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ADMINISTRATORS' BENEVOLENT AND CORRECTIVE HUMOR AND SUSPENSIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SCHOOL AGE FEMALES

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ADMINISTRATORS' BENEVOLENT AND CORRECTIVE HUMOR AND

SUSPENSIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SCHOOL AGE FEMALES

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my maternal grandfather, George Preston Arthur

Boyce who instilled in me a love for lifelong immersion in education. Though his opportunity

for learning was halted by the randomness of time and place, he strove for his progeny to surpass

his stifled accomplishments. This dissertation is dedicated to the hope and dreams of my son,

Musa Uchenna Preston Bacon the sunshine of my life and my every breath. This dissertation is

for Shakara and so many African American girls whose dignity and humanity are thrashed but

whose resilience and strength is unwavering.

Acknowledgments

Abstract

African American female students' suspension rates are rising and outpacing those of all categories of students, including African American males. This is due, in part, to an administrator's over-reliance on zero-tolerance disciplinary policies, as well as a teacher's negative perception of African American female students. Soaring rates of suspension contribute to school disengagement, high dropout rates, and a formidable risk of involvement in the school to prison pipeline. In addition to the toll these risks take on human lives, society loses the benefit of human productivity, taxable wages, and stable, thriving communities. As attention to the rising rate of suspension of African American females increases, there are several suggested interventions to reverse the trend. Some researchers offer strategies like Positive Behavior Interventions (PBI) that modify students' behavior. Others recommend culturally sensitive, professional learning for teachers. Administrators are encouraged to replace zero-tolerance policies with restorative justice practices. There is, however, a paucity of research that offers humor, specifically, benevolent and corrective humor, as a tool that administrators can apply, instead of handling office referrals with harsh, disciplinary decrees when they exercise their authority to suspend a student.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether a principal's benevolent and corrective humor score was predictive of the suspension rate of African American female students. Guided by established research in transformational leadership, school suspensions, and Black Girlhood Studies, a newly created, self-administered, Benevolent, and Corrective Humor Scale was distributed to a nationwide population of educational leaders. Benevolent humor is compassionate and for the benefit of the individual. Corrective humor is a moral-based mockery with a sympathetic heart. The blend of these evidence-based approaches was used to address the

complex and multi-layered lives of African American females and their heightened risk for suspension. Results indicate a weak, positive relationship between corrective humor question 2 and the percentage of African American female students r (.149), $p = .040$. Recommendations for educational leaders and future research are provided.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

Comedian Marc Schumacher, a former schoolteacher, introduces a bit that retells how he "literally had to text message a student" (Schumacher, 2016, Opening), to reprimand Tyler, the student, for violating the school's cellphone policy. Schumacher describes how he sent text messages to the student to recapture the young man's attention. Throughout the exchange of messages, the student questions the source of the message to which the audience responds in raucous laughter. With a lol, Schumacher ends with a text that informs the student that he has detention in his immediate future. The teacher and student engaged in what could be called disciplinary texting.

Roughly 2,000 miles away, in a South Carolina high school, cell phone violations are handled in a starkly unique way. In that classroom of predominantly African American students, an African American female's teacher did not view the young woman's alleged cellphone violation with levity. He failed to see the humor in her transgression, of what he believed to be the violation of the school's sacrosanct cell phone rules. He was compelled to invoke the school's zero-tolerance disciplinary mandate and follow the ladder of referral that included and culminated in the body-slamming and dragging of the young woman across the floor, in full view of her classmates, the teacher, and an administrator (Jarvis, 2015). There could not be a starker Dickensian contrast between the best response and the worst response to the same situation.

Since the early 21st century, the suspension rate for African American female students has grown faster than for any other group of students (Annamma et al., 2019). They experience suspension rates more than 65% higher than boys and six times higher than White females.

