These students are bounded by their alternative school placement, in their suspension from their home schools and in their prescribed at-risk labels (Glesne, 2011). Using the collective case study approach, I examined the responses of participants and the various factors influential to their perspectives. I compared and contrasted stories that provide a voice for each student participant. Each student has a unique story to tell, but there is a common experience of school among each participant (Stake, 2006). The case study also allows exploration "over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). I offer a picture of how the complexities connected to their unique identities relates to the complexities of school discipline.

While quantitative methods have been used in previous studies regarding the black-white female discipline gap, and could be used to provide data regarding which

factors are most influential in the disparity (Skiba et al., 2002; Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2010; Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005), a qualitative approach provides greater depth regarding how and why certain factors influence specific types of discipline interactions. I provided a glimpse into the lives of black girls' living in an urban area, the challenges they face, and their efforts to overcome those challenges. In particular, I illuminated what happens to them when the educational system excludes them from reside (schools assigned to students based upon their address) schools. The illumination of black girls' lived experiences will elevate their voices so adults – researchers, school teachers, administrators, policymakers and the general public - can perhaps be participants in the reduction of a school-to-prison pipeline trajectory.

Population

The target population for this study is adolescent black female students. More specifically, this study focused on black girls residing in urban neighborhoods of Metro City. Within Metro City, the participants are enrolled at an alternative middle school in Metro City School District (MCSD). MCSD slightly enrolls over 100, 000 students with 64 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals. While public data for MCSD does not include the alternative schools, it did reveal there were approximately 20, 000 general education, middle school students during 2015-2016 school year and of those students, 9,500 (47 %) are girls. There is a middle school female enrollment with roughly 4,800 (51 %) of those being White females and 3,800 (40 %) black females.

In the 2014-2015 school year, MCSD was comprised of 26 middle schools that included sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Only 4 of the 26 middle schools have more

black female students than White female students. However, all 26 middle schools have black girls leading the female suspension rate. Suspension data of middle schools in MCSD across gender has 3,000 girls suspended in the 2014-2015 school year. Black girls were assigned 2,000 out-of-school suspensions compared to 300 white girls. While black girls only make-up 40% of the middle school female population, almost 70% of out-of-school suspensions were given to black girls. The black girls participating in this study were suspended from middle schools representative of urban middle schools across the United States that have a discipline gap between White students and students of color (Gregory et al., 2010).

Setting

Research was conducted at Metro City, a large urban city located in the southeast United States. Metro City has nearly 700,000 residents and over 60 neighborhoods with 92% of population speaking English and 4% speaking Spanish. Almost 72% of the residents of Metro City identify as White, with 22% identifying as black. Approximately eight Metro City neighborhoods have a black majority demographic, ranging from 75% to 90%. All eight neighborhoods are in close proximity to each other on the “north side” of Metro City. North Metro has the highest levels of poverty, dropouts, unemployment, and percentage of MCSD students receiving free- or reduced-lunch.

North Metro offers access to 10 comprehensive middle school programs as resides schools. Out of the 10 reside middle schools within north Metro the state department identified three schools as the lowest performing middle schools in the state. The reside school of the 3 participants in the study are north Metro middle schools with two participants attending schools identified as “low performing.” Priority schools are

those that have not met annual goals for three consecutive years and whose overall performance – as measured mostly by test scores -- places them in the bottom 5 percent of the state. To shed the label, schools must show three consecutive years of meeting goals and climb out from the bottom 5 percent. Additionally, one participant attended a lower performing school with the 4th highest black female suspension rate in the school district.

Sampling

The sample for this capstone study used purposive sampling strategies (Glesne, 2011) to identify middle school black girls who attend an urban, alternative public school. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select information-rich cases “from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 169). Participants are labeled “bad”, which is evident through their placement at an alternative middle school. A university institutional review board approved the recruitment of participants and interview protocols. After IRB approval was obtained, students enrolled in an alternative middle school during the 2015-2016 school year were chosen. Recruitment of alternative school students was significant because suspension to alternative schools is often the last step before youth drop out of school completely, increasing the likelihood that they will get arrested and incarcerated (Wald & Losen, 2003).

A snowball sampling method (Patton, 1990) was conducted to identify gatekeepers for targeted participants. Snowball sampling allows a qualitative researcher to pinpoint information-rich informants by asking initial contacts to locate key actors or incidents that play an important role in the issues under investigation (Patton, 1990). Two

local community advocates for diversity and equity in public education were determined to be key informants. Both were identified as informants because each has personal relationships with families with children attending alternative school.

The community members used parent letters (see Appendix E) to recruit parents of participants (see Table 2) who met the following criteria; suspended or expelled from their current reside school, middle school student, and identify as both black and a girl. After parental consent was given, I obtained student assent (see Appendix F) directly before beginning the interviews. I interviewed the participants for 45-60 minute audio-recorded interview sessions three times each over the course of a month.

Table 2
Participant Demographics

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Race</u>
1	12	7 th	Girl	Black
2	13	8 th	Girl	Black
3	13	8 th	Girl	Black

The students in the case study reflect the targeted group population in race and gender but are not a representative sample (Merriam, 1988). This study will attempt to represent the variety of students in the larger group, but in no way is preparing to generalize the findings to a larger population of black females (Glesne, 2011). There are some variations of the participants beyond the similarities based on race, gender, and placement in alternative middle school. While the students have many commonalities, variances in household dynamics, parental involvement, and socio-economic impacts provide the study with richer information regarding the disciplinary interactions.

Data Collection

Data were collected from multiple sources, including audio recorded interviews, surveys, student drawings, student journal entries, school district data books, and transcription. During the school year in which I interviewed them, participants included three black girls who were identified with behaviors that warranted placement in an alternative school. I interviewed each student three times in a one-month period, with each interview lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. To protect anonymity, all names are pseudonyms and girls were told pseudonyms would be used. Prior to beginning individual interviews, I reviewed the informed assent, reiterated the purpose of the study, gave an overview of the topics to be covered during the interview, and asked participants if they had questions.

When beginning the interview process, I worked to establish rapport with participants by explaining that I was a teacher and a researcher with the hope of making schools better places for all students. I explained that although I am a teacher, I was not acting as an informant and I would not repeat anything they said to other teachers, their parents, or to anyone else. After receiving assent, participants completed a short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix G) to confirm they met the basic criteria. I used the same interview guides for all girls in the study; however, I allowed for a free flowing conversation with the girls addressing topics in a natural manner. I engaged in both small talk and explanatory introduction of the interview process and purpose of the study to mitigate our relationship as strangers.

Kvale (1996) defines qualitative research interviews as "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences,

to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p. 8). I approached the interviewing process in ways that resemble Kvale’s emphasis on interviewing as a craft, requiring instinct, practice, and dexterity. While it is important to prepare for the interviews with questions and topics to be covered, interviews will be more useful if the listener is allowed to hear a flowing conversation that may take unexpected turns, rather than a series of mechanical questions and answers.

A qualitative interview based method gave participants an opportunity to share their unique perspectives regarding the suspension process. It provided a firsthand perspective of how school suspension and placement in an alternative school affects personal identity, expectations of education and future aspirations. Interviews with students allowed the collection of student interpretation of their suspension experience - information that would not have been available through direct observation (Merriam 1998). The exploration of student perceptions of the suspension process through interviewing ensured the voices most impacted by exclusionary discipline are heard in the school-to-prison pipeline research.

I used my theoretical framework to guide the development of a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix H). There are several types of interviewing formats ranging from a highly structured, standardized format to an unstructured/informal conversation (Merriam, 1998). I selected a semi-structured format because the interview was guided by prepared questions, but allowed for open-ended answers and divergence in how the questions were asked and answered. This semi-structured approach provided questions or topics to be covered with each participant that are flexible and “build a

conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style” (p. 283).

The semi-structured interviews were guided by Kvale’s (1996) recommendations that interview questions should have thematic and dynamic dimensions allowing the interview to capture information relevant to the research topic in a way that “promotes good interview interaction”, and will generate “spontaneous, lively, and unexpected answers from the interviewees” (p.129). I prepared a set of predetermined questions that ensured issues most salient to my research questions were addressed, but also allowed students to speak in a free-flowing manner. My approach also resembled the “long interview” described by McCracken (1998) as a technique that enables the researcher to probe shared meanings that take one into the “mental world of the individual” (p. 9), and thus better understanding how the person conceptualizes her or his experience. The interviewing process is designed to facilitate a situation where the interview was a “conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest,” in which I, as the interviewer, created an atmosphere of safety that encouraged free expression of experiences and feelings, without it turning into a therapy session (Kvale, 1996).

The protocol was divided into three sets of interviews with focus topics that include: (a) perception of self, (b) perception of school, and, (c) perception of school discipline. Interviews with students are supplemented by visuals describing aforementioned key focus topics. At the end of each interview I also requested participants to document written and/or visual reflections of their daily school experiences in a journal. The journal and visual interpretations were used in triangulation of data sources. I consulted Koppitz’s (1984) work on interpreting human figure

drawings to analyze the emotions present in the girls' drawings, along with the girls' explanations of the drawings.

The participants' ideas, thoughts, feelings, and excitement about events are revealed through their drawings (Malchiodi, 1998). These characteristics of children enable us to have information about their ideas, thoughts and inner worlds through their drawings (Malchiodi, 1998). Similarly, Harrison, Clarke and Ungerer (2007) emphasize children's drawings may show significant emotional clues and make it easier to reflect negative, challenging, and harsh feelings through drawing rather than stating them directly. This study is also based upon how participants use drawings to interpret how they see the world; their perceptions of self, school and discipline.

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and consent to record the interviews was obtained. The audio-recorded interviews were reviewed for specific variations in emotional responses, such as laughter or raised voices, as well as the words themselves. To ensure accuracy, the recordings were played twice before noting a question mark about a poorly understood comment. I also took notes during the interview to underscore any point that appeared particularly interesting.

I reviewed the recording of each interview immediately following its completion and made additional notes. The transcript considered final was converted to a text only file for coding. All data was stored in a locked location only accessible to me, while electronic files were stored on a password-protected computer. The stored data included paper and electronic forms of transcripts of interviews, demographic survey, researcher notes, student illustrations and journal entries. Collectively, the interviews, tasks and

entries reveal participants' perceptions of self, school and how they characterize discipline interactions and its implications

I explained confidentiality, that is, the information they provided me would be kept confidential and not shared with their parents, teachers, or principals. In the writing of the study, I disguised names by the use of pseudonyms; however, there is potential risk to the girls as a result of being interviewed or observed. During the research process, information about inappropriate or illegal behavior could have been disclosed to persons other than the researcher, such as law enforcement personnel or school staff, and that such disclosure might have adverse consequences for the girls. I emphasized to the girls they did not have to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable. I also described how information and records were maintained, including the recordings and transcripts from the recordings. The general risks to participants were those associated with a breach of confidentiality that could occur if someone were to see files, notes, or records to which names are attached.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred April 2016 through May 2016 after data collection was completed. While the interview questions were used as the backdrop for coding, the themes emerged through a careful, line-by-line reading and review of transcripts. Transcripts from each individual interview were read multiple times to create a detailed description of the participant's perspectives. I augmented the coding process with notes and memos to help me capture and interpret ideas that appear in the interviews (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 1994). As suggested by Creswell (1998), data analysis was done in three stages; classification, interpretation and representation.

Classification was done by reading through the transcripts of interviews and by studying the collected documents. This allowed me the opportunity to clearly develop the themes discovered during the transcription phase of data collection. Thematic interpretation was employed to develop naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 2006). Thematic interpretation provided the opportunity to seek out patterns of instances that develop a framework characterizing the participants' responses.

Initial coding included In Vivo Coding to document direct quotes that captured the exact words of the participants' experiences (Saldaña, 2013). The coding process involved a line-by-line review of the transcript of each interview. Thinking about what information was imparted, a code was created based upon key concepts directly articulated or implied by the girls' answers and comments. After the In Vivo Coding process was complete, I reviewed the coding reports, memos and identified interpretive codes to be used in the second, conceptual, phase of the coding process.

Narrative was a second coding phase that expanded contextual issues of student voice. The inclusion of narratives brings out relevant issues of school discipline through the student perspective (Stake, 2006). During the second round of coding, emerging codes were added to the original list. To analyze the data, I closely adhered to Josselson's (2011) approach to narrative analysis. I analyzed the collection of each student's narratives as a case reading of all three interviews from each participant as a cohesive autobiographical account. I inductively coded each participant's set of interviews as a narrative to identify the tensions of each case and how they ultimately formulated a coherent whole.

After coding all data sets, themes were created and organized into categories of self-appraisals, reflected appraisals, resistance or acceptance. Organizing the data across these concepts highlights the relationships between students' self-perceptions, their perceptions of being singled out for punishment by educators, and their subsequent responses. After establishing themes and organizing categories, I triangulated data from students' drawings and journals to promote trustworthiness. At the conclusion of the individual case analysis, cross-case analysis techniques were used for this study. After descriptions of each layer of the case studies were written, the themes analyzed, the data was interpreted and presented holistically.

Reflexivity

Several steps were taken to increase the credibility and dependability (Guba, 1981) of this study. To establish trustworthiness in the coding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), fellow capstone researchers were asked to help make meaning of the coded data. I triangulated the data sources by “comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means” (Patton, 1990, p. 467). Using analytical triangulation methods allowed me to gain a fuller description of the participants' stories and the components most influential in their discipline perceptions.

I presented thick descriptions by describing the settings, participants, and themes in rich detail (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This process allows readers to feel as though “they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study” (p. 129). Thick descriptions will identify the complexities of the process (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Doing so helps readers determine if the findings can be transferred to other groups or settings. By foregrounding student voice in my reporting

and providing data slices from all participants, I contributed to the study's credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Full transcripts and the coding process were shared with my capstone colleagues, both of whom have presented qualitative research at a national conference. I also had discussions with my capstone members about participants' stories and the emergent themes that enhanced the reflective consideration of voice. Sharing this information creates an audit trail (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Guba, 1981) to ensure the findings and implications connected directly to the data that was collected. This process also increased the credibility of this study by confirming researcher bias did not overpower the voices and thoughts of the participants.

Limitations

This study is limited because it involves a small number of girls who attend an alternative school in one school district. It does not purport to be generalizable to all black girls who have been suspended from school. Rather, its intent is to convey how a specific group of black girls understand their experience of school suspension. Another limitation of the study is the absence of interviews or direct input from the key adults who are implicated in the school-to-prison pipeline experience, that is, teachers, administrators, police officers and parents.

Again, the intent of the study is to privilege the voices of youth, as these are the opinions that are rarely heard. Further research on this subject, as well as policy formation, would benefit from documenting the response of adults to the youth opinions on their suspension experiences. Interviewers are not objective tools that can be separated

from the interview content, but rather shape the process of the interview as well as the responses given by participants (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Additionally, collecting data over a longer time period might have strengthened my rapport with students and provided a richer collection of their perspectives. I was only allowed to collect data afterschool at times convenient for the participants within a specific window of time to complete the current study. Another limitation in the study pertains to my treatment of ableism, heterosexism, classism, and other possible macrostructural forces that impact student experiences. While I believe these forces are at play in how students are disciplined in schools, I did not foreground these issues. Instead, I adhered to the narrative inquiry paradigm and allowed the issues identified directly by the students to take center stage. Consequently, my interview questions did not ask about these forces; the students also did not mention them. While I could infer connections between student experiences and these forces, I chose not to do so in this study because they are not well supported by students' own narratives. Although these limitations have undoubtedly shaped the narratives presented below, I believe the test of their usefulness lies in readers' judgments of their credibility and transformational power (Merriam, 1998; Van Maanen, 2011).

Lastly, key informants provided access to participants I would not have been able to obtain; however, key informant involvement in recruitment could also be seen as a limitation. The sampling did not utilize maximum variation to identify black girls with more varying differences in socio-economic status, grade level, and referred offenses. Creswell (2007) noted, "this approach is often selected because when a researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of the study, it increases the likelihood that the

findings will reflect differences or different perspectives—an ideal in qualitative research” (p. 126). I also assert that, while the sample is limited in size and geographical location, practitioners from other contexts will recognize similarities between these persistently disciplined students and those from other schools and regions, supporting readers’ naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 2006) and the study’s transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Concerns

There are illustrative and quotable material from interviews and observations that disguise interviewee identities. Pseudonyms are used throughout the study to protect the confidentiality of the students, and any other persons mentioned in the study.

Professionals are identified only by their functional title (e.g., school administrator) to avoid revealing his or her identity. In addition, the school district and city where the study was conducted is referenced with an alias.

Digital recordings were stored on my computer along with electronic data files that are password-protected. All identifiable information written on documents was stored in a locked location where only I have access. Digital recordings and other identifiable information will be erased and destroyed within three years of the study. All participants, upon agreement to participate, were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Attention was given to this regard, so students did not feel obligated to participate. Member checking also occurred when transcripts were provided to participants to review for accuracy (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This process allowed participants to provide additional clarification.

Researcher Positionality

Milner (2007) puts forth a framework for “researching” the self in relationship to others. By working through this framework, I sought to address the tensions of race and culture in my own research, teaching, and practice. I am a black, middle-aged female brought up in a low-income, urban environment and a first generation college student raised by parents who placed great value in education. My family, on both my father’s and mother’s side, have lived and worked in urban communities with a majority of black residents. Creswell (2007) stated, “how we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research” (p. 179). How I write, and my passion and excitement about this research comes from a combination of my identity, past experiences, and values (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

My research is rooted in a childhood saturated with stories of racial identity and injustice. Yet, it is imperative to learn the individual lived experiences from participants of color and not categorize them as a monolithic experience. Milner reinforces this as he explains, “Truth, or what is real and thus meaningful and “right,” for researchers and participants, depends on how they have experienced the world” (p. 395). Therefore, I cannot begin to say what is true for others. Like Milner, I believe race (and racism) is “pervasive, widespread, and ingrained in society and thus in education” (p. 390). I must develop an understanding of others as I listen to their stories, and be cognizant of the relationship between others and myself.

While many researchers focus on socioeconomic status (SES) as a way to explain issues of injustice, racism, inequity, and oppression (to include race and culture), looking

through the SES lens is not enough. Rather, I prefer Gutierrez' s (2003) suggestion to, “ground cultural observations in the historical, dynamic processes of communities, labels that refer to research participants can be treated not as categories but as narrative descriptors of the participants’ backgrounds” (p. 23). These stories include my interpretations of study participants’ that are situated within contextual nuances and realities that are critical to understanding lived experiences. Ladson-Billings (2012) cautions the reader not to overgeneralize a particular racial or cultural population, but to look at the context while also “...look[ing] for student’s familiarity of experience with cultural practices by seeking to understand the students’ short- or long-term history” (p. 23). In my research, I cannot take my values and biases out of the stories I tell, but instead acknowledge them.

As a black female who grew up in poverty and was considered a “discipline problem”. I was indoctrinated at a very young age with the notion that education is accessible to all and is my only path to a quality life-style. Currently, I have taught in urban, public schools for over a decade and I bring my childhood perspectives about educating black students from poverty to my classrooms. I have successfully educated black boys and girls from low socio-economic, urban communities, and through my experiences have come to challenge the dominant deficit perspective that blames persistently disciplined black youth for their failures (Valencia, 1997).

While my varied schooling and cultural experiences will shape my perceptions and interpretations of the students’ stories, my objective is to present the collective experiences of middle school black girls, for whom school has proved a challenging place to navigate. My research is somewhere between a voice for adolescent black girls who

are tracked into the pipeline to prison, and activism to abolish these practices. Race, class, gender, and age will have an effect on my ability to hear and interpret the voices of the study participants.

While imperfect, I believe I will be able to bridge and buffer the various divides of class, race, gender and age. An interpretivist theoretical approach recognizes the role researchers' subjectivities play and that our interpretations are "culturally derived and historically situated" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). The questions guiding my research emerge from various personal and professional experiences, and are sharpened by recent scholarship and advocacy to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. My solution, following Buroway (2003), is to consider my research as a "revisit" of my previous experiences and in this way manage the inescapable difficulties of balancing one's involvement in the world as an activist and one's efforts to interpret that world as a researcher. This embedded, practitioner and activist experience will pose challenges, specifically the need to extricate my previous experiences with the teaching in low performing urban, public schools from the current research (Buroway, 2003).

While Buroway (2003) was discussing participant observation, his observations appear applicable to any research effort, which is recognition that "we are part of the world we study" (p. 666). In revisiting the question of the role of school suspension in the school-to-prison pipeline, I challenged myself to focus less on the issues I face as a practitioner. I tried to be an explorer, discovering how the girls themselves thought about their suspension and placement in an alternative school. I also tried not to disregard or discount my work in schools; after all, my observations propelled this academic interest. I approached my research work with an effort to be self-conscious about those experiences

and aware of how those experiences color my interviews and interpretation of the data. I cannot and would not disavow my work as a practitioner or activist; to do so would be academically dishonest.

As an activist, I am not neutral in various community efforts, and I work to eliminate out-of-school suspensions and challenge messages that stigmatize black girls who are suspended from their home. I rely on a body of scholarship; much of it classified as feminist research, as described by Fine (1991):

...feminist scholars across disciplines, situate themselves proudly atop a basic assumption that all research projects are (and should be) political; that researchers who represent themselves as detached only camouflage their deepest, most privileged interests. (p. 15)

I consider my approach to fall somewhere between Fine's classification of researcher as "voice" and researcher as "activist." This work grows out of my personal and professional life to be a transformational change agent in social justice education.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed outline for the methods I used to explore the research questions. In this chapter I discussed the methodological approaches in conducting this study, the lens through which the data is interpreted, and how my personal history influenced my motivation for the study. Both my early life and professional work have merged in my academic and activist interest in school discipline disparity and how educational practices prepare certain youth to become prisoners. The next two chapters will introduce outcomes of the current study and its implications for future research policy makers, and practitioners.

CHAPTER IX
FINDINGS: STUDY TWO

The first three chapters of this document provided background information related to disproportionate school discipline of middle school black female students. Chapter four provides findings for case studies and a cross-case analysis of three adolescent black girls who participated in the study. The stories of the cases will also include prompts with written and picture responses. Two out of the three participants completed, “homework”, by turning-in journal entries describing interactions that were “good” and “bad” at their current school.

Participant Cases

Below, I present the narratives of each student. Following each narrative, I describe how I identified central tensions of that case and how my analysis of those tensions yielded a more robust narrative. In the subsequent discussion, I elaborate upon the importance of this methodological approach in addressing the discipline gap in schools. Three adolescent black girl girls participated in three sets of interview questions aligned to the current study’s research questions and conceptual framework. Each interview was conducted after school, in person, at a time most convenient for the participant. I also collected drawings and journal reflections from the participants. Prior to being interviewed, each student participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire of self-reported information that also included academic and behavior questions. The participants identified themselves as; a middle school student, black, female, Metro north side resident and suspended from their reside school. Students’ discussions of lived experiences are analyzed in the hopes that school discipline policy decisions will include the understanding of how black girls perceive, and are affected by discipline interactions.

Black Womanhood

Black femininity juxtaposed against historical social contexts of Jim Crow, reveals a time when black people were portrayed as derogatory stereotypes in popular culture. In the United States, all racial groups have been caricatured, but none as often or in as many ways as black Americans. It was not until the 1940s and 1950s Amos 'n' Andy radio show that the characterization of black women as domineering, aggressive, and masculinized became popularly associated with the name *Sapphire* (West, 2008). During Jim Crow, the portrayal of black women as the angry Sapphires permeated mainstream American culture.

Today, the image of the black female as Sapphire is still prevalent in the socially accepted imagery called, “the Angry Black Women”. A Google search of “Angry Black Women” or “ABW” demonstrates how pervasive this caricature has become in contemporary American culture. There is even a pseudo-malady called, "Angry Black Woman Syndrome" perpetuated in 21st media, such as the movie, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (Perry, 2007) and in the emergence of "Reality Shows." Again, we see televised shows serving as vehicles for black women to be portrayed as ABW.

ABW is popularized in the cinema and on television as a loud talker, with one hand on a hip and finger pointing violently while rhythmically rocking her head. She is a shrill nagger with irrational states of anger and indignation and is often mean-spirited and abusive her primary targets, she has venom for anyone who insults or disrespects her. Sapphire is a perpetual complainer who criticizes because she is unendingly bitter and wishes that unhappiness on others (West, 2008). The Sapphire caricature is a harsh portrayal of black womanhood that encourages them to be passive, servile, non-

threatening, and unseen. This stereotype has become a social control mechanism employed to punish black women who violate the societal norms..

Although any group of people has the potential to be negatively stereotyped, research has shown that African Americans suffer from more negative stereotypes than European Americans (Stephan & Rosenfield, 1982). More specifically, research findings have indicated that European American students endorsed the belief that African American women were loud, talkative, aggressive, antagonistic, unmannerly, argumentative, and straightforward. African American women were viewed as holding more negative traits than American women in general (Neimann, O'Conner, & McClorie, 1998; Weitz & Gordon 1993).

Stereotypes of black women are often perpetrated on the interpersonal level in the form of gendered racial microaggressions -everyday exchanges, usually brief, that deliver demeaning messages or subtle reminders about racial stereotypes and often enacted automatically and unconsciously (Sue, 2010). Essed (1991) originally coined the term *gendered racism* to capture the complexity of oppression experienced by black women on the basis of racist perceptions of gender roles. The concept of gendered racism is an intersectional framework consistent with contemporary microaggressions research that specifically examines the interconnection of racism and sexism. The foundation of Essed's (1991) gendered racism was her interdisciplinary theory of everyday racism or the recurrent, familiar practices of racism that occur in everyday life. Essed found black women's experiences of everyday racism were manifested and maintained through three processes: "marginalization of black women's experiences, containment of internal reactions to oppression, and problematization and legitimization of oppression" (p. 10).

Essed contended black women experience gendered and classed forms of racism based on the stereotypes of black womanhood.

Drawing on both the microaggression and gendered racism literatures, Lewis et al (2010) explored the various types of gendered racial microaggressions experienced by black women. In Lewis's study, it was found that black women experienced gendered racial microaggressions based on expectations of being a Jezebel (perceived exoticization and/or sexualization by men) and ABW. For example, participants reported receiving sexualized comments from men about their body parts. The participant's anger towards the men was labeled as ABW, thus the use of "anger" served as vehicle to silence them.

While all three participants in the current study describe being "angry" in a cycle of aggressive social interactions, they simultaneously resist labels as troublemakers. When negative interactions occur between the participants and a peer and/or adult, participants identify physical and character traits (i.e. mouth, attitude) as catalyst, however the same "mouth" and "attitude" are defense mechanisms in schooling environments. This exertion of power is a common theme found in the literature on both racial microaggressions (e.g., Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens, 2008) and gender microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007). Black women experience a power struggle for respect (perceived authority and/or intellect questioned or challenged in work or professional settings) and invisibility (perceptions of being ignored and made to feel invisible in work or professional settings (Lewis et al., 2010). Sometimes, everyday microaggressions are moments when we ignore, negate, or dismiss others' experiences of harm. When microaggressions take shape, sudden overreactions to young people of color translates into feelings of fear (Pollock, 2004; Torres, Driscoll & Burrow, 2010). Collins

(1991) highlighted the historical and socially constructed images of black women that have been created in society to oppress and subordinate them. Within this framework of understanding how the participants experience agency in zero tolerance practices, each girl has the pseudonym of “Jane”.

The presentation of each case follows a similar format. It begins with a basic introduction of the participant and their background. Next, the perception of self is described along with the participant’s perception of others. Then, information regarding the participant’s perception of their behavior and the school discipline process is given. The participant’s make connections between current behavior actions and its future implications. Chapter IX ends with a cross-case analysis of common themes found in the central tensions meant to guide the discussion for Chapter X.

Jane 1 - The Maverick

When I met Jane 1 for the first interview, we were at her home and she appeared shy and reserved as I introduced myself and the purpose of my research. I explained how her experiences were important and could help other girls who could be sent to the alternative school in MCSD. Jane 1, an introverted 12-year-old seventh grade student spoke softly and occasionally sucked her thumb. One psychological variable that has been popularly associated with thumb-sucking is anxiety (Bakwin & Bakwin, 1942; Ilg & Ames, 1955). Jane 1 may have been nervous and needed to calm herself by sucking her thumb during the interviews.

She lives in a low socio-economic neighborhood with her maternal grandmother, five siblings, and a dog in a small three-bedroom home. Jane 1’s grandmother openly shared information about the family when I arrived for each visit. The grandmother

shared that she has been raising Jane 1, along with other grandchildren as the only parent. The grandmother also shared that Jane 1's elementary aged sibling was shot in a drive-by shooting and her oldest sibling was a teen-age mother with a young baby.

While Jane 1 endures daily socio-economic hardships without a mother or father, she perceives a close and loving relationship with her immediate family. When reflecting over the perception of her family, "We care about each other..... they got my back through whatever and I got theirs.....they give me stuff that I need." By emphasizing how her "needs" versus "wants" are being met, Jane 1 characterizes a familial loyalty associated with survival. The significance of loyalty could also be characterized by having parental nurturing replaced with sibling relationships. Even when Jane 1 mentioned having friends, she emphasized the point that she "really doesn't talk to them." This same feeling of mistrust was also revealed in her feelings towards adults at school. She affirms having a quiet demeanor as a loner, which became evident while describing her free time at home as "sleeping and playing on the Internet." Jane 1's descriptions of school relationships were less positive in regards to adults compared to peers.

According to her grandmother, Jane 1 is constantly suspended from school, has spent time at a local mental health facility, and was currently "kicked off the school bus." Looking at Jane 1's child-like features and her small frame as she sucked her thumb, one would never expect behavior to be described in such extremes. However, her grandmother mentioned on two occasions that Jane 1 is "sneaky" and uses profanity extensively during arguments with her siblings. When Jane 1 was given the "homework" of journaling about good and/or bad experiences, she was the only participant to

diligently record aspects of her school day (see Figure 2) possibly because she became suspended right after we met. The journaling gave Jane 1 the opportunity to share “my side of the story” about the suspension.

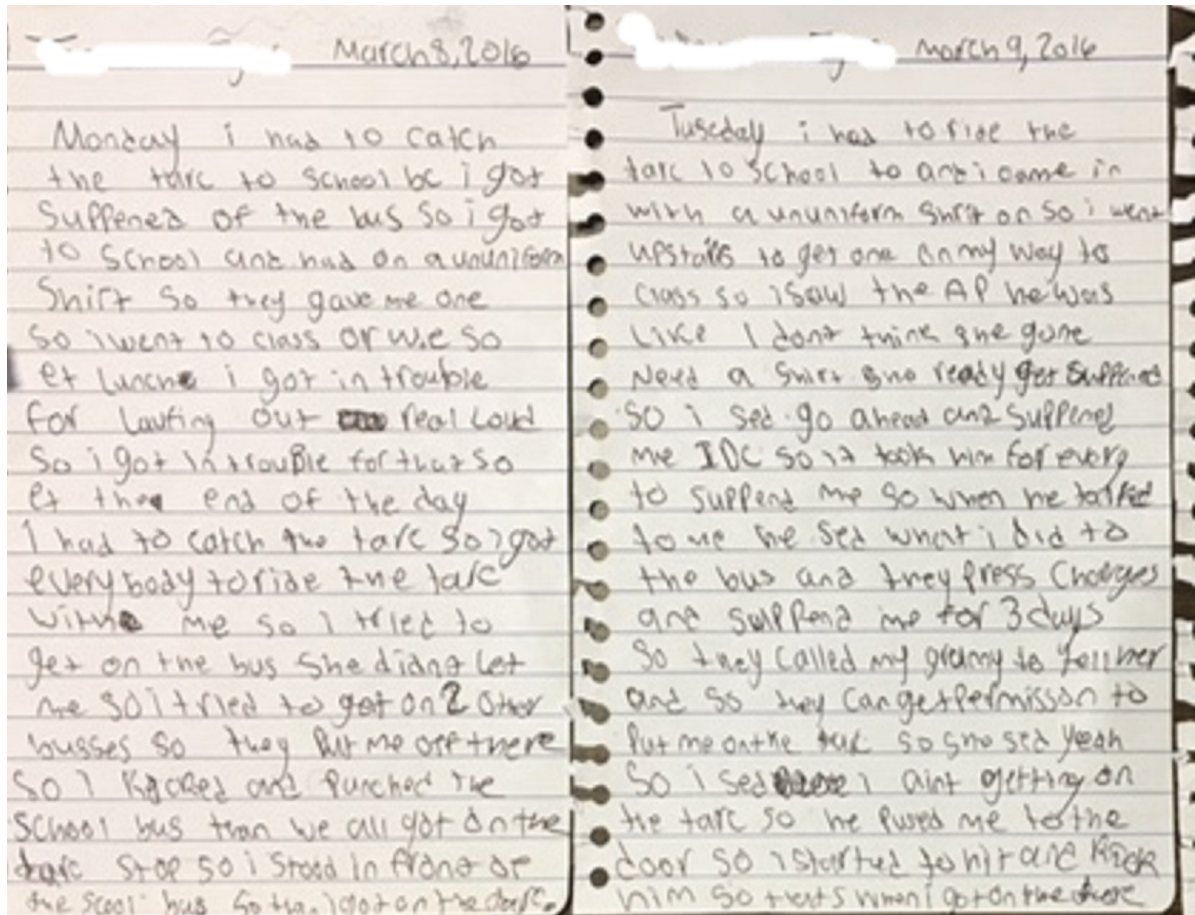


Figure 5. Jane 1 journal reflections.

In total, Jane 1 provided five entries over a two-week period. A majority of the entries describe the process of her school bus suspension for “getting mad” and hitting the bus with her fist. When she is suspended from the school bus, she describes getting into a fight with another student while waiting for a public bus and the police breaking up the fight.

Through her journaling, she affirms her grandmother’s perception as a behavior problem:

So today was off the chain and I got in trouble a lot in class because I was playing around and hitting people. End of the day I had to catch the Tarc because I got suspended off the bus. When I left school, this girl wanted to fight and walked up on me, so I hit her and throw her to the ground and then the police tried to break it up and I was fighting back and I got sent back to school...So today I didn't go to school because I'm suspended, so I had to stay home, so I went to sleep almost all day and then my granny tried to wake me up at 4 something, but I didn't wanna wake up and we started yelling at each other and I was mad for a little bit but then I got over it at the end of the day.

Most of her time in the journal entries are described as “getting in trouble” and receiving a consequence for some type of physical aggression or altercation. This general malaise remained throughout her journal entries and the events manifested from, “stupid stuff”, signaling her acknowledgment of making poor choices. Overall, her poor decision-making is perceived as temporary.

In her self-description, Jane 1 admits to being “silly” but “angry”- two polar opposite emotions, but the “angry” only occurs when she feels provoked. Table 3 gives sample data associated with themes found in codes from Jane 1’s narrative.

Table 3
Jane 1 Inductive Codes and Themes

<u>Focus Topic</u>	<u>Codes</u>	<u>Themes</u>	<u>Data Example</u>
Self-Perception	Self-Esteem	Introvert	“...don't like talking about stuff – I have friends – I just don't talk to them” “I like to be quiet, I don't like talking”

	Emotion	Anger	“I get mad and react”
		Violent	“I’ll fight...and start throwing stuff”
	Decision-making	Poor Choices	“I’m smart, but I just do bad stuff”
School Perception	Social interaction	Negative Conflicts	“This girl walked up on me and we already had beef” “...that I fixed my mouth and attitude/cause my mouth and attitudes bad”
Discipline Perception	Consequences	Exclusion	“ISAP or detention after school” “They said you are suspended 10 days”

Jane 1 describes the school discipline process like a judicial process as if suspension is a hearing in courtroom. She even references the term “going “downtown” when she is sent to a juvenile correctional detention center because of her behavior. While Jane 1 describes multiple suspensions (school and bus) between sixth and seventh grade, she believes her behavior is just an adolescent phase. On two occasions, Jane 1 described how she was provoked by someone saying, “F-(expletive) her dead people” and in another instance stating, “She walked up on me.” The feeling of being provoked kept recurring in her justification for displaying physical violence towards others. While Jane 1 admitted hurting people is wrong, she never took fault in fighting or being aggressive. Jane 1 believed assuming close proximity to her personal space or saying “disrespectful” words warranted a fight. However, Jane 1 discussed consequences for her actions as if they were inevitable and described school discipline as “fair.” When Jane 1 spoke of school, it was a place where people learned and she was prideful about receiving

high grades, especially in math. Academic pursuits did not seem to be a difficult task, but emotional self-control was a challenge that appeared in her interview responses, reflections and journal entries. A close look at Jane 1's perception of school discipline (see Figure 3) magnifies the theme of "exclusion."