Contrary to the belief that their rates of suspension match their increased rate of misconduct, the allegations of recalcitrance are more often for violations that are under the umbrella term called "defiance" (Annamma et al., 2019; Green, 2017). As early as 1994, the steady rise in suspensions of African American females have been documented (Cooper, 2015). With a few declines along the way, African American female students' suspensions are associated with accusations of stereotypical demeanor like having "an attitude" or being "sassy", and other subjective claims, that represent reasons for disproportionate disciplinary action that is concentrated on African American girls (Cooper, 2015). From elementary through the middle-level grades African American girls' suspensions rose, then began to decline during high school (Mendez and Knoff, 2003; Zimmerman, 2018). According to Wun (2014), African American girls are exposed to discipline and punishment that is affected by the intersectionality of race and gender.

Epstein, Blake, and González (2017) reported a suspension rate of 41.6%, for African American females in grades K-12; compared to a suspension rate of 28.4% for White female students, during the 2013- 2014 school year. Epstein, Blake, and González (2017) contend that the disproportionate suspension rate is associated with the concept of adultification. They describe adultification as an adult's prejudgment of a child's ability to function at a higher level of maturity than is age appropriate. This adult-like behavior is described by educators and law enforcement (Green, 2017). Although African American school-age females are less than 10% of the enrolled population, they represent 13% of the students who are suspended (Epstein, Black, and González, 2017). Nationwide, during the 2011-2012 school year, African American female students were six times more likely to be suspended than white girls; while in New York

City, they were 53 times more likely to be suspended than white female students (Crenshaw, Ocen, Nanda, 2015).

African American females' disproportionate suspension rates have also been attributed to their violation of European standards of femininity (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2010). The author's study found that African American female students were 21% of school enrollment and more than 42% of the out of school suspensions. The White female students were 26% of the enrolled population and 14% of the out of school suspensions. The authors continue by noting that a frequent cause for the disproportionate suspensions was for actions that defied traditional standards of European based femininity such as "loudness", "unladylike" dress, and other stereotypes of African American women, including hypersexuality. These misrepresentations place limitations on African American girls' when they are viewed only through a miscreant lens; as opposed to being viewed as scholastic successes, as observed concerning their mathematical capabilities (Gholson, 2016).

Background of the Study

Reports of high suspension rates of African American students have most often focused on African American males; and though it was for good reason, it excluded the necessary attention that was needed to be paid to African American females (Crenshaw, 2014; Crenshaw, Ocen, and Nanda, 2015; Lindsey, 2017). The binary choice between addressing disproportionate suspension of males and not that of females led to a paucity of research that is centered on the life experiences of African American females and the social, political and historical elements of the intersectionality of gender and race (Hines and Andrews, 2017; Lindsey; Andrews, Brown, Castro, and Id-Deen, 2019). As researchers observed an increase in the suspension rate of African American female students, it was revealed that African American females were not only

under-researched but, African American females were "overpoliced and under-protected" (Crenshaw, Ocen, and Nanda, 2015).

Zero-tolerance disciplinary policies have been cited as the primary contributor to high suspension rates of African American students; however, Heilbrun and Cornell (2015) report the principal's philosophy regarding zero-tolerance policies is highly associated with high rates of suspension. This provides an opportunity for a closer look at the relationship between an administrator's actions and the decision to suspend an African American female. Perhaps an administrator's sense of humor can delay the decision to suspend. More specifically, perhaps the administrator's benevolent and corrective humor, measured by the benevolent and corrective humor (BenCor) scale Rüch and Heintz (2016), will reveal a correlation between humor and lower suspension rates of African American females.

Wanzer, Frymier, and Irwin (2010) report that humor plays a role in enhancing student learning. Moccia (2013) proposed a model of management that included a sense of humor. The objectives of the model were to use humor as a tool to aid in-group cohesiveness, enhanced leadership, and stress reduction. Though there are writings about the value of humor in the classroom (Jonas, 2009; Story and Butts, 2010) there is a dearth of reporting about administrators' sense of humor (Hurren, 2006) in their interactions with students. In the few writings about principals and their sense of humor, there is no reporting of the principal's use of humor in relationship to their authority to suspend African American female students. Moccia also refers to the role values play in conjunction with a sense of humor. Benevolent and corrective humor is a concept of humor that is based on morals and aimed at filling a "virtue gap" in the spectrum between a sense of humor and mockery. The authors identify this gap as a

space to be filled with humor that is uplifting, forgiving, and compassionate (Rüch and Heintz, 2016).

Finding new ways to impede the rate of suspensions of African American female students is a worthwhile endeavor that promises benefits to parents, students, administrators, and society. Humor, as a viable administrative tool, has not gotten rigorous, research attention, and warrants serious investigation. This study is designed to examine whether there is a relationship between a principal's propensity to use benevolent and corrective humor and the rate of suspension of African American female students.

Statement of the Problem

Suspension rates of African American female students continue to outpace the suspension rate of all other categories of students (Hines and Andrews, 2017). Principals are authorized to suspend students. To stem the rising rate of suspension of African American female students, principals must be central to the solution. One solution that has not been addressed is the use of humor by principals, to lessen their reliance on harsh, zero-tolerance disciplinary policies. Introducing the concept of benevolent and corrective humor is a first step toward reversing the pattern of punitive responses to student misconduct.

Significance of the Study

Educational advocates engage in ongoing solutions to persistent educational dilemmas. The suspension rate of African American female students is among the ongoing and salient educational concerns that continue to attract the attention of researchers (Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010; Harrison, 2015; Love, 2016; Skiba, 2002; Wun, 2016, 2018). The principal's role in suspension and philosophy about disciplinary policies justifies placing the school leader at the center of such an investigation. The principal is pivotal to discovering a viable solution to

the problem of disproportionate and harsh disciplinary policies. Positive behavior interventions (Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin & Swain-Bradway, 2011); culturally synchronized faculty and improved classroom management training for teachers (Weinstein, Clarke & Curran, 2004) have been proposed as effective ways to reduce suspensions. Their success rate notwithstanding, exploring the use of humor by principals paves an unchartered path toward new and innovative leadership praxis.

This study is designed to offer a new way to reduce suspensions of African American females in a way that is enjoyable, fun, morally based, and beneficial to all stakeholders. The findings in this study promise to reveal that a high BenCor score is correlated with a low suspension rate. That finding would encourage further exploration into the furtherance of humor, not only by the principal but by other internal stakeholders. A finding of a low BenCor score and a high suspension rate may encourage decision-makers to consider establishing BenCor interventions to stem the rise of suspensions. It would provide educational leaders an opportunity to reassess their practices and philosophy about disciplining African American female students. Lastly, if the findings reveal there is no correlation between the principal's BenCor score and the suspension rate of African American female students, one less proposed intervention to be considered. Knowledge about the relationship between a principal's BenCor score and the suspension rate of African American female students will enable school leaders and decision-makers to reassess their reliance on punitive, zero-tolerance policies. It is hypothesized that African American female students will be less likely to be suspended by a principal who has and uses benevolent and corrective humor. It assumes that humor is a skill that transformational leaders either have or are willing to learn.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine whether a principal's propensity for benevolent and corrective humor has a relationship with the suspension rate of African American female students. The research question that guided this quantitative, conceptual study is:

1. Does the benevolent and corrective humor score have a predictive value for the suspension rate of African American female students?

This question is intended to expand the discussion of effective disciplinary policies that do not include the zero-tolerance model. Furthermore, this study expects to expand the landscape of restorative justice practices that are guided by respect for and understanding of African American females. Its goal is to see if there is benefit in using benevolent and corrective humor by educational administrators.

Theoretical Framework

Transformational leadership theory, Black Girlhood Studies (BGS), and benevolent and corrective humor form the foundational frames for this study. Transformational leaders exhibit a collaborative, people-centered, and, participatory style. They seek to gain knowledge about people and how they function in an organization (Owens & Valesky, 2011). Hoy and Miskel (2008) describe transformational leaders as those who build trust, inspire belief in the organization's ability to succeed, encourages follower creativity and innovation and, are attentive to individual differences and needs. Transformational leaders encourage their followers to collaborate in looking for new perspectives. This style of leadership is effective across cultures and organizational designs. School culture and climate are enhanced when led by transformational leaders. Transformational leaders are more inclined to be open to a new

approach to school disciplinary policies like the use of benevolent and corrective humor when faced with the decision to suspend an African American female.