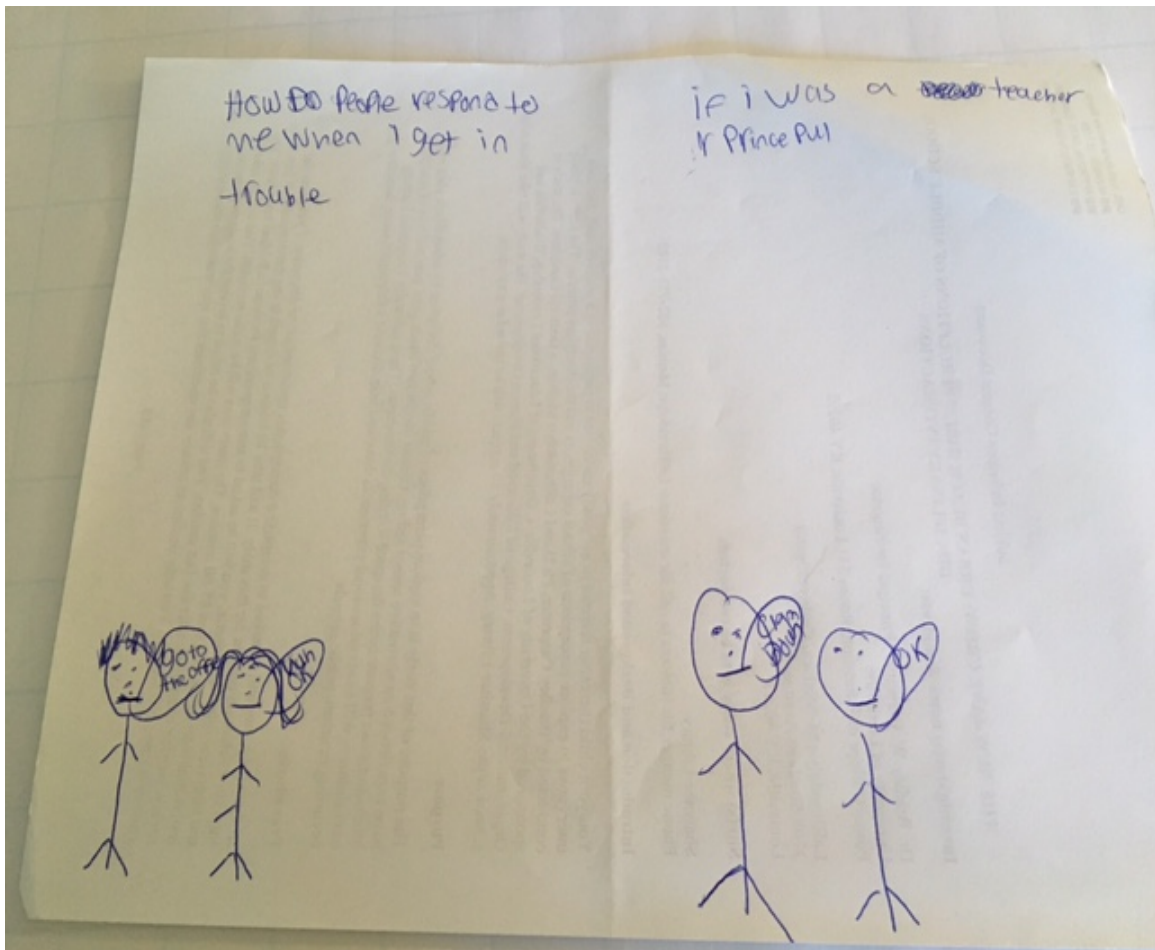


Figure 6. Jane 1 school discipline reflection.

When asked how she is treated during discipline process, Jane 1 shows herself being compliant. The first picture is a teacher with a "talk bubble" over adult that says, "go to the office" with her talk bubble response saying, "ok". When asked to draw how she would discipline students if she was the teacher, she shows herself with a talk bubble saying, "calm down" and the student response of "ok." Jane 1's version of how discipline

should be in the second picture, replaces the exclusionary practice with de-escalation. She says, “They tell me go to office or go write sentences, but I would tell kid calm down or put in corner to do they work”. Jane 1 has an acute self-awareness of her behavior, but she also interprets an unmet need from adults. While she understands “losing control” is inappropriate, she feels as if she is not given the chance to channel her emotions and “calm down.”

According to Jane 1, when she gets older (16), she will do better and get serious about becoming a hair stylist. She did admit a change in attitude is needed by stating, “They probably won’t trust me being a manager or boss of a hair school.” When asked about her future aspirations, Jane 1 did not connect her current behavior to future incarceration. She believes she will eventually mature and “grow-up” by the time she reaches high school. Jane 1’s confidence in obtaining high academic grades could possibly fuel her outlook on reaching future career success.

Jane 2 - The Socialite

Jane 2 lives with her mother, grandmother, and a high school aged sister in a community of working class families. Modest size homes with multiple cars in driveways and many school-aged children fill her neighborhood streets. At our first encounter, Jane 2’s mother answers the door and asks a few questions about my research. Seemingly intrigued by the thought of someone investigating the experiences of black girls, she appears excited about her daughter’s participation. After my self-introduction, Jane 2’s mother calls her down from upstairs and she immediately hops down the steps with a huge toothy smile.

Jane 2 is a tall, slender 13-year-old eighth grader who is very talkative with a friendly personality. She has a general happy-go-lucky disposition and describes herself with positive traits:

I see me as the girl everybody wants to be friends with. I see me as outstanding girl. I think I'm very smart and pretty. I see me is a sweet young lady. Is me is a leader and not a follower. I see I make a lot of bad choices. That's how I see myself.

She describes herself as someone who is perceived as “mean” but can be “sweet” in terms of who will bear the brunt of her bad moods.

Jane 2 displays a connectedness to an active social life that includes a strong support system, especially from her mother. While describing her involvement in afterschool activities, she reflects over personal relationships with friends and family. She especially emphasizes nurturing relationship of her mother who “keeps her busy”, she states, “My mama would ask do I want to do it....so when I wanna do something, I'm not sitting in the house”. Table 3 gives sample data associated with themes found in codes from Jane 2's narrative.

Table 4
Jane 2 Inductive Codes and Themes

Focus Topic	Codes	Themes	Data Example
Self-Perception	Self-Esteem	Confidence	“I think I'm very beautiful intelligent and unique-I am intelligent and outstanding” “Fun, to hang out with happy and cute”
	Emotion	Anger	“I got upset” “I was taking a test and they

			kept talking, I couldn't concentrate" "She got me upset when she said she was gonna suspend me for 3 days for walking out"
	Decision-making	Poor Choices	"I been tryna stop but I do play a lot Its just me not knowing when to shutup"
School Perception	Social Interactions	Negative Conflict	"My mouth talking, constantly talking back, thinking I have the last word" "some think I'm mean but I'm sweet person" "No tolerance for bullying"
Discipline Perception	Relationships	Positive Affirmations	"But the AP thinks I'm going to be something"
	Consequences	Violent	"The security guard came and apologized because he took me down"

Jane 2 feels a part of loving relationships and has a strong self-confidence in appearance, intellect and leadership. While Jane 2 shows a high self-esteem, she still includes the flaw of making bad choices as one of her attributes.

When Jane 2 was asked to reflect over "best" and "worst" memories at school (see Figure 4) she describes giving support for a friend who "gets out" of the alternative school. The second picture describes how she went to a juvenile center after being tasered:

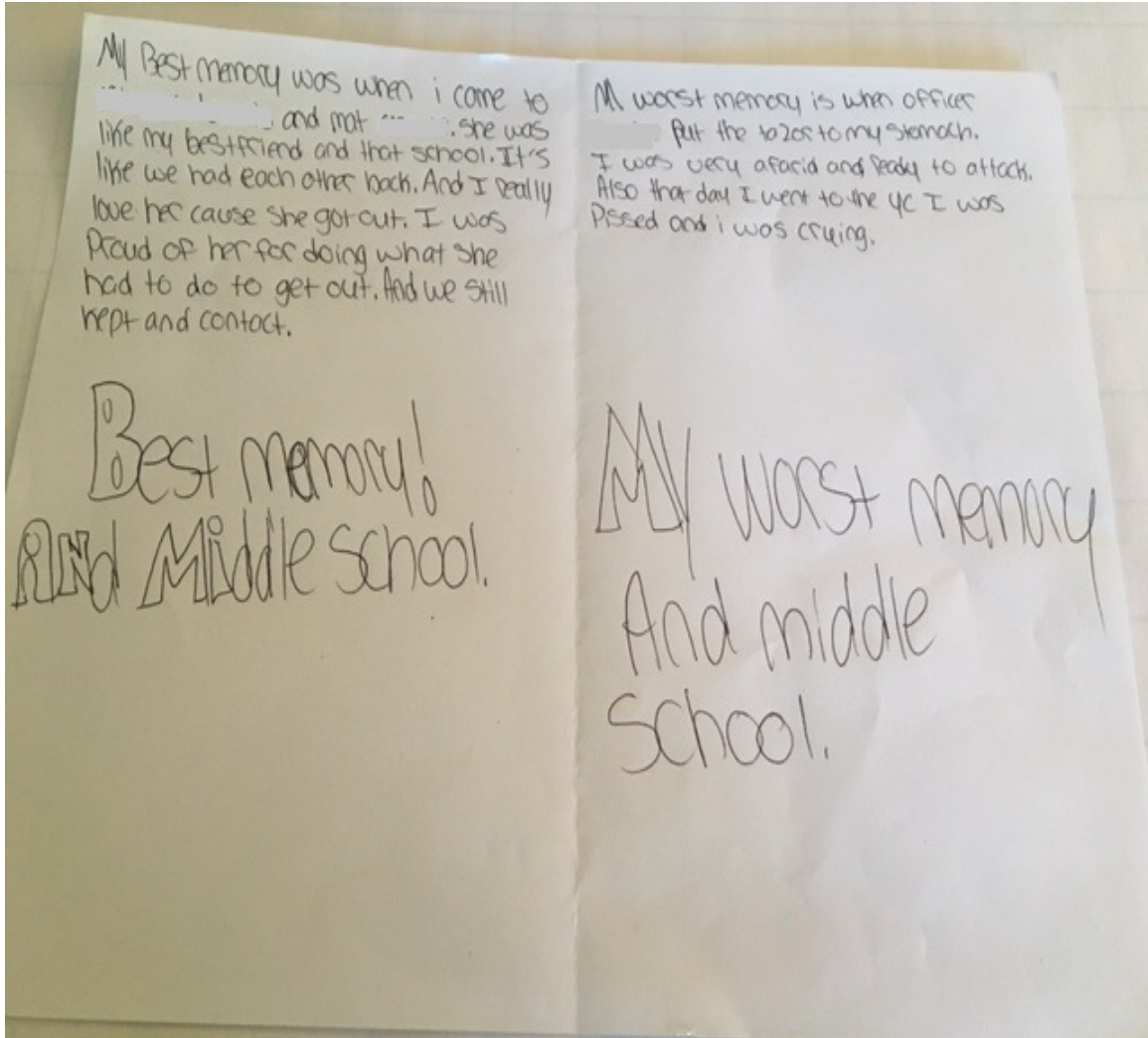


Figure 7. Jane 2 school memory reflection

My best memory was when I came to MC alternative school and met Laila. She was like my best friend at that school. It's like we had each others back. And I really love her 'cause she got out. I was proud of her for doing what she had to do to get out. And we still kept in contact. My worst memory is when officer put that Taser to my stomach. I was very afraid and ready to attack. Also that day I went to the YC. I was pissed and I was crying.

Both the “best” and “worst” memory depictions are alarming in their own way. On the surface, the “best” memory could be interpreted as a supportive friend being joyful, but it also portrays imagery of an eleven or twelve year old, “getting out”- a term that mirrors language describing prison. The “worst” memory is especially alarming, since most adults have never been tasered. While Jane 2 does not disclose specifics of the event, she ends the story with her going to the “YC”, which is an acronym for youth center.

The presumption for being tasered is severe behavior that warrants such an extreme restraint. Jane 2 continually describes situations where severe behaviors are trying to be contained (i.e. calling police, physical take down, being tasered).

When describing herself as a student, Jane 2 emphasizes her commitment to learning, but has difficulties staying “focused” and needs to “pay attention more.” She infers a sense of boredom with school by stating, “I don’t like just sitting in classroom all day and I would go outside more and have free time in day and go on fieldtrips more.” She also associates success with academic grades by measuring future success in terms of college matriculation. When asked about her favorite classes, she immediately discussed her enthusiasm for working out math problems, but then in the same breathe exclaimed how her behavior needed to change in classes.

When the topic of teachers was brought up, Jane 2 remained neutral in how she may be perceived stating, “Some say I’m good and some say I can be bad....but I get tired of hearing it.” While Jane 2 takes responsibility for displaying undesirable behaviors, she describes her behavior as having “good and bad days” like most people. She has an apathetic attitude towards classroom interactions as if her “getting in trouble” is an endured, normal school experience. However, her apathy towards her teachers is

reversed when she speaks about authority figures that are commonly a part of the discipline process. She identified an assistant principal, security guard and In-School Adjustment Program (ISAP) teacher from a previously attended school as people she trusted and believed in her potential. Her affinity towards authority figures alludes to having positive authority interactions, possibly due to the high frequency of her interactions.

Regarding Jane 2's disciplinary events, she acknowledges student-teacher conflicts arising from her need to "get the last word", but conflicts are not viewed as her fault. When Jane 2 explained the event that led to her alternative placement, she described herself as someone who was misunderstood and unfairly treated. According to Jane 2, she became upset and walked out of class when her classmates would not be quiet during a test. Upon her departure from class, she says an assistant principal threatened her with suspension, which caused her to become more upset because "no one would listen". This scenario somehow leads to a security guard restraining her when the assistant principal gave the directive to "take her down".

When asked why the assistant principal would make that decision, she exclaims this assistant principal lied to her mother about approaching the assistant principal in a threatening manner. Throughout her recollection of the event, Jane 2 stays focused on how the event became escalated because the assistant principal "lied on her" and never liked her since last year. While her portrayal of this student-administrator interaction counters her suggested affinity for authority figures, Jane 3 specifies having multiple "principals", and being at odds with this particular administrator.

The story ends with the police being called because Jane 2 was allegedly "out of

control.” The police eventually left and Jane 2 was released to her mother. Jane 2 says she would have expected to receive a suspension consequence for leaving class and arguing with the assistant principal, but being restrained, involving police and placement at the alternative school was “too much.” Jane 2 does not connect her behavior to the event outcomes; instead, she believes the personal bias displayed by administration put her in a predicament that could have been handled differently. When Jane 2 submitted a journal entry she only shares negative occurrences at school as well as home, and gives details about being “picked on” while riding the bus:

Last week was horrible because I was getting picked on, on my bus. I upset and felt like hitting him back, then I thought and I said tell my momma. So, after I told her, she called up to the school and no AP was there. So when I came to see the next day they said I would not have a problem out of him anymore. But now my momma pick me up and drop me off to school.

Jane 2 maintains her mistreatment is a form of “bullying” she experiences during peer and adult interactions. She frequently references bullying when discussing daily interactions in classrooms and the school bus, “Like one teacher, anything you do she will kick you out and sometimes I feel like I’m getting harassed.” Jane 2 clearly displays a familiarity with the school discipline process and its significance. In her explanation for the importance of rules, “Principals are people who make the rules and expect us to follow the rules.” Jane 2 acknowledges authority and enforcing expectations, but she also engages in verbal conflicts with peers and adults.

Jane 2 is not explicit in how interactions become negative and if she is the antagonist or protagonist when the “bullying” starts. Jane 2 would continue to provide the

context for her discipline experiences, but not who or what started the conflict. While she does take some responsibility for having a “bad attitude” and “making bad choices”, her story descriptions do not have her portrayed as the aggressor. Jane 2 does not foresee future implications for her constant interactions with the discipline process. She believes her future involves going to college and her behavior will not be hindrance in that endeavor.

Jane 2’s perception of school discipline magnified the unexpected theme of “affirmations” from authority figures. When asked how she is treated during discipline process, Jane 2 writes examples of comments she hears when she is disciplined, such as, “get your behavior together” and “you’re too pretty for that”. Jane 2 connects the discipline process with conferencing that could be considered positive reinforcement, but there are no concrete replacement strategies mentioned. Subsequently, Jane 2 is lectured about making changes, subsequently associated with her attractiveness; however, it is not clear if the adults explicitly show her how to change. By expressing a differentiation in giving affirmations versus strategies, Jane 2 highlights a need for discipline that rehabilitates and reforms. In her school discipline reflection, Jane 2 would implement ways to “help” students and cultivate “leadership” during discipline interactions.

Jane 3 - The Egotist

Jane 3 lives with her mother and 16-year-old sister in an apartment complex. The demographic of children playing outside reflected a diverse international population. At our initial meeting Jane 3’s mother was welcoming and smiled when I introduced myself. After my introduction, Jane 3 sat and listened while her mother eagerly shared her concerns with how discipline is handled at schools. Jane 3’s mother perceived the

interview experience as positive because Jane 3 could “talk to someone” about school. When Jane 3’s mother leaves the room, she sits quietly as I get materials out. I was with Jane 3 during a down time before dance practice. Jane 3 was dressed in athletic shorts and a tank top with two large afro puffs.

The core family for Jane 3 is her mother, an older sister, and an estranged father (see Figure 8).

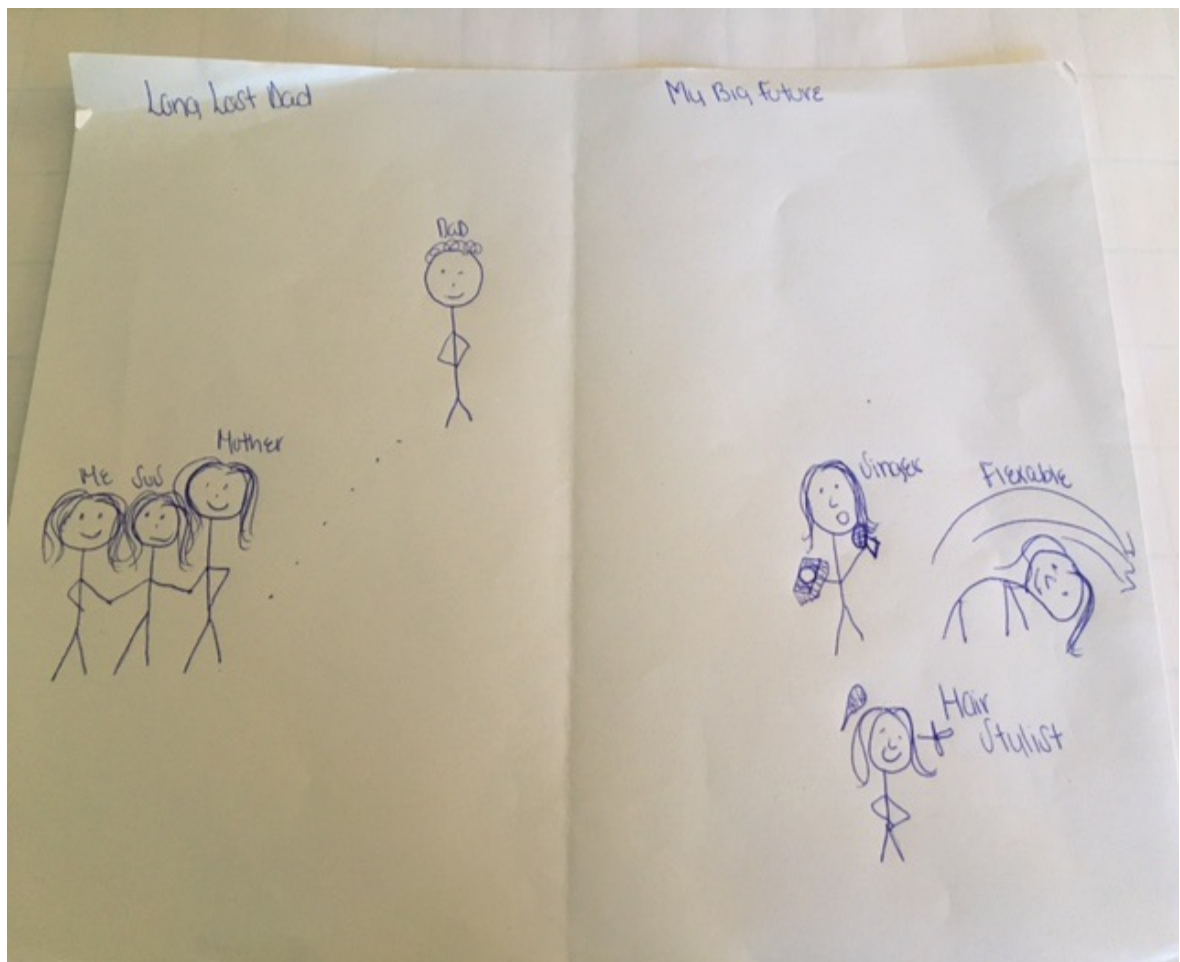


Figure 8. Jane 3 self-reflection.

Jane 3's family is not originally from Metro City and moved to Metro City five years ago, while the father lives in Jane 3's hometown. While Jane 3 speaks fondly of her mother, "I drew my mom-she was there my whole life", she seems affected by the distance between her and her father. In the first picture she shows the distance by drawing her father away from other figures. Jane 3 describes her childhood as "rough" and identifies the constant moving and not having money as contributing factors. Jane 3 associates familial relationships with the lived experiences of overcoming poverty with her mother and sister. She expresses a high self-esteem and shows pride in her appearance and talents. In the second picture, she draws herself in poses that show her participating in dancing, singing, and hair styling activities.

Jane 3 discussed school in terms of "drama" and "jealousy." She perceives school to be consumed by "he say, she say" conflicts that quickly get out of hand, "It goes from one person to another and then your words are switched up and now they don't like you and they want to fight you." She also explains that much of the drama stems from girls who are attracted to her, so she gets into conflicts because she is not gay or because people are gossiping about "who she likes." Jane 3 stays focused on "girl drama" in relation to sexuality and physical attractiveness in social interactions. Jane 3 says fighting does not solve problems, yet she explains that she fights in self-defense when girls are rejected by her or are jealous of her looks.

Jane 3 displays some narcissist tendencies by constantly referencing to her attractiveness, "They saying stuff about me...I don't want them and they can't have me. I'm too pretty for that gay stuff." In her school memories reflection, Jane 3 recalls her "worst" school memory involved embarrassment from ripping her pants, yet another

reference to the outward appearance and looking “attractive.” Jane 3 is definitely preoccupied with the topic of physical beauty and how others perceive her outward appearance. Jane 3 proclaims she has been suspended over twenty times for fighting, dress code violations and “talking too much” because she has a “temper.” Table 5 gives sample data associated with themes found in codes from Jane 3’s narrative.

Table 5
Jane 3 Inductive Codes and Themes

Focus Topic	Codes	Themes	Data Example
Self-Perception	Self-Esteem	Confident	“Strong, smart, pretty, I’m great at doing hair and rapping” “That I’m... a smart, pretty little girl”
	Decision-Making	Poor Choices	“They see me as being pretty but doing bad stuff”
School Perception	Social Interactions	Negative Conflict	“Fighting... Ummm.. drama and jealousy” “Cause people speak on me I go to the person and asks them why you talking about me, then the teacher thinks I’m starting trouble”
Discipline Perception	Relationships	Positive Affirmations	“Like...I can be a better person- They see me as a bright person, a leader”
	Consequences	Violent	“when we was fighting, she was choking me”

Jane 3 does not acknowledge being noncompliant because she is defending herself by “getting at the truth” when she confronts peers. Her bottled-up anger, coupled with a sense that nothing will be done if she complains, leads her to take matters into her own hands. In her school discipline reflection (see Figure 8), Jane 3 illustrates an adult with the talk bubble, “go to the office now” and a pointed finger towards her face. The adult is obviously displeased by the furled brows and frown she has drawn on the person’s face.



Figure 8. Jane 3 school discipline reflection

In the second picture, she draws two figures that seem more comparable in size, while still establishing an authority figure. When asked how she would discipline students, she draws herself with a talk bubble in a postured stance saying, “this is your warning.” Jane

3 has captured excluded discipline that references the school office as an option that could be circumvented with in class management of warnings.

When describing how she was placed at the alternative school, Jane 3 tells a story about a teacher accidentally getting hurt trying to break up her fight. During the scuffle, she claims the teacher “choked” her trying to restrain her and lied about getting hurt. The story ended with Jane 3 and the principal arguing back and forth, the police were called, and Jane 3 was sent home with her mother. Throughout her story, Jane 3 portrays herself as a victim of student gossip, teacher assault and unfair administrative punishment and police intimidation. Jane 3 gave particular emphasis to the other girl not getting suspended because Jane 3 was the “new girl” at the school. She believed the adults perceived the other student was completely innocent.

Jane 3 perceives a need for discipline that is not zero tolerance and allows resolution at the classroom level. Jane 3’s counter solution is to have the adult issue a warning instead of sending a student to the office for discipline. When asked about her future success, Jane 3 was the only participant who considered incarceration as a possible pathway. Jane 3 contemplated how her temper could jeopardize getting a good job because, “Maybe somebody gonna’ try me and I’m going to really hurt them”. Regardless of her positive self-esteem, self-proclaimed talents and potential to excel academically, Jane 3 still perceives school as a channel to prison.

Cross-Case Analysis

The narratives of Jane 1, Jane 2, and Jane 3, offer a range of perspectives regarding their own identities, school interactions and discipline. A cross-case analysis of

the narratives (see Table 6) includes the application of concepts found in Labeling theory; self-appraisals, reflected appraisals, resistance and acceptance.

Table 6

Cross-Case Analysis

Theoretical Concept	Codes	Themes
Self-Appraisals	Self-Esteem	Confidence
Reflected Appraisals	Decision-Making	Poor Choices
Resistance	Social Interactions	Conflicts
Acceptance	Relationships	Affirmations

When the Labeling theory concepts are synthesized with themes, the girls collectively depict confidence, poor choices, and negative conflicts in their narratives.

Self-Appraisals

Similarities

While each girl admits engaging in undesirable behaviors at school, they all are resistant to being labelled “bad”. Since they all feel a part of loving familial relationships, their strong support system has shaped a positive self-perception. Just as we see our physical appearance reflected in a mirror (Brownfield & Thompson, 2005) and caregivers and peers perception. All three provided depictions of self-esteem in relation to being “smart” and “pretty”. Their self-portraits are explicitly defined by how much they know and what they look like. Additionally, the group self-perception was accompanied by “mouth” and/or “attitude” as proponents that cause trouble with peers and/or adults. The group self-appraisal embraced a negative label, but they did not internalize their behavior as something inherent to their identity.

Differences

Jane 1 affirms having a quiet demeanor as a loner who mainly spends time at home. Jane 2 describes relationships with both family and friends. Jane 2 is explicit in describing close peer relationships at school and outside school through extra-curricular activities. Jane 3 is the only girl who emphasizes pride physical beauty, discusses her father and addresses poverty. While Jane 1 is a soft spoken introvert, Jane 2 is an outgoing extrovert and Jane 3 is an extrovert who expresses a significant concern for her outward appearance.

Reflected Appraisals

Similarities

According to Bernburg (2009) and Matsueda (1992), reflected appraisal is people's responses to others based on what they believe those others think of them. Based upon the reflected appraisal literature, the reflected appraisals become apparent when each girl perceived their "talking back" projected during conflicts. True to the theory of reflected appraisals, children "act" in order to maintain the respect of their peers and to be thought of as part of the group, which is defined in opposition to teachers whom the students do not respect. All the girls embrace the characterization of their "mouth" and "attitude" as conduits of "talking back", but only as a means of defense. The groups reflected appraisal is defined by agency during moments of conflict.

Differences

While all the girls describe the same reflected appraisals of "mouth" and "attitude", there are variations in how "mouth" and "attitude" are barriers to positive relationships with peers and adults. Since Jane 1 does not cultivate relationships she

describes reflected appraisals occurring involuntarily. Jane 1 describes interactions occurring because others engage her in conflict. Jane 1 was the only girl who mainly described having issues with peers. Both Jane 2 and Jane 3 describe conflicts with peers and adults, but Jane 3 stays focused on “girl drama.” While Jane 1 asserts reflected appraisal mostly with peers, Jane 2 and Jane 3 affirm conflicts with peer and adults, with Jane 3 identifying female peers as primary adversaries.

Resistance

Similarities

According to D’Amato (1993), resistance happens through children’s responses to “intermediate cultural discontinuities” between school defined by adults and school defined by children themselves. Based upon resistance literature, the girls’ resistance differed from, and existed in tension with, dominant institutional forms. During moments of conflict at school, each girl describes a form of resistance. While all of the girl’s reference their participation in fighting, it is described as a necessity. Acts of physical aggression occur when verbal altercations are escalated during moments of self-defense. All the girls describe their fights as temporary poor decision-making that does not reflect their identity as “smart and pretty.” During the discipline process, every girl describes accusations of hurting and/or intent to harm an adult as additional reason for their suspension to the alternative school. Subsequently, their discipline descriptions include adult injuries and/or adult feelings of being endangered, along with law enforcement and/or judicial system interactions.

Differences

While all the girls describe an act of resistance against oppression of agency, there are variations in how they resist. Jane 1 believed assuming close proximity to her personal space or saying “disrespectful” words warranted a fight. The feeling of being provoked kept reoccurring in her justification to fight. Jane 2 was the only participant who used the term “bullying” to describe her acts of resistance. The feeling of being victimized kept reoccurring in her justification to fight. Jane 3 focused on “girl drama” that causes acts of resistance in her pursuits to “get at the truth.” The feeling of being slandered in gossip justified protecting her reputation. While Jane 1 describes resistance involving peer conflicts, Jane 2 and Jane 3 affirm resistance involving peers and adults.

Acceptance

Similarities

Jane 2 and Jane 3 describe school relationships with peers that are interpersonal. Jane 2 and Jane 3 recognized feelings of acceptance in school through positive affirmations from both peers and adults. Jane 2 and Jane 3 identify adults associated with discipline such as administrator or security guard, consequently not identifying a teacher. Jane 2 and Jane 3 also describe adult affirmations through the use of “pretty” as a benchmark for good behavior.

Differences

While Jane 1 and Jane 2 describe acts of acceptance through positive affirmations, Jane 1 depicts acceptance experienced through familial relationships. Jane 1 is also the only girl with multiple siblings. Jane 1’s feelings of acceptance could be explained by having primary interpersonal interactions with siblings. Jane 2 and Jane 3 also have

caretaker mothers who ensure involvement in afterschool activities. Since Jane 2 and Jane 3 have social networks with peers and adults outside school, these positive interactions could influence school relationships. Subsequently, Jane 1 does not participate in activities and has a caretaker grandmother who divides time and energy between many children. Thus, Jane 1's lack of involvement and sharing of a caretaker could create peer and adult relationships void of school acceptance.

Summary of Findings

The findings are based upon perceptions of three black girls who attend an alternative middle school. The narratives illustrate experiences affecting each girl in different ways, but also generally resulted in commonalities of self-appraisal, reflected appraisal, resistance and acceptance. Their voices resonate with experiences of social *distance* in school spaces. This distance is found in the resistance to perceived female behavior. Within the constructs of female behavior is the perception of femininity shaped by possible biases and stereotypes that cultivate labels that foster oppressed student agency in excluded spaces. The following chapter discusses theoretical frameworks, starting with Labeling theory, then Symbolic Interactionism and lastly Third Space. Next, Chapter 5 concludes by synthesizing student perceptions and theories with how Jane Crow archetype is silenced in school discipline. Lastly, implications for future research, policy and practice are given.

CHAPTER X
DISCUSSION: STUDY TWO

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the major themes found in the research and how they answer the central research questions:

- 1) How do middle school black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive themselves?
- 2) How do middle school black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive their behavior with peers and teachers?
- 3) How do middle school black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive school discipline and its possible future implications?

While each story is unique, each girl in this study describes conflict with peers and adults that led to exclusionary discipline and alternative school placement.

Connecting stages in the school-to-prison pipeline are policies such as high stakes testing and zero tolerance sanctions that push youth out of mainstream schools and into alternative schools. Suspension to alternative schools is often the last step before youth drop out of school completely, increasing the likelihood that they will get arrested and incarcerated (Wald & Losen, 2003). The following subsections discuss the application of student voice and theory to answer the research study questions. The chapter concludes with a discussion about black female identity in school discipline literature with implications for practice, policy, and directions for future research.

Biased Labeling

Labeling theory (Bernburg, 2009) asserts the social process of labeling people as deviants or delinquents impacts their future behavior through both self-exclusion and exclusion by others. Literature regarding labeling identifies black and brown students being more likely to be punished and more likely to be labeled as “frequent flyers” than

their white counterparts (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Glass, 2014; Matsueda, 1992).

Literature in educators' uses of exclusionary strategies to punish subjective perceptions of student behavior (Fabelo et al, 2011; Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Rocque, 2010; Skiba, et al., 2002; Thornberg, 2007; Weinstein , 2008), has found black students make up the majority of students disciplined. Similar to findings in Labeling Theory literature, the girl's in the current study were defined by others with the subjective term of being "bad". The girls were also consistently excluded from classrooms during discipline events that describe a "labeling hype" (Blake et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2013; Rios, 2011; Vavrus & Cole, 2002).

The narratives describe discipline that would often recast their defiance as resistance to the context or situation. The girls did not claim being "bad" as part of their identities even though their responses, reactions, and resistance led them to play the role of a "bad girl" in some situations. A review of the literature on the discipline experiences of black females in K-12 schools reveals how black girls' violations of traditional standards of femininity can influence their involvement in the school discipline system (Blake et al., 2011; Evans-Winters, 2005; Grant, 1992; Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005; Jones, 2009; Morris, 2007). In alignment with this literature, the girl's "bad" labels are consistently described as undesirable behaviors for "pretty" girls. Their narratives are aligned to literature describing gender stereotypes that are the basis for disproportionate disciplining by teachers' views of appropriate "feminine" behavior."

The ABW portrayal or Sapphire caricature (West, 2008) is a negative perception of black girls' behavior that potentially informs educators stereotypes during discipline interactions. Acts of losing control and visibly or even physically expressing anger defies

stereotypes about what is “ladylike.” Educators are positioned as having the power to judge when students are “bad” and the authority to determine punitive consequences for students’ “bad” behavior. In the identification of behavior labels, there exists an imbalance of power between educators and students. The narratives of Jane 1, 2, and 3 reveal how an imbalanced power is present through their labels as bad.

Jane 3 states, “I’m bad ‘cause I go to alternative school”; Jane 2 states, “...some of them see me as bad” and Jane 1 states, “I’m smart, but I just do bad stuff”. Significantly, none of the interview questions included the word “bad”, but the participants used the word, “bad” frequently to describe themselves and how adults perceive them. Jane 3 even used the word “labeling” to describe adult perception by stating, “The principal keeps labeling me as if I’m one of these children and she kept disrespecting me and so I’m disrespecting back.” The girls in this study defended themselves against the label of “bad” by positioning their “badness” as a temporary status resulting from poor decisions.

The application of resistance identifies “bad” behavior as situational rather than inherent to the students. Rather than adopting the deviant role, students enacted reactions, and resistance within particular classroom contexts and relationships that either supported or alienated them (Goffman, 1959; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). Labeling students maintains a discipline focus on the student and the student’s behavior rather than on the educators or situational factors contributing to the discipline event. Acts of reaction and resistance occurred when participants were challenged, threatened, or harmed (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Hollins, 2011; Raible & Irizarry, 2010).

Educators' inclinations to label students and withhold support from those perceived as bad further impairs the progress of disciplined students who want to make positive changes despite previous mistakes (Nicholl, 2007). The group self-appraisal embraced a negative label, but they did not internalize their behavior as something inherent to their identity. All the girls embrace the characterization of their "mouth" and "attitude" as conduits of "talking back", but only as a means of defense. The groups reflected appraisal is defined by agency during moments of conflict. The intersection of racial and gender stereotypes collide with discipline practices that portrays black girls as delinquents; social problems themselves rather than young girls affected by social problems.

Disconnected Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interactionism includes individuals' interpretations of, and responses to, things in society motivating their choices about how they interact with others (Blumer, 1969). All of the girl's describe participation in negative conflicts through peer and adult interactions. More specific to the discipline gap and the plight of persistently disciplined black girls, Symbolic Interactionists examine the co-constructed nature of students' and educators' behaviors and responses to each other (Stevick & Levinson, 2003). The narratives of the current study describe disconnected interactions that are not co-constructed, but exclusionary.