Black Girlhood Studies illuminates the social, political, and historical peculiarities that place African American female students at elevated risk of school suspension (Field, Owens, Chatelain, Simmons, George & Keyse, 2016). Through the lens of Black Girlhood research, a transformational educational leader is equipped to strengthen her interactions with teachers and students and to avoid biased behavior (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

In her 2009 Ted Talk entitled, "The Danger of the Single Story", novelist and storyteller, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie implored her audience to avoid embracing the "Single Story" of a nation, of a people or, of a gender (Adichie, 2009). The singe story of African American girls' comportment, their style, and their very presence becomes the socially constructed story of who they are and limits who they can become. Black Girlhood Studies challenge the stereotypical, anti-black, sexist, and misogynistic narrative Its nascence notwithstanding, the essence of benevolent and corrective humor is a concept of forgiveness and compassion. These effects are the types of character strengths that African American girls continually battle against.

Benevolent and corrective humor encourages the use of compassion and forgiveness in the presence of wrongdoing or misconduct (Rüch & Heintz, 2016). It considers life's vicissitudes and uses character strengths like transcendence, wisdom, and courage. A high BenCor score is associated with a propensity to use benevolent and corrective humor. The purpose of this study is to examine whether there is a relationship between BenCor scores and the suspension rate of African American female students. Perhaps principals who are transformational leaders and are inclined to seek a better understanding of African American female students through Black Girlhood Studies, are also the kind of principals who would be

open to the use of benevolent and corrective humor to reduce the rate of suspension of African American female students.

Assumptions of the Study

It is assumed that respondents to the survey are concerned about the high rate of suspension of African American females and, as transformational leaders are open to the idea of benevolent and corrective humor as a viable administrative tool. It is also assumed that all survey questions were answered honestly.

Delimitations of the Study

The study collected data from school leaders from across the United States who completed the BenCor Scale. The following limitations are:

1. This study did not filter transformational leaders from non-transformational leaders.

2. This study did not collect data from teachers, parents, or students.

3. The sample size is not generalizable.

Definition of Terms

Administration/Educational Leadership. The former focuses on process and the latter focuses on activities like scheduling and bookkeeping (Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs & Thurston, 1999). In this study, the terms will be interchanged to refer to the person in the school building, licensed and certified to oversee the daily school operations and with the authority to suspend students. Persons with those responsibilities may also be known as a principal or school leader. An administrator may also have jurisdiction over more than one school. The distinction between the two will be made.

African American. African American is the preferred term for people of dark hue and African ancestry. In this study, when discussing Black Girlhood Studies, the term Black will be used.

Benevolent and Corrective Humor (BenCor). The "Conceptualization of humor from a 'good character' perspective. Benevolent humor reflects an understanding of human weaknesses. Corrective humor is 'moral-based' ridicule used to fight badness and mediocrity" BenCor expands the concept of humor beyond the creative ability to make people laugh or appreciating a joke; also known as a sense of humor (Rüch & Heintz, 2016).

Black Girlhood Studies. The theoretical/conceptual lens that centers African American girls (females) in the discussion about their lived social, cultural, historical and emotional experiences; and removed from the margins of African American women's studies (Field, Owens, Chatelain, Simmons, George & Keyse, 2016).

Transformational Leadership. Leadership that is "more concerned with end-values such as liberty, justice, equality..." so "…people can be lifted into their better selves" (Hodgkinson, 1991, pg. #).

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 contains the introduction to the study, the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose, and significance of the study, the research questions, the theoretical framework, assumptions of the study, delimitations, and limitations of the study and the definition of terms. In Chapter 2, based on a review of the related literature, the many factors that are related to the complex issues of zero tolerance, gendered racism, teacher perception, antiblackness, and humor will be discussed. Chapter 3 presented the research and design of the study. Chapter 4 presented the analysis of the data, and Chapter 5 cited

the conclusions of the study and offered practical applications of the data and made recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This review of literature presents the factors and events that contribute to the high rates of suspension of African American female students, the role school principals play, and, to introduce benevolent and corrective humor as a new approach to replace punitive disciplinary policies and reduce suspensions.

Educational Leadership

Leadership, according to Merriam Webster Online, is the act or instance of leading. The ubiquity of the word leadership is reflected in its numerous definitions. English (2008) cites Campbell's description of the leader as one who is on a "magic flight" and guided by the values, psychology, and mythology of their society. Leadership, according to Hoy and Miskel (2008) has been compared to beauty and described as an aspect of an organization and, as a social process. The authors continue by listing more concrete explanations of leadership like a) characteristics of a position or office, b) characteristics of an individual, and, c) someone's behavior. According to Owens and Valesky (2011), for organizational goals to be met, successful leadership must reveal the ability to maintain performance levels while stabilizing existing practices. Hoy and Miskel's interpretation of leadership will guide this study: "…a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task" (p. 419). Leadership theories, though, have played a role in shaping the vision of what effective leadership is.

Throughout the 20th century, educational leadership scholars acknowledged that there was a paucity of research in the field, caused in part by a lack of faculty engagement (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006). There was a call for empirical data to shape [theory] and practice. Several

theories abound that were used to measure leadership effectiveness but three will be presented here. One theory that predominated the educational leadership landscape is the Great Man Theory that claims great leaders are born with the ability to lead (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015; Borgatta, Bales & Couch, 1954). On the contrary, others argue a second theory, the Behavior Theory, that leadership ability can be learned and directed toward job centeredness or employee centeredness (Guthrie & Reed, 1991) or an autocratic or democratic style of leadership (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015). A third, and increasingly popular theory, is known as the Transformational Leader Theory (English, 2006). The theory compared transactional leadership, which leans toward cautious managerial techniques that maintain the status quo, with transformational leadership that involves collaboration between the leader and the follower (English, 2008). Transactional leadership motivates followers with quid pro quo exchanges of salary increases, promotions, or favorable assignments. It is a system of rewards and punishments (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015; Owens & Valesky, 2011) where followers lack enthusiasm (English, 2006). Siegrist (1999) reported that technological advances, as well as increased attention and support from institutions of higher learning, contributed to the modulation of educational leadership from a managerial to a transformational and visionary experience.

Transformational Leadership

Addressing the human dimension of an organization is crucial to leadership effectiveness (Owens & Valesky, 2011). The writers continue by asserting the importance of including moral leadership as an essential ingredient of effective leadership. It is the blend of moral and transformational acumen that motivates and inspires followers to seek the best possible outcome for all stakeholders. Leaders and followers, according to transformational leadership theory,

uplift one another which leads to the enjoyment of a dynamic and interactive exchange (English, 2008). James MacGregor is credited with introducing the transformational leadership theory. According to Burns, as described by English, transformational leadership, "…is an interaction between a leader and a follower based on some exchange of goods, services or psychic or emotional needs that both parties seek from the other…" (p. 28). Though a transformational leader may be charismatic, the emphasis is not on the person's charisma unlike the premise of the Charismatic Leadership Theory where the leader is perceived by followers to operate at and with high levels of miraculous prowess. Effective transformational leadership flourishes when followers become an integral part of the leadership equation. It extends beyond the walls of the school and into the greater society. In this way, a truly transformative school can expect to experience social justice (English). Regardless of the century or the theory, effective school leaders are measured by their ability to a) attain organizational goals, b) maintain cultural patterns, and c) adapt to the external environment (Sergiovanni et al., 1993). Above all, schools are expected to be safe havens.

Zero Tolerance Disciplinary Policies

Concerns about school safety increased in the early 1980s and into the 1990s due to widespread media reports about incidents of school violence (Skiba, 2014). One occurrence of school violence that attracted substantial public attention was the shooting at Columbine High School, in Littleton, Colorado, in 1999. It heightened the public's fear of school violence and ushered in what some writers call the zero-tolerance philosophy (Skiba, 2014). Though there is no established definition of the term *zero tolerance,* it is accepted that it describes a method of communicating that all offenses, whether major or minor, will receive the same punishment (Skiba, 2001). A student's slightest transgression is to be met with the strongest imposition of

punishment. The concept of zero tolerance emerged during the administration of President

Ronald Reagan and his Attorney General, Edwin Meese, as a way to address rule-breaking in

their so-called war on drugs (Skiba).