Symbolic Interactionism is characterized by students and teachers, acting as agents in the co-construction of disciplinary acts. Students and teachers, then, act as agents in the co-construction of these disciplinary acts (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Pane, 2010; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Within co-constructed spaces, students make decisions

about their actions based upon contextual factors such as teachers' behaviors (Supaporn et al., 2003); similarly, teachers make decisions about how to respond to those students' acts based on factors in the school and classroom contexts (Thornberg, 2007). The interactions between the girls and adults do not exist within Symbolic Interactionism because the narratives consistently describe conflicts eventually leading to office referrals. The girls do not describe narratives that includes their voice in the creation of safe spaces.

In their narratives the girls describe discipline events where adults are positioned as the objective decision-makers. This relational dynamic maintains a power imbalance in the structure and culture of schools. The girls noted this imbalance through experiences of marginalization in exclusionary discipline events. Students resented being "kicked out," or going to the office as a disciplinary response that seemed to damage relationships between students and educators. Jane 1, 2, and 3 provide responses of "mouthing off" as a catalyst to receiving discipline consequences, illustrating how "standing up for themselves" or being "respected" justifies the "mouthing off" to peers and adults. During moments of conflict at school, each girl describes a form of resistance.

While each girl referenced her participation in fighting, they describe such actions as a necessity. Acts of physical aggression occur when verbal altercations are escalated during moments of self-defense. All the girls describe their fights as temporary poor decision-making that does not reflect their identity as "smart and pretty." When students seek attention, both explicitly and implicitly through misbehavior, school officials should immediately engage them. This is a great opportunity to build relationships with students, helping them see the harm that was caused and teaching them how to address their

problems. Within discipline events, educators choosing to exclude students in response to their challenging behaviors are missing opportunities to help students improve at negotiating difficulties.

Stevick and Levinson (2003) conclude that, “the behavior that appears to teachers and administrators as misconduct or irrational violence may in fact be a rational student response to a variety of school conditions” (p. 346). Ultimately, teachers should use tactics inside of the classroom, such as warnings and consequences (Romi & Roache, 2012), rather than sending a student out of class that could contribute to the institutionalization of “bad” behavior and loss of academic time. Jane 1 and Jane 3 affirm this notion by illustrating alternative solutions of “calm down” and “this is a warning” in response to how they would counter discipline exclusion. Literature regarding exclusionary discipline also points to positive student-teacher interactions as a counterbalance to exclusionary discipline (Fabelo et al., 2011; Noguera, 2003; Toldson, 2011).

Teachers’ understanding of students’ backgrounds and cultural assets is important to cultivating trusting student-teacher relationships. Similarly, by developing their relationships with marginalized students, teachers could help to reduce incidents of challenging behavior as well as contribute to students’ positive academic outcomes and self-concepts (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003). The narrative of these persistently disciplined girls did not mention positive relationships with teachers- the adults who divvy out exclusionary discipline. Just as students and teachers co-construct the role of “bad kid,” with a shift in educators’ responses to students, students and teachers could also co-construct students’ roles as “good kids” (Turner,

1962). While the students in this study did not adopt an identity as “bad,” positive relationships with teachers may empower students to play the role of “good kid” more frequently.

Exclusive Third Space

Venzant Chambers and McCready (2011) used the phrase “making space” to reflect the practice of establishing spatial and discursive environments to involve youth in naming the organizational practices and values that excluded them. Third space is offered as an alternative approach to understanding the negative consequences of leaving people out of policy decisions that affect them directly. According to Jane 1 and Jane 3, discipline experiences occur in excluded spaces during negative conflicts. The participants describe school environments characterized by educator decisions that push them from classrooms. Scholarship examining how the structure of schools contributes to conflicts between students and teachers by way of student resistance re-casts students as agents, arguing that their challenging behaviors seek empowerment, rather than reflecting a deficit (Brown & Rodríguez, 2009; Fine, 1991).

Soja (1996) provides a framework for this empowerment in terms of First, Second, and Third Spaces. Third Space includes school intervention decisions in a social space where youth are active participants in the process. A Third Space does not characterized the findings of this study because school spaces are exclusive and not interconnected between equality and social relations. The Second Space can be described as “the way it could be,” and emerges when an individual or group responds to the existing policies and systems of the First Space. The findings of the current study are not Second Space either because Second Space involves “response” for change. All the girls

only describe acts of “resistance.” Thus, the active resistance to excluded spaces is described as exclusive spaces that resemble First Space.

The narratives are situated in a First Space because power in social spaces, is described as “the way it is.” Each girl describes First Spaces’ where they are silenced through perceived “bad” behavior found in Labeling Theory and disconnected relationships found in Symbolic Interactionism. In the First Space, school decisions are controlled and constructed by adults with the most power without the inclusion of student voice. Looking at the continuum of discipline in partnership with school spaces, the ways society potentially misunderstands and misrepresents elements of black femininity, an understanding about girls being “bad” develops. A set of conditions reveals itself and presents disproportionate contact with the criminal legal system and school disciplinarians or policies and practices.

The convergence of multiple factors within First Space or Exclusive Third Space presents girls who are dealing with multiple forms of oppression. Their resistance to that oppression is often misread as combative, angry behavior. The discussion of discipline and black girls, must have a central focus of oppression to explore the cultural conditions that renders black girls uniquely vulnerable to having their behaviors read as loud, aggressive and dangerous to the school environment. In Third Spaces, histories of exclusion and enactments of power are acknowledged and used to guide the construction of new practices.

Educators could better support persistently disciplined students by recognizing the strengths reflected in challenging behaviors (Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, & Hanna, 2010). Jane 2 and Jane 3 identify relationships with adults associated with discipline such as

administrator or security guard, but not a teacher. To ensure engaged instruction, schools must also recognize how teachers with the most office referrals implement classroom management plans. In the cases of Jane 1, Jane 2, and Jane 3, we see students that perceive school through disconnected interactions with teachers who rely on zero tolerance to resolve conflicts. A paradigm shift in school discipline is needed to illuminate how school structures contribute to discipline interactions.

The narratives illustrate experiences affecting each girl in different ways, but also generally resulted in commonalities of self-appraisal, reflected appraisal, resistance and acceptance. Their voices resonate with experiences of social *distance* in school spaces. This distance is found in the resistance to perceived female behavior. Within the constructs of female behavior is the perception of femininity shaped by possible biases and stereotypes that cultivate subjective labels. The following sections discuss how Jane Crow archetype is silenced in school discipline, and implications for future research, policy and practice.

Being Jane Crow

The disconnection between girls' behavior and girls' arrests has laid the foundation for increased policing of minor forms of girls' violence (particularly fights in and around schools) and mandatory arrests of girls for 'domestic violence' (often in response to a family argument or even abuse) among others (Chesney-Lind & Mauer, 2002). Shifts in policing and policies (like zero tolerance initiatives in schools) have bolstered the detention and judicial processing of girls, and it is girls of color, not those of white girls, that have increased the most markedly.

The Commission on the Status of Women in San Francisco has brought attention to these figures in a hearing into the over-arrest of black girls in their city (Chesney-Lind, 2003). The inquiry noted that black girls in San Francisco comprise just 2 percent of California's black girls, but they comprise fully 12 per cent of the state's female arrests for robbery (Chesney-Lind & Mauer, 2003). These constructions of some women as 'bad', particularly black girls and women, supports racist notions that are arguably at the core of United States culture. Gendered racial microaggressions could take the form of assumptions about cultural ways of being.

The findings of this study compliment the theoretical and empirical literature on racial micro aggression that pathologizes cultural values and communication styles of black women found in literature on people of color (Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). Both institutionalized social constructs and the educational system play crucial and complementary roles in black girl's disproportionate contact with the criminal justice system. Many of the behaviors the study participants were disciplined for seemed to defy traditional standards of femininity and closely paralleled the behaviors of stereotypical images of black women as hypersexualized, angry, and hostile (West, 1995). Similar to Morris' (2007) findings, in which teachers often commented on the inappropriate and "unlady like" behavior.

Over the past decade, a growing body of literature on the black woman in America has assessed misconceptions and myths about who she is, and how she functions. The concern here is the lack of consistency in what constitutes defiant behavior within the educational system and how it contributes to black girls referrals for defiance. The lived experiences of black girls in urban communities of the United States have been

obscured by racial injustice agenda that persistently prioritizes black males. Black girls are also experiencing disproportionate school discipline practices in different, but just as frequent ways. Given that females of color will comprise approximately 53% of the U.S. population by the year 2050 (Ahmad & Iverson, 2013), the idea of leaving them out of a national discourse on education is educationally unsound and inequitable. Yet, this is the situation in which black girls currently and frequently find themselves.

While black girls continue to experience marginalization and exclusionary classrooms, there is a failure to examine and conceptualize the integrated issues of race and gender (Mirza, 2009; Pinder & Blackwell, 2014). Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), during the 2011-12 school year, shows 12 percent of all black female pre K- 12 students received an out-of-school suspension, which is six times the rate of white girls and more than any other group of girls and several groups of boys. Additionally, 19 percent of black girls with disabilities received out-of-school suspensions, compared to just 6 percent of white girls with disabilities. Like many black girls in the United States, Jane 1, Jane 2 and Jane 3 frequently miss learning opportunities because their teachers send them out of class for infractions such as having a bad attitude and talking back.

Smith-Evans et al. (2014) examines barriers to educational success for black girls, and access to leadership opportunities. One important barrier identified in the report is the prevalence of stereotypes that adversely impact the educational experiences of black girls. The report states, “The intersection of racial and gender stereotypes has a significant impact on discipline rates for African American girls, likely due in part to bias in the exercise of discretion by teachers and administrators” (p. 6) . Stereotypes as being angry, aggressive, promiscuous, and/or loud have permeated the black female identity

(Koonce, 2012; Evans-Winters, 2005). As a result, black girls are more likely than white girls to be penalized for behaviors that challenge our society's dominant stereotypes of what is appropriate "feminine" behavior.

This implicit bias leads to more severe punishments for black girls than for other girls, and higher proportions of black girls being referred to the juvenile justice system for minor disciplinary infractions. While the current study only features the experiences of three persistently disciplined girls, their detailed insights into interactions with educators during discipline events illuminate the highly problematic nature of school discipline. There is need for school reform initiatives supporting gender-specific objectives that are not colorblind. Murray (1965) affirmed that race and sex discrimination were connected and she invoked the experiences of black women to demonstrate overlapping and interconnected forms of inequality. The dual realities of the intersectional oppression of racism and sexism experienced during discipline interactions by the black girls in this study epitomize, *The Jane Crow*.

Implications for Future Research, Policy and Practice

Recommendations are targeted for future research in school discipline disparity, educational policy, and classroom teachers that work with black girls on the front lines of education. The recommendations below describe in more detail ways to further identify and address the particular challenges faced by black girls and how to improve their schooling experiences. More research is needed to identify practices and programs that will best improve outcomes for black girls in public education. The current study encourages researchers, policymakers, and educators to invest resources to improve

educational outcomes for black girls. The following recommendations provide a roadmap for such action.

Future Research

Future research committed to educational equity, must continue to interrogate and center the narratives of black girls in ways that establish a more robust and critical engagement. The narratives of the current study illustrate experiences affecting each girl in different ways, but also generally resulted in commonalities of self-appraisal, reflected appraisal, resistance and acceptance. Their voices resonate with experiences of social *distance* in school spaces. This distance is found in the resistance to perceived female behavior.

Within the constructs of female behavior is the perception of femininity shaped by possible biases and stereotypes that cultivate labels. The subjective labeling of students fosters oppressed agency in excluded public school spaces. There is a deficiency in the research literature exploring the voices of black adolescent girls in the public middle school discipline process. Literature that explores school discipline has examined disproportionate high poverty, urban, minorities in the school-to-prison pipeline (Balfanz, et al., 2003; Edelman, 2007; Wald & Losen, 2003), the discipline gap (Gregory et al., 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Monroe, 2009) and ethnic overrepresentation in exclusionary discipline (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Additional research also has investigated the school experiences and perceptions of black girls who have experienced exclusionary discipline (Blake et al., 2011; Murphy et al., 2013; Morris, 2007; Thornberg 2007). These studies highlight the subjectivity of teacher perception in discipline sanctions for black girls.

There is a gap in the literature and need for research that directly explores the perceptions of middle school black girls who are most affected by the school-to-prison pipeline experience. This research is meant to create schools where students can learn without the threat of being pushed out or excluded; where they can speak up without being silenced and where their needs are heard and valued. Scholars should consider in-depth empirical studies that explore the topic of female discipline in urban environments that are disaggregated by race, as the literature is relatively silent in this area. Studies should also seek to build on Skiba et al.'s (2002) study design to amplify the injustice found in K-12 public school discipline. In addition to assessing inequity in discipline infractions using quantitative techniques, this study recommends scholars build on qualitative techniques that fully explore the perspectives of excluded black girls or black girls at-risk for school exclusion (Clark et al., 2003).

Further research is needed to understand how educators can use management strategies in order to avoid an overreliance on methods of exclusionary discipline. Furthermore, it is possible that black girls risk for experiencing exclusionary discipline practices reflect a lack of cultural distance between teachers and students, since the majority of teachers employed in MCSD are predominately white (Monroe & Obidah, 2004). While this study did not directly test this relationship since data on the racial/ethnic background of the referring teacher for the participant's infractions was not available. Yet, it is still recommended that future research examine student-teacher ethnic/racial match to determine the degree to which a lack of cultural distance between teachers and students contributes to black girls' risk for exclusionary discipline.

It is also recommended that training is developed to cultivate educators' cultural understanding and empathy to decrease exclusionary classroom based practices. This is particularly true in light of a wave of current reforms in the United States that restrict schools' use of exclusionary discipline, and instead, encourage schools to adopt a rehabilitative approach to discipline (Freedberg & Frey 2012). Some critics of this approach argue that without the voices of students included in the discourse, school reform will remain ineffective and school structures oppressive (Anyon, 2005; Fine, 1991; Smyth, 2006). Gregory and Weinstein (2008) noted that defiance - a common infraction of black females in this study - were specific to the context of classrooms.

Black students are more likely to be defiant in classrooms of teachers they perceived as less caring and who had lower expectations of them academically (Gregory & Weinstein 2008). Other research similarly indicates the student-teacher relationship is specifically important for black students. This is apparent by increased engagement and achievement for black elementary students who have strong relationships with their teachers (Hughes et al. 2008). Research on the discipline gap shows disproportionate rates of exclusionary discipline with students of color stem from educators' subjective judgments of student behaviors (Blake et al., 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 2002). Teacher beliefs about the values of students' cultures, the role of those cultures in the classroom, and students' potential for success greatly impact students' academic and behavioral outcomes (Au & Blake, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Addressing student experiences and teacher beliefs equally in reducing the discipline gap in schools could shift perceptions of, and responses to, classroom

behaviors. Future research in reducing discipline disproportionality needs to explore the strengthening of student-teacher relationships by increasing student engagement and feelings of school belonging. Future research could also involve classroom observations and analyses of educators who resist the labeling of students as “bad” and nurture a “gifted mindset” towards persistently disciplined students. An understanding of how some educators are able to defuse “drama” and avoid employing exclusionary discipline could allow for creating alternate ways to respond to student behaviors.

Policy

The needs of black girls are often overlooked by policy makers and contribute to a lack of educational programming and policies. Policies simply focusing on race or gender ignore the unique positionality in which black girls live and learn. In his discussion of color and culture-blind policy and document analyses, Milner (2007) states:

Without a direct focus on the racialized and cultural practices of teachers and administrators in referring students to the office or to special education, dangers could materialize that would make it difficult for policy changes to occur—changes that could benefit learning and achievement among students of color.

Indeed, dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen may surface when researchers adopt color- and culture-blind policy and document analyses. (p. 393)

The stories of middle school black girls suspended from their home school will magnify the sense of urgency needed in revamping policies concerning school discipline.

Inquiry into adolescent black girl’s perceptions of discipline centers a student voice in why and how students are pushed from or jump out of urban public schools. Klingner et al. (2005) recommended examination of federal, state, district, and school

policies to create culturally responsive educational systems, including such areas as funding, the influence of high-stakes tests, teacher performance with culturally diverse populations, and teacher training in culturally competent pedagogy. For black girls that frequently attend to these hyper-segregated schools, high-poverty, and often low-performing, schools, there is the belief that zero-tolerance responses to negative student behavior is the way to curb negative student behavior. To address zero tolerance policy contributing to the discipline gap and ultimate school-to-prison pipeline, the following federal, state, local district and school policy implications are recommended.

Federal and State Policies. Federal and state policies should create opportunities to help amplify the voices of black girls who are marginalized. The inclusion of black girls voices in policy creation ensures their perspectives and their needs are visible, supported, and prioritized at every level in the public, private and nonprofit sectors. It is recommended that federal and state agencies assess and report on existing federal and state programs and their impact on black girls, and make recommendations for improvement. In addition, more funding is needed for research projects to examine and identify interventions that hold promise for best improving educational outcomes for black girls. Ultimately, it is recommended to target resources and supports to improve school environments and their educational outcomes for black girls.

District and School Policies. Local districts and schools should report and make publicly accessible student academic and school climate data, including school discipline data, cross-tabulated by race, gender, and disability. Local districts and schools should develop forums with focus groups, involving youth and community members, to identify community and culturally-responsive strategies to address issues facing black girls. They

should also develop and implement support programs that nurture leadership development for black girls. These programs should provide services and mentorship for black girls, including culturally appropriate, gender-responsive, mental health services. Local districts and schools can either reinforce dominant ideas that are present in society, or they can actively work to develop skillsets among young people to be critical participants in the process of developing the society they would like to live in. Lastly, develop policies that expose black girls to black women in leadership positions — through ongoing mentoring programs, field trips, and guest speakers, so that they know they can achieve their goals and grow to be successful women.

Practice

Narratives such as Jane 1, Jane 2 and Jane 3 can be used to develop curriculum designed to cultivate teachers' abilities in responding appropriately to challenging student behaviors. The recently released federal guidance to schools (US Department of Education, 2014) and the Council of State Governments Justice Center's The School Discipline Consensus Report (Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, & Cohen, 2014) emphasize the significance of a positive school climate to improve student discipline outcomes. The discipline gap can be narrowed with the consistent application and monitoring of classroom expectations through positive reinforcement strategies. Given the social consequences of exclusionary discipline for black girls, it is important to identify strategies that address and reduce inequitable discipline practices.

While studies such as Morris (2007) provide a rich foundation for using intersectionality to understand how educators perceive black girls, we do not have a thorough understanding of how girls of color perceive their own behavior during

discipline events. Fenning and Rose (2007) proposed the implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to remedy disproportionate discipline practices. Prevention strategies such as PBIS have been suggested as evidence-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline (US Department of Education, 2014).

PBIS is a continuum of proactive discipline procedures used to actively decrease problem behaviors and increase positive interaction between students and teachers through the implementation of clearly defined standards for student behavior (Sugai et al., 2000). PBIS has been shown to decrease office referrals for all students and increase teacher efficacy in behavior management (Netzel & Eber, 2003). While these strategies can reduce the overall number of exclusionary discipline incidents, their effectiveness in reducing the discipline gap remains suspect (Tobin & Vincent, 2011). Often overlooked in this literature to date is the role of educator beliefs in transforming school practices (Welner & Oakes, 1999).

Successful implementation of even the best programs relies on the beneficence, skill, and dedication of educators. However, when educators do not believe in educating those who challenge them, or when educators' prejudices lead them to dismiss students on the margins; negative beliefs may impede the success of any initiatives that attempt to change the status quo (Corbett, Wilson, & Williams, 2002). Negative educator beliefs can impede positive change toward more equitable discipline practices through deficit oriented paradigms and implicit biases. PBIS incorporated with cultural competence training into the program is a possible solution to creating such transformational change during discipline interactions.

Cultural competence training in combination with clearly defined standards for student behavior could decrease teacher perception of negative stereotypes and misconceptions. Attending to the interpersonal dimension of teaching is a critical component of effective pedagogy for students of color, such as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1999) and warm demander pedagogy (Bondy et al., 2012; Ware 2006). Teacher educators, and teacher education programs, must coherently integrate such pedagogical frameworks into preparation curriculum in order to build teacher capacity for diverse student populations (Howard & Aleman, 2008). Training teachers to focus on relationships with students while simultaneously managing discipline problems has been shown to increase teacher efficacy in classroom behavior management and subsequently decrease office referrals (Netzel & Eber, 2003). The inclusion of clear definitions of behavior found in PBIS and teacher cultural competency training may assist in reducing the overrepresentation of black females in the discipline system.

While multicultural education and culturally responsive approaches have been adopted by teacher education programs and required in some districts and states, many pre- and in-service training lack transformative strategies that empower effective change to discipline practices. Educators' continued lack of support consistently positions students as unworthy of intervention (Collins, 2011), which can incite students to react in ways that confirm their teachers' negative estimations of them (D'Amato, 1993). Educators' views of students who repeatedly exhibit challenging behaviors and become labeled as "bad" define students in sum total by their behaviors and presume students lack value for their education. Educators enter schools with little previous contact with racial groups other than their own.

Unless pervasive negative stereotypes are explicitly challenged, educators can carry these common stereotypes with them into schools. Teachers should also seek to make the schooling experience for black girls better by raising the level of expectation (Landsman and Lewis 2006) for academic achievement and utilizing practical teaching practices for utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2006) that keep this population focused on academic coursework. While PBIS working in conjunction with culturally competent practices have proven to positively impact school discipline, the participants in this study seemly appear to experience school spaces specific to students placed at alternative schools. Their narratives unanimously describe negative, sometimes violent interactions with peers and adults. These common interactions have led to parallel experiences with law enforcement and the juvenile justice system.

While this study did not directly examine the relationship between alternative schools and the school-to-prison pipeline, subsequent work with expelled students has suggested the relationship between alternative schools and incarceration (Vanderhaar et al., 2013). Literature in juvenile justice has also connected an increased presence of school-based police officers with educators' increased dependence on school police. Educators responses to students' challenging behaviors has resulted in increased involvement with the juvenile justice system (Rios 2011). To address exclusionary discipline in relation to alternative school-to- juvenile justice system pipeline, restorative practices are one of the most widely cited strategies (McCluskey et al., 2008; Pavelka, 2013; Teske, 2011).

Restorative practices are inclusive, evidenced based programs supporting positive school culture and intended to keep students in school . Most importantly, it is focused on

responding to conflict by repairing relationships that may have been damaged. As previously mentioned, research shows exclusionary discipline in school is closely linked to academic failure, dropout and involvement in juvenile justice. Policies like zero tolerance extend exclusionary practices when administrators are required to issue prescribed punitive consequences regardless of the behavior (Teske, 2011). School administrators must especially show due diligence to prevent biased ineffective discipline practices that perpetuate racial disparity in alternative school placement.

Successful implementation of restorative practices requires leaders to model daily reflection on school interactions, reevaluation of values, beliefs, biases and patience with the process of cultural and systemic change (McCluskey et al., 2008). It is imperative for school leadership to facilitate tough issues of ethnic inequality when looking at school's discipline data (Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Kohler, Henderson & Wu, 2006). As part of examining discipline data trends, administrators must take the lead in promoting a safe space where staff can be honest about racialized data patterns.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that black girls have similar experiences in the school discipline system as their black male counterparts. All black youth seem to be overrepresented in various discipline infractions and subsequent exclusionary discipline practices. Black females specifically, are more likely to experience discipline practices that exclude them from the school environment than other females. Physical separation across schools and districts by race and class remains the norm. The structure of relationships between groups in our society remains largely segregated, lessening the opportunities for students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds to have the same

access to high-quality schools. This also creates a space for groups to interact and have their stereotypes of one another challenged. Experiences in schools are not just segregated physically, but also bound socially. Physical and psychological separation by race creates very real boundaries in lived experience that make learning from and understanding each other difficult.

Despite the end of legal sanctions upholding strict segregation, there has not yet been a real and functional integration in schools and society. The absence of a truly integrated society in which Americans live together as equals has a nation unable to learn from one another. Surmounting stereotypes magnify social inequities that run rampant in United States schools and society. In public schooling, adults and youth interact across race lines more than people in many other careers, while in many cases being underprepared to do so. The rapidly increasing diversity in our nation's student population warrants education programs prepared to meet diverse needs. PBIS, culturally responsive classroom management and restorative practices has been offered as strategies to address this problem. With greater insight into black female perspectives of schooling, educators and policymakers can be better prepared to design learning environments and educational experiences that produce positive outcomes for a growing population of female students of color.

Sixty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, America remains relatively segregated as a society. The boundaries between the experiences of those of different heritages remain still-pervasive stereotypes with vastly separate experiences for students and teachers of different races. Researchers, policy-makers and educators must come together and honestly talk about the racial and ethnic stereotypes and inequalities that

shape our school discipline patterns, so *all* students, regardless of race and gender, get a fair chance at receiving a quality education. Recent organized philanthropic efforts have committed to improve outcomes for boys and men of color. This signals an understanding of challenges facing black boys, but girls experiencing the same educational hardships are being ignored.

In sum, this research is a call to action for significant commitments to improve educational outcomes for black girls. The data in this study lays the groundwork for researchers, policymakers and educators to develop an agenda and target funding to address the needs of women and girls of color in the United States. Their narratives represent an opportunity to hear from the stories of girls who have experienced school pushout. The narratives of black girls require equal attention, especially when overlapped with oppressions black girls uniquely face as the *New Jane Crow*.

CHAPTER XI
INTRODUCTION: STUDY THREE

Statement of the Problem

While most Americans recognize the names Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and Eric Garner as Black men recently slain by police officers, how many people know the names Natasha McKenna, Rekia Boyd, and Janisha Fonville as Black *women* killed by police officers? The media coverage of racial injustice toward Black men has drawn much needed attention to race relations in the United States and the criminalization of Black males. However, Black women also experience unfair treatment in the criminal justice system as well as other institutions, including schools. After the July 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder of Trayvon Martin, an unwitting activist wrote a reflection and started the Twitter hashtag “#blacklivesmatter” beginning a new movement for the plight of Black Americans on social media (Day, 2015). Also, in response to the Zimmerman verdict, President Obama began a program focusing on supporting young Black males through his My Brother’s Keeper initiative, funneling significant financial means into programs for this population (Fischer, 2014).

There is no doubt Black males are treated unfairly in our criminal justice and education systems. However, Black females also experience disproportionate negative outcomes at alarming rates, especially when compared to White females, as observed in the achievement gap, the discipline gap, and the school-to-prison pipeline (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). The few studies attending to the unique experiences of Black girls within the discipline gap focus on their needs and challenges (a deficit-based approach) rather than their strengths (Kennedy-Lewis, Murphy, & Grosland, 2014; E. W. Morris, 2007; Murphy, Acosta, & Kennedy-Lewis, 2013). Black females deserve equal attention and support in the conversations and initiatives around race and racism in the

United States, especially as they relate to experiences of discipline (Crenshaw et al., 2015). I seek to draw out the often-overlooked or misconceived strengths of Black girls (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darenbourg, 2011) by applying a resource-oriented perspective through Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2005) and Hinton's (2015) reconceptualization of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this embedded case study (Yin, 2014) is to discover the strengths of Black girls who have been persistently disciplined in high school. I seek to broaden and deepen educators' and researchers' understanding of the range of strengths held by persistently disciplined Black female high school students and how they apply these strengths to overcome challenges, in particular related to oppressive, disproportionate discipline. Black girls experience exclusionary discipline such as suspension and expulsion from school at higher rates than White females (Crenshaw et al., 2015). This disproportionality exists at even higher levels than the disproportionality in discipline for Black boys compared to White boys (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Additional consideration must be paid to Black girls. Blake et al. (2011) state:

Additional studies are warranted that explore the topic of female discipline in urban environments that are disaggregated by race, as the literature is relatively silent in this area...we recommend that scholars adopt qualitative techniques to more fully explore the perspectives of excluded Black girls or Black girls at-risk for school exclusion. (p. 103)

Researchers must find out more about this population and how Black girls experience and navigate the achievement and discipline gaps in our school system. We must challenge

deficit thinking and identify and promote the importance of strengths of communities of color beyond the dominant cultural capital our society traditionally values. Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2014) recommend continued development of stories of persistently disciplined students and “actively positioning students as successes rather than failures” (p. 25). Interviews applying the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process (Cooperrider et al., 2005) will be conducted with students and adults the girls identify as influential in their lives. This, along with other data collected (archival records and observations), will be reviewed within a new framework drawing on strengths of communities of color (Hinton, 2015) to increase understanding of persistently disciplined Black girls within a positive, resource-oriented mindset.

Setting the Context

The popular press tends to focus on the pathology of Black students as delinquent underachievers as seen in the achievement gap, the discipline gap and the school-to-prison pipeline. My Brother’s Keeper and the #BlackLivesMatter Movement turn the attention to the systemic failure of urban schools to effectively educate Black students rather than the individual failure of Black students to succeed in school. These initiatives seek to highlight and change the long history of urban schools failing Black students. Urban schools face significant challenges that influence their ability to effectively educate the students they serve. Students who attend urban schools are more likely to be living in poverty and identify as students of color (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Noguera, 2008). They are also more likely to struggle with academic achievement and have inexperienced teachers (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Noguera, 2008). Leaders of initiatives that demand public education and non-profit organizations serve

youth of color in a proactive and intentional way recognize the challenges faced by urban schools and that we need systemic, meaningful change.

An achievement gap in education between Black and White students has long been recognized and discussed in schools (Coleman et al., 1966; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Studies also show students eligible for free- and reduced-lunch, an indicator for poverty, achieve at significantly lower levels academically than their higher income peers (DeArmond et al., 2015). Although many educational initiatives have sought to address the inequities in education particularly for low-income, minority students, significant differences in academic progress continue today (Jeynes, 2015).

In a critical examination of the achievement gap, growing concern for the fair treatment of Black students has identified a discipline gap as a salient factor within Black student achievement (Blake et al., 2011; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Gregory et al., 2010; A. Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). The oppressive discipline systems in schools inequitably exclude Black students from classroom learning, which has a pronounced influence on their academic progress. To further problematize this issue, school professionals overwhelmingly feel uncomfortable talking about race, and they often do not recognize the racialized nature of many challenges in education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Pollock, 2004; Singleton, 2015). This discomfort and lack of awareness hinder many educators' abilities to engage in dialogue explore real solutions (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Pollock, 2004; Singleton, 2015). Many people maintain colorblind mindsets with the belief that we live in a post-racial society and ignore the issue of race (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2014; Love, 2014).

Additionally, Black youth face significant dissonance between their home and school lives that influences their classroom experiences and academic progress (Khalifa, 2010; Tyler et al., 2010). Studies have found exclusionary discipline, including in- and out-of-school suspension, is not effective in changing behavior or improving outcomes for youth (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997).

The attention on Black students has overwhelmingly resulted in researchers examining the experiences of Black boys because they have the highest populations demonstrating underachievement and experiencing exclusionary discipline (Allen, 2010; Harper, 2015). Researchers have criticized initiatives focused on Black males as exclusionary and asked, “What about Black *girls*?” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Ricks, 2014). In fact, studies have shown the discipline gap is more disproportionate for Black girls compared to White girls than Black boys compared to White boys (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Crenshaw et al. (2015) examined challenges and disproportionality in schools faced by Black girls, initiating a call to action to more equitably understand and serve this population. Crenshaw et al. (2015) identified Black females experience greater disproportionate discipline in schools than Black males. Most studies that explore the discipline gap apply a quantitative approach and statistical analysis (Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 1997; Wallace et al., 2008). The few qualitative studies exploring the experiences of persistently disciplined Black girls focus on student and teacher perceptions of the discipline process and the challenges faced by this population in general (Blake et al., 2011; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2014; E. W. Morris, 2007; M. W. Morris, 2016). Researchers identify the cultural dissonance between schools and students and the influences of school culture and climate (Vincent et al., 2011). Additionally,

reform initiatives supposedly aimed at decreasing the discipline gap are not inherently culturally responsive and although they decrease overall behavior referrals, they do not decrease the discipline gap (Vincent et al., 2011).

School professionals sometimes engage in deficit-based thinking, and thus often fail to recognize the strengths and cultural knowledge Black students bring to school (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Tuck, 2009). Little attention has been paid to more fully understanding Black girls, in particular those who have persistently experienced exclusionary disciplinary practices in schools, especially through the application of a strengths-based framework. These young women bring significant strengths and knowledge to which educators should be asking not, “What’s wrong with them?” but, “What’s *strong* with them?” These holes in the literature may be explained by the small population of Black females in academia and policy leadership positions due to the dual discrimination they face as both women and people of color. Women in these positions have only recently banded together to promote this agenda as a research topic and gender/race gaps (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Ongoing racism and sexism along with a lack of awareness and desire to explore issues of race and gender perpetuate the discipline and achievement gaps for Black girls. Often with the deficit framework, researchers focus on the pathology of individuals (e.g. Black boys) rather than a systemic or structural approach to examining problems, solutions and change, inclusive of multiple marginalized populations.

School leaders recognize the importance of contextual factors, but lack the needed exploration of what works, drawing on strengths (e.g. Appreciative Inquiry) and

developing potential solutions. Cooperrider et al. (2005) attribute the success of AI as an effective change method to the underlying assumption that every individual and system:

...has something that works right – things that give it life when it is most alive, effective, successful, and connected in healthy ways to its stakeholders and communities. AI begins by identifying what is positive and connecting to it in ways that heighten energy, vision, and action for change. (p. xv)

Cooperrider et al. (2005) affirm the value of a strengths-based approach and assert the effectiveness of AI stems from the process of liberating voices, personalizing relationships, building hope, harnessing individual choice, developing capacity, and increasing positivity. Applying this process by engaging in meaningful conversation with persistently disciplined Black girls will allow their voices to be heard in new and different ways and inform school leaders' understanding of this population and the positive foundation on which they can continue to build.

Community cultural wealth (CCW) provides a resource-oriented framework for thinking about communities of color (Yosso, 2005). However, Hinton (2015) reconceptualized this framework arguing there are ways to think about culture outside of a capitalist mindset that align more with social justice ideology. He promotes a new way of considering strengths of communities of color without applying a paradigm focused on wealth. The strengths he identifies include trust, love, spirituality and resistance (Hinton, 2015). These areas align particularly well with the experiences of Black girls and research, which has shown the importance of relationships, religion and self-advocacy and strength in these areas for our young Black women (Adams, 2010; Alston, 2005; Brice, 2011; Reed & Neville, 2014; Ricks, 2014; West, 1995).

Definition of Terms

Success in education has been defined in many ways ranging from grade promotion to proficient and distinguished test scores, to compliant behavior. In the context of this study, I will use the term “continue” in education in lieu of “success.” “Continue” signifies students are making progress toward high school graduation. Thus, students “continue” in education through enrollment in a comprehensive high school program and the accrual of credits toward graduation. “Persistently disciplined” signifies a student has been suspended out-of-school for two or more incidents in the current school year (August 2015 to March 2016). This definition is drawn from the work of Murphy et al. (2013).

Research Questions

Through this qualitative research, I explore the following two research questions:

1. What strengths and supports do persistently disciplined Black girls draw on to continue in education?
2. What inspires persistently disciplined Black adolescent girls to continue in education?

Data Sources and Analysis Methods

In this study, I apply Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider et al., 2005) to integrate a strengths-based approach to engaging with persistently disciplined Black girls and the adults they identify as influential in their lives. Appreciative Inquiry began in the field of organizational development and has only recently been applied in educational settings. San Martin and Calabrese (2011) emphasize the value of applying AI in schools “to inspire educators to think in new ways about learning” (p. 110). In order to gain

sufficient depth in understanding the participants' experiences in this embedded case study (Yin, 2014), I focused on three Black girls who had been suspended multiple times and attended the same high school at the time of the study. Participants were identified and recruited through a review of student records searching for multiple out-of-school suspensions for students identified as Black females in the school database. I analyzed data by means of multiple rounds of coding interview transcripts, direct and participant observations and triangulated findings through analysis of student records and physical artifacts of student work. The limitations of this study are the sample size and my positionality as a researcher embedded in the school context. The delimitations of this study include the bounding of the sample within one school and district.

Significance of the Study

In this study I address a gap in the disproportionate discipline literature by reframing the traditionally pathologized and deficit-based examination of persistently disciplined Black girls through focusing on their strengths. I bridge community, home and school factors in the pursuit of equity in education for persistently disciplined Black girls. This research will influence researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners in increasing understanding of discipline and behavior to inform future studies, create more equitable policies, and better prepare educators to apply concepts of race, discipline and equity in their practice.

The study findings contribute to future research by highlighting the significance of key areas of strength for persistently disciplined Black girls that can be further explored in future studies. Examples include engaging Black girls in Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) around issues of discipline, exploring the importance of

spirituality to Black girls, identifying effective proactive home visiting approaches, and understanding the role of romantic relationships and racial identity for persistently disciplined Black girls. A more contextualized understanding of Black girls can inform community and family engagement policy and practice. Teacher education, professional development and hiring policies all have the potential to positively or negatively influence disproportionate discipline. With the predominance of White individuals in the education profession (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter, 2001), hiring policy may be reviewed to improve recruitment and retention of minority teachers. Policy-makers and practitioners can move towards decreasing the discipline gap by *reaching out* to engage students. *Reaching out* works in contrast to the current exclusionary discipline practices that *push students out* into the school-to-prison pipeline. Additional implications include an increase in training on culturally responsive practices for educators including both academic and behavioral interventions and approaches. In addition, schools must continue to explore and implement programs that focus on culturally responsive pedagogy, positive behavior, restorative practices and developing trust within teacher-student relationships to promote success for marginalized students.

Summary and Organization of Remaining Chapters

In this chapter, I described the importance of applying a strengths-based perspective to explore the experiences of persistently disciplined Black girls within the context of the achievement gap, the discipline gap, and the school-to-prison pipeline. The rest of this study is organized in the following manner. In Chapter XII, I review the relevant literature exploring the achievement gap, the discipline gap, and the school-to-prison pipeline with a focus on the experiences of Black girls. I also describe the

theoretical foundations of the conceptual framework. In Chapter XIII, I describe the methodological approach to research including the rationale for incorporating appreciative inquiry, justification of site and participants, and procedures for data collection. In Chapter XIV, I explain the analysis and results of my study. In Chapter XV, I discuss my findings including implications for research, policy, and practice.

CHAPTER XII
LITERATURE REVIEW: STUDY THREE

In this study, I aim to discover and highlight the strengths and supports of persistently disciplined Black high school girls within the context of the discipline gap. Through this qualitative research, I explore the following two research questions:

1. What strengths and supports do persistently disciplined Black girls draw on to continue in education?
2. What inspires persistently disciplined Black adolescent girls to continue in education?

I address a deficiency in the literature regarding the strengths of Black adolescent girls who have disproportionately experienced school discipline through multiple suspensions. Other researchers have explored perceptions of teachers and Black students around disciplinary infractions (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2014; E. W. Morris, 2007; Murphy et al., 2013), the strengths of academically gifted Black girls (Adams, 2010; Brice, 2011; Evans-Winters, 2014; Mayes & Hines, 2014; Reed & Neville, 2014), and the positive attributes of Black males (Allen, 2010; 2012; Harper, 2015; Harper & Associates, 2014). Additional research has delved into the school experiences and perceptions of Black girls who have experienced persistent discipline (Blake et al., 2011; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2014; Murphy et al., 2013). However, there is a gap in the literature and need for research that directly explores individual, family, and community strengths of persistently disciplined Black adolescent girls. My research challenges the master narrative of persistently disciplined Black girls as loud, hostile, and defiant. Instead, I evoke the strengths of persistently disciplined Black girls for school leaders to learn from and build upon to engage and support the personal and educational growth of Black girls.

The Plight of Black Students

Black students in general experience greater challenges within schools than White students. An achievement gap between Black and White students has long been recognized as a primary issue in education wherein White students significantly outperform Black students on standardized tests, even when controlling for a number of other factors (A. Gregory et al., 2010). Recent literature points to the need to more closely investigate the gaps in achievement and discipline for Black girls in particular (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Evans-Winters, 2014; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Mayes & Hines, 2014; Ricks, 2014). Although many studies focus on the challenges faced by Black students (Noguera, 2008; Williams & Bryan, 2013), a growing trend in the literature emphasizes the importance of highlighting the strengths students bring to school and apply to navigate their school experience (Lind, 2013; San Martin & Calabrese, 2011; Tuck, 2009). In this study, I combine these areas to investigate the experiences of Black high school girls and the cultural and community assets they hold and use to overcome educational and life challenges.

Discipline Gap

Throughout history in the United States, school experiences for students of color have been disproportionately negative, from lack of access to quality schools dating back to segregation and desegregation in the 1950's, to a rise in overrepresentation of students of color in exclusionary discipline with adoption of zero tolerance discipline policies following the Gun Free Schools Act (1994) and the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (1996). Although school suspensions were first recognized as racially disproportionate over thirty years ago in the Children's Defense Fund (1975) study,

exclusionary practices have continued to exist and increase through over identification of students of color in special education, in particular behavioral disorders, (Gregory, 1997; Hosp & Reschly, 2003), exclusionary discipline including office referrals, suspension, alternative school placement, and expulsion (Browne, Losen, & Wald, 2001; Fenning & Rose, 2007) and corporal punishment (Gregory, 1995). Despite the lack of evidence to support zero tolerance policies in discipline, these practices continue (Skiba & Knesting, 2000). The existing body of research describing the “school-to-prison” pipeline points to inequities within schools and discipline practices that oppress students of color. Some argue students of color are accurately represented in discipline data because they misbehave more often or more severely. Multiple studies have found this is not the case and conclude unfair treatment of minority students does, in fact, take place in schools (Bickel & Qualls, 1980; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009).

School-to-Prison Pipeline

Research across methodologies supports the existence of a so-called “school-to-prison” pipeline, the idea that school disciplinary practices influence life outcomes, including involvement in juvenile justice (Casella, 2003; Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Shollenberger, 2015; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). In the last five years, additional attention has been placed on the significance of race and racial disproportionality within the “school-to-prison” pipeline (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2009; Shollenberger, 2015; Skiba et al., 2014; Vanderhaar, Petrosko, & Munoz, 2015).

In a comprehensive review of literature, Skiba et al. (2014) concluded the concept of the “school-to-prison” pipeline is more than a political metaphor, and exclusionary

school discipline practices do serve as a risk factor for negative educational and life outcomes. They determined this link to be consistent beyond other risk factors such as poverty and low academic achievement (Skiba et al., 2014). Review of state and district data in Florida (Acoca, 2000), Kentucky (Christle et al., 2005), and Missouri (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2009), along with a national analysis of longitudinal self-report data from 9,000 young people (Shollenberger, 2015) further supports the existence of the “school-to-prison” pipeline. This research demonstrates a clear link between school discipline practices and juvenile delinquency, which in turn increases a young person’s likelihood of ongoing involvement in the criminal justice system as an adult (Noguera, 2003).

Young people involved in school discipline face significant challenges in educational and life outcomes. Casella’s (2003) ethnographic research explored incarcerated individuals’ school experiences and highlighted the way school professionals often pathologize misbehavior and stigmatize young people early in their educational experiences with labels of “dangerous” or “jail bound.” This pathology and labeling often result in one negative behavioral incident snowballing quickly into ongoing delinquency (Casella, 2003). In addition, youth with criminal histories that do persist in education face discrimination in the college application process increasing barriers and decreasing access to opportunities in higher education and likelihood of positive life outcomes (Halkovic, 2014). Christle et al. (2005) further argued school leaders must look beyond the individual student to the school factors that influence student behavior and school professionals’ response to misbehavior. They argued the quantitative analysis of school factors relating to exclusionary discipline and delinquency across grade levels of statewide data in Kentucky showed schools have an important role

in preventing school dropout and youth delinquency (Christle et al., 2005). Edelman (2007) emphasized the public health nature of the problem in her editorial extending the “school-to-prison” pipeline to the entire family and community as the “cradle-to-prison” pipeline. She identified the “cradle-to-prison” pipeline as a disease or virus in a call to action for systemic change and proactive approaches by school and community leaders.

More recent research has focused on the significance of race within the “school-to-prison” pipeline and the disproportionate contact experienced by youth of color in the juvenile justice system (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2009; Shollenberger, 2015; Skiba et al., 2014; Vanderhaar et al., 2015). In a cross-county study in Missouri, Nicholson-Crotty et al. (2009) found Black youth were more likely to fall into a cycle of delinquent behavior after an initial offense than their White counterparts. They argued disproportionality in discipline, both in school and the juvenile justice system, exists not because Black students misbehave more, but because they receive harsher punishments than White students for the same behavior. Additionally, when Black students are suspended more often, they spend this out-of-school time in unstructured environments (e.g. out in the neighborhood without adult supervision) and may be influenced by peers who have dropped out of school or are involved in illegal activities. This raises their possibility of becoming involved with peers who influence them negatively, having more contact with police officers, resulting in more involvement in the juvenile justice system (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2009). Shollenberger (2015) further supported the broader negative influences of school disciplinary actions finding that controlling for suspension also reduced racial gaps in educational attainment and criminal justice outcomes. The more students were suspended, the more likely they would perform poorly academically and be

arrested or incarcerated, regardless of race (Shollenberger, 2015). Vanderhaar et al. (2015) emphasized the link between exclusionary discipline in the form of alternative school placement and involvement in juvenile detention in Kentucky in a longitudinal discrete time hazard study following a cohort of third grade students through graduation from 1998-2006. Alternative school placement had significantly more influence on juvenile justice involvement for Black youth; they were five times more likely than White youth to be involved in juvenile detention after being placed in a disciplinary alternative school (Vanderhaar et al., 2015).

The literature supports the existence of the “school-to-prison” pipeline and related racial disproportionality in large national, state and school district samples across quantitative and qualitative studies. Although some studies discussed are small, their findings are supported by large, national and statewide studies that have reviewed both secondary data and self-report data. These findings call for additional attention to the racial disproportionality in school discipline practices.

The majority of attention related to the discipline gap for students of color has focused on Black boys. Boys have higher rates of exclusionary discipline and Black boys receive the vast majority of all disciplinary actions. Quantitative studies of nationally representative data samples (Gregory, 1995; 1997; Wallace et al., 2008) and smaller scale state and district samples (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 1997) have consistently found school discipline practices to be racially disproportionate, most strongly for Black boys. This disproportionality has continued over the last thirty years despite an overall decline in school disciplinary actions since 2000 for all students except Black students (Wallace et

al., 2008). Before 2000, most studies focused primarily on Black boys and rarely mentioned specific data for Black girls due to the overall overrepresentation of boys in general and Black boys in particular in the discipline system. Gregory (1995) provided the first analysis of disproportionality in corporal punishment. He highlighted the extreme difference in likelihood of experiencing corporal punishment between Black boys and White girls (16:1) in nationally representative data from 43,000 schools (Gregory, 1995). An analysis of the same 1992 data from the Office of Civil Rights focused on the overrepresentation of Black boys in special education, especially in the area of behavioral disorders (Gregory, 1997). Within special education, behavioral disorders have the highest correlation with exclusion from general education classes, negative stigma and likelihood of dropout (Gregory, 1997).

The Plight of Black Girls

Black girls represent a unique perspective within youth of color. Recent studies have disaggregated data highlighting the challenges they face and strengths they possess that differ from Black boys (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Fordham, 1993; Reed & Neville, 2014). This research emphasizes the dual marginalization they experience of being both Black and female as well as beginning to recognize the distinctive assets Black girls hold that support them in overcoming the oppression of racism and sexism.

Discipline Gap

Although initial studies focused primarily on the overrepresentation of Black boys in exclusionary discipline, research has begun to address similar trends for Black girls. Gregory (1995) did provide the data to compare Black girls to White girls (5:1) in

receiving corporal punishment despite not identifying or discussing this finding. This difference is more significant than the difference between Black boys and White boys, which is 3 to 1 (Gregory, 1995). More recent studies (Crenshaw et al., 2015, Wallace et al., 2008) have begun to identify and discuss patterns in school discipline disaggregated by race and gender. These studies have exposed a significant gap for Black girls compared to White girls, in many instances more disproportionate than the discipline gap for Black boys compared to White boys. A study of a school district in Florida found out-of-school suspensions to be twice as likely for Black boys than White boys and more than twice as likely for Black girls compared to White girls (3:1 in middle school and 2.5:1 in high school) (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002). In an analysis of a nationally representative sample of tenth graders, researchers found Black girls experienced suspension and expulsion at a rate five times greater than White girls whereas Black boys experienced these same punishments at a rate only three times greater than White boys (Wallace et al., 2008).

Fordham (1993) argued that, although Black girls have been more successful academically than Black boys and experience exclusionary discipline to a lesser degree overall, the lack of attention to Black girls has silenced them and simultaneously punished them when they resist being silenced. Ongoing research has continued to focus on the issues faced by Black boys (Noguera, 2008) and sparked a national initiative (Fischer, 2014) to provide additional supports and opportunities to Black boys. Recently, Crenshaw et al. (2015) called for school leaders and policy makers to provide equal attention to Black girls. They presented additional research findings that Black girls are at an even greater disadvantage than Black boys within the disciplinary system. For

example, in New York City public schools in the 2011-2012 school year, for every one White girl expelled, there were 54 Black girls expelled. Comparatively, the gap is much smaller for Black boys: for every one White boy expelled, there are 10 Black boys expelled. Additionally, Black girls experience twice the disproportionate discipline Black boys do for suspension rates. In New York City public schools in the 2011-2012 school year, for every one White girl suspended, ten Black girls were suspended. For every one White boy suspended, there were five Black boys suspended (Crenshaw et al., 2015). These data demonstrates a need to further investigate this disproportionality and increase understanding of what the underlying issues are beneath the surface level data of these gaps.

Researchers have only recently begun to explore the significance of disproportionate discipline for Black girls and their perspectives on behavior. Blake et al. (2011) specifically examined the experiences of Black girls in an urban school district through a multivariate analysis of variance replicating the study design of Skiba et al. (2002). Their findings further supported the overrepresentation of Black girls in exclusionary discipline as compared to White girls, and identified common infractions as subjective (e.g. inappropriate dress and defiance), potentially related to a difference of interpretation, expression and expectation of femininity by Black girls and their teachers or administrators (Blake et al., 2011). E. W. Morris' (2007) findings support this differential view of femininity. He conducted classroom observations and interviewed 14 teachers and administrators as part of a 2-year ethnographic study. His research showed Black girls did not fit typically accepted White perceptions of femininity, thus resulting

in discipline referrals. Black girls tended to be more actively engaged and outspoken in the classroom than their male counterparts (E. W. Morris, 2007).

Conceptual Framework

In this study, Critical Race Theory (CRT) informs the counter storytelling aspects of the research (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) and works in concert with a new conceptualization of community cultural wealth (CCW) (Hinton, 2015; Yosso, 2005). CRT centers on the impacts of race and racism with a focus on challenging the dominant ideology of equal opportunity, recognizing the influence of history and context (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT values voice and lived experience and creating socially just change (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT centers on six core tenets: ordinariness, interest convergence, social construction, differential racialization, intersectionality, and voice of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Ordinariness recognizes the reality that the dominant culture is considered the norm. Anything outside of the dominant culture is out of the ordinary or abnormal. The concept of interest convergence means the status quo and the privilege of the dominant culture serves the interests of a large percentage of the population so there is limited drive or initiative to make changes. Social construction involves the creation of race and ethnicity by human society; there is no basis in genetics or biology. Differential racialization involves the treatment of the minority groups by the dominant group in ways that serve the majority. Different minority races and ethnicity come in and out of favor at the mercy of the dominant group. The tenet of intersectionality demonstrates the importance of the many facets of any one person's identity (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, the experience of a Black woman is different than that of a Black man. Additionally, the perspective of a Black heterosexual woman is

different than those of a Black homosexual woman. Finally, the voice of color principle asserts that only people of color can truly speak about racism. People of color have unique experiences that only those who have experienced these things can speak about (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The tenets of CRT, have informed the conceptual framework I apply in this study. Similar to CRT, counter storytelling challenges the typically oppressive master narrative to provide a different viewpoint on an issue (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). In this case, the counter narrative rejects the deficit-based thinking toward persistently disciplined Black girls and focuses on their positive attributes within the context of Hinton's (2015) reconceptualization of Yosso's (2005) six types of capital, community cultural wealth (CCW). CCW was developed through a Critical Race Theory perspective on cultural and social capital, expanding from the traditionally accepted notions that often view people of color in a deficit-based mindset to a more culturally inclusive understanding of capital. Hinton (2015) reframed Yosso's (2005) work to more authentically align cultural attributes with community well-being and social justice.

The six types of capital in community cultural wealth include aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). Aspirational capital involves the ability to maintain hope in spite of past failures and significant failures. Those who have strong aspirational capital believe in a "culture of possibility" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Linguistic capital focuses on intellectual and social skills including forms of expression and communication: storytelling, oral history, visual art, music and poetry. Familial capital includes community history and kinship networks such as family, teams, groups, and religious and community centers.

Social capital involves networks of people and community resources and how people unite together to resist racism. Navigational capital demonstrates the way people of color maneuver through social institutions (e.g. schools, discipline systems) that were not originally designed with people of color in mind. People with navigational capital show individual agency and self-advocacy. Finally, resistant capital (also transformative capital) focuses on the cultural wealth within an individual, family or community that is used to change oppressive structures. Resistant capital is the way people assert a different viewpoint against the frequently racist master narrative (Yosso, 2005).

Strengths in Communities of Color: Trust, Love, Spirituality, and Resistance

Yosso’s (2005) CCW has recently been critiqued by Hinton (2015) for its reliance on a capitalist framework and language which Hinton argues cannot be truly critical because it is rooted in the dominant culture’s belief system. Hinton (2015) draws on multiple theorists who bring focus to the strengths in communities of color without referencing capitalist frameworks. These include trust, love, spirituality, and resistance (Hinton, 2015). The concepts Hinton (2015) recognizes as strengths shift the perspective from one of financial focus to community well-being.

▲		▲
Trust	• Social capital	
▲		▲
Love	• Familial capital • Cultural capital	
▲		▲
Spirituality	• Aspirational capital • Cultural capital	
▲		▲
Resistance	• Resistant capital • Navigational capital	

Figure 9. A model of Strengths in Communities of Color.

Trust has been emphasized throughout the field of education. Trust is vital for classroom teachers to develop relationships with students and engage them in learning (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). Trust also holds great importance within a school building and community in terms of how school professionals engage with one another as well as with families and community leaders.

Love serves a key underlying factor for developing trust between students and teachers. Emotional motivations are significant for both Black girls and those who care about their educational success. Drawing on this framework of love in considering how educators can engage Black girls raises questions about the intentions of educators and what they are doing to show care and concern for all students. Love is also something that spreads well beyond any conceptualization of cultural capital. It does not have any fixed amount and does not decrease when it is “used” or shared (Hinton, 2015). Thus, it pushes the thinking about communities of color outside of the capital framework. The role of love in the experiences of marginalized people, in particular Black girls, is vital to their resilience. Hinton (2015) emphasizes, “Love sustains us in the face of trauma and loss” (p. 312). Black girls experience disproportionate rates of victimization and trauma, thus finding the love within them to love themselves and being loved by others may be significant in supporting them in educational success.

The significance of spirituality within Black communities has a long history. Churches have long served as central locations for Black gathering and community building (Reed & Neville, 2014). Spirituality has been found to have strong influences in psychological well-being for Black women (Reed & Neville, 2014). In addition, Black women have drawn on their sense of spirituality to drive them into positions of

leadership, for example those few Black women in school principal (Jean-Marie & Normore, 2010) and superintendent positions (Alston, 2005). These women identify their faith as a strong motivator for them and what helps them through their most challenging moments (Alston, 2005). Spirituality also inspires Black female leaders' desire to serve and build connections with others (Jean-Marie & Normore, 2010).

Hinton (2015) references four types of resistance, but in this study, I will focus on transformational resistance, also captured within the concept of resistance for liberation (Robinson & Ward, 1991). Transformational resistance recognizes the power imbalance between the dominant and marginalized cultures, critiques oppression and promotes social justice (Hinton, 2015). Reed and Neville (2014) explore the relationship between resistance and spirituality and identify churches have played a key role in organizing resistance efforts throughout history. The concept of resistance often has negative connotations, but researchers also describe it a "fortifying and nourishing to the soul" (Camarota & Fine, 2008, p. 2). Resistance as a strength holds particular relevance for Black girls. As the focus of policy and program initiatives has centered on Black boys, the voices and experiences of Black girls have been silenced and ignored. Instead of being pushed down, Black girls have found their voices and advocated for themselves, often in a way that is not welcomed or understood by educators or school leaders (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Black girls have also been identified as having high self-esteem as compared to any other racial group of girls (Adams, 2010). In this study, I seek to explore and identify how we can re-vision transformational resistance in a positive sense and draw on this strength of Black girls to support them in reaching positive educational and life outcomes.

Summary of Literature Review and Findings

Distinct challenges exist for Black youth in education both academically and behaviorally. Black girls face these challenges in a unique way. Black girls experience disproportionate discipline at higher rates than Black boys and are given less attention and receive fewer interventions specifically targeted to support them. The school-to-prison pipeline demonstrates the long-term negative consequences of disciplinary practices in education and their inequitable effects on Black youth. Within the field of education, professionals focus on deficits and individual pathology. By exploring the experiences of persistently disciplined Black girls through the lens of a new conceptual framework of Strengths in Communities of Color, I seek to raise awareness and understanding of the strengths of these marginalized young people. Through the strengths-based lenses of trust, love, spirituality, and resistance, I will re-vision Black girls who have been labeled bad, deviant, trouble makers and problem-children to highlight the positive attributes they bring to school with them.

CHAPTER XIII
METHODS: STUDY THREE

In this chapter, I describe the methodological approach used to explore the research questions. Given the substantive quantitative literature validating the existence of the discipline gap for all Black youth (Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 1997; Wallace et al., 2008) and Black girls specifically (Crenshaw et al., 2015), Blake et al. (2011) advocated for future studies to apply qualitative methods to more deeply examine the unique experiences of persistently disciplined Black girls. Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2014) recommended future studies focusing on persistently disciplined Black girls apply a strengths-based approach that emphasizes success rather than failure. Additionally, research has identified the need to apply the process of appreciative inquiry (AI) in educational settings to reframe viewpoints of marginalized students to draw focus to their positive attributes rather than their needs (Calabrese, Hummel, & San Martin, 2007).

In the subsequent section, I explain why I chose to conduct an embedded case study (Yin, 2014) informed by the process of AI and review the conceptual framework. Then, I provide information regarding the target population, the setting in which I conducted the study, and the procedures I engaged in for sampling and recruitment. I follow with details of the data collection and analysis techniques used and justification for my choices within these stages of research. I conclude the chapter by reflecting on the limitations of the study, ethical considerations, and how I situated myself within the research. In each section, I rationalize the choices I made as a researcher, which have all ultimately enhanced the rigor and relevance of this study.

To reiterate, in this study, I aim to discover and highlight the strengths and supports of persistently disciplined Black high school girls within the context of the

discipline gap. Through this embedded case study, I explore the following two research questions:

1. What strengths and supports do persistently disciplined Black girls draw on to continue in education?
2. What inspires persistently disciplined Black adolescent girls to continue in education?

Research Design and Rationale

I selected an embedded case study design (Yin, 2014) in order to give voice to the lived experiences of multiple youth and the adults they identified as influential in their lives within the bounded system of a single school community. The embedded design serves as a focusing device through the identification of subunits, averting a common weakness with cases studies in which the approach is so flexible the entire research study changes during the process (Yin, 2014). This approach also aligns with CRT and in particular the tenets of intersectionality and voice of color, which inform the conceptual framework (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Through the embedded case study approach, I seek to understand the strengths and community assets of Black high school girls who have been suspended multiple times. Three cases will be described and analyzed to compare the cases through a cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). The embedded case study will explore three Black adolescent girls who will be the focus of the study in an effort to give a full picture of each of the girls within the context of the conceptual framework, Strengths in Communities of Color: trust, love, spirituality, resistance. A small number of participants were selected in order to deeply look at each individual's context, family, and community

to gain a broad and in depth understanding (Creswell, 2013). Each case will be described in detail through vignettes. In addition, similarities and differences will be highlighted to identify common themes (Stake, 2006). Although the nature of a small study does not allow for generalizability, the purpose of the research focuses primarily on gaining insights into a few extreme cases (Yin, 2014).

Further, the qualitative approach will provide additional perspectives on the existing quantitative studies that identify the discipline gap (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). Through this study, I add a strengths-based understanding to the body of qualitative literature that focuses on student and teacher perceptions of the discipline process (Blake et al, 2011; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2014; E. W. Morris, 2007). The qualitative design allows for exploration of the issue of disproportionate discipline through highlighting the typically silenced voices of youth most affected by the discipline process (Creswell, 2013).

Conceptual Framework

As previously described, the study will engage Critical Race Theory in the application of a re-conceptualized version of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005). I call this re-conceptualized understanding of CCW Strengths in Communities of Color drawing together Hinton's (2015) description of the values of trust, love, spirituality, and resistance. These four areas were specifically explored through the data collection and analysis to understand the level of their existence in the strengths, supports and inspiration of persistently disciplined Black girls to continue in education.

Setting

Research was conducted at Sanders High School (SHS), a comprehensive public school in the Metro City School District (MCSD) in the southeastern United States. SHS currently serves 650 high school students in ninth through twelfth grades and an additional 150 students in sixth through eighth grades. This study focuses on high school students, thus, I describe the demographics of the high school student body as follows. Almost 50% of the ninth through twelfth grade students at SHS identify as Black and 46% identify as White. Approximately 80% of the students receive free- or reduced-lunch, which serves as an indicator for poverty. Although SHS offers five magnet programs, the majority of students reside in the surrounding community, the lowest income area of the city. This is unique for the school district where most schools enroll students from a more diverse range of neighborhoods. MCSD, a large urban school district, serves over 100,000 students in a metropolitan community of 760,000 people.

The setting of the study within MCSD was selected as representative of large, urban school districts in the United States. Additionally, SHS presents a unique case within the district in that the majority of high school students reside in the surrounding school community. SHS also has been identified as the school with the highest suspension rate in the school district suspending three times as many students as the average high school in the district during the 2014-15 school year. This is particularly noteworthy as the student population at SHS represents only about half of the students enrolled at other high schools in the district (N=600, m=1000). This data draws attention to the school as a site for further investigation into discipline practices and a need for increased understanding of persistently disciplined students. The negativity associated

with discipline presents an opportunity to reframe the students affected by this process, their families, and their communities, in a positive frame through the appreciative inquiry (AI) process, discussed further in the data collection subsection.

The site identified, SHS, is also my current location of employment. This serves as both a strength and challenge in this study. As an existing school employee, I have already developed trust and rapport with students, families, and staff. Glesne (2011) identified these characteristics as ideal in field relations. However, as a form of “backyard research” (Glesne, 2011, p. 41), it was important I take particular precautions in identifying and clarifying my role as a researcher to avoid confusion for participants (Glesne, 2011). In the informed consent, I addressed the ways in which future interactions for a time bound period of research will be part of the research process. I reminded participants of my role as a researcher whenever possible. Through applying a specific, strengths-based process (AI), I implemented approaches I do not necessarily use in my day-to-day duties, which supported the separation of my research role and employee role. The approach used is similar to action research in that I seek to work with the participants by gaining insights from them in order to improve their school experiences (Glesne, 2011). My role within the school and district is “vital because the research is generally a beginning step in a longer, change-oriented process” (Glesne, 2011, p. 43). As an insider, I have a strong voice in speaking into the potential opportunities for incorporating the findings of this study into school and district policies and practices. Additionally, employing ethnographic approaches within case study research generated “thick descriptions” and allowed me to see the participants’ perspectives and personalized meanings (Geertz, 1973; Sattin-Bajaj, 2015).

Ethnographic methods also allow for deeper investigation of culture (Foley, 1991), significant in this study exploring the experience and culture of Black girls through the lens of Strengths in Communities of Color.

Sampling Procedures and Participant Recruitment

Students were selected through purposive sampling (Merriam, 1988) to identify Black high school girls who have been suspended two or more times in the current school year. After approval by the university Institutional Review Board (IRB), I engaged district and school-level permission and support to gain access to data and identify students from whom I sought assent and consent for participation in the study. In the district behavior database, I conducted a review of students who had been suspended this school year from SHS. I narrowed the search by identifying only females coded as Black who were enrolled in tenth grade or higher. When I examined this data in March 2016, there were 15 students who met the criteria. I recruited students in order of most to least suspensions and first contacted parents/guardians of the students identified by phone to invite their daughter to participate in the study. I reached out to 12 of the 15 students' parents/guardians and spoke to 5 of them about the study. Initially, they all agreed to participate. One student stopped attending school before I could begin collecting data, and a second declined to participate after the initial consent was completed. For the remaining three students, I met with the parent/guardian at their homes (at their request) to complete the informed consent. Then, I met with each of the students at school during her lunch, a free period, or after school to complete the assent. As part of the assent process, I confirmed that each girl self-identified as Black. In addition, as an employee of the school site, I emphasized the voluntary nature of the research and the student or

guardian's election to participate or decline participation would not in any way affect the services or supports they receive from me or any other school staff.

To gain additional insights into the girls' strengths, I applied snowball sampling (Patton, 1990) and asked the girls to each identify two influential adults in their home, school, or extracurricular lives who I could conduct consents with to be interviewed as part of the study. These influential adults included family members, teachers, and friends. I completed the consent process with each adult identified.

In order to delve deeply into the experiences of these young women and understand their strengths as fully as possible, I focused on only three specific cases. Creswell (2013) recommended case study research focus on no more than four or five cases, a number which he asserted allows "ample opportunity to identify themes of the cases as well as conduct cross-case analysis" (p. 157). In addition, the research includes rich data about the site and individuals through the collection of multiple types of data, described further in the following section (Creswell, 2013).

Population

The study population focuses on Black female high school students. Sample characteristics include students who have been promoted to at least tenth grade and have been suspended two or more times in the current school year (August 2015-March 2016). All three participants attended the same high school at the time of the study and lived in the same neighborhood surrounding the school. Table 7 includes additional demographic information on the three girls. Each focus participant was asked to identify two adults (18 or older) who have been influential in their lives. Table 8 includes additional demographic information on the identified influential adults.

Table 7

Key Characteristics of Student Participants

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Kamiyah</u>	<u>LaTonya</u>	<u>Tierra</u>
Age	18	17	15
Grade	12 th	11 th	10 th
Race	Black	Black	Black
Parent/guardian	Great Aunt	Mother	Mother & Father
Neighborhood	Sanders	Sanders	Sanders
Years attending SHS	4	2	1.5
#HS attended	1	2	2
#MS attended	2	1	2
Cum. GPA	2.13	2.97	2.62
Credits accrued	24.5	17	12
Class Rank (percentile)	63/93 (32 nd percentile)	37/112 (67 th percentile)	47/130 (64 th percentile)
Times retained	0	0	0
<u>Behavior Data (2015-16)</u>			
# Suspension incidents	4	5	5
# Suspension days	6	9	9

Table 8

Key Characteristics of Influential Adults

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Kamiyah</u>		<u>LaTonya</u>		<u>Tierra</u>	
Name	Laura	Helen	Camila	N/A	Sarah	Stephanie
Gender	Female	Female	Female		Female	Female
Race/Ethnicity	White	Black	Latina		White	Black
Age	38	67	26		31	18
Employment	Teacher	Retired	Teacher		Teacher	Student
# Years knowing focus participant	4	18	1		>1	1

Data Collection

Multiple sources of data were collected for this case study, representing all six of the sources of evidence discussed by Yin (2014): documentation, archival records,

interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. This myriad of sources provides in depth knowledge regarding the overall case of the school as context and the intricacies of the individual embedded cases. I conducted pilot interviews of influential adults to test and refine the AI protocol and procedures as part of a course assignment (Creswell, 2013). The adults were personal contacts and each represented a role group students identified as influential: a family member and a school staff person. This data is not included in the study findings, but it informed the development of the study design and interview protocol as a form of pilot testing (Creswell, 2013).

There was one case in which the initially identified adult chose not to participate, and I asked the participant to identify another adult for me to recruit. In another case, the student withdrew from school and the influential adult she identified then declined to participate. I made several attempts to meet with her and she canceled each time. After the student withdrew from school, she also declined to participate in the second interview. I scheduled with her on three occasions and she canceled or did not show for each. I attempted to contact her through phone calls, text messaging, and leaving a note at her home.

Several types of documentation and archival records were gathered to gain insights into the school context. These include behavior referrals and discipline data. Some of this is available through the school and district website. Other materials, I was able to access to as a school employee or requested directly from the school. I looked at individual student records to develop a fuller picture of each student. These included attendance, enrollment history, grades, parent/guardian communication, and behavior

referrals. Yin (2014) stated documentation and archival records are valuable sources due to their stability, specificity, and broad coverage over a span of time. However, he cautions the validity of these documents may be low and that it is difficult to know if records have been edited or include bias.

I collected data that most explicitly addresses the research questions through semi-structured and conversational interviews. I combined a cultural interviewing (Glesne, 2011) approach with AI in the multiple interview sessions I conducted with the girls. The interviews were conducted during March-May 2016 in school, as preferred by the interviewees, and lasted 20-40 minutes each. The first interview with each student focused on rapport building and gaining a broader context for each girl's background and life experience with a more conversational approach (Glesne, 2011). I initially focused on helping the girls feel comfortable and finding out their story, using the interview to get "words to fly" (Glesne, 2011, p. 102). The second interview, a semi-structured interview, focused on questions specifically designed around both AI and the conceptual framework, *Strengths in Communities of Color*, described previously. I have included the interview protocol for youth and adults in Appendices J and K.

I interviewed each adult in person one time through a semi-structured interview. I conducted interviews in home, school, or community locations based on the preference of the participant. There was one case in which the initially identified adult chose not to participate, and I asked the participant to identify another adult for me to recruit. In another case, the student withdrew from school and the influential adult she identified then declined to participate. I was ultimately unable to gather this section of data for the participant.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. I also maintained field notes that describe my general impressions from the interview and observations immediately following the interview. As recommended by Glesne (2011), I maintained a record of the questions discussed, any particular circumstances that may have affected the interview, and a brief description of demographic data. I transcribed interviews as soon as possible after they were conducted to gain as much insight as possible and learn from them throughout the process (Glesne, 2011).

In the semi-structured interviews for both the girls and the influential adults, I applied AI. The AI process includes four stages: discover, dream, design and destiny. AI has been applied in education research, in particular to apply the “power of imagination and innovation to public schools” (San Martin & Calabrese, 2011, p. 112). In this study, to gain initial insights into the experiences and strengths of the girls, I focused on the first two stages: discover and dream. The second interview with the girls began with broad exploration of what they feel is going well in their lives, more specifically, “what gives life” (Cooperrider et al., 2005). After this open ended reflection, I included direct questioning around the Strengths in Communities of Color identified: trust, love, spirituality, and resistance. These were all framed in a positive sense and invited the girls to focus on positive experiences in their lives in these areas. In addition, the second interview included the dream phase. Girls had the opportunity to identify what they would like to see happen differently; envision what is possible (Cooperrider et al., 2005). As part of the interviews, I also requested for the girls to describe a work product that brings them pride. This would be considered a physical artifact that could include a piece of artwork, an essay, a poem, or any other assignment or assessment they choose.

Before beginning the interview process, I sought informed consent and assent from the girls and their parent/guardian. Through this process I reviewed the purpose of the study, shared the general topics covered in the interview, and invited participants to ask questions. All data was stored in password-protected files on a password-protected computer or in a locked drawer in a locked office, which is accessible only to key personnel in the school building.

Finally, I wrote field notes that include both direct observation and participant observation. I arranged opportunities to observe the girls in structured and unstructured settings, in and out of school. I directly observed each girl for 20-30 minutes two times with the exception of the participant who withdrew from school, LaTonya. In this case, I only directly observed the participant one time. When possible, I arranged direct observations in settings that included the influential adults girls identified, in addition to the girl. I was able to do this on three occasions. I observed Kamiyah in her English class with Laura and at choir practice with Aunt Helen. I visited the horse farm with Tierra and her teacher Sarah. As a member of the school community, I also engaged in participant observation and recorded notes and thoughts of interactions with the participants during the course of data collection in addition to other fieldwork activities. This provided additional detail to the school context and student-staff interactions.

Data Analysis

The interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts were analyzed in an iterative process (Creswell, 2013). Analysis occurred throughout the two month time period in which I collected data and additionally after all data was collected. I learned from the data as I observed, reviewed documents, and interviewed participants. I

conducted all interviews myself, although a graduate-level social work student attended some of them as an observer. The social work student provided additional observations and insights. She helped transcribe three of the interviews as part of her internship with me.

I applied cross-case synthesis (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014) to identify and explore patterns in the data. I summarized each case with the focus on the girl and all data informing my understanding of the girls, while also maintaining a broader understanding of the case of the school the girls all attend. The interviews were coded in two rounds and read multiple times within each round. I employed First Cycle coding methods by starting with In Vivo Coding, direct quotes from participant statements in their exact words (Saldaña, 2013). I selected this type of coding because Saldaña (2013) asserts the value of In Vivo Coding in “studies that prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (p. 91), in particular for marginalized voices such as youth. Saldaña (2013) recommends an additional coding method be used along with In Vivo coding to allow for additional insights on the part of the researcher. With the focus on the Strengths in Communities of Color framework (trust, love, spirituality, resistance), Values Coding drew out the attitudes and beliefs of the girls and influential adults related to these strengths, and elicited additional areas of strength (Saldaña, 2013). Since Values Coding can be identified beforehand, the four strengths were included as deductive codes (Saldaña, 2013). Code maps and codebooks were created of both In Vivo and Values Coding methods.