Zero tolerance is a law enforcement tactic that was popularized by Wilson and Kelling

(1982) in their Broken Windows Theory. According to the two social scientists, a neighborhood

with "broken windows" signals a lack of community cohesiveness and self-determination. The

metaphorical broken window invites increased criminal activity. The premise of zero tolerance

was to maintain order (Bell, 2015). In response to the calls from the public to shore up school

security, schools embraced the zero-tolerance concept and imposed harsh disciplinary

punishment when school rules were broken. Initially, the policy focused on removing guns and

drugs from school campuses as evidenced by the passage of the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act

(Brown, Trone, Fratello & Kapur, 2013; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). The perception of

uncontrollable school violence did not match reality; nevertheless, fear motivated the

continuation of zero-tolerance disciplinary policies and led to the inclusion of other punishable

actions like smoking tobacco, fighting, and school uniform violations (Brown, et al). In a report

of the 1996-1997 school year, the discipline issues that principals rated as moderate or serious, in

order of seriousness were student tardiness, excessive absenteeism, and physical conflicts (Skiba

& Peterson). As the list of violations increased and became more mundane, the number of

African American students who were suspended from school under zero-tolerance mandates

rose. School suspension is the removal of a student from class for misconduct and it is the most

frequently used form of discipline (Mendez & Knoff). It can result in removal from class but not

from school, in the case of an in-school suspension or removal from school, also known as an out

of school suspension.

The literature is replete with evidence that anti-black sentiment and implied bias account for the disproportionate suspension of African American students (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba, 2001; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002; Skiba, Shure & Williams, 2011). In the vast compendium of peer-reviewed writings, one article was found to posit that ethnicity is not a variable that accounts for high suspension rates for African American students, rather, that their suspension rates reflect their disparate behavior pattern (Wright, Morgan, Coyne, Beaver & Barnes, 2014). Skiba and Peterson (1999) and Skiba (2004) dispute this claim. They consistently report evidence that racial bias is inherent in African American suspension rates. Racial behavioral differences, which are minor, makes a weak case in support of burdening African American students with high rates of suspension. The writings about African American disproportionality in discipline is most often centered on African American male students (Morris, 2012). This is not to suggest that such attention is unwarranted, rather that there should not be a bipartite examination of the issue (Hines & Andrews, 2017). Although the reports of alleged violations differ, the extent of and the impact of disproportionate and harsh punishment under the zero-tolerance mandates are no less formidable for African American female students.

Black Girlhood Studies

Dumas makes the case that school policy is constructed around the idea that the very presence of Black bodies makes them a problem or what he calls antiblackness (Dumas, 2016). He describes the suffering of African American children in schools through the longue durée of enslavement, as well as through contemporary social and political conditions and how they must navigate their way through a social construct that views them as un-human or otherly. The "otherliness" of "Blackness" is juxtaposed to the dehumanization of the African American

female body as a "breeder" (Winters & Esposito, 2010). How anti-blackness, as described by Dumas, is manifested in the experience of African American school-age females is examined through the lens of Black Girlhood Studies (BGS).

African American girls do not attract the attention of researchers to the same degree they attract the attention of disciplinarians and those authorized to suspend students. As the need to finely focus on African American girls became evident it led to the emergence of BGS to fill the void of substantive research that centers its exploration on the African American girl (Harris, 2017). A growing number of scholars' attention turned to unearth sources relevant to African American girls' lived experiences apart from the margins of women's studies (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2013). Wright (2016) explored the historical trope of African American girls, in nineteenth-century literature, as the figure of racial progress, of power, and as a central figure for many writers (N.S. Wright personal communication, May 7, 2019). Borne out of the writings of African American feminist writers, researchers, novelists and poets (Collins, 2002; Lourde, 1968; Naylor, 1982; Shange, 1975; Walker, 1982), respectively, BGS hones in on and provides an understanding of the complexities of African American girls' lives (Lindsay-Dennis, 2014). The South Carolinian student's humiliating experience was not an exceptional occurrence and begs for an examination of the systemic obstacles to the flourishing of African American girls' talents (Lindsey, 2018).