After reviewing and analyzing each individual case, I conducted cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014) to compare and identify themes across cases. This

included an analysis of the girls' perspectives and those of the influential adults in their lives. I applied four key strategies to promote validity and trustworthiness: triangulation of data, spending extensive time in the field, peer review and debriefing, and rich, thick description (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) recommends researchers engage in at least two procedures in a study to claim credibility for a given study. I triangulated the data to confirm my findings through examining themes and patterns across multiple sources of evidence for each girl as well as across cases (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). I triangulated data sources (e.g. three girls, six adults, multiple observations of each girl), data methods (interviews, observations, document analysis), and researcher (Miles et al., 2014). As a member of the school community for the last two years, I spent extensive time in the field and developed trust and rapport with participants. I also conducted participant observations and gained a deep understanding of the culture of the school and community. I engaged in peer-review through discussions of my findings with my co-authors as well as the graduate-level social work student previously mentioned. Finally, I included detailed descriptions of student records, my observations and numerous quotes to highlight student voice.

Limitations

As a new researcher with a specific time frame for completing the study, I chose to engage a tight research design with clear, predetermined structures (Miles et al., 2014). As such, a study limitation included the inability to be truly sensitive to the unique qualities of the data collection site and participants to allow themes to emerge more organically (Miles et al., 2014). In addition, I conducted the research in the same location where I am employed. Although this provides value in my rapport and trust with

the participants, I needed to be clear about my role and the voluntary nature of the study. It was important for me to make every effort to step outside of my perspectives as an employee so as not to unduly influence the data I collected (Glesne, 2011). Because the research has a positive focus, it is unlikely I solicited “dangerous knowledge” (Glesne, 2011, p. 43) that will place the participants or myself at risk.

Ethical Considerations

As in any research with human participants, I was mindful of making ethical choices to protect participants throughout the process. Because some of the participants are minors, they are considered a vulnerable population. I protected them through consent of their parent/guardian and their own assent. In the informed consent process, I used vocabulary familiar to them and emphasized the voluntary nature of the study. Interviews for the girls were conducted in a private location where they could not be overheard or observed by others. At the end of each interview, I asked them to reflect on the experience and allowed them space to share and process any discomfort they felt as a result of any topics raised in the interview. I was also very clear in my responsibilities to report anything that falls outside the stated boundaries of confidentiality. Pseudonyms for the girls, the influential adults, the school and district are used.

Positionality

As researchers, we undoubtedly bring our own experiences and perspectives into everything we do. Therefore, it is essential that I reflect upon my own identity and how it relates to this research (Glesne, 2011). Milner (2007) emphasized the importance of reflecting deeply on one’s own experience and the lens one brings to the research in order to most fully honor the participants in research and share their stories. Milner (2007) also

emphasized the importance of self-reflection in maintaining a critical perspective in research and increasing my own consciousness of how I influence and think about my own research. This is particularly important to my research as I am applying Critical Race Theory frameworks and examining issues of race and racism.

My racial and cultural heritage has shaped my identity, my own life experience and perspectives. I am a mixed race American woman, half-Chinese and half-White. My father's parents emigrated from China in the 1940's as young adults. Based on the stories my Chinese grandparents have shared with me, I know they quickly sought to assimilate to American culture and encouraged my father and his siblings to focus on learning English and participate in American customs. My mother's side of the family can trace roots back to the colonists on the Mayflower in the 1600's. They are liberal, White Americans who have had significant time and resources to establish extensive educational backgrounds and financial capital.

My racial and cultural backgrounds influence my experience of the world, research interests, and my interpretations of others. Although I am, to many, visibly of Asian descent, I grew up immersed in White, middle class culture. I did not even begin to understand my ethnic identity as a mixed race person until I entered college, lived in large cities, and spent more time with others with similar and varied ethnic and racial backgrounds. I have also traveled extensively to countries where I have seen and gained appreciation for different cultures and lifestyles.

I had much of the racial privilege of White people in my formative years, as I was not forced to think about my ethnic identity, just feeling "normal", more or less. I was occasionally singled out in broad terms of "adding to the diversity" of a group or being

teased playfully with nicknames that I now recognize as racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007). The privilege I experienced and liberal cultural mindsets promoted within my family strongly influenced my interests in social justice and critically examining inequity in our society seeking to make positive change. This mindset fits with my research in the area of disproportionality in discipline, in particular for girls of color. It has also affected the professional choices I have made in my career to pursue public education and social work, engaging with communities, families and students to walk alongside them and empower them, rather than reach “down” to help them.

Milner (2007) encourages researchers to reflect on the cultural and racial identities of the participants of the study and how they relate to the researcher and approach to research. In some respects, I am a member of the community in which I am conducting my research. In other respects, I am an outsider. These roles have advantages and disadvantages within my research. The participants I focus on in my study are Black high school girls who attend an urban public high school. I explicitly focus on culture and race in my research questions so I will gain specific insights in these areas for each of my participants and am able to draw on themes of differences and similarities in their experiences. A key selection criterion is that participants identify as Black and female, so I asked them this upon reviewing the assent form.

As a woman, I relate to some of the experiences of the girls, but I am not Black and I have not experienced multiple school suspensions. In addition, most of the students that were recruited live in poverty. I have experienced economic privilege the majority of my life. I have worked extensively with people living in poverty over the last fifteen years of my career, but I have never experienced many of the challenges first hand.

My role within the school includes supporting students' social and emotional well-being. Although a power differential exists between students and me, I engage as much as possible as an equal, a partner, in overcoming challenges, which is informed by both my background in education and social work. Thus, I have reflected on any observations or interactions that may have been influenced by this power differential, but I do not believe it has negatively influenced the participants. I continually reflected on this throughout the data collection and analysis process. In order to minimize potential confusion related to my role, I emphasized in the informed consent and assent process that all interactions between myself, the students and their families, and school staff identified as participants for the period of March to May 2016 were considered part of the research study.

Through reflecting on my identity, the researcher in which I am engaging, and the identities of my participants, I have extended my ability to most fully respect and honor the lives and experiences of the participants I am studying. I have recognized the privilege I bring and the importance of engaging with participants with a sense of respectful curiosity and non-judgment. Through ongoing field notes, discussion with colleagues, and individual reflection, I maintained a critical stance and analyzed my own biases within the context of this research.

Conclusion

This chapter included an overview of the methodology applied to address the research questions. I also described my positionality as a researcher, limitations to the study, and ethical considerations. The approaches used for collecting and analyzing data elicited rich and thick data. The following chapters will detail the results of this study

and implications for the field regarding the strengths of persistently disciplined Black girls.

CHAPTER XIV
RESULTS: STUDY THREE

In the final two chapters, I incorporate the AI stages of “Discover” and “Dream” (Cooperrider et al., 2005) to my description and analysis of results. Through these processes, I also engage counter storytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) to reject the deficit-based thinking of the master narrative (students’ school records) with the positive attributes elicited in the interviews and observations I conducted. In this chapter, I *discover* the girls’ complex identities and core strengths, supports, and inspiration to continue in education. I describe the individual participant cases and provide a cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014) to highlight the themes related to the conceptual framework of Strengths in Communities of Color (trust, love, spirituality, resistance) along with emergent themes. Each case will be described in detail through vignettes drawing on the multiple data sources. I will then explain the overlapping themes among the cases, again within the context of the conceptual framework as well as emergent themes. In the subsequent chapter, I will discuss how these discoveries helped me to answer my research questions and *dream* of how these discoveries can inform next steps in research, policy and practice.

To reiterate, the purpose of this study is to discover and highlight the strengths and supports of persistently disciplined Black high school girls within the context of the discipline gap. Through this qualitative case study, I explore the following two research questions:

1. What strengths and supports do persistently disciplined Black girls draw on to continue in education?
2. What inspires persistently disciplined Black adolescent girls to continue in education?

Participant Cases

For each participant, I describe the portrait illustrated by the student's school records, focusing on academic and behavioral data. I contrast this portrayal with the rich data collected through observations and interviews, applying Appreciative Inquiry to highlight positive student characteristics within the context of the conceptual framework, Strengths in Communities of Color (trust, love, spirituality, resistance), and emergent themes. These comparisons illuminate the complexities of each individual young woman and enhance my understanding of who they are both in and outside of the school walls. I conclude with an overview and analysis of themes and how they emerged across multiple cases and the connections to the conceptual framework.

Kamiyah: Spirited Optimist

Kamiyah's maternal great-aunt raised her from the age of 12, after her mother abandoned her in the hospital where she was born in Metro City. Initially, other relatives cared for her, but over time could no longer serve in this role for her due to health issues or other responsibilities in their own nuclear families. Kamiyah has lived in the same area of Metro City her whole life. She has several half siblings, none of whom live with her. She now has contact with her mom but views her more as a friend than a mother figure. At the time of the study, Kamiyah was in the final months of her senior year of high school.

To gain insights into Kamiyah's life beyond her school records, I interviewed Kamiyah, her guardian (great aunt), and her English teacher. I also observed her in multiple settings. Kamiyah has known her great aunt since birth and has been in her care for the last six years. Her great aunt, Aunt Helen, is a 67-year-old Black woman who is

currently retired. Kamiyah has known her English teacher, Laura, for four years, since she began high school at SHS. Her English teacher is a 37-year-old White woman who has been a teacher for 14 years. I observed Kamiyah in two settings, her church choir practice and her English classroom. I chose to focus on the observation in the church because of the richness and contrast I viewed compared to the school profile data.

Additionally, the perspective I gained of Kamiyah by watching her in church affirms her strong connections to her spirituality, discussed further in the findings and cross-case analysis that follow.

Although Kamiyah's school profile shows school staff sometimes viewed her as a struggling and disengaged student, I observed her as a courageous and optimistic young woman in pursuit of admirable goals, eager to make a difference in the lives of others. The many challenges she faced, supportive family and friends, and her growing sense of faith, served as motivators and gave her strength to continue in her education. By the time I completed my research, Kamiyah had successfully graduated from high school and was moving forward in her plans to enroll in college and work towards becoming a nurse.

Kamiyah's School Profile

Reviewing only Kamiyah's school records, one might conclude she does not care about school or her future. Her records describe her as a playful and disruptive student, who talks too much, is frequently late or absent, completes the bare minimum academically, and does not get along well with peers. The photograph of Kamiyah in her school records looks a few years old. Her hair cut resembles her current style and her rich Black skin almost blends into her black t-shirt with a yellow paw print on the chest. She smiles slightly, not showing her teeth, and her eyes sparkle.

Kamiyah has attended the same high school for the last four years. During her senior year, she studied Advanced Placement English, Physical Education, United States History, and a general math class. She had more than enough credits going into her senior year, so she left school two hours early each day to work at her part-time job the first two trimesters and then served as an aide to a teacher her final trimester. She has been habitually late to school this year (22 unexcused tardies) and has arrived between two minutes and three hours after the school day began. She missed 23.5 days of school, only 5.5 of them excused. Her GPA this year accumulated to a 2.11 at the end of the last grading period in April. She earned some A's and B's but also failed or almost failed several courses.

Kamiyah's behavior records fill 28 printed pages of incidents, suspensions and related details. Over the course of high school, Kamiyah showed a peak of incidents her freshman year and then another increase her senior year. In ninth grade, she served eight days of out-of-school suspension for fighting and using profanity. She received 38 behavior referrals during the year, primarily for being tardy to class (9), talking (8), and sleeping or putting her head down (5). She also received multiple behavior referrals for: loudness, laughing, phone use, singing, disruption, refusal, throwing objects at others, fighting, threatening others, and profanity. After her freshman year, her behavior referrals declined significantly averaging nine each year in tenth through twelfth grades. In her tenth and eleventh grade years, she served only five total days of out-of-school suspension for being tardy to class, heated verbal altercations and aggression. She received additional behavior referrals for being off task, cell phone use, skipping class,

and refusing to follow school directives. In the current school year, she has served six days of out-of-school suspensions, three days of which were for instigating a fight.

During Kamiyah's high school career, teachers' communications with her guardian centered on challenges with behavior and academic performance. Her history teacher called her guardian seven times this school year. His comments describe her as off task, distracting to other students, too talkative, and disruptive. Her English teacher taught her for four years and recorded twelve conversations with Kamiyah's guardian during this time. These conversations included concerns with missing work, conflict with peers, sleeping in class, and laughing at inappropriate times. This teacher also made two positive phone calls home, one in the beginning of Kamiyah's sophomore year and another in the middle of the same year, saying she was a lot more focused.

Kamiyah's school profile portrays her as a student who needs significant redirection and does not seem very motivated. Although she demonstrated some progress in her behavior referrals, even as a senior, she continued to cause disruptions in class and engage in negative interactions with peers.

Another View of Kamiyah: Church Choir Practice

Stepping outside of the school walls, I had the opportunity to observe Kamiyah during her church choir practice, an activity she identified as important to her, especially as she has become more involved in her church in the last two years. Through this observation, I saw her as an integral part of a vibrant and spirited community, full of gratitude and hope. I created the following vignette from my field notes during and after the observation.

The rain poured down in the early afternoon as I entered Kamiyah's Baptist church for choir practice. The large, off-white building sat on the corner and was the largest on the block. When I walked through the sanctuary doors, it took me a moment to identify Kamiyah up on the stage. I found her standing in the back row of the group of 30 or so women with one man and a few children singers, all Black. The room was well lit and a colorful stained glass window brought attention to the center of the sanctuary. The space looked to hold 2-300 people on white pews covered with blue cushions. There were only two other people in the pews and I wondered what the space might feel like filled with a crowd of church members during a Sunday service.

Kamiyah wore a white baseball hat and black jacket with a purple and yellow Los Angeles Lakers t-shirt underneath. She swayed gently to the music as she sang. I could see her small stud earrings catch the light from a distance. The group started another song and cheered and shouted. A loud, excited energy filled the room when they began singing and the group moved in unison, swaying and clapping side to side, swinging their arms.

Kamiyah seemed to have the words memorized like many other members of the choir. Only one person was holding a paper that appeared to have lyrics. "Always bringing me out," they sang.

Kamiyah stood out as one of the only adolescent members of the choir, surrounded by adults and children. Her great aunt sat in the center of the group, grinning widely and deeply engaged in her singing and worship.

Kamiyah continued to sing and smile broadly, laughing throughout, clearly enjoying herself. She fanned herself and wiped sweat from her brow, joining in with the

group of alto singers as the choir sections practiced their parts. She listened intently as the director gave tips on breathing and timing. She leaned back in her seat, clearly very comfortable in this space. She lifted her head to look at the director and continued to sway in her seat while others sang.

When I left the church, I noticed a small sign on the grass outside reading, “West Metro City is the breeding ground for innovation.” I felt grateful for being welcomed into this community, although I felt somewhat awkward and out of place. While no one said anything about my presence, I knew I stood out as an outsider when I entered the church. I was acutely aware of being the only non-Black person present and assumed I was the only person there who was not a member of the church. My personal beliefs are not rooted in organized religion so I often feel uncomfortable in religious environments, although I am open to a wide variety of beliefs and embrace opportunities to learn about different religions. Despite this discomfort, I enjoyed seeing this side of Kamiyah and her experience in church that she deeply values. I also appreciated the reinforced and highlighted perspective of a strong sense of community and hope in an area that is often portrayed negatively. I wish more people, especially educators, could see this or would take the time to experience it.

This vignette shows a contrasting side of Kamiyah from what her school records describe. She has a strong sense of community, faith, and joy. These attributes show through in her commitment to and participation in her church and choir and how she interacts with others in this setting.

Strengths, Supports and Inspiration

After being persistently disciplined throughout high school, Kamiyah remains steadfast in her resolve to continue her education in college and give back to her community. Kamiyah has been repeatedly excluded from school and could be considered “at-risk” of entering the school-to-prison pipeline. However, with the enduring support of Aunt Helen, the hope Kamiyah draws from her spirituality, and her bravery in overcoming obstacles and accepting challenges appear to be guiding her in the opposite direction at the moment.

“We have never fell apart”: Love, trust, family. Although Kamiyah did not have a traditional family structure growing up, she found deep love in the family members who chose to be there for her throughout her life and extended this compassion to close friends. She found her primary strength and support in her relationship with Aunt Helen and the love they share. Aunt Helen expressed, “In [Kamiyah’s] heart, she’s lovable.” Her ability to love and believe she is lovable influences her strengths of being outgoing and expressing her feelings.

Kamiyah described having had a “rough start” when she was born prematurely and her biological mother abandoned her in the hospital. Her great grandmother initially cared for her, and Aunt Helen remembered the first time she met Kamiyah as a tiny baby who could “fit in a shoe box.” Kamiyah went on to live with her cousin who she thought was her mother until she was 12 years old. She then moved in with her Aunt Helen who felt a sense of responsibility to keep her great niece from entering the foster care system. Kamiyah soon learned the hard truth about her biological mother when she overheard a conversation in church one day. She currently has contact with her biological mother, but

sees her more as a friend than a mother. Aunt Helen shared her struggle with the challenge of raising a child without her biological parents and recognized the pain Kamiyah experienced around these lost relationships. She expressed a strong bond and love between her and Kamiyah stating, “I love her and she loves me.” However, she knew Kamiyah was “looking for love” and that children “want they own mother love and father love.” Kamiyah spoke about the difficulty of not knowing her biological parents, but also emphasized how Aunt Helen has filled this void in many ways as a consistent and supportive role model in her life. Kamiyah said Aunt Helen is “like a mom to me” and “she really made me who I am.” Aunt Helen is “who I really be with 24/7.” Kamiyah’s sense of love and family stems strongly from her relationship with Aunt Helen and the unwavering presence she has had in her life.

Laura, Kamiyah’s English teacher, identified another painful experience with love that Kamiyah shared with her this school year. Kamiyah’s sense of love and compassion extends to friends, one of who was shot and killed this school year. Laura shared that Kamiyah came to her soon after her friend’s death trying to understand and process, “What do I do with this love now that he was here and then...now he’s not?” Kamiyah did not bring this loss up in our interviews; having only occurred six months ago, she is likely still grieving and healing from her friend’s tragic death. She holds this love in her heart and seeks an outlet for sharing it with others. Additionally, losing a friend to community violence further drives Kamiyah to make a different life for herself. Kamiyah’s genuine care and compassion extends into her hopes for her future in a career in nursing.

“God got plans for her”: Spirituality, hope, laughter. Kamiyah currently feels a strong sense of focus toward her future and making progress toward her goals of graduating from high school and attending a Black Bible College in her hometown to study nursing. She reflected on her early high school years and identified that she engaged with the wrong crowd and started on a negative direction. She now has a small core group of friends who she can “hang out with for real...on the daily” and has connected with a sense of community and purpose in her church. In addition to being guided by her faith, Kamiyah and her friends motivate one another and keep each other in a “positive lane” as she explains:

My auntie helped me get there. And my cousin. Because they never left my side and they....they put me in the right path to being...because as I was getting older, I seen myself falling and being around the wrong crowd and doing negative stuff but now as I’m ready be 18, it’s just, it changed. I don’t know, I don’t know, I guess it’s ‘cause it’s so much stuff happening out here in the world that I didn’t want to be in that situation...Oh the killings and you know just, just the society period. And I seen the people who I used to hang with and how much trouble they was getting in so...me as a better person, I stepped out of that into a positive lane ...to keep me focused...like when I was young, I didn’t go to church, but now I go, I’m faithful...going to church and I’m like, you know, up, organizations in the church, it’s, I don’t know, it’s helping me.

Kamiyah draws her newfound sense of focus and investment in an “adult journey” from her loved ones and spirituality. She has been impacted by violence in her community and seeing her friends who she used to be close to make choices that led to poor outcomes.

She knew she wanted something better for herself. She described her junior year in high school as her “critical year” and feels passionate and excited about attending college and getting “the ball game rolling” with her adult life.

Kamiyah identified her faith as something she draws on to keep herself focused on the future and moving forward. She has not always been active in church, but in the last few years she has become a member of the choir and participated in outreach ministries collecting resources for homeless people and visiting nursing homes. She taught Vacation Bible School and identified that she keeps a Bible on her phone. She attends church every Sunday, making efforts to arrange her work schedule around church services and even walk long distances beyond the expectations of her aunt to attend. She says, “I can’t miss! I got off early, and if I just went home I would have felt bad because I would’ve missed an opportunity to go to church.” She finds inspiration and hope in her spirituality and commitment to her faith. She feels a sense of belonging and purpose in her religious community.

Kamiyah connects spirituality with being in a good mood and staying positive. She says she is “a very uplifting person and ready to go.” Laura, her English teacher, identified Kamiyah’s smile and laugh as what she enjoys most about her:

I always tell her she has the best smile and the best laugh. Her laugh is just contagious and everybody remembers that. And she’s got a good sense of humor...even sometimes um if there’s something hard with the material she’s not getting, even if she makes a silly mistake, she can laugh at herself and she can, you know, she can always fix it, but she doesn’t take it too seriously and she, I

don't know, I mean, I think some of us, it's so easy to beat ourselves up every time we make a mistake and I don't think she's like that at all.

Kamiyah has a positive outlook on life and brings humor and levity to others. She applies this to challenging situations and can bounce back easily from something that might be upsetting or overwhelming to someone else. This ability stems from her sense of self-confidence and self-reliance as well. She describes her most valuable quality as her appearance and her dedication to keeping herself up and uplifted, drawing on this in relation to her spirituality. Laura and Aunt Helen both see her as strong, brave, and self-confident. However, they expressed higher aspirations for Kamiyah's self-esteem, and they both shared hope that she believe in and trust herself more.

Aunt Helen has significantly influenced Kamiyah in her spiritual beliefs as she raised her and set the tone for participation in church and religion. Aunt Helen remembers drawing on her Christian ideals when she first saw Kamiyah and thinking, "God got plans for her." She mentioned God and religion many times in our conversation expressing her unwavering trust in Jesus Christ. She also credited God that Kamiyah had relatives to step in and take care of her when her mother abandoned her, "...by grace of God someone cared enough to get her out of the hospital and nourished her to where she is today." Kamiyah looks up to Aunt Helen a great deal and has been undoubtedly influenced in her own religious beliefs by observing and listening to Aunt Helen.

Although religion and spirituality hold a prominent place in Kamiyah's life, Laura had little knowledge of this. She knew that Kamiyah had been involved in some church

activities, but said she “couldn’t speak for that” and was not aware of Kamiyah’s significant commitment to and involvement in her church and religious beliefs.

“I better be about me”: Resistance, independence. The behavior incidents described in Kamiyah’s school records reflect her commitment to expressing herself and speaking her mind. When considering how she overcomes obstacles and stands up for herself and others, these “problems” can be reframed as strengths and an outsider can gain insights into Kamiyah’s point of view. Kamiyah shared frustrations about school rules, in particular, dissonance between what school staff expect in terms of respect and how she, as a student, believes she demonstrates respect. She reflected, “[Teachers] feel like we being disrespectful, but I don’t see where I’m being disrespectful.” Kamiyah feels like teachers do not take the time to understand what is going on in a situation before responding and believes administrators too quickly accept teachers’ accounts as fact. She wants others to remember, “like my auntie always say, there’s always two sides to every story.” It is important to her to have a voice in what happens to her and to be able to stand up for what she believes is right.

Aunt Helen and Laura both recognize Kamiyah’s perseverance and courage in how she speaks up for herself and others, overcomes obstacles and is developing her independence. Aunt Helen believes Kamiyah is “holding in a whole lot” and that she has been “through a whole lot.” She has received some counseling services to seek to work through some of the challenges she has faced in her life, but continues to believe, according to Aunt Helen, “this is a mean world out here, I better be about me.” Kamiyah does not expect anyone else to come to her rescue. She relies on herself and knows she needs to stand up for herself.

Laura saw Kamiyah's self-expression in the classroom as both a strength and challenge. In her first few years as Kamiyah's teacher, she wrote behavior referrals related to situations in which Kamiyah stood up for herself by arguing with a peer or sharing negative feelings toward Laura in a way that Laura viewed as inappropriate for the school environment due to profanity and loud volume. However, in reflecting on her observations of Kamiyah standing up for herself or others, Laura had positive memories of Kamiyah standing up for her once. She shared, "Some kids were being a little ridiculous and rowdy in class...I remember her saying, 'Don't mess with Ms. Laura. You know Ms. Laura. Go on Ms. Laura.'" Laura said she would "never forget it" and that it "meant a lot to me." She also sees a lot of positives in that Kamiyah "puts herself out there" and "tries to be challenged." Laura remembered the first day she met Kamiyah her freshman year, claiming she stood out to her right away. Kamiyah was seated "front and center, looking at me intently, staring directly at me." The class focused on skills for struggling readers and Kamiyah completed her work and tried even when she did not fully understand the material. She was offered the opportunity to take Advanced Placement English her junior year and accepted the challenge. In her senior year, despite the difficulty of the course for her in her eleventh grade, Kamiyah elected to remain in AP English for her senior year when she could have taken an easier course. Laura respects this about Kamiyah and sees her as "tough" and "to be admired." She recognizes Kamiyah may not always handle situations with finesse, but her grit and determination ultimately come from a place of caring and motivation to be and do better for herself and others.

Summary

The strengths and supports evident in Kamiyah's life through the data reviewed have guided her in continuing her education despite some of her negative experiences in school. The love she has for family and friends, her positive attitude rooted in her faith, and her courageous approach to school and life contrast the image of a disengaged, unmotivated student evoked from her school records. Kamiyah is an outgoing and friendly young woman with a profound sense of love for her aunt who has raised her and compassion for serving others. Kamiyah has overcome many life challenges to navigate her way to her current college-bound trajectory. She has developed an ability to stay focused on herself and her goals despite the many negative influences she has encountered such as peer pressure (hanging out with the "wrong crowd") and community violence (the death of her close friend). She holds spirituality as something very important to her, and she has a conviction for giving back to her community. She believes in standing up for her opinions and openly expressing her feelings and ideas. These strengths and supports played a key role in motivating Kamiyah to reach her recent milestone of high school graduation and will continue to guide her as she pursues the "positive path" she has identified in her college and career goals.

LaTonya: Star Student

LaTonya lives with her mom and older brother. She has only one other relative in the Metro City area, her maternal grandmother. When LaTonya was about four years old, she and her mother moved to Metro City from a small town in a neighboring state to follow her grandmother who wanted to experience life in a bigger city. They moved to their current home in the area surrounding SHS four years ago. LaTonya was in eleventh

grade when I interviewed her, but she did not complete the school year for unknown reasons.

In addition to reviewing school records, I learned about LaTonya by interviewing her and her Spanish teacher and observing her. LaTonya, unfortunately, was unable to complete a second interview or provide contact information for a second influential adult. She originally identified her grandmother, but due to family circumstances, her grandmother was unable to complete the interview. LaTonya has known her Spanish teacher, Camila, for less than one year, since the beginning of the current school year. Camila is a 26-year-old Cuban-American woman who has been a teacher at SHS for four years. I observed LaTonya only once, at the part-time job she had recently started. She had also invited me to observe her during English class, but every time I attempted to observe her, she was absent. Thus, to contrast the image of LaTonya portrayed by her school records, I rely on my observations of her in the workplace along with interview data.

By only viewing LaTonya's school profile, one would likely be confused by an apparently academically talented student who seems to have given up on herself and her education. However, I came to see her as a determined learner, helpful classmate and concerned sister grappling with the competing demands of family, work, and school. Although she temporarily stopped coming to school, she told me that she intended to return to SHS the following school year to graduate.

LaTonya's School Profile

Upon first glance at LaTonya's school records, her behavior and attendance issues overshadow her academic success. She has a history of skipping school and smoking in

the bathroom and has an arrest record for theft. When I sought to observe LaTonya in English class, her teacher sarcastically ridiculed, “I can tell you I observed her catching the bus on Main Street when she was skipping fourth period the other day.” Although many teachers and staff believed in her, their patience waned with her inconsistent attendance and repeated requests to make up assignments. LaTonya’s picture in her online school profile shows a happy, young girl. Her hair is done up in curls and piled on top of her head. Her warm brown skin glows and contrasts against the bright white collared shirt she wears under a purple sweater. Her teeth glimmer in her wide smile.

LaTonya completed ninth grade at another high school with strict rules and a back-to-basics skill-focused approach. She transferred to SHS at the beginning of tenth grade. During her junior year, she studied Advanced Placement English Composition, Spanish, Honors Geometry, Honors Biology, Sociology, and Advanced Placement World History. Her attendance was sporadic all year, including frequently coming to school late, leaving early, and skipping classes. She missed 51 days of school, only 14.5 of them excused. During the course of this study, she stopped coming to school altogether in the beginning of May, almost a month before school ended for the year. Her GPA this year accumulated to a 2.97 at the end of the last grading period in April, but she will inevitably fail all of her current courses due to her recent absences. During the first and second trimesters, she earned all A’s, B’s and C’s except for one section of AP World History which she failed.

LaTonya’s behavior records fill 27 printed pages of incidents, suspensions and related details. She averaged 13 behavior referrals each school year, but the intensity of LaTonya’s actions increased between ninth, tenth and eleventh grades culminating in

referrals and suspensions for smoking (2) and theft (6 days out-of-school suspension) in the current school year. In ninth grade, she primarily received referrals due to being tardy to school or classes (10). She received one referral and a 3-day out-of-school suspension for phone use and one referral for a dress code violation. During the last two years at SHS, she received multiple referrals for cutting class, disrespect, phone, smoking, tardy to class, and disruption.

During LaTonya's high school career, teachers' communication with her mom was minimal according to documentation available. There were multiple references to mental health and counseling referrals provided to her mom as stated in her behavior records, but no information was provided regarding whether she ever participated in such services.

Another View of LaTonya: Restaurant Server in Training

LaTonya invited me to observe her at the restaurant where she had recently started working. She expressed a sense of pride in this part-time job and shared excitement at the opportunity to learn new skills as a server. In this demanding and fast-paced setting, I saw her calm demeanor, maturity, and confidence shine through. I created the following vignette from my field notes during and after the observation.

The chain restaurant where LaTonya works lies across the street from her former high school. The restaurant has an open layout and many windows. At first, only a handful of tables are filled in the late afternoon hour when I visit. Soft music plays in the background while patrons hold quiet conversations. The customers are primarily White and elderly and many seem to be regulars. This is LaTonya's first week at this job, so she is shadowing a more experienced server, a White woman with red hair who appears

to be in her 40s. LaTonya observes attentively as the lead server engages with customers. LaTonya chimes in comfortably, smiling and laughing along with them.

LaTonya is wearing a green apron over her white shirt and black slacks. Her hair is tied up in a loose bun and she is wearing glasses. Her nails are polished in a light pink and she has on small stud earrings, a thin black belt, and a small name badge. She approaches a newly seated couple and greets the customers with a smile, "Hello, hello!" She confidently takes their beverage orders and walks with purpose to retrieve their drinks. She fills their glasses on a tray and carefully carries it to deliver the drinks to the customers. The tray comes off balance briefly, but this does not seem to concern or faze her, and she easily rights it and serves the items.

LaTonya returns to the main counter and interacts with several other servers including two young Black women. I recognize one of them as another SHS student with whom LaTonya is friends. I remember she mentioned they applied for the jobs together. They smile, chat, and laugh as they work, clearing and setting tables, serving food, and interacting with customers.

This vignette illustrates a different perspective on LaTonya from her school profile. She shows great ease and confidence in interacting with customers. She demonstrates commitment and dedication to her part-time job in attending consistently and arriving on time.

Strengths, Supports and Inspiration

Although she experienced much academic success, LaTonya struggled to adhere to school expectations and was frequently excluded from the classroom due to her time serving in-school and out-of-school suspensions. This ongoing exclusion may have

contributed to her ultimately choosing to exclude herself at times in her frequent absences from school and temporarily leaving school altogether. In deficit-based thinking, one may assume LaTonya's withdrawal from school will lead her to drop out of school completely and secure her future as a lifelong waitress or succumb to economic pressures and continue breaking the law to make ends meet. The determination and confidence I saw in LaTonya gives me hope in a counter narrative: she will return to SHS next year and make a strong finish to graduate from high school. In our last conversation, she expressed a resolve to try again the following year and continue working toward her goals.

The challenges LaTonya faced during the course of the study and ultimately being unable to complete the study demonstrates some of the ongoing issues within students' lives that influence their engagement and progress in school. Many students deal with transitions and changes outside of their control such as moving mid-school year, changing living arrangements, or experiencing extreme challenges within their home environments. These issues arise more often for students of color and families living in poverty (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015; National Poverty Center, 2015). LaTonya shows persistence and hope within these issues and it is important to highlight and recognize this as strength while also noting the difficulties of her circumstances.

LaTonya has reached this point in her academic career by learning and following classroom routines and school expectations. Seeing her friends achieve and her desire to make a positive impact on the world have motivated her to continue on when she has questioned her commitment to her education. LaTonya also holds a quiet confidence and maturity that allow her to live in the present and enjoy life even when everything around

her feels as though it is falling apart. These characteristics have driven her to her current academic status, one year away from her high school diploma, and will undoubtedly play a role in motivating her to re-engage in school in the future, if she chooses to do so.

“All that good stuff”: Trust, success, confidence. LaTonya has liked school from a young age and developed a positive identity around herself as a student and classmate. She describes herself as energetic and athletic and has played volleyball and softball in high school. She enjoys creative writing and shared that a recent poetry assignment “turned out really good.” LaTonya’s Spanish teacher, Camila, has always seen LaTonya as a top student. She remembers first meeting her and knowing she would be a “star student.” She identified exemplary qualities in LaTonya: ability to explain concepts in her own words, participation in class, dedication to the study of the Spanish language, and being a responsive and engaged student. She agrees with LaTonya’s description of herself as helpful. When LaTonya was in Camila’s class the first two trimesters this year, LaTonya helped Camila by passing out materials, cleaning up, and tutoring other students. Camila expressed that she would love to have LaTonya as a classroom aide. LaTonya assisted Camila in holding the class’ attention and encouraging others saying, “Come on, let’s do this.” LaTonya’s organizational skills impressed Camila and she used LaTonya’s notes as an example for her peers. Camila believed the smaller class size and energetic, fast-paced nature of the class allowed LaTonya to “spread her wings” and “shine.” LaTonya’s success in this classroom environment supported her positive relationship and the trust she developed with Camila.

Camila was not familiar with much of LaTonya’s life outside of school. She remembered that family was important to LaTonya, and she struggled with maintaining

her attendance. However, she remained successful because she knew how to follow the classroom routines and catch up on assignments and material for days she missed.

Camila also described LaTonya as resourceful and that she knew how to look up information online and ask others for help before seeking direction. In class, Camila observed the people around LaTonya have the potential to influence her strongly. “If she’s surrounded by students that want to work, she gets, she wants to be even better.”

LaTonya looks up to some of her friends and feels motivated by their commitment to work and school. She maintained that the relationship is mutual and she and her friends “look out for one another” and motivate one another. When she sees a friend working diligently and saving up to get a car, she feels motivated to do the same.

LaTonya also identified feeling supported and motivated by school structures and staff. SHS has undergone significant staffing changes in the last year. She remarked that she misses a previous administrator who had motivated her. When she came to SHS in her sophomore year, her assigned assistant principal was Dr. Farmer, a young White male. He handled any discipline issues she presented last year and she said it has been difficult to adjust to the changes in administration and get to know new counselors and principals. During her freshman year when she attended a highly structured school, she said getting homework every day and having weekly tests in most of her classes “kept me like I need to get this done.” The fast-paced instruction and high expectations challenged and support her in persisting in school.

“Getting this far”: Family, friends, love. LaTonya has faced many challenges in her life and relies on her mom and friends to support her through these difficult situations. She expressed pride in her ability to reach this point in her academic career,

one year away from high school graduation. She has encountered several significant challenges for which she has leaned on others to continue on in life and school, including her brother's health and fearing for her safety in her neighborhood.

About five years ago, LaTonya's older brother was diagnosed with schizophrenia. It has been a difficult issue for her in learning about the illness, understanding his experience and seeing him struggle at times when he has refused treatment. His diagnosis prompted her to learn more about schizophrenia. She tries to take the time to talk to him and understand where he is coming from. LaTonya worries that he may end up in a situation where he inadvertently upsets someone he does not know and ultimately gets physically hurt in the process. Her mom and grandmother provide support for her in coping with this challenge, and they all struggle together with trying to decide what to do to help him when he does not understand or want to accept help.

The neighborhood LaTonya lives in worries her due to shootings and other potential dangers. She says she "stays cautious" and keeps to herself when walking around. If people approach her or try to speak to her, she keeps walking to "be on the safe side." She has lived in the neighborhood for four years. LaTonya reports that she does not really engage with anyone in the neighborhood, but her mom seems to be friends with the neighbor across the street. When I met with her mom in her home to complete the consent to participate in the study, she came over from the neighbor's house and returned there when we finished meeting.

LaTonya's mom has provided consistent support for her throughout her life. LaTonya describes her as someone who "takes care of me." They enjoy each other's company and have a close friendship. LaTonya makes her mom laugh and her mom

makes her laugh. LaTonya knows her mom has her own challenges “but still she makes it look good.” She also shared that she feels close to her grandmother. Her extended family lives several hours away in a small town, and her grandmother is the only relative outside of her immediate family who lives nearby.

“Good times and laughs”: Exuberance, friends, trust. LaTonya leans on friends as well, in good times and bad. She describes herself as a “people person” and enjoys “catching up on laughs” when spending time with her small group of close friends, most of whom she knows from middle school. LaTonya gets together with friends to visit the local waterfront and amusement parks although they all spend most of their free time working at part-time jobs. They motivate each other to work toward their financial, academic and career goals.

LaTonya has a strong sense of trust with her friends, as they have known each other for several years. LaTonya appreciates these long-term friends, “I just, I know like where we stand and, you know, they know where we stand and we’re just good friends and we get around each other and it’s nothing but good times and laughs so....” She has a sense of history and comfort level that allows her to be herself and enjoy their company. She says they also support one another by “keeping in touch with each other, try to give each other encouraging words and look out for one another, even if we don’t like what we gotta say.” LaTonya feels she and her friends can be truly honest with one another and even share the hard truths about life that are difficult to hear from anyone but the most trusted confidants.

“Ready to graduate”: Making a difference, friends. LaTonya feels proud of how far she has come and has high aspirations for her future. She plans to attend college

and study psychology. She hopes to find a cure for schizophrenia. When asked where she sees herself in ten years, she groaned slightly, struggling to think that far into the future. She ultimately identified that she hopes to be starting her career in psychology and “just getting that situated and trying to pursue that.” She draws her future motivations from her current challenges and sees a clear path for herself to reach her goals.

LaTonya envisions herself as focused and determined and feels driven by her friends who she describes similarly. In addition to having fun together, seeing her friends commitment to work and reaching goals “makes me wanna do the same thing and you know I see them you know they get their check or whatever and I’m like I want to do that.” She feels determined to persist, but often has difficulty staying on course when obstacles arise. She has recently been dealing with significant stress and worry about her brother. She shared how this stress has affected her ability to focus in school and caused her to lose motivation and commitment to her education. She sees herself as a high achieving student and feels disappointed in herself and disheartened when she does not demonstrate her abilities through her actions. When she stopped coming to school during the middle of this study, we spoke briefly on the phone. She shared that she needed to address some things going on in her life outside of school, but that she planned to return to school next year and graduate. She said this with strong resolve and conviction. Despite the current bumps in the road, she remains hopeful that she can and will regroup and reach her goals.

Summary

By evoking LaTonya's voice in this research, I identified many positive attributes that reframe the portrayal of her as a delinquent student in her school profile. Her previous successes, supportive family and friends, ability to enjoy life, and desire to create meaningful change in the world counter some of the negative behaviors she exhibited in school.

LaTonya has drawn on her outgoing and helpful personality traits to achieve success. She regularly leans on her close family and friends to find support and credits this support to getting as far as she has today in her educational and personal life in the face of significant barriers. LaTonya feels a deep trust within these relationships with her mom, grandmother, and a few friends she has known for several years. This provides her with the confidence she needs to stay motivated and focused toward her goals. She has an overall exuberance for life and can let go of the present difficulties and worries about the future to enjoy laughing and having fun in the moment. These traits have served her well in reaching the eleventh grade, and she will need to find ways to continue to use these strengths and supports to come back to school next year and earn her diploma. True to her positive nature, despite the current bumps in the road, she remains hopeful that she can and will reach her goals.

Tierra: Independent Leader

Tierra lives with her mom, dad, older brother, older sister, and her sister's newborn baby. Tierra moved to Metro City from Wisconsin as a baby and briefly lived in Missouri before settling in Metro City and her current home, about a five-minute drive from SHS. Tierra was enrolled in tenth grade at the time of the study.

To better understand Tierra beyond my analysis of her school records, I interviewed her, her brother's girlfriend (Stephanie) and her English teacher (Sarah). Tierra has only known each of these women for about a year. Stephanie is an 18-year-old Black woman studying Public Health at a local university. Sarah is a 31-year-old White woman and started teaching at SHS this school year. I also spent time watching Tierra at a horse farm she visits weekly and at the pizza shop where she works. I chose to focus my description of Tierra at the horse farm because of the intense contrast between her being outside in nature and her existence within the confines of the school building.

Tierra epitomizes a persistently disciplined student and has the school records to prove it. She is in seemingly constant conflict with school staff and regularly refuses to comply with directives given. She has been referred to alternative disciplinary schools twice in high school but has always remained at her regular school. Contrary to this image of defiance, in my observations and interviews, I encountered an intelligent, compassionate, and honest leader with a lively sense of humor.

Tierra's School Profile

During much of her school experience, Tierra has been at odds with teachers and administrators. In only two years of high school, she has been suspended 36 days. At the end of her freshman year, she was referred to an alternative disciplinary school, but she was allowed to re-enroll in SHS at the start of her tenth grade year. She repeated a similar pattern and has now been referred again for alternative school at the end of this school year. In Tierra's school profile, her photo highlights her athletic and confident energy. She wears a plain white t-shirt and a thin, black headband holds her short hair

away from her face. Her soft, brown skin shines against the blue background and her two front teeth are highlighted in her half-smile.

Tierra completed the first few months of ninth grade at another high school with strict rules and a back-to-basics, skill-focused approach. She transferred to SHS in November of her ninth grade year. During her sophomore year, she studied Honors English, Honors Science, World History, Honors Geometry, Art, Photography, and Spanish.

This school year, Tierra frequently arrived at school late or missed entire school days, typically unexcused. She has 28 absences, only 3 of them excused. She began arriving to school late after the first two weeks of school and continued this pattern averaging arriving to school 5-45 minutes late one or two times a week. Occasionally she came in 1-2 hours late. Although she earned a 4.0 during one 6-week progress report grading period, her overall GPA was a 2.62 for the school year. She did improve significantly from her start of a 1.6 GPA the first grading period to a 4.0, 3.2 and 3.4 in the most recent grading periods. She failed one course during the course of the school year (World History), but she otherwise earned mostly A's, B's and C's for her final course grades.

Tierra's behavior incidents span 25 pages. She had 18 reported incidents her freshman year (all at SHS, none at her first high school) and 28 this school year, through April 2016. Overall the majority of her behavior referrals included mention that she refused to do something or stop doing something (at least 10 mentions each school year). She also had 10 referrals in two years for walking out of class without permission, after which she was typically identified as *roaming the halls*. However, it appears her

behavior overall was less intense or problematic this year compared to last year if measured by the severity of the consequence. Her out-of-school suspension days decreased from 20 for the past year to 16 for this year. The 16 out-of-school suspension days for this year includes a more recent review of her behavior in which I discovered she assaulted another student with her sister in mid-May and was suspended for the remainder of the school year (7 days). She was then recommended for alternative school placement. In her records, she had a similar incident at the end of the previous school year in which she was in an intense physical altercation, suspended for 10 days, and recommended for alternative school placement. According to her enrollment history, she never attended alternative school, but started the school year at her regular school, SHS.

Throughout high school, there were few documented contacts between the school staff and Tierra's parents. Five calls home were from the same teacher, all for excessive talking and class disruption. Five additional calls were listed from administration and resource staff about concerns with Tierra's behavior and attendance.

Another View of Tierra: Horse Lover

Tierra expressed excitement for me to see her in the special setting of the horse farm. Although she was feeling ill the day I visited, she eagerly demonstrated her knowledge and aptitude as an emerging equestrian. Her interactions with the horses highlighted her leadership skills, confidence and compassion. I created the following vignette from my field notes during and after the observation.

About thirty minutes drive from the school, Tierra, two friends and their English teacher, Sarah, spend time together at the Sugarsnap Stables on the east end of town on Tuesday afternoons. Paddocks of grazing horses and bright green grass surround the

barn and stables. It's a beautiful sunny day with clear blue skies and a slight chill in the air. The three girls, all Black, sat in the back of the teacher's black sedan before emerging to greet the horses with some peppermints. Tierra wore black leggings, tan boots and a burgundy t-shirt. She had her hair tied up in a high ponytail with a black "Pink by Victoria's Secret" headband holding any stray strands out of her face.

Tierra knew many of the horses by name and some of their stories. She eagerly walked up to the horses when they came over to the fence to pet them. Tierra left the group briefly and then rejoined them at the paddock to retrieve Prince, who they could all take a turn riding. She walked comfortably and confidently into the paddock and out to the rest of the group and the horses. She immediately took over leading the horse and talked to him as she walked, holding his reins. She walked several feet ahead of the others and reprimanded and redirected Prince when he did not do what she wanted.

Sarah tied up Prince and announced that she would take care of his feet and the girls could brush him. Tierra immediately stated that she would do his feet. She attempted and he shied away. Sarah helped her get started and Tierra struggled, so Sarah took over. Tierra started brushing Prince with the others, hair and dust flying around. Then she commented that she did not like the brush she had and disappeared into the equipment room. She pulled out a helmet for herself and some other items for Prince. Sarah reviewed equestrian terminology with the girls as they prepared Prince for riding. She reminded them that the name of the halter was like a shirt. She insisted on handling the more advanced task of putting in the bit and bridle so Prince would not startle.

Tierra again took the reins and led Prince to the riding area. She commented to remember the order, the order of birth. The group had a joke that they were all the teacher's children. Tierra stated she was first even though she is the youngest of the three. No one argued. She climbed up easily onto Prince and Sarah began leading them around. Tierra held her cell phone and texted while she rode. Sarah commended Tierra, somewhat in jest, that she was a true equestrian being able to ride one-handed and use her cell phone. They discussed going faster and Tierra immediately accepted the opportunity. Sarah prompted her to trot without holding on and Tierra hesitated briefly but let go and continued, smiling and laughing. She called out reminders and encouragement as Tierra rode. Tierra shared that she has been practicing riding in her sleep. Sarah continued to remind Tierra to keep her hands steady. Tierra commented that it's hard, but then seemed to get it, trotting smoothly and making clicking noises at Prince. Sarah praised her efforts. Tierra hopped off of Prince deftly and said, "Good boy."

Tierra found a seat in the bleachers and watched her friends ride. She appeared at home at the barn although she had only visited three times. She seemed to thrive under the special attention from her teacher and enjoyed riding first and taking responsibility for leading the horse.

The image presented of Tierra in this vignette shows a significantly different view of her than what her school profile illustrates. On the horse farm, Tierra exhibits a calm, confident demeanor and recognizes the influence her mood and actions have on others, in this case the horses. She comfortably takes on leadership roles and accepts constructive criticism within the context of learning about horseback riding.

Strengths, Supports and Inspiration

Considering only out-of-school suspensions, Tierra has been excluded from school more than ten percent of her first two years of high school. Due to her repetitive behaviors and seemingly out-of-control actions, she has exhausted many school staff and they have great difficulty seeing beyond Tierra's actions to the potential that lies within her. Underneath her tough exterior, Tierra showed sensitivity, compassion and tender love. When channeled in productive ways, she has a strong sense of independence and speaks openly and honestly. The select individuals she allows to see her true self (e.g. her late grandmother, her teacher interviewed in this study) provide valuable support and Tierra strives to make them proud. Although one may not consider Tierra to be "successful" in education due to her behavioral record, she does continue to earn credits and move toward high school graduation, and she has remained within the regular school system as opposed to becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. Some of the same characteristics that have prompted behavioral incidents have also served her positively in maintaining her academic status despite prolific suspensions: fierce belief in justice, desire for independence, and openly and honestly speaking her mind.

"Graduating for real": Independence, compassion. Tierra aspires to maintain excellent grades in high school, attend college, and begin a career in nursing. In discussing the future, she has a clear route in mind to reach her goals and is very aware of the steps she needs to take. She recognizes the importance of the ACT she will be taking a year from now. She feels passionate about graduating from high school and envisions herself getting into a good college and obtaining a bachelor's degree, "Like I know that I will be able to get into a good college." She raised her grades significantly this year and

feels confident in her ability to continue to demonstrate academic excellence. Tierra also hopes to be independent and give back to her community. She wants to:

...leave, like, my mom's house and stuff. And then it's to...hmmm...like, start a new community, like, a new community group 'cause, like, dance and stuff like that. 'Cause it's like we don't have much 'round here. So I feel like if we get, like, we can get more and, like, it's like really out there, the more people will be committed.

Tierra sees areas for growth in her community and wants to contribute using her strengths.

Regarding her future nursing career, she also highlights her desire to help those in need. She connects this back to the care she provided to her grandmother and believes she has been skilled at caring for others since a young age. She shared, "I knew when I was younger what I wanted to be 'cause, like, when she was sick I'd have to go over there and make sure she took her medicine and make sure she eats." Tierra felt special and important in this role and took the responsibility very seriously.

Tierra believes she has the potential to make a life-changing impact on others. She recalls a time when her intuition and quick action saved her grandmother's life. She arrived at her grandmother's house one day to find her grandmother unconscious. She immediately recognized something was out of the ordinary and called her mom for assistance. They were able to get her grandmother to the hospital just in time to be treated. Healthcare staff informed Tierra that if they had not seen her grandmother in the previous thirty minutes, she might not have survived. Tierra envisions herself providing preventative care elderly patients may forget about which could ultimately save their

lives, “Like...’cause say like somebody needed something so they... like diabetes, say that they needed to take they insulin shot then I feel like if they forget and I remind them, it’s like. I can save their life.” Based on her past experience, she has confidence that she can provide the care needed to prevent and address serious health issues in patients.

“She always wanted me to finish strong”: **Spirituality, love, family.** Tierra had a difficult start to her high school career experiencing the death of her grandmother a few months into ninth grade. Her grandmother was in the hospital for several weeks and Tierra struggled to get up early enough to catch the bus to get to her previous school across town causing her to miss several weeks of school. She spent a lot of time up at the hospital with her family and felt they became closer before her grandmother died, but then “after it was like we split up.” She lives right around the corner from SHS and transferred in November of her freshman year. Over time she has been able to talk more openly about her grandmother who she said was more like her mother, “It was like my mama was my sister and my granny was my mama.” The shift in the family dynamic has greatly affected Tierra and she identifies this as a significant source of her negative behaviors in school.

Tierra expressed feeling alone now that her grandmother has passed away. She shared that she enjoyed expressing “more about my granny and my granddaddy...like being able to actually talk... I used to hold it all in, I didn’t just talk about it but now some I can actually get more out without being emotional and stuff.” She holds her grandmother close to her heart and has a strong sense of love in relation to her. Tierra draws on this love to inspire her dreams and hopes for the future.

The love Tierra continues to feel toward her grandmother extends into the realm of spirituality. Even though her teacher, Sarah, explained she and Tierra do not frequently discuss religion or spirituality, Sarah was aware of how important Tierra's grandmother was to her. She explained, "Whenever she talks about her grandmother who passed away, she'll talk about how her grandmother is watching over her or things like that." Sarah referenced a photography and reflection piece Tierra completed for art class that represented her spirituality and deep connection with her grandmother, "She did that art with the photography thing and she talked about her grandmother in there, too, so I know that's like a source of strength and spirituality for her, knowing that her grandmother is watching over her." Tierra did not explicitly mention this artwork to me, but it was available publicly in an art show. The photograph she created shows her hand holding her cell phone with a collage of images of her grandmother. Two photographs highlight her grandmother's bright smile while others include family and a cross. In Tierra's reflection on her photograph, she wrote:

The saddest moment of my life was October 25, 2014 when my Nana, my granny, my world, my everything, left my side. I took care of her when she was sick and wasn't eating. I was there. She was the person that kept me on my feet and made me the young lady I am today...I felt like the world was ending. She was a fighter and she didn't give up.

Tierra looked up to her grandmother with great admiration, but she also drew purpose and meaning from being her caretaker. She sees her as a continued source of strength and inspiration.

“Us three is all we got”: Family, resistance, trust, responsibility. Tierra recalls her mom telling her from a young age it was important for she and her siblings to stick together. She has taken this responsibility to heart primarily in how she has stood up for her sister. Although Tierra is almost two years younger than her sister, she views herself as the older sister and says she is overprotective of her sister. Tierra engaged in a physical fight to keep another girl from fighting her sister earlier this school year, “I don’t let my sister fight anyways. ‘Cause she’s little and the girl, she was way bigger than her, so I was like no you’re not fighting her. I’ll fight you.” Tierra’s sister also recently had a baby, and she was even more protective of her when she was pregnant.

Tierra looks to her brother and his girlfriend for guidance and support. She recalls identifying her brother as her hero when she was younger. He has been there for her and encouraged her. Now, Tierra explains, they are there for each other and she supports him as well. Tierra is also very close with his girlfriend and describes her as an older sister, more so than her biological older sister. She identified her as an influential adult in her life (Stephanie). She says Stephanie tells her “what’s right and what’s wrong” and “don’t let the negative get in the way.” She looks up to Stephanie and sees some of her own future opportunities in Stephanie’s current endeavors.

Both influential adults Tierra identified (Stephanie and Sarah) believed Tierra confided in them and they have each been able to be there for her in various challenging situations. They also described her as somewhat closed and guarded and hoped she will find ways to engage them fully in her thoughts. Sarah reflected on her first encounter with Tierra when she actually took responsibility to stand up for Sarah in her first day in

the classroom. Students had taken her Teddy Graham crackers and Tierra remarked, “That is so messed up!” She almost got into a physical fight standing up for Sarah.

Tierra also feels a strong sense of responsibility and leadership with the horses. She is one of the “elite three” Sarah has selected to visit and care for her horse. Sarah has observed Tierra take her role seriously and demonstrated a high level of awareness of her movements and state of mind when she is around the horses.

“Every situation doesn’t need a reaction”: **Honesty, maturity, humor.** Tierra reflected that she is learning from her mistakes and becoming more mature. She has developed a stronger sense of control in her actions and words. She used to play and take important things lightly. She recognized “it wasn’t worth it” and that “attitude don’t help with nothin’.” Although she continues to have frustrations with behavior corrections in school, she seems to have increased awareness of this and what she needs to do to improve, even when it is easier said than done.

Although there are times when Tierra needs to rein in her strong personality, those who know her well greatly appreciate her zest for life as it emerges in her humor and honesty. Stephanie views Tierra’s outspoken nature as a light and fun part of their friendship. She shared, “She’ll keep your day going for real,” describing Tierra’s sense of humor and ability to make her laugh. Sarah also highlighted Tierra’s sense of humor as a strength as well as her openness. She said Tierra “wears her heart on her sleeve” and “always speaks her mind.” Tierra has an engaging personality and enjoys the attention of others. Although this sometimes manifests in negative ways, it also fosters positive relationships and brings joy to those with whom she interacts.

Summary

By eliciting Tierra's opinions and the perspectives of those close to her in this research, I reframed the primarily negative description of her in of her school profile to discover her the strengths and supports that inspire her to continue on in education.

Tierra takes great responsibility in standing up for others, in particular her siblings, and is often outspoken. In many cases, her openness appeals to others and both adults I interviewed about her expressed appreciation for her playful sense of humor, straightforward communication style, and unpredictability. Tierra has aspirations to be independent and make a positive difference in the world. She holds on tightly to her memories of her deceased grandmother and gains strength in her belief her grandmother is watching over her. Tierra is learning to harness these attributes to apply them in ways that will help her be successful in school rather than land her in a power struggle with an authority figure.

Cross-Case Analysis

When comparing the stories and experiences of all three young women, significant similarities emerge to support an initial response to the research questions I pose. I will frame these responses by examining the patterns I discover across strengths and supports that ultimately inform and drive the girls' inspiration to continue in education. Throughout this analysis, I will integrate the conceptual framework, Strengths in Communities of Color, explicitly exploring trust, love, spirituality, and resistance. This framework extends the focus on the positive in the community context drawing on a sense of well being in the community that can be strengthened and built on rather than focusing on obstacles and barriers that need remedies or solutions. Many serious and

traumatic life experiences emerged in the girls' stories through my research. However, I intentionally chose to focus on how the girls overcame challenges rather than looking closely at the challenges and how they potentially held the girls back or negatively affected them. I engaged in interviews and observations informed by Appreciative Inquiry to examine, as stated previously in this study, what is *strong* with the girls rather than what is *wrong* with them.

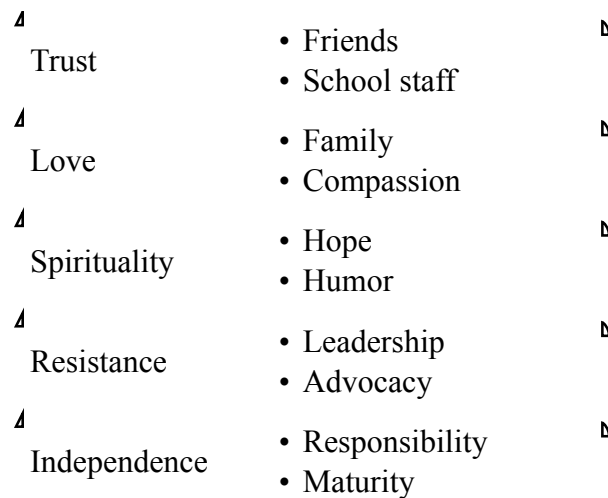


Figure 10. Revised model of Strengths in Communities of Color conceptual framework.

Trust and Love

Love and trust represent significant supports the girls lean on to overcome the challenges they face as they continue to pursue their goals. These areas of strength included immediate family, close friends, extended kinship networks, and select teachers and school staff. All three girls identified important people in their families who motivated and inspired them, notably they each identified a female elder in their families. Kamiyah feels a strong sense of both love and trust with her great aunt, Aunt Helen. Kamiyah shared that she felt loved when her Aunt Helen took her in as her own and

Kamiyah has a deep sense of trust with Aunt Helen rooted in everything she has done for Kamiyah:

[I felt loved] when my auntie took me in, because if she didn't take me in I would've had to go through the system process, the state. And it showed that she really loved me from taking me in... I trust my auntie. Um really, I really trust her. I like trust my friends to an extent, but I don't trust them all the way. Like I can't just sit down and talk about my whole life story to my friends. I don't have that. ...Because she been there and took me right or wrong. And like I know I'm going to go through stuff but stand away from the rough side and stay on the right path. I trust her.

Kamiyah's relationship with Aunt Helen gives her a sense of security and support.

LaTonya has a similar relationship with her mom and grandmother. She identified them both as the people she feels closest to and said they are her role models. She describes the dynamic between her and her mom as more of a friendship than a parent-child relationship, but she still feels taken care of by her mom. Tierra describes meaningful relationships with her grandmother and her siblings, as well as her brother's girlfriend. She feels closest to her grandmother, but she also has a strong sense of confidence in her connections with the others. The three girls felt they could sincerely trust and rely on these significant family members and identified times in their lives when they had been there for them. They believe they can express things with them that will not be shared with others evoking a sense of safety and confidence within their relationships.

All three girls also explained how their relationships were built on love and trust with a very small, select group of friends. They all discussed how they and their friends motivate one another and encourage each other to stay on the right track and make

positive choices. Each of their reciprocal roles in these friendships also gives them a sense of purpose and leadership. Tierra spoke about how she serves as a confidant to others:

... it's like if someone is really going through something I'm all ears to hear about it, like 9 times out of 10, I've already been in the situation. So I'll just like talk to 'em about it. And...it's like they always be like, you're a good friend to talk to and I'm like yeah, I've been in that situation before so yeah, I know what's happening... Cuz it's like everything that I tell 'em, it doesn't leave their mouth. Like no one knows, it's between me and them.

Tierra sees herself as a supportive friend to others and provides guidance and supports related to the challenges she has overcome. This gives her greater self-confidence and fuels her desire and abilities as a leader.

Finally, the girls all described at least one positive relationship with a school staff member based on a foundation of trust. Kamiyah expressed an appreciation for her English teacher Laura and the relationship they developed over her four years in high school. LaTonya and Tierra both identified teachers who are important to them who they have known less than a year. Even though those teachers had only known each girl a short time period, they were able to quickly build rapport and trust with them in order to have a strong relationship and be considered influential in their lives. LaTonya also emphasized how she had been affected by the change in school staff and the people who had supported her in the past who had left:

I was doing good. I played softball and volleyball last year and pep rallies were okay, everything was okay. But this year I don't know, we got new principals and

teachers and all that good stuff so just trying to adapt to that...I miss my old my old counselor or whatever he was, assistant principal, Dr. Farmer. I really miss him, he was...yeah, he motivated me as well, too.

LaTonya experienced significant transition each year of high school. She changed schools between ninth and tenth grades; then her high school had many staff changes between tenth and eleventh grades. The girls all had to adapt to the systemic transitions at SHS and get to know new teachers and administrators even when the students themselves stayed at the same school. The teachers interviewed all commented on the difficulty of explaining what trust means. However, they all excelled in developing trust-based relationships with Kamiyah, LaTonya and Tierra in the school environment.

Spirituality

Within the context of great loss and painful experiences, the girls all rely on their sense of spirituality to maintain a sense of hope, humor and mindfulness. The challenges they have experienced in their lives motivate them to create change that matters and give back to their communities. Kamiyah expressed the most explicit involvement and commitment to faith and religion. She views herself as uplifted and positive, characteristics motivated by her engagement in her church community, in particular her participation in her church choir and ministry work:

We, uh, get together on Saturdays and go minister out to others that you know don't have a church home or [are] homeless. We in the homeless ministry too, we uh, preparing like little stuff like deodorant, socks, toothpaste, toothbrush for the homeless to take to the...is it the westside mission ...And knowing that I got

something good now. Except for when my auntie and them was growing up. We got it better than what they had.

She has gratitude and appreciation for what she does have in her life and recognizes what others have done before her to create the life she lives, a viewpoint of herself and the world that is greater than one person. Kamiyah also described regularly reciting Bible verses at family meals and attending Bible study groups. Tierra described a core connection with church, the Bible, and praying for strength. Her teacher, Sarah, described the importance for Tierra of believing her grandmother is watching over her. Tierra also described spirituality as being spirited, excited, and energetic. She embodies this in what Stephanie and Sarah both describe as unpredictability and a vibrant sense of humor. Spirituality in the form of laughter and zest for life is evident in the experiences of Kamiyah, LaTonya, and Tierra as well. LaTonya does not explicitly mention spirituality or religion, but she does frequently reference laughter and enjoying life. Kamiyah's teacher, Laura, reflected on the contagious nature of Kamiyah's laugh and how much she will miss it as Kamiyah moves on and graduates from high school. Stephanie, Tierra's brother's girlfriend, highlighted the role laughter plays in their relationships saying, "She'll keep your day going for real." Tierra's ability to be playful and find humor and joy in everyday situations raises the spirits of those with whom she interacts. A sense of spirituality in the form of organized religion as well as a general appreciation for the joys in life represents a positive and important characteristic for all three girls. . These experiences of spirituality and religion as independent but related constructs reflect the work of Hill and Pargamont (2008). They discuss the ways in which a the combined concepts of spirituality and religion promote a sense of strength

and meaning, perseverance, purpose, and positive coping methods (Hill & Pargamont, 2008).

It is important to note that, although the girls spoke about the importance of spirituality and hope in their lives, the teacher participants explicitly noted they had little knowledge of this topic. They all had minimal understanding of students' religious beliefs and spirituality. Laura and Camila both claimed they could not really speak to this connection at all. Sarah provided a brief description of the importance of religion to Tierra in the context of her grandmother's death; however, she also expressed this was an area they did not speak about often.

Resistance

Typical connotations of resistance may be negative, but for this study, I consider resistance as a strength. For all three girls, characteristics that could be construed as problematic or needs serve as assets; the girls show strength in their willingness to speak their minds, accept and overcome challenges, and heal from loss. Each of the three girls describes herself and/or is described by others as having a strong voice and being outgoing, outspoken, and open. The girls all use straightforward communication styles and speak their minds. Although these characteristics were not always perceived positively by the influential adults and in the students' school records, both the girls and the adults highlighted these attributes as valuable. Their teachers all described situations in which the girls stood up for them and applied this strength in advocating for their teachers. Kamiyah stood up for Laura when the class was getting rowdy. LaTonya stood up for Camila to re-engage the class when students were getting off track. Tierra stood up for Sarah when other students stole her food on her first day teaching. They have all

applied their sense of justice and used their voices to advocate for someone else, in particular someone else who is supposedly in power or who should have authority. The girls applied their power and leadership abilities with their peers to support the teachers they care about.

The girls demonstrate another instance of resistance as a positive attribute in their perseverance in accepting challenges and overcoming significant barriers. They all experienced some level of loss and pain within their network of family and friends. Kamiyah struggled with being abandoned by her biological mother as an infant. She also felt significant loss and sadness with the death of one of her friends this school year. LaTonya grappled with the difficulties of understanding her brother's mental health diagnosis and feeling helpless and worried about his well-being. Tierra felt a profound sense of loss in the death of her grandmother and that of her grandfather soon after. She has a tattoo representing this loss and signifies the importance of her grandparents in her life:

I was going through so much and then it was like I had just lost my granny and then I had just lost my granddaddy...the one on my back it means like always on my mind and forever in my heart...It's like all the words is going into a heart cuz it's like my granny was my heart.

Tierra misses both of her grandparents deeply, but she chooses to channel these negative feelings into a positive attitude and seeks to make her grandparents proud.

Although all three girls identified a strong sense of community within their neighborhoods and neighbors looking out for and supporting one another, they described frequent violence including shootings and concern for their safety. Despite these

challenges, or in some cases because of these challenges, the girls found ways to proceed and endure in life and education. Instead of dwelling on her pain when her friend was killed, Kamiyah thought about ways to channel the love she felt for him into other areas such as her church ministries and caring for others. Tierra talks about her desire to give back to the community and create opportunities for younger children to be engaged in productive activities. LaTonya feels unsafe walking around in her neighborhood, but she has the confidence and courage to continue to pursue her goals even though she may sometimes feel afraid.

Independence

The Strengths in Communities of Color framework I apply does not include independence as a theme, but this concept emerged for all three participants, especially in terms of the importance of part-time work. All three girls have worked part-time jobs since they were old enough to do so. This shows a significant level of maturity and commitment that, at times, transferred over to their school lives. Tierra reflected that her part-time jobs help her in:

Maturing cuz it's like from last year to this year I can honestly say that I haven't gotten in trouble as much. And it's like I come to school with a purpose and then I leave with a purpose...It's like you don't, like, it's like I don't have to ask my parents for nothing no more. I can just get it on my own...like gives me more like as I think about it 'cuz I be wantin to quit but I just have to think about it like this is for you, you gotta do it for you

The perspectives Tierra has gained from working have supported her in making positive choices in the school environment as well. LaTonya described supports in the form of friends as role models in maintaining a commitment to working.

My friends uh my friends are very focused. Uh, all of my friends have jobs and they've been working for uh a long time, like one of my closest friends I been knowing from middle school she's been having her job since ... a year probably now.....

The skills required to keep a job over time include developing abilities in teamwork, communication, and consistency. The success the girls find in their work environments supports them in increasing their confidence and also builds their maturity, which they can then apply in educational environments as well.

Inspiration to Continue in Education

The girls draw on their strengths and supports within the Strengths in Communities of Color, including trust, love, spirituality, resistance and the addition of independence, to inspire them to continue in education. They have been encouraged and pushed to seek to make a difference, speak their minds, live in the moment and make a better life for themselves. They are motivated by the negative examples they see to choose positive paths and are driven by challenges rather than shying away from them. None of the girls expressed any expectation that their life trajectories would include a future in the juvenile or criminal justice systems. The girls all have strong ideas about their goals and futures including clear plans and pathways for college and careers. The strengths they possess emerged through the AI process and give insight into how this population, persistently disciplined Black high school girls, can be further engaged to

pursue and follow through with the constructive pathways to their futures. Rather than dwell on the negative choices they may make, or have made, the positive attributes of persistently disciplined Black girls can be reframed and focused on to promote success in school and life.

Trust and Love: Making a Difference

The girls identified inspiration to continue in education related to the trust and love they felt with their family, friends, school staff and community. They all expressed a desire to set a positive example for others and make a difference related to experiences of those they love. Kamiyah feels a sense of responsibility as a role model for her younger relatives as well as for her peers:

I have little siblings so I try to prepare them for the real life. Like I work with them. Like yesterday I went over my cousin's house and I played around with them, like played school, played house, just to get them prepared for life...

She takes pride in her role as a senior leader and recognizes she has come a long way since she was younger. She identified this as a highlight in her life when she has felt most alive and engaged:

Being a senior. Because I knew I had to take big responsibilities...like behavior wise. I have improved a lot of my behavior. And coming to school. Like, some days I have missed because I was sick, but I feel like I have become a better person and setting an example for my peers...knowing that, us being a senior means we need to take responsibilities over the underclassmen. It's really motivating me to see how, you know, how we used to act as underclassmen, so it's a really eye opener for real.

These responsibilities have kept her on track in her later years of high school and inspired her to maintain positive connections with education and longer-term career and college trajectories.

All three participants also identified an interest in professions that involve serving others. These interests stemmed from challenges they and their family members have faced. Kamiyah aspires to become a nurse and focus on caring for elderly patients. She has seen relatives in nursing homes where they have not been cared for appropriately. She believes they deserve better and she will be able to provide high quality, compassionate care to people in similar situations once she completes her training. LaTonya focused her goals in the field of psychology in connection to her brother's mental health diagnosis. She seeks to increase her understanding of schizophrenia and find a cure. She shared, "I'm passionate about, um, my brother's illness, what causes that, and how it affects him as well as others." Tierra's inspiration for her career stems from her relationship with her grandmother. She describes how she sees herself in the future:

I'm helping more elderly people cuz like when my granny was alive that's when like, I used to practice on her, like that's how I knew I was younger what I wanted to be cuz like when she was sick I'd have to go over there and make sure she took her medicine and make sure she eats...so it's like I used to practice.

Tierra feels inspired to become a nurse by her grandmother's struggles with diabetes and the role she played in caring for her. These dreams of helping others like her grandmother motivate her to achieve in school and further her education.

Kamiyah, LaTonya, and Tierra all described an interest in giving back to their community and goals within the helping professions. For Kamiyah, her interest in nursing and caring for the elderly stems from her faith and the role her Aunt Helen has played in her life as a representative of an older generation. Kamiyah also expressed an interest in contributing to her community as a mentor for younger children and wanting to set an example for them. LaTonya draws on her love for her brother and the difficulty of seeing him struggle without treatment in her dream of studying psychology. She also spoke fondly of volunteering with young girls at a local community center. Tierra's relationship with her grandmother in a care-taking role prompted her to develop an interest in nursing. She shared that she wants to start a community group to provide young people with something to do in her neighborhood where she feels little exists to engage them in positive and productive ways. These greater aspirations and interests inspire the young women to stay engaged in school so they can continue to work toward these goals. Although their attendance records, including exclusionary discipline, illustrate a disconnect in their commitment to school, the girls all manage to complete at least the minimum requirements for classes so they can earn credits toward high school graduation.

Spirituality: Living in the Moment

The girls all showed an ability to set aside the difficulties and negative influences in their lives to be mindful and present in the moment. This allowed them to cope with everything they experienced and also continue in education and dream great futures for themselves. They drew on their sense of spirituality in various ways, from religion, to

prayer, to finding joy in the little things in life. Their faith and spirituality give them hope and also fueled their determination to create change that matters.

Stephanie, Tierra' friend and her brother's girlfriend, shared her perspective on how Tierra's sense of humor brings lightness and energy to their relationship, "She is hilarious and she's very playful. At the mall you know how they have different stores she plays with clothes and everything." Her sense of humor serves as a way for her to connect with others and also a distraction and form of coping with and escaping from challenges that arise in her life.

For Kamiyah, she has a deep sense of religion and spirituality as previously discussed. In addition, her English teacher, Laura, describes the significance of Kamiyah's ability to accept things as they are:

I feel like she's accepting of things that have happened. And I think that's really her strength in how she's gotten through some of the things that she's gone through. She does kind of take things as 'Okay, well this is what it is' and she moves on. Um...I think that that's probably her, a big strength of hers.