Gendered Racism. This study will draw heavily from the growing list of writings in Black Girlhood Studies with tangential connections to Critical Race Feminism literature. While African American males are suspended more than other students, Annamma et al. (2019) report that suspension rates for African American female students have grown faster than for any other group of students. Even though the rates are rising fast, the research and attention to African

American female students are inadequate. As research on African American females and suspension increases, researchers report these young women are not accorded the latitude of youthful indiscretions but operate under the weight of deprivation of innocence (Baker, 2012; Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004; Crenshaw, 2016; Epstein, Blake & González, 2017; Losen & Skiba, 2011; Morris, 2012; Morris, 2007; Hannon, DeFina & Bruch, 2013; Vavrus & Cole, 2002; Wun, 2016 &).

Lindsey (2018) asserts that addressing anti-blackness solely as it impacts African American males ignores the greater percentage of the African American community. Adding feminine pronouns is an inadequate examination of the way White supremacy and patriarchy are meted upon African American girls. The academy must be included as a site of anti-black girl terrorism. Morris and Perry (2017) argue the case for a closer examination of African American female students and suspensions and report that disproportionate disciplinary policies are greater between African American females and other races than they are for African American male students and other races. Thus, they urge for an analysis that is derived from the intersection of gender and race. African American female students need research dedicated to them that challenges the stereotypes and redefines the values and circumstances of African American females (Winters & Esposito, 2010).

Implicit bias and low expectations place African American female students at a higher risk for suspension (Rudd, 2014). The teacher's background weighs heavily when deciding whether an office referral is written for student misconduct. Downey and Pribesh (2004) report that African American students are typically rated as poorer classroom citizens than are white students. Baker (2012) found that teacher perception is a factor in the suspension of African American [female] students. She explains that teachers are not colorblind, and their perception

of students is influenced by the race of the student. African American teachers reported fewer African American students for behavioral problems. Convention dictates that girls are perceived to be less of a behavior problem than boys except in the case of African American girls. African American girls' gender is not an advantage in the eyes of teachers and therefore, puts the young women at high risk for disproportionate school discipline because they are viewed as threatening and aggressive (Blake, Butler, Lewis & Darensbourg, 2010; Hines & Andrews, 2017; Zimmerman, 2018).

Disruptive behavior is the most cited reason for African American students' suspensions (Baker, 2012; Morris & Perry, 2017). Violations of dress code, failures to turn off a cellphone, or to remove a hat fall into this category. Skiba, Shure, and Williams (2011) also found that among high school students, "defiance" is the single and most common reason for a teacher to refer an African American student to the office. Teachers and other school personnel determine their definition of what is disruptive. Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette (2004) concur that teachers' beliefs and perceptions are stronger contributors to African American female suspension than inappropriate or challenging behavior. Even the language teachers and administrators use reflects a negative perspective of African American females. Kayama, Haight, Gibson, and Wilson (2015) noted the importance of language and communication to a young person's self-perception. When school officials use criminal justice or legal terminology it conveys a message of oppression and curtails healthy social growth. Whether it is the physical presence of prison-like conditions or the use of terms like surveillance, the students learn from what Kayama et al. (2015) call the "hidden curriculum". The hidden curriculum is that space where students, especially adolescents, receive socialization messages. When students are suspended, they no longer are exposed to that socialization process.

Vavrus and Cole (2002) report that African American female suspensions are authorized without a conspicuous violation of disciplinary policy. The authors observed that suspensions occur during what they called the disciplinary moment. The disciplinary moment is the result of the retrospective examination of the incremental interactions between the teacher and the students that resulted in the office referral. Vavrus and Cole observed that contumacious conduct that warranted a referral in one instance, in the same class, and with the same teacher in another instance went unaddressed. Poor behavior was not the contributing factor to suspension; rather, inconsistent, and subjective application of the rules. African American female students are subjectively selected for suspension because they do not conform to European concepts of femininity. Anti-blackness presents itself when African American female students are socially constructed to be the antithesis of socially acceptable femininity (Winters & Esposito, 2010). African American [female] students are, according to Zimmerman (2018) filtered through "controlling images" of African American bodies. Compared with White females, African American females are depicted as "too strong" or masculine. African American female students are more closely examined and held accountable for not conforming to normative gender behavior (Morris & Perry, 2017). The young women are perceived to engage in misconduct when they violate gender assumptions about femininity (Morris, 2012).

African American females are racialized and oppressed because of their hair (Johnson & Bankhead, 2013). The