This acceptance allows her to focus on the present and future rather than dwell on the past. She focuses her energy on what she has control over and the steps she is taking to improve her life, not blaming those who have hurt her or caused difficulties in her life. Kamiyah's acceptance of the way things are also contributes to her resilience in being able to bounce back from obstacles and keep her focus on her goals.

Resistance: Speaking Their Minds

The results showed connections between the participants' strengths within the area of resistance and their hopes for expressing themselves, improving the community

and defying the negative examples around them. The girls have the potential to apply the confidence they have in standing up for themselves and others to effect positive change.

As her Spanish teacher, Camila describes this characteristic in LaTonya:

She's very quick witted. And what I liked the most about her, because she was so outspoken, if she didn't get something, she would say it right away, and um...I feel like every classroom has certain students that set the mood for the classroom and she was one of those students that would set the mood for the entire classroom. Because when she didn't understand, and she asked the question, maybe another student didn't understand and didn't ask, they weren't so outspoken. So she would be the one to always clear things up. Sometimes she didn't have a question but could see confusion in other kids' faces and she would say something to clear it up even more.

LaTonya channeled her courage to speak her mind into serving as a leader within the class. This gave her power in supporting her classmates, pleasing her teacher, and developing her own sense of self-efficacy as a learner that promotes positive connections with school and her future. The participants all referenced violence in their neighborhoods and their concerns with the effects on the community. They identified this as an area they hoped to improve and influence in the future. The girls also expressed they were motivated to take a different path by seeing others around them make negative choices.

All three girls also find inspiration in accepting a challenge. Laura described how Kamiyah pursued AP English despite past struggles and difficulties with reading.

LaTonya and Tierra both attended highly structured schools prior to SHS. They both had

significantly less behavior incidents within the programs with high expectations than at SHS. As a persistently low achieving school with significant intervention by the district and state, SHS has dealt with ongoing retention issues for staff at all levels contributing to inconsistencies in implementation of behavior expectations and discipline policy.

LaTonya expressed that she was motivated by the intensity of the work at her previous high school and the high expectations helped to keep her on track. Tierra enjoys proving to others she can do something they may not expect or that may impress them. When horseback riding, she rose to the challenge of riding the horse faster than she had been when prompted by her teacher. She also demonstrated persistence in developing difficult riding techniques as she learned and practiced in the moment. The girls all find motivation in being challenged to do things others believe they cannot do and trying to prove others wrong.

Independence: Making a Better Life for Themselves

Finally, in the addition I have made to the Strengths in Communities of Color framework, the girls demonstrate independence through their desire to better themselves and live on their own. They all showed this through their commitment to part-time jobs as well as the hopes and goals they identified for their futures. In my observations of LaTonya at work, I witnessed professionalism, poise and dedication. She arrived on time and took her role seriously. As previously stated in regard to her strengths, seeing her friends' commitment to work and the financial freedom it provided them supported her in continuing to work.

Kamiyah expressed her intentions to pursue her dreams through college. She shared with Laura that “she’s not trying to stay back and end up doing nothing even if that’s what her friends do.” She stated to me:

But I want to go to college. Like I want to see myself somewhere in the future. Not just being underneath my auntie all the time...I am going to a bible college. I really feel like it will help me become a better person who can work on praying every day.

She believes that pursuing her education will help her complete her goals and be independent.

Tierra also showed great commitment to her part-time job. At one point, she even worked two part-time jobs while attending school. She described working as a high point in her life and saw it as a “big learning process, like a big growth process.” She identified that working created opportunities for her to become more mature and responsible:

It’s like you don’t, like, I don’t have to ask my parents for nothing no more. I can just get it on my own...as I think about it ‘cause I be wantin’ to quit but I just have to think about it, like, this is for you, you gotta do it for you...

Tierra enjoys the financial independence that allows her to make more of her own choices and not rely on her parents as much. She also demonstrates motivation and commitment to her work even though she does not always enjoy it or want to continue. She sees working as an important avenue for personal growth and holds herself accountable for staying employed. All three girls demonstrate responsibility and confidence in relation to their part-time work.

Summary of Findings

The school profiles of each of the young women in this study focus primarily on deficits. Their records highlight behavior infractions and frame them as troublemakers and delinquents who fight, steal, and rebel against school authorities. However, by taking a closer, more thorough look at each young woman, I identified significant strengths, supports and inspiration that promote their continued engagement in education. Through the non-school observations and the interviews with adults they identified as influential, I gained insights into their unique and vibrant personalities. By intentionally looking for their strengths, these findings can inform school practices that can better engage persistently disciplined Black girls in education and promote positive behavior change as it relates to some of the challenges they face.

Exploring the themes across cases, I observed strength for all three girls in all areas of the conceptual framework (trust, love, spirituality, resistance) in addition to the emergent finding of independence as an area of strength. The girls hold important values and characteristics related to resistance and spirituality that serve as strengths to overcome barriers. Their sense of support stems from relationships built on trust and love. A lack of discussion of spirituality in the context of school, romantic relationships, and racial identity stood out as silences within the interviews for all three girls and the influential adults they identified. In the following section, these areas will be explored further in the context of the literature and related implications for policy, practice and future research will be discussed.

CHAPTER XV
DISCUSSION: STUDY THREE

Overview of the Study

Recent research has brought increased attention to the disproportionality in discipline for Black girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Limited research exists seeking to understand this population (Blake et al., 2011; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2014; E. W. Morris, 2007; M. W. Morris, 2016). Additionally, the limited studies exploring persistently disciplined Black girls focus on the challenges Black girls face or the negative behaviors they demonstrate rather than the strengths they possess to overcome the ongoing oppression they encounter as persistently disciplined students (Blake et al., 2011). Informed by the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process (Cooperrider et al., 2005), I intentionally designed interview protocols to help me *discover* the strengths and supports that inspire persistently disciplined Black girls to continue in education within the conceptual framework of Strengths in Communities of Color (trust, love, spirituality, resistance). In addition to the identified themes, *independence* emerged as a significant strength for all three girls. A strong value for, and striving for, independence can be considered in this study as an addition to the Strengths in Communities of Color framework. Each theme will be further explored in the context of the literature previously reviewed and additional literature drawn on to explicate the relevant areas illustrated in the findings.

Further, in this chapter I will also apply the second AI stage to *dream* of what could be in regard to research, policy and practice connected with my findings. The education system needs to change in order to better serve Black youth, girls in particular, in response to the discipline gap. In considering the *dream* phase, I engage CRT and the concept of interest convergence. The recommendations related to improving educational

experiences for Black youth must recognize that the affected group is not the dominant group, but the marginalized group of persistently disciplined Black youth. The continued practices that result in this disproportionality serve the dominant (White, middle class) population in maintaining power and privilege. This tension must be explicitly identified and engaged to truly *dream* and envision what is possible to create a more equitable and just educational system.

The application of AI in my research also highlights issues in how educators approach solutions. I explicitly chose not to explore challenges related to community violence, loss, family challenges, and poverty. These issues emerged within my research, but I reframed them as strengths in how the girls overcame them, not in how these issues held the girls back or potentially influenced their negative behaviors. Educators lean toward addressing behavior concerns with monitoring and compliance, including exclusionary discipline, which has been shown to affect Black students more so than White students (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba et al., 2014). In particular, educators struggle to see the positive in persistently disciplined students. Even more so than other student populations, persistently disciplined students are viewed negatively, and thus educators must be intentional about reframing apparent needs as attributes and learn how to draw on student strengths. By focusing on strengths, educators can step away from the negative lens they may be accustomed to and aspire to find ways to engage all students in learning by building on natural curiosity, motivation, and human connection. The efforts can be used to build community well-being within and outside of school, applying the Strengths in Communities of Color framework to

critically challenge capitalist frameworks and promote a true path toward social justice (Hinton, 2015).

To reiterate, the purpose of this study is to discover and highlight the strengths and supports of persistently disciplined Black high school girls within the context of the discipline gap. Through this embedded case study, I explore the following two research questions:

1. What strengths and supports do persistently disciplined Black girls draw on to continue in education?
2. What inspires persistently disciplined Black adolescent girls to continue in education?

Discussion of Key Findings

Major findings in this study relate to the areas of strength identified in the conceptual framework, Strengths in Communities of Color (trust, love, spirituality, resistance), with the addition of *independence* as a strength that emerged in the study.

Trust and Love

For all three girls, my research revealed strengths in their sense of trust and love with family, friends, and school staff. Additionally, they each drew on their sense of compassion in their goals of making a difference in their communities. These findings related to trust and love reflect the literature regarding the importance of family engagement in schools (Auerbach, 2009), peer influence on adolescents (Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986; Padilla-Walker & Bean, 2009) and development of trust between students and teachers (A. Gregory & Ripski, 2008). The participants all identified a close friend or family member as influential in their lives as well as a teacher, which promoted their

continued engagement in school. It was also notable that all three girls discussed the significance of their relationship with female elders in their families (grandmothers and great aunts). These relationships reflect the literature regarding the growing role of grandparents as caregivers and supports in the lives of school-age young people that researchers in the fields of education and sociology have begun to discuss (Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1998; Dolbin-McNab, 2006; Kelch-Oliver, 2011). The girls all recognized that while they did not have a large social network, they had one or a few close friends who they truly trusted and peers who provided motivation and encouragement. In Hinton's (2015) description of love as a strength in communities of color, he emphasized that it sustains in the face of adversity. All three girls faced significant challenges and obstacles in their young lives and the loving relationships they hold with family, friends, and very special teachers supported them through the difficult events in their lives.

Spirituality

The importance of spirituality in the lives of the girls in the study stood out as one of the key findings. They each experienced and relied on spirituality in different ways. I applied a broad understanding of spirituality, expanding from organized religion and church participation to include hope, humor, and mindfulness within this concept. For Kamiyah and Tierra, spirituality was closely linked to their participation in organized religion, attending church and prayer. For all three girls, their strengths in focusing on the positive and bringing humor to others served as coping strategies. They were able to focus on finding joy in the present moment rather than dwell on the obstacles and pain they experienced. This reflects a certain enthusiasm or spirited feeling that Tierra discusses or uplifted nature Kamiyah identifies.

This finding corroborates the work of Alston (2005) and Jean-Marie and Normore (2010), whose research found that spirituality played a significant role in the motivation and drive of Black women in leadership roles centering on the existence of inner strength, connectedness and finding meaning in their work. As young Black women, the students in this study show similarities to the Black women leaders in Alston's (2005) and Jean-Marie and Normore's (2010) work. The girls in this study find both solace and inspiration in their sense of spirituality. Tierra thinks about her deceased grandmother watching over her and prays for strength. Kamiyah finds community in her church choir and outreach ministries. LaTonya has a broader sense of spirituality in the joy she experiences spending time with friends and family. Their spiritual connections have served to motivate them to where they are today and have the potential to continue to inspire them to reach their long-term goals.

Resistance

Student strengths in relation to resistance included courage, advocacy for others, and persistence in the face of adversity. These areas all support Hinton's (2015) conceptualization of transformational resistance with a focus on righting an imbalance of power and pushing an agenda of social justice. The girls all believe in the importance of speaking up for themselves and others and rarely hesitate to do so. Tierra speaks up for her sister and even physically fights her battles. Kamiyah speaks up for herself when she feels she has been wronged, for example when she was blamed for instigating a fight. She showed courage in sharing her perspective with an administrator, a significant power imbalance, and ultimately received a lesser consequence for her actions. LaTonya speaks up for herself and her classmates when something does not make sense in class. This

finding also corroborates the work of Evans-Winters & Esposito (2010) who found people in power often misunderstood Black girls and their approach to advocating for themselves and others. All three girls received many behavior referrals related to their advocacy for themselves or others (refusal to comply with adult directives, heated verbal altercations, fighting). Some of these areas are more clear-cut than others in how school leaders must respond in terms of discipline and consequences. However, in regard to refusal to comply, in particular, substantial leeway exists in how educators can develop trust in their relationships with persistently disciplined Black girls to give them voice in these situations and ultimately avoid the power struggle that often ensues when students are given a directive with which they disagree.

Independence

The final area that emerged in the results of this study was not previously identified in the conceptual framework. Independence as a strength for persistently disciplined Black girls relates to their sense of individuality and autonomy, which has connections to resistance. However, with the specific connections to, and significance of, part-time work for all three girls, the area of independence warrants its own subsection and individualized attention. Initially, I did not ask explicit questions about part-time jobs. A question about whether or not they work or volunteer was briefly included in the original interview protocol in which I inquired about a general description of the students' experiences and opening self-description. However, upon finding all three girls had significant commitments to part-time work, and that they found a strong sense of purpose and autonomy in this, I explored this topic further. I observed two of the three

girls in their work environments and I asked additional questions about their beliefs and values related to their part-time jobs in follow-up interviews.

The majority of the literature shows a negative link between part-time work and academic achievement (Ormiston, 2016). However, part-time work requires many attributes that have the potential to serve students well in an academic environment and can also inform school practices. All three girls self-identified and/or were recognized by influential adults for their ability to accept a challenge. They excelled in fast-paced environments such as behind a restaurant counter. In employment and extra-curricular settings, I observed the girls exhibit behaviors that would impress and excite their teachers. They listened attentively, took initiative, and spoke calmly and respectfully with customers. In all of these settings, they engaged in meaningful learning. LaTonya observed an experienced restaurant server and practiced engaging with customers. Tierra worked consistently without any redirection. She discussed her strategies for collaborating with her co-workers and how she has effectively and professionally handled conflict at work. Kamiyah talked about her commitment to work and balancing this responsibility with her participation in bible study and attending church. She applies important time management skills to be able to manage all of her activities.

The girls noted parallels between school and work, but they all seemed to have more patience and respect for their superiors in the work environment than in the school and classroom context. Not surprisingly, they were motivated at work by the direct and immediate reward of a paycheck as compared to longer-range rewards at school. However, within the work environment, they had a clear sense of their place and the

expectations. They were also given responsibilities that made them feel valued and important.

The work environment also allowed for greater social interaction than many classrooms. The girls I observed at work engaged in conversation with colleagues as they worked and laughed, clearly enjoying their time together in addition to working for the purpose of a paycheck. All three girls were described as social and having a great sense of humor, by both the adults I interviewed and themselves. These are strengths that serve them well in the work environment, but often are undervalued or scorned in classrooms. This was evidenced in the student profiles that described student behavioral issues related to talking or laughing. Finding ways to make classrooms more engaging, experiential and attuned to the social nature of adolescents, in particular persistently disciplined Black girls, would serve to promote their success in school and beyond.

Implications

Implications for Future Research

The research literature exploring the strengths of persistently disciplined Black girls leaves much for further exploration. The findings of this study lead to important questions that future research could address for persistently disciplined Black girls by giving them voice and agency through Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), more deeply exploring the role of spirituality in their lives and school experiences, examining effective practices in early intervention and home visiting, and pursuing topics notably absent from this study and the girls' responses: racial identity and romantic relationships.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) or courses such as transformative social justice provide examples of valuing student voice in education. Harrel-Levy, Kerpelmna, and Henry (2016) found participation within a transformative social justice class for Black students in an urban, parochial school had positive long-term implications in their civic engagement and career pathways with a strong leaning toward seeking careers in helping professions. All three girls in this study expressed inclinations toward helping professions (nursing and psychology). Providing students opportunities in school to use their voices to serve others could build on this desire and inspiration and support the development of stronger connections to school and community. The girls also all referenced concerns about community violence and safety in their communities. These are areas for exploration within the context of YPAR. Cammarota and Fine (2008) describe YPAR as a form of resistance that is “nourishing to the soul” (p. 2). For all three girls in the study, their desire to help others stems from personal experiences of loss and incorporating their motivations in this way might provide an opportunity for healing, a sense of hope, and movement toward their future goals. Providing persistently disciplined Black girls opportunities to research themselves and each other with support from experienced researchers through YPAR may provide valuable insights into their experiences and lives that may not be evident in adult-researcher driven studies.

The important role of spirituality in Black communities has been identified in the literature (Reed & Neville, 2014), but this area has not been explored specifically in the context of persistently disciplined Black girls. Additionally, the gap between the importance of faith to the young women participants in this study and the minimal understanding and discussion of this area by their teachers deserves additional attention.

The work of Toldson and Anderson (2010) reflects this gap in identifying educators often overlook religion and faith and their importance to students and families. Further research is needed to increase understanding of how to draw on and appreciate spirituality both in collaboration with and separate from religious institutions. Further research in this area could serve to inform practices to promote school engagement and academic success for persistently disciplined Black girls.

Family, in general, and female elders, specifically, provided support and security and served as role models for persistently disciplined Black girls. The girls' school records shows a prominent lack of communication and partnership between school professionals and the girls' families. The literature shows a strong body of evidence for involving parents in children's school experience (Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009; Williams & Chavkin, 1989; Young & Carpenter, 2008). Researchers have also identified innovative approaches to better address students' unique circumstances related to their living situations and families, in particular related to trust (Young & Carpenter, 2008). In regards to persistently disciplined Black girls, additional research is needed exploring the most appropriate and effective approaches to engaging them and their families. This research should consider how to support school staff in engaging in proactive communication such as home visits that serve to increase cultural knowledge and build rapport and trust between staff and families. Further, increased understanding related to early intervention in the transitional phases of changing schools, changing grades, and during times of high levels of staff turnover and how these transitions affect persistently disciplined Black girls could inform educator approaches to partnering with students and families at these critical points in students' educational careers.

There were two areas I did not explicitly address in the interview questions, but I noticed the girls did not address or bring up in their responses. I did not ask specific questions about race or racial identity, but during the assent process, I explained the framework of the study involved exploring experiences of persistently disciplined Black girls. None of the girls discussed their race or the related implications in their experiences of school, discipline or any other context of the interview. Additionally, although Kamiyah and Tierra both alluded to romantic relationships, they shared minimally about these aspects of their lives. LaTonya did not reference romantic relationships at all. I know from the girls' brief mention these relationships do exist, but it is unclear as to the importance of these relationships or what role romantic partners or dating relationships in general play in their lives. Much of the recent literature examining persistently disciplined Black girls highlights the significance of sexuality and sexualization of this population (Crenshaw et al., 2015; M. W. Morris, 2016). It would be appropriate to explore the area of romantic relationships in the context of strengths rather than how it is typically focused on in relation to victimization and trauma.

Implications for Policy

Policy makers would benefit from recognizing and understanding the strengths of persistently disciplined Black girls and how they can promote their success in education and support them in disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline. The most significant areas for policy makers in education to consider include: faith-based partnerships, dynamic curriculum that supports high levels of student engagement (e.g. opportunities for student voice and leadership), family engagement approaches, and developing and maintaining high expectations and clear structures in schools. Additionally, in situations when

students do violate written behavioral expectations, policy makers should consider the potential for restorative practices in humanizing the students who have caused harm and engaging them in a deeper lesson than exclusionary discipline provides.

Federal and local policies support the development of faith-based partnerships despite the longstanding separation of church and state in the United States. In 2009, President Obama issued an executive order promoting the collaboration of faith-based community organizations and governmental agencies, with an expectation that these faith-based organizations respect freedom of religion and government agencies not ascribe to religious principles. He stated, "...Few are closer to what's happening in our street and in our neighborhoods than these organizations. People trust them. Communities rely on them" (CBS News, 2010). Although conversations across religious beliefs can still be uncomfortable or contentious, the standard has been set that we as a society can and should overcome these differences and find common ground in the spirit of improving our communities.

At the local level, MCSD recognizes faith-based partnerships on its website, but does not delineate between alliances with these organizations as compared to businesses or other non-profit organizations (MCSD, 2016c). The findings of this study call for intentional and specific attention to faith-based communities by both individual schools and the district as a whole to engage this untapped resource, especially in regards to Black churches. School level documentation demonstrates a partnership with a large Christian church in the development of a school-based health clinic (MCSD, 2016b). However, this church is located on the opposite end of town and serves a population that differs significantly from the SHS community in regards to race and socioeconomic

status. Building connections with the Black church leaders directly in the community would serve the school leaders well in increasing understanding of the youth and families in the community from a strengths-based perspective and building goodwill among students and families toward the school.

Jordan and Wilson (2015) emphasize the value of faith-based partnerships with Black churches in their research in North Carolina. School staff that participated as church members assisted in developing partnerships and executing programs and initiatives. Their research described a wide range of the potential for what churches can do to support the mission of schools in practical and conceptual ways: recognizing students' academic achievements, offering scholarships, hosting back-to-school activities, partnering in anti-suspension programs, mentoring youth, organizing college fairs, and providing technology resources (Jordan & Wilson, 2015). Through these efforts, the church promoted the importance of academic achievement and connects youth to additional positive role models. Jordan and Wilson (2015) also asserted the importance of promoting dialogue among and between school and church representatives in the area of racial inequity. This ties directly to the purpose of this study and recognizing and addressing the disproportionality in discipline for Black girls.

The experience of youth in the school discipline system is heavily shaped by the efforts of school professionals to engage with students and families in a positive manner, rooted in parent involvement policy and practice. Schools and districts often only do those things for which they are held accountable and which can be directly measured (e.g. open house, parent-teacher conferences). Administrators apply the parent involvement requirements and recommendations, but because they are somewhat vague and open to

interpretation, this often leads to a lack of connection with many parents and guardians, in particular for those students and families who are already disengaged from the educational system (i.e. persistently disciplined youth).

The State Title 1 Parent Involvement policy does not include any specific outreach recommendations for students who have been persistently disciplined or any expectations for school staff regarding discipline or behavior and parent communication (State Department of Education, 2012). The policy does not offer any recommendations for parents or guardians who are difficult to reach or engage, a common challenge with those of students who are persistently disciplined. This research study reframes the thinking around the involvement of parents or guardians whose students have experienced persistent discipline. School staff should be intentional about implementing strategies for proactively engaging parents or guardians of students who have a history of behavior challenges and involvement in the discipline system. Additionally, school and district leaders should hold school professionals more accountable and raise expectations for reaching out to parents and guardians of those students who have behavior challenges in schools. Connecting with families on a positive level early on and seeking their input and insights on their child and her actions may help in better understanding what is truly underlying that young person's likely negative educational experience and behavior. This could help connect the youth and/or family with necessary community resources and supports such as mental health services, mentoring, or other positive extracurricular activities with the potential to increase the youth's sense of belonging and decrease negative influence of peers in unstructured settings. School staff must go beyond calling home to inform parents or guardians of a problem or suspension from school. School

professionals must provide ongoing follow up and communication in order to address the root of negative behaviors, provide relevant and intentional supports, and promote positive behaviors in the future (Johnson, 2014).

Education policy makers should consider the success many youth show in part-time work and find ways to adapt curriculum and classroom experiences to mirror some of the qualities and characteristics students find motivating. The findings of this study identified a fast-paced environment and ample opportunity for social interaction as factors that appealed to youth in work settings. They also appreciated being given responsibilities and having a clear purpose and role. Policy-makers should increase expectations for school leaders to provide opportunities for all students to engage in demanding curriculum through experiential and project-based learning (Markham, 2011). To build on students' advocacy for themselves and others, policy-makers should also emphasize the value of creating space for student voice within and outside of the classroom and provide a wide variety of leadership opportunities for students. Policies must hold school leaders and other educators accountable for engaging students in their school community and making them active participants in their own learning to deepen their investment in their school, community and their own futures.

Policies related to the implementation of proactive discipline frameworks such as Positive Behavior Interventions in Schools (PBIS) and Restorative Practices would align with the study findings regarding the impact of clear rules and expectations for students and compassionate approaches to discipline. The girls in the study were eager to accept a challenge and both girls who attended very strict schools prior to SHS excelled in that environment. Such policies should include nuanced implementation guidelines that

require explicit consideration of and dialogue regarding race since they have not shown differences in the discipline gap independently (Skiba et al., 2014). The promotion and implementation of Restorative Practices in schools has also shown decreases in behavior incidents, disproportionality in discipline, and a more positive school culture (McCluskey et al., 2008; Mirsky, 2007; Ortega, Lyubansky, Nettles, & Espelage, 2016). Restorative Practices can be implemented in conjunction with PBIS and align with the three tiers of multi-tiered systems of supports to promote more proactive, preventative approaches regarding student behavior (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Proactive restorative practices include the use of affective language and more targeted approaches involve facilitated circle discussions with students and adults to promote healing and reintegration in response to conflict (Wachtel, 2013).

Implications for Practice

For educators working directly with persistently disciplined Black girls, this study reveals several recommendations for practice. Educators should be aware of the strengths held by persistently disciplined Black girls so they can reframe their thinking about this population and build on these strengths rather than dwell on their needs and challenges. Educational leaders should advocate and insist upon attention to these areas in their schools and districts. Recommendations for practitioners include home visiting interventions, more comprehensive student records, development of spiritual attunement, and creating space for student voice and leadership.

Educational leaders have a responsibility to hold their staff accountable to explicitly discuss issues of race and gender, in particular disproportionality in discipline, and related interventions and strategies. They should model these practices and prioritize

time with their staff for meaningful dialogue about race and discipline within their schools and the approaches staff might engage in to decrease the discipline gap. To gain insights into students' spirituality, educational leaders might make arrangements to observe students in faith-based settings alongside school staff, as suggested by Jordan and Wilson (2015). After such a visit, educational leaders should then be intentional about engaging in conversations with staff that address racial bias some may hold to tackle issues of racial inequality (Jordan & Wilson, 2015). Educational leaders should seek out professional development for themselves in these areas as well as invest time and money in training their staff in better understanding the strengths of Black girls, reframing deficit-thinking in general, and engaging in proactive practices to build stronger relationships with students and families.

One well-researched avenue for engaging families and drawing on the existing trust and love they have with persistently disciplined Black girls includes visiting homes. Home visits shift the power dynamic and situate the school professionals as learners and the families as knowledgeable (Johnson, 2014). Home visits can build on the love and trust that exists within families and increase the trust between families and schools, including the trust between persistently Black girls and school professionals. All three participants in this study also identified grandparents or great-aunts as significant in their lives. Drawing on these relationships and engaging these family members draws on the students' sense of love and trust and may increase the school-home connection and ultimately promote success for students.

In order to positively reframe students within their school profiles and recognize their strengths in addition to challenges, school staff should maintain records that reflect

student strengths and supports. Educators should be mindful of the language they use when writing behavior incident referrals. Behavior referral forms should be adapted to include prompts for those writing them to include examples of student strengths and proactive strategies they have tried before requesting support. This would allow for additional documentation of student strengths and increased attention to and expectations for knowing students more intimately. School administrators could also hold themselves and other staff accountable for engaging in proactive strategies of engagement and document these within student records. School staff should also consider a broader range of the people who influence the student and find ways to expand beyond the standard expectations for parent/guardian contact to collaborate with additional relatives, in particular exploring female elders in relation to persistently disciplined Black girls (with appropriate parent/guardian permission).

The connections between school and churches need not only exist in formal partnerships or programs. School staff can also be “spiritually attuned” to the experiences of Black students and promote the consideration of academic skills within a greater meaning and purpose (Dantley, 2005). Dantley (2005) also reinforces the value of critical dialogue among school staff regarding racism and injustice. He encourages educators to consider spirituality as an integral part of culturally relevant pedagogy (Dantley, 2005). The results of this study reinforce the importance of school staff finding ways to engage students in meaningful conversation about faith and spirituality, which can occur within a respectful and safe classroom environment where all ideas and beliefs hold value. An expanded notion of spirituality allows for discussion in these areas with recognition that delving into a conversation about religion in a classroom can create

tension and discomfort. School and district leaders can provide encouragement and guidance for this work. Zweiback (2015) described an approach to spiritual thinking that applies to all people, not only those who ascribe to beliefs of an organized religion. These ideas rely on exploration and understanding of ethical values and critical thought, not necessarily based in religion.

For persistently disciplined Black girls specifically, spirituality should be intentionally explored within the intervention process upon initial recognition that a student has received multiple behavior referrals. School staff who respond to discipline incidents can ask questions about spirituality as a support, seek out communication with religious leaders in the student's life (with appropriate parent/guardian permissions), and draw on the student's sense of ethics potentially rooted in religion to seek to make amends for harms done. These findings warrant additional research in the area of faith-based partnerships specific to Black churches and persistently disciplined Black girls as well as drawing on spirituality within the practice of restorative justice (Batley, 2004).

While the literature identifies the importance of student voice, the importance of engaging specific populations of students (e.g. persistently disciplined Black girls) requires additional consideration. A common positive attribute of all three girls, both self-identified and described by the influential adults, was self-confidence in the form of being outgoing, outspoken and open. School professionals often misunderstand the representation of resistance demonstrated by Black girls as disrespectful or disruptive. Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) describe how Black girls advocate for themselves differently, often in ways that are not well-received by people in positions of authority.

To engage and give power to the voices of persistently disciplined Black girls, school leaders should seek ways to authentically listen to and value what they have to say.

In the strength of independence, there are areas school professionals could draw on more to engage persistently disciplined Black girls. Two teachers referenced giving students responsibility as an entryway for developing trust and building on strengths. This reflects the girls' experience at work and feeling a sense of purpose in taking on responsibility. It also relates back to trust and how much responsibility a person is willing to give to someone depends on the level of trust the person will complete the expected actions. Educators may seek to enhance their practice with persistently disciplined Black girls by finding ways for them to have meaningful roles within the classroom that develop their leadership and scaffold experiences that build trust and loyalty between them. This has the potential to promote positive feelings between the teacher and student and inspire the girls to participate more fully in school for positive short- and long-term outcomes.

Summary and Conclusions

Through the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process and the application of the Strengths in Communities of Color framework, my study emphasizes the strengths possessed by persistently disciplined Black girls and the importance of school staff recognizing these strengths. Although the school records of the girls primarily focused on their deficits, through observation and interview, I was able to identify key ways in which they are inspired to continue in their education.

I uncovered strengths and supports and how these positive attributes have the potential to engage persistently disciplined Black girls in school and promote positive

academic and life outcomes. Future research should consider keeping race and strengths at the center in order to most effectively consider persistently disciplined Black girls and influence the way educators and schools approach this population. Future research should also include YPAR (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Giving students voice and gaining their perspectives in what affects them will support the girls in developing more positive experiences related to school and empower them to make meaningful change, something they all identified as important to them.

Policy related to the strengths of persistently disciplined Black girls should consider the role of religion and spirituality in their lives, the importance of family engagement, and the discipline policies and practices implemented in schools – both proactive and reactive, universal and targeted. Race must be explicitly addressed in all of these and policy-makers, researchers and practitioners must all be transparent and open in considering their own privilege and power. Practitioners should also be aware of their conceptualization of persistently disciplined Black girls, in particular, and find ways to counter the master narratives of this population as hostile, loud and defiant, and identify and celebrate their strengths such as trust, love, spirituality, resistance and independence.

To pursue true equity in schools, we as educators must hold ourselves accountable for truly knowing *all* of our students by intentionally discovering their strengths and supports, with particular attention to traditionally marginalized students (e.g. persistently disciplined Black girls). We must develop trust in our relationships with *all* students to earn the privilege of walking alongside them as dream what is possible for their futures as well as the future of our communities, society, and world.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Racism and inequity remain serious concerns in American public schools. To continue working toward educational justice, district and school leaders should consider the strengths and needs of students of Color. By creating and implementing culturally responsive discipline policies educators can ensure more equitable schools. In three qualitative studies, we explored the perspectives and lived experiences of school principals and Black girls as they relate to race, discipline, and education. Through this research, we highlighted the significance of individual identity and intersectionality, a concept which honors the ways in which various facets of one's identity affects an individual's experience (e.g. being a Black man is different than being a Black woman). Our findings show principal identity (and race-related experience) matters in understanding and implementation of discipline policy. We also emphasized the unique experience of Black girls. We asserted this population must be explicitly considered and intentionally supported in schools. In this section, we summarize our key findings and discuss important implications for research, policy, and practice at the local and national levels.

Synthesis of Key Findings and Implications: A Multifocal Analysis of Race and Disciplinary Policies in Public Schools

Educators struggle to make full sense of the discipline gap and its disproportionate effects on the trajectory of students of Color. Findings for each study

are discussed below along with key implications for MCSD policy. The first study focused on how district and school leaders think about and talk about race in relation to discipline, in particular as it relates to policy implementation. The second study elicited issues of power that arise through evoking perspectives of Black middle school girls who attend alternative school and their perceptions of the discipline process. The third study provided a counternarrative to contrast the typically negative viewpoint of students regularly involved in the discipline system. This study exposed the strengths, resources, and supports of Black girls and their communities.

We then discuss implications for research and practice as they relate to race and approaches to school discipline. Our focus in this section speaks to the lack of conversation and dialogue regarding race and approaches to school discipline. We believe there must be specific attention paid to relationships between race, power, and privilege in light of racialized problems such as the continuing discipline gap in public schools and the school-to-prison pipeline. Race influences the views of school leaders on school discipline, whether or not they intentionally consider race. Our research findings assert the importance of direct and intentional attention to race and racial subgroups (e.g. persistently disciplined Black girls) within research, policy, and practice regarding the development and implementation of school discipline and related initiatives.

Educators, Race, and Discipline Policy in MCSD. Findings from the first study were consistent with previous research on how educators think and talk about race and discipline in their schools. Some principals understand the role they play in the collective sensemaking of their stakeholders and managing policy change (Evans, 2007). Some leaders will engage in race related conversations, while others choose silence (Diem &

Carpenter, 2012). Some leaders deeply consider their racial and gender identities as they make sense of race and discipline policy (Evans, 2007; Theoharis, 2008; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011; Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009). Principals in this study either made sense of PBIS within the racial context of their diverse urban schools, or did so with limited attention to the racial context. Principals either participated in racialized discourses as role models, activists, and advocates (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011; Tatum, 1994), or repealed/silenced racialized discourses coinciding with the traditional masternarrative, colorblindness, and deficit thinking (Delpit, 1988; Castagano, 2008; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Milner, 2007; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). This is especially true when making sense of school discipline policies such as PBIS.

To remedy these problems, principals must have training in how to think about, talk about, and act upon race and discipline in their schools. Implementing and managing discipline policy in the racialized context is challenging for principals who are well versed in racialized discourses (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Principals who are not as skilled and are left to their own sensemaking devices are stumbling in the dark. These findings suggest that the MCSD district has school leaders who need support in engaging in racialized discourses and implementing PBIS. Proficiency in racialized discourses is necessary as they address PBIS implementation as an aid in decreasing discipline disproportionalities in their schools (Milner, 2007; Diem & Carpenter, 2012, 2013). MCSD has many diverse schools. Most of these schools are led by white administrators and staffed by white teachers (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014) who are ill prepared for working in diverse schools (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Sleeter, 2001;

Bell, 2002; Jordan, Schwartz, & McChie-Richmond, 2009). Most educators are not prepared for conversations about race that will strengthen their school cultures and communities (Evans, 2007). Many of them do not understand how vital and affirming talking about race is for their students of Color (West, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Singleton, 2014; Castagno 2008; Diem & Carpenter, 2012, 2013) or how the voice of Color empowers students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As a result, countless missed emancipatory opportunities transpire in classrooms and schools across the district daily. Those opportunities are unnecessarily missed. Many students of Color are deemed struggling both academically and behaviorally (Muscott, Mann, and LeBrun, 2008; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). Yet, they are persistently disciplined only to be suspended and excluded from schooling opportunities.

This study determined that there are some principals who are exemplar PBIS implementers and some who are exemplar practitioners of racialized discourses. In some cases, you will discover both characteristics occur in an individual school leader. Such MCSD school leaders exist and must be elevated to coach cohorts of fledgling social justice leaders. These exemplar principals should also train and coach leaders who need support to implement PBIS and talk about race in their schools. Creating these cadres of social justice leaders, MCSD can begin to rectify missed opportunities to connect, coach, mentor, and sanction principals who require assistance and monitoring.

Study 1 signals the need for a paradigm shift that requires divergent thinking of school leaders placing emphasis on correcting the discipline gap over addressing the achievement gap. Shifting efforts to keep marginalized students in school before targeting the achievement gap is key to improving outcomes for students of Color. If a student is

present at school and not suspended the likelihood increases and they will progress, graduate, move on to post-secondary goals of work or career, and become an independent citizen. All these milestones appeal to educators, parents, policy makers, taxpayers, and most of all students. The greater the focus MCSD places on discipline gap-reducing measures like PBIS, the less out of school time students will experience. Consequently, we can lessen the flow of students of Color to the school to prison pipeline. The impetus for change decidedly resigns in the hands of MCSD.

Power, Race, and Discipline Policy in MCSD. Findings from the second study reveal perceptions of three Black girls who attend an alternative middle school. The narratives offer a range of perspectives regarding their own identities, school interactions and discipline. A cross-case analysis of the narratives included the application of concepts found in Labeling theory-self-appraisals, reflected appraisals, resistance, and acceptance. When the Labeling theory concepts are synthesized with inductive themes, the girls collectively depict confidence, poor choices, and negative conflicts in their narratives. Starting from derived findings of confidence, poor choices, and negative conflicts, the researcher applied socio-spatial, theoretical frameworks to understand their discipline interactions. Third Space, Symbolic Interactionism, and Labeling theory were utilized to examine persistently disciplined black girls' accounts of lived experiences. The frameworks clarify how the girls describe interactions with educators who label them, and the implications for their long-term success. The researcher wanted to highlight Black girls' experiences of a process that typically gets defined and explained by adults.

All three participants of Study 2 described being “angry” in a cycle of aggressive social interactions, where they simultaneously resisted the label of troublemaker. When negative interactions occurred between the participants and a peer and/or adult, participants identified physical and character traits (i.e. mouth, attitude) as a catalyst. This same “mouth” and “attitude” are also self-defense mechanisms in schooling environments. This exertion of power is a common theme that has been found in the literature on racial microaggressions (e.g., Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens, 2008) and gender microaggressions (Sue et al., 2010). Black women experience a power struggle for respect (perceived authority and/or intellect questioned or challenged in work or professional settings) and invisibility (perceptions of being ignored and made to feel invisible in work or professional settings (Lewis et al., 2010). The girls’ experiences resonated with feelings of social *distance* in school spaces. This distance is found in the resistance to perceived female behavior. Within the constructs of female behavior is the perception of femininity shaped by stereotypes that cultivate biased labels. The subjective labeling of students fostered oppressed agency in excluded public school spaces.

In 2015, the Metro City School District (MCSD) *Code of Acceptable Behavior and Discipline* was revised and adopted. The policy outlines appropriate behavior before, during and after discipline events involving students, school personnel and parents. Current revisions to the policy includes the addition of the prevention strategies, restorative practices and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as tier one strategies for classroom “disruptions”. The policy also lists “deliberate disruption” and “failure to follow school rules” as referable behaviors for a school suspension. The policy

is written with the assumption that unbiased teacher perception, teacher training and teacher accountability systems are present within the school.

The examination of school discipline policy concerning the behavior antecedent will reveal current inequities and educational disparities between student groups, schools and neighborhoods in MCSD. In 2013, the MCSD department of Diversity, Equity and Poverty published, *The MCSD Equity Scorecard*. The scorecard provides a critical review of MCSD system structures, practices and policies by looking at district data through the lens of equity and inclusion. According to the scorecard, Black students receiving free and reduced lunch represented the highest rate of suspension. Almost half of the black student population was suspended at least one time during middle school compared to 14% of White students. The report also reveals that 4 out of 10 Black students were suspended more than one time in the 2013-2014 school year. The top two reasons why Black students were suspended: 1) fighting 2) disruptive behavior. Research about the discipline gap between Black and white students reports national trends that mirror the scorecard data. Race matters when we begin to critically examine the implementation of school disciplinary practices. A growing body of evidence has found that Black students make up the majority of students disciplined as a result of educators' uses of exclusionary strategies to punish subjectively defined behaviors such as "disruption" or "defiance". Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) reviewed racial and gender disparities in school punishments in urban settings, and found that white students were referred to the office significantly more frequently for offenses that appear more capable of objective documentation (e.g., *smoking, vandalism, leaving without permission, and obscene language*). Black students were referred more often for *disrespect, excessive noise,*

threat, and *loitering* – behaviors that would seem to require more subjective judgment on the part of the “referring”. Over the past 30 years, discipline gap research has revealed findings connecting relationships between student race and subjective consequences.

Research studies highlighting the subjectivity of teacher perception in discipline sanctions for Black girls identify a stigma of identity politics. Black girls are more likely to be marginalized by stereotypes about Black femininity, particularly in the context of socioeconomic status, crime, and punishment. Furthermore, findings suggest that educators express more interest in promoting the social, rather than academic skills of Black girls. The disparity between discipline outcomes for Black and White students needs to be addressed with policy grounded in racial and gender equity. The *Code of Acceptable Behavior and Discipline* should provide an explicit blueprint for culturally responsive PBIS and restorative practices within an exemplar classroom. The discipline gap can be narrowed with the consistent application and monitoring of classroom expectations through positive reinforcement strategies. However, negative educator beliefs can impede positive change toward more equitable discipline practices through deficit oriented paradigms and implicit biases. These negative beliefs may impede the success of any initiatives that attempt to change the status quo. Successful implementation of even the best programs relies on the beneficence, skill, and dedication of educators who operate within an accountability system that ensures positive classroom environments for all students.

Counternarratives, Race, and Discipline Policy in MCSD. The third study regarding strengths of persistently disciplined Black girls supported previous research emphasizing the importance of reframing deficit thinking (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Tuck,

2009). The analysis of data collected through the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process (Cooperrider et al., 2005) revealed the many resources, strengths, and supports that persistently disciplined Black girls possess, which inspire them to continue in education. These areas should be drawn on to support them in positive life trajectories and influence educators' views of and interactions with this population. In particular, persistently disciplined Black girls counter the master narrative of hostile, loud, and deviant through their demonstration of Strengths in Communities of Color, the conceptual framework applied in this study. These areas include trust and love: (seen in the desire to make a difference in the lives of others, positive relationships with family, especially female elders in their families, friends, and school staff), spirituality (evident in the girls' ability to live in the moment, accept the past, and find joy), and resistance and independence (as observed in their confidence, courage in accepting challenges and willingness to speak their minds).

The insights gained regarding strengths and supports of persistently disciplined Black girls have direct implications for MCSD policy, in particular the discipline policy with attention to family engagement and community partnerships. Additionally, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of engaging all students in dynamic curricular opportunities. MCSD leaders already recognize the value of these areas in the district vision and recent initiatives. The findings of this study inform the continued efforts of district and school leaders in these areas. In regard to discipline policy, an emphasis on high expectations and positive disciplinary frameworks supported persistently disciplined Black girls in school engagement as it relates to their outspoken nature and drive for independence. This supports the MCSD initiatives related to PBIS and Restorative Practices. The district

leaders should also recognize that ongoing and additional attention to race within the implementation of these initiatives is vital in order to truly address disproportionality in discipline. Currently, the discipline policy includes a brief introduction to PBIS and Restorative Practices. These areas should be expanded within policy guidelines and the district should provide continued training and support for staff in understanding and applying these practices. In the district vision, leaders already highlight the need for more equitable access to advanced learning opportunities. The findings of this study support this emphasis and stress the value of dynamic, socially engaging, and meaningful learning experiences, in particular for students who have been excluded from education through disciplinary actions.

Additionally, although federal, state and local policy identify expectations for parent involvement, these policies provide significant leeway for interpretation. It is the responsibility of district and school leaders to find ways to more deeply engage families in education. The findings of this study emphasize the trust and love parents, guardians and extended kinship networks provide for youth, specifically Black adolescent girls. It is recommended that educators recognize and value the supports provided by family members. Educators should engage in proactive communication and seek to identify individual student and community strengths early on in behavior intervention efforts. Finally, the district and many schools within it have partnered with faith-based organizations. The value of spirituality emerged in this study and can inform future policy related to building connections between schools and, in particular, churches within the school community. District leaders should consider expanding their efforts related to

these partnerships and create policy that encourages educators within the district to seek out these connections with their students and families.

Implications for Research. In regards to future research in the area of racialized discourses and school leaders' implementation of discipline policies, several areas emerged as key next steps to further understanding the relationships between discipline policy implementation and race. More research is needed focusing on the influence of university preparation programs on social justice leadership in education (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Diem & Carpenter, 2013). This research can be used to understand the phenomena of racialized discourses and silences in schools and how to combat them through teacher and leader preparation programs. Creation of social justice cohorts are imperative to preparing current and future leaders for school administration. The efficacy of such cohorts must be researched and evaluated to improve coaching and training practices.

Engaging school leaders in participatory action research (PAR) can strengthen school leaders' data analysis regarding the adaptive challenge of discipline management (James, Milenkiewicz, and Bucknam, 2008). PAR is a reflective process that can change practice (p. 5, James et al., 2008) of school leaders who serve in MCSD and participated in discourse and PBIS trainings must be studied. Research on recruitment and retention of culturally responsive educators should be conducted to discover these educators' strengths and motivations. Such research can assist the district in fostering the kind of professional development to support those capacities. Of utmost importance is researching how MCSD transparently communicates discipline, race issues, and equity with its stakeholders. Studying the communicative impact of district initiatives such as

the *MCSD Equity Score Card* can help the district improve transparency and engage community members in equity dialogue.

In the second study, findings are based upon perceptions of three Black girls who attend an alternative middle school. In regards to future research in the area of perceptions of discipline for Black middle school girls, this study raises their voices to emphasize the importance of attending to experiences of social *distance* in school spaces. The research points to the value of future empirical studies examining teacher-student interactions through classroom observations, in particular for educators who resist labeling and apply restorative practices with culturally responsive, positive approaches to behavior management in classrooms. Additionally, future research is warranted exploring student-teacher ethnic/racial match as it relates to cultural synchrony, quantitative studies examining school discipline practices and females in the urban environment disaggregated by race, and additional qualitative studies specifically seeking to engage the voices and perspectives of Black girls excluded from school through disciplinary practices.

The final study of the capstone revealed several areas as appropriate and sensible next steps in further understanding the strengths of persistently disciplined Black girls in the context of education. More research is needed that includes the voices and insights of this population. Giving persistently disciplined Black girls voice and agency through Youth Participatory Action Research would serve a dual purpose of empowering these young women while also informing educators. A deeper exploration of the role of spirituality in the lives and school experiences of persistently disciplined Black girls

recognizes the history and significance of the Black church (Reed & Neville, 2014) and how foundations of religion can support educational endeavors for these girls.

Additionally, examining effective proactive practices in early intervention and home visiting specifically for Black girls who have exhibited behaviors that could lead to identification as persistently disciplined could support a decrease in the disproportionality in discipline by promoting an increased understanding of what will promote success and build relationships and trust between educators and these students and families. Finally, pursuing topics notably absent from this study and the girls' responses which include racial identity and romantic relationships, would add significantly to the research body around persistently disciplined Black girls. The key focus of all of this future research must attend specifically to Black girls to most appropriately honor and celebrate their experiences.

Implications for Practice. Educators must explicitly consider race and pursue meaningful professional development and reflection related to both their own racial identities and those of their students. As evident in the discipline gap, race matters for students in their success or failure in schools, specifically for Black students. The research studies in this capstone emphasize the need for educators to explicitly consider race without hiding in coded language to engage in serious dialogue about how race intersects with discipline practices and student outcomes. Educators should be intentional about gaining increased understanding of and applying practices such as Culturally relevant Pedagogy, Cultural Competency, Culturally Responsive Practices, Positive Behavioral Interventions in Schools, Restorative Practices. We urge school leaders to engage fellow educators in "*Courageous Conversations*" about race,

inequality, and education. Specifically, as it relates to these each of these studies, school leaders must intentionally reflect on their own racial identities and racialized experiences and recognize how these inform and affect their interactions with staff and students and the disciplinary priorities and policies they set in schools.

Educator preparation programs and school leaders should also consider the training and development of educators in regard to cultivating critical perspectives, cultural understanding and personal empathy. In regards to persistently disciplined Black girls, all educators must be held accountable for increased awareness of how their preconceived notions of race and femininity affect their interactions with this population in particular. Educators need to disrupt their deficit-based thinking and assumptions about the school-to-prison pipeline and negative labels they apply to students within the context of discipline. They should consider how they can engage all students, specifically persistently disciplined Black girls, and identify and draw on their strengths and perspectives on discipline practice to promote successful academic and life outcomes.

Conclusion

The studies in this capstone emphasize the importance of race, power, and privilege as they relate to issues of discipline within public schools. The current attention to these areas at the national and local level create a vital window for MCS D to further address and review existing disciplinary policies and practices in order to promote equity and social justice in education for all students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Email invitation to Principals

Hello <principal>,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Marcia Carmichael-Murphy and I am a part of the University of Louisville Ed.D. Block '16 Cohort. Currently I am in the Capstone phase of my degree work. Dr. Bradley Carpenter is guiding my Capstone team's work in this final semester.

I am conducting research on how school administrators make sense of and act on PBIS policy in their diverse schools. Would you be willing to be a participant in my study?

Each participant will be interviewed twice. Each interview would last approximately 45 minutes each and would be audio-recorded and I will take notes during each interview.

Both interviews can take place either at your school or another location that fits with your schedule.

If you are willing to participate, please let me know and I can email you the informed consent and we can set up interview times.

I look forward to talking with you.

Thanks.

APPENDIX B: VERBAL DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

How would you identify your gender?

How would you identify your race?

What is your highest level of educational attainment?

How old are you?

How many years of service to the MCSD district?

Are you a product of MCSD?

Do you have any questions that were not answered during the review of the informed consent?

APPENDIX C: STUDY PROTOCOL SUBMITTED TO UNIVERSITY IRB

Carpenter & Carmichael-Murphy – Written Protocol

TITLE: Stumbling in the Dark: Principal Sensemaking of PBIS Policy in Racially Diverse Schools

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Students of Color experience disproportionate discipline in schools. This disproportionate experience leads to negative student outcomes and students entering the school-to-prison pipeline. Evidence points to linkages between the discipline and achievement gaps, however research has focused on educators' technical remedies over adaptive ones. Little research is present on how school leaders make sense of equity policy, in this case Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), in their schools.

JUSTIFICATION AND USE OF THE RESULTS:

Our investigatory efforts within Metro Public School District are justified by the numerous contributions this study will offer the field of education leadership, including but not limited to:

- understanding how principals make equity policy decisions within their diverse schools
- identifying what communicative and implementation leadership practices maximize or detract from the effectiveness of PBIS in schools with diverse student populations

- how positive capacities might be capitalized upon by educators and policymakers to increase program fidelity and decrease the discipline gap in schools, while increasing student achievement and graduation success of traditionally marginalized students
- provide the research team an opportunity to help mold and support future equity policy meant to decrease the discipline gap

METHODOLOGY/PLAN FOR ANALYSIS OF RESULTS:

Our effort within MCS D will be structured as an instrumental, multiple case study (Yin, 2009). This study's main purpose is to add to the body of research while delving into the phenomenon of PBIS implementation within the context of student racial diversity and disproportionate discipline. We seek to develop an in-depth understanding of how principals make sense of, communicate policy to stakeholders, and implement PBIS in their schools.

Qualitative methodology was chosen because of its ability to develop a robust depiction of the experiences of each participant school and principal participant's lived experience and sensemaking process. Several layers of qualitative inquiry will be utilized for triangulation. The research team will conduct semi-structured, open-ended interviews with principals (two interviews each) from PBIS participant schools. Participants will be divided into two implementation groups based on school-based and district-based surveys – low-medium, and medium-high. Data collection will also draw from school and district level implementation surveys and direct observation of principal participants. All

qualitative data gathered through interviews and observations will be transcribed and analyzed for emergent themes and coded using two cycles of coding to ensure emergent and convergent themes and patterns are thoroughly analyzed (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

TIMETABLE

Our team will visit participant schools on at least two occasions. Data will be collected for three months after the final approval of

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT

Subject Informed Consent Document

Principal Sensemaking of PBIS

Investigator(s) name & address:

Dr. Bradley W. Carpenter, Principal Investigator

University of Louisville

Woodford and Harriett Porter Building, Room 331

Louisville, Kentucky, 40292

Marcia Carmichael-Murphy, Co-investigator

539 Forum Avenue

Louisville, Kentucky 40214

Site(s) where study is to be conducted:

Jefferson County Public Schools

Phone number for subjects to call for questions:

502-551-1355

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Marcia Carmichael-Murphy Ed.D. candidate at the University of Louisville. The study will take place at four different JCPS schools. Approximately 4 subjects will be invited to participate.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand how school leaders make sense of PBIS policy and disproportionality, specifically at diverse urban schools.

Procedures

In this study, you will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher two times, for about an hour per interview. You will be asked to complete the informed consent process and a short demographic survey, lasting only a few minutes. The interview questions will be open-ended. The interviews will be recorded. The subject may decline to answer any questions that make them uncomfortable.

Potential Risks

There are no foreseeable risks, although there may be unforeseen risks associated with this study.

Benefits

The possible benefits of this study include:

- discovery of new information concerning the implementation of PBIS in their schools
- discovery of new information regarding academic and behavior disproportionality findings may provide an opportunity for researcher to alter policies/practices in a way that support district and policy implementation of PBIS and policies meant to combat disproportionality

The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others.

Compensation

You will not be compensated for your time, inconvenience, or expenses while you are in this study.

Confidentiality

Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. Your privacy will be protected to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public. While unlikely, the following may look at the study records:

The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, Human Subjects Protection Program Office

Government agencies, such as: Jefferson County Public Schools and the Kentucky Department of Education

Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP)

Conflict of Interest

This study involves a conflict of interest as the investigator will benefit by your participation in the study.

Security

Your information will be kept private. All information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked room or on a password protected computer.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in

this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

You will be told about any changes that may affect your decision to continue in the study

Contact Persons, Research Subject's Rights, Questions, Concerns, and Complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the study or the study staff, you have three options.

You may contact the principal investigator at 502-852-0611

If you have any questions about your rights as a study subject, questions, concerns or complaints, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPPO) (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a subject, in secret, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the HSPPPO staff. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as lay members of the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this study.

If you want to speak to a person outside the University, you may call 1-877-852-1167.

You will be given the chance to talk about any questions, concerns or complaints in secret. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

Acknowledgment and Signatures

This informed consent document is not a contract. This document tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in the study. You are not giving up any legal rights to which you are

entitled by signing this informed consent document. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Subject Name (Please Print)	Signature of Subject	Date Signed
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Printed Name of Legal Representative	Signature	Date Signed
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Relationship of Legal Representative to Subject

Printed Name of Person Explaining Consent Form	Signature of Person Explaining
Date Signed	

Printed Name of Legal Representative	Signature	Date Signed
--------------------------------------	-----------	-------------

Printed Name of Investigator	Signature of Investigator	Date Signed
------------------------------	---------------------------	-------------

List of Investigators:	Phone Numbers:
Dr. Bradley W. Carpenter, Principal Investigator	502-852-0611
Marcia Carmichael-Murphy, Co-investigator	502-551-1355

APPENDIX E.

PARENT LETTER

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Your child is invited to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Bradley Carpenter from the University of Louisville's Department of Educational Leadership and Organizational Development and LaRhondolyn Mathies, a Doctoral Candidate from the University of Louisville's Department of Educational Leadership and Organizational Development. We are interested in exploring perceptions of middle school discipline by urban Black girls who are suspended from school.

Our goal is to collect responses concerning the following questions; 1) How do middle school Black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive themselves? 2) How do middle school Black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive their school connectedness? 3) How do middle school Black girls attending an urban, alternative public school perceive their school discipline experiences and its possible future implications?

If you will allow your child to join this study, she will be asked to complete and return a short questionnaire to verify if she meets the selection criteria. If selected, she will be asked to participate in three individual interviews. The interviews will be audio recorded and last 45-60 minutes. Interviews will take place after school at the Shawnee Library at a time that is convenient for the child. Everything your child says will be treated

completely confidentially and anonymously. At no time will anything your child shares with us be directly connected to your child.

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. She may choose not to answer any question with which she does not feel comfortable. She may withdraw from the study at any time, and for any reason, without consequences. If selected, participants will also be asked to document written and visual reflections of their daily school experiences in a journal.

Student participants who complete all parts of the study will receive a \$10 gift card. This amount will be prorated for those who do not fully complete the study.

If you are interested in allowing your child to participate in this study, please return the signed consent form. If you have any further questions, please contact me by phone (502-777-2182) or email (lmmath04@louisville.edu). We do believe that your child's participation is important, and we would very much appreciate the chance to work with them in the research study. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

LaRhondolyn Mathies, Co-Investigator

Dr. Bradley W. Carpenter, Principal Investigator

APPENDIX F.

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

What is your name? _____

What is your age? _____

What is your gender? _____

What is your race/ethnicity? _____

What is your current grade level? _____

What is your birthdate? _____

What is your zip code? _____

What is your current home school? _____

Describe the academic grades on your last report card.

Describe the conduct grades on your last report card.

APPENDIX G.

Subject Informed Consent Document

THE NEW JANE CROW: BLACK GIRLS' PERCEPTIONS OF MIDDLE
URBAN SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY INTERACTIONS

Investigator(s) name & address:

Dr. Bradley W. Carpenter, Principal Investigator

University of Louisville

Porter College of Education, Room 331 Louisville, KY 40292

LaRhondolyn M. Mathies, Co-Investigator

3708 Southern Avenue

Louisville, KY 40211

Site(s) where study is to be conducted:

Shawnee Library

Phone number for subjects to call for questions: LaRhondolyn Mathies, 502-777-2182

Introduction and Background Information

You/your child (hereafter referred to as “you”) are invited to participate in a research study that uses interviews to explore perceptions of school experiences and the discipline process. The study is being conducted by Bradley Carpenter, Ph.D and LaRhondolyn Mathies, a Doctoral Candidate. The study is sponsored by the University of Louisville’s, Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development,

College of Education and Human Development. The study will take place after school at the Shawnee Library. Approximately 10 subjects will be invited to participate.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore perceptions of middle school discipline by urban Black girls who have experienced an alternative school setting. Greater insight into Black girls' perspectives of discipline interactions can prepare better designed learning environments. These culturally competent learning environments will foster educational experiences that could help decrease a disproportionate discipline gap occurring in urban, public schools.

Procedures

In this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire to determine if you meet the interview selection criteria for this study. It will take 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. If you meet the interview selection criteria, you will be asked to answer questions for three individual interviews. The individual interviews will last 45-60 minutes. The interviews will be audio recorded. You will be asked to review written transcripts after the last session. You will also be asked to review the analysis pertaining to your case once it is written. You may decline to answer any questions that may make you uncomfortable. If selected, participants will also be asked to keep a daily journal of school experiences. The total length of this study is 60 days.

Potential Risks

There are no foreseeable risks other than possible discomfort in answering personal questions or disclosure of information to authorities may be mandated if it involves causing harm to self and/or others. There may also be unforeseen risks.

Benefits

The possible benefits of this study include an opportunity to share your experiences, adding to the body of knowledge about urban Black girls' perceptions of public middle school. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others.

Compensation

At the conclusion of the study, you will be given a \$10 gift card for your time while you are in this study. Per Human Subjects Protection Program Office policy (see U of L Investigator's Guide), compensation must be prorated for individuals who withdraw prior to the full completion of the study. Individuals who only complete the demographic questionnaire and interview will be given a \$5 gift card. Those who also review the interview transcripts and analysis of their case will be given the full \$10 gift. You will be paid by Visa gift card. Because you will be paid to be in this study the University of Louisville may collect your name, address, social security number, and keep records of how much you are paid. You may or may not be sent a Form 1099 by the University. This will only happen if you are paid \$600 or more in one year by the University. This will not include payments you may receive as reimbursement, for example mileage reimbursement. We are required by the Internal Revenue Service to collect this information and you may need to report the payment as income on your taxes. This information will be protected and kept secure in the same way that we protect your other private information. If you do not agree to give us this information, we can't pay you for being in this study. You can still be in the study even if you don't want to be paid.

Confidentiality

Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. Your privacy will be protected to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public. While unlikely, the following may look at the study records: The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, and Human Subjects Protection Program Office. Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), Office of Civil Rights

The data will be stored and secured at the home of the co-investigator in a secured area for up to three years after the completion of the study.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify. You will be told about any changes that may affect your decision to continue in the study.

Contact Persons, Research Subject's Rights, Questions, Concerns, and Complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the study or the study staff, you have three options. You may contact the principal investigator at 502-852-6475.

If you have any questions about your rights as a study subject, questions, concerns or complaints, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPPO) (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a subject, in secret, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the HSPPPO staff. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as lay members of the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this study.

If you want to speak to a person outside the University, you may call 1-877- 852-1167. You will be given the chance to talk about any questions, concerns or complaints in secret. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

Acknowledgment and Signatures

This informed consent document is not a contract. This document tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in the study. You are not giving up any legal rights to which you are entitled by signing this informed consent document. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Subject Name (Please Print)	Signature of Subject	Date Signed
-----------------------------	----------------------	-------------

Printed Name of Legal Representative	Signature of Legal Representative
Date Signed	_____

Relationship of Legal Representative to Subject

Signature of Person Explaining the Consent Form	Date Signed
(If other than the Investigator)	

Printed Name of Investigator	Signature of Investigator	Date Signed
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List of Investigators:

Phone Numbers:

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502-852-6475

LaRhondolyn M. Mathies

502-777-2182

APPENDIX H.

SUBJECT ASSENT

THE NEW JANE CROW: BLACK GIRLS' PERCEPTIONS OF URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY INTERACTIONS

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Dr. Bradley W. Carpenter and LaRhondolyn M. Mathies. When a person is in a research study, they are called a “subject”. You are invited because you have experienced an alternative school setting, currently enrolled at sixth, seventh or eighth grade level and identify as both Black and female. This means that you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire to determine if you meet the selection criteria to further participate in an interview for this study. It will take 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. If you meet the selection criteria, you will be asked to keep a journal and answer questions for three individual interviews. The individual interviews will be audio recorded and will last 45-60 minutes. You will be asked to review written transcripts after the session. You will also be asked to review the analysis pertaining to your case once it is written. You may decline to answer any questions that may make you uncomfortable. The total length of this study is 60 days. The possible benefits of this study include an opportunity to share your experiences, adding to the body of knowledge about urban Black girls' perceptions of public middle school. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others. This study will include three

45-60 minute sessions over the course of one month. Your family, the study investigators, and teachers will know that you are in the study. If anyone else is given information about you, they will not know your name. A number or an alias will be used instead of your name. You have been told about this study and know why it is being done and what you have to do. Your parent(s) have agreed to let you be in the study. If you have any questions you can ask Dr. Bradley Carpenter or LaRhondolyn Mathies. They will answer your questions. If you do not want to be in this study or want to quit after you already in this study, you can tell the researcher and they will discuss this with your parents.

Printed Name of Subject	Signature of Subject	Date Signed
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Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

Printed Name of Investigator	Signature of Investigator	Date Signed
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APPENDIX I.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

This interview is being conducted to explore perceptions of middle school experiences and discipline interactions by Black girls who have attended an alternative school. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time. You may also choose not to answer questions with which you do not feel comfortable. Your responses will be confidential and will not be connected directly to you when reported. Your parent has received a consent form to sign and you have received an assent form to sign, which indicates your consent to participate in this interview. This interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF?

Interview #1: Introductory Questions

The questions below are intended as “ice-breakers”, to provide the youth an opportunity to talk about herself as well as to gain some baseline information.

What grade are you in?

Which schools have you attended?

How old are you?

Who do you live with and where?

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Tell me a little about yourself and your family and important events in your life. Describe your childhood? What was it like growing up?

Describe yourself in 3-5 words. How do you see yourself? What are your gifts or talents- what are you good at?

Describe how you think adults outside of school perceive you? What do adults outside of school (i.e., relatives or friends of the family) generally think about you? Are they right or wrong? Could you tell me more about that?

Describe how you think your peers outside of school perceive you? What do your peers generally think about you? Are they right or wrong? Could you tell me more about that?

Could you fold this paper in half and draw the following pictures for me: a. Your family b. Yourself c. Could you put a title on each picture and then tell me about each one?

Interview #1 will conclude with the participants receiving a journal where they will be asked to write and draw entries about their daily experiences at school. They will be asked to bring their journal to each subsequent interview meeting.

HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS?

Interview #2: General opinion about school

Pretend you are writing a letter to an alien explaining this “thing called school.” The alien would soon be coming to an earth school to visit. What should the alien expect? What would happen there? What would the alien see, smell, experience, feel?

Why do you go to school? Do you go to school regularly or do you skip?

What would you change about school?

What would you keep the same about school?

Do you enjoy your subjects? What kind of work really engages you? What kind of work do you dislike?

Have you been involved in school activities and/or teams? Why or why not? How did you get involved? Why are you not involved?

Have you had adults in school you could talk to? Why or why not? How do you think each of those people sees you as a student? Are they right or wrong? Explain.

Have you had peers in school you could talk to? Why or why not? How do you think each of those people sees you as a student? Are they right or wrong? Explain.

If you could tell all of your middle school teachers something about yourself, what would you want them to know?

Tell me about the times you have been in trouble at school during middle school. What do you think caused you to get in trouble in each case?

Could you fold this paper in half and draw the following pictures for me: a. Your best memory of school or your proudest moment as a student b. Your worst memory of school or the moment that made you the most angry or embarrassed (whichever you think would help me to best understand your experience) c. Could you put a title on each picture and tell me about it?

Interview #2 will conclude with the participants sharing entries from their journal.

HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AND IMPLICATIONS?

Interview #3: Suspension to alternative school experience

Why did you get suspended to alternative school? What happened on that day and how did the school respond? How did you feel when were suspended to the alternative school?

(Probes: were you scared, happy, embarrassed indifferent?) Had you ever been suspended before?

How did the incident that brought you to the alternative school at this time come to the attention of a teacher/principal/other staff member? What did they do?

How were you disciplined? Who was in charge? Were your parent(s) called?

What were the steps involved in the process

What were you told about your behavior? Were you told that you violated school rules?

Did you know about these rules beforehand? Did you go to a Superintendent's hearing?

Did anyone go with you? What happened?

What do you think about your own behavior? Do you have ideas about what should

happen when a student breaks the rules? Is there an alternative to out of school

suspension? Do you have any ideas about how to improve alternative school?

(Probe if troublesome behavior is acknowledged: What causes you to act in ways that get you in trouble in school? Are you doing it to gain respect of your peers? To express your dislike/anger/frustration with school? Does it relate to something going on in your family? In the community?

Did you know about the rules (you were accused of breaking) before you got in trouble?

What is your opinion about this rule? Did you expect to be suspended from school? If not, what did you expect to happen?

Do you think what happened to you is fair? Why/why not? What did your family and friends think? In general, do you think that teachers are fair in how they administer discipline?

Do you think that the rules are the same for everyone, or do you think some people get treated differently even though they break the same rules? [If yes] why do you think they get treated differently? Do you think that it has anything to do with race? gender? [Are white youth and youth of color treated the same]?

Are boys and girls treated the same?] If the answer identifies lack of fairness: How does the fact that some people get treated differently from others make you feel?

In general, what do you think about school rules? Do you think they are respectful of you as a [classification, e.g., African American young lady]? How are they respectful or not?

Effect of Suspension

How has the suspension changed things for you? [If it has] How and in what ways?

Does anyone treat you differently since the incident [include friends, non-friend peers, family, teachers, principal]? [If yes] how? Why do you think they treat you differently?

Do you expect when you go back to mainstream school? What do you think will happen when you go back? Probe: Will you be up-to-date in your class work? Will teachers be glad to see you return? Will other students be glad to see you come back?

Do you expect to stay in school until you graduate? Why? Why not?

Do you think that being suspended will have any effect on your staying in school? On your behavior in school? On your winding up in prison? What is the meaning of school to prison pipeline?

Have you ever been arrested? If so, what happened? Has it affected the way you behave?

Do you expect to spend some time in jail or prison in the future? Why or why not?

(For those who think they will go to prison) how do you think this will affect your life?

What do you think prison is like? Do you know anyone who has been to prison? Who and what did they tell you about prison?

Where do you see yourself in 5 years? Is this view of the future affected by your being suspended from school and put in the alternative school?

Could you fold this paper in half and draw the following pictures for me: a. How the adults at the school usually respond to you when you get in trouble. b. How you would respond to a student who got in trouble if you were a teacher or principal OR how you think that teachers and principals should respond. c. Could you put a title on each picture and tell me about it?

Interview #3 will conclude with the participants sharing entries from their journal.

This concludes the interview. Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research study. Within the next two weeks you will receive an email with a copy of the transcript for this interview. You are asked to review the transcript and provide any clarification you feel is needed. Once data analysis is complete, you will receive a copy to review.

APPENDIX J.

Student Interview Protocol

Interview 1:

1. Tell me about yourself.

Probes:

What do you enjoy doing?

What are you good at?

How do you describe yourself (characteristics)?

What are you proud of?

What are you excited/passionate about?

What are your hopes and dreams for the future?

Where do you see yourself in 1, 5, 10 years?

What is most important to you? What are your values?

What challenges have you faced and/or overcome?

2. Tell me about your family.

Probes:

Who lives in your home?

Who are your other family members? Tell me about them.

What is your family like?

Who are you closest to in your family?

3. Tell me about your community.

Probes:

Where are you from?

Where else have you lived?

How would you describe your neighborhood?

What do you like/dislike about your neighborhood?

What groups, teams, religious/community centers are you involved with?

4. Tell me about your friends.

Probes:

Who are your friends? Tell me about them.

How do you decide who your friends are?

What do you and your friends do for fun?

How do you and your friends support one another?

5. Tell me about your role models/who you admire and look up to.

Probes:

Who are your role models? Tell me about them.

What makes them your role models?

Describe your relationships with your role models.

6. Tell me about your experiences in school.

Probes:

What schools have you gone to?

What do you like/dislike about school?

How would you describe yourself as a student?

Do you think you are treated fairly in school? Why or why not?

In your opinion, what was the highlight of this interview?

Student Interview Protocol

Interview 2: Appreciative Inquiry

Discover (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2005)

What would you describe as being the best experience or high point in your life? This would be a time you felt most alive and engaged.

Probes:

What happened? When? Where? What were your feelings? What challenges did you encounter? How were they overcome? What insights did you have?

What made it an exciting experience?

Who else was there who is important to you? Why are they important to you?

What was it about you that made this a high point experience?

Based on this story and others like it, if we now had a conversation with people who know you best and asked them to share the three best qualities they see in you, what would they say?

Without being modest, what is it that you most value about yourself as a human being, friend, citizen, daughter, student?

What is your most important achievement you can recall that illustrates your talents and values?

What was it about you (unique qualities that you have) that made it possible to achieve this result?

Show me an example of something you created that you feel proud of. Tell me about it/describe it.

What stands out to you?

What do you like/dislike about it?

What does it remind you of/make you think about?

What does it represent/show about you?

Give an example of the most effective team or group you have been a part of.

What are the factors/skills that made it effective?

What three wishes do you have for your life?

Dream

What is the world calling you to be?

I will be most proud of myself when what occurs?

Imagine your life 7 years into the future – what is happening that is new, better, and/or different?

What is the best outcome you can imagine?

How is the world different?

How are you contributing to this new world?

What are you doing that makes a difference?

Imagine it is 2025 and you have just won an award.

What is said about you as the award is dedicated?

What are your friends saying?

What are your family members saying?

What did it take to win this award?

Trust

What does trust mean to you?

Who do you trust?

What makes you trust them?

Resistance

Tell me about a time when you stood up for yourself or someone else.

What happened?

Where were you?

When?

What did you do?

How did you feel?

What was the outcome?

Tell me about a time when you overcame a significant challenge in your life.

What happened? Where? When? What did you do? How did you feel? What was the outcome?

What supports and resources did you lean on to overcome the challenge?

Love

What does love mean to you?

Tell me about a time when you felt loved.

Who did you feel loved by?

What made you feel loved?

Who else do you feel loved by? What makes you feel loved?

Tell me about a time when you felt love toward someone else.

Who do you love? What makes you love them?

Spirituality

What does spirituality or faith mean to you?

Do you consider yourself religious?

Do you attend church? How often? Where? What religion?

Do you practice a religion? What practices do you participate in?

Tell me about a time when you drew on your sense of spirituality or faith.

What happened? What did you do?

How did you feel?

What did it mean for you?

In your opinion, what was the highlight of this interview?

APPENDIX K.

Interview Protocol for Influential Adults

How long have you known (youth's name)?

How did you come to know (youth's name)?

Describe (youth's name). What do you enjoy most about (youth's name)? What are her strengths? Supports/resources? Skills? Interests?

What does trust mean to you? Describe a time when you experienced trust with (youth's name).

What three wishes do you have for developing trust within your relationship with (youth's name)?

Tell me about an event or situation in which you felt the presence of love with (youth's name).

Tell me about an event or situation in which you observed (youth's name) draw on spirituality or faith.

Tell me about a time when you stood up for (youth's name) or you observed her stand up for herself.

Tell me about a time when (youth's name) overcame a significant challenge in her life and what supports and resources she leaned on to overcome the challenge.

In your opinion, what was the highlight of this interview?

CURRICULUM VITAE

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Grandparent Caregivers: Unsung Voices in Public Education. *The
Journal of Family Diversity in Education* (Accepted, awaiting
publication)

NATIONAL MEETING PRESENTATIONS:

UCEA National Conference, Washington, D.C. (November, 2014)
Topic: *Grandparent Caregivers: Unsung Voices in Public
Education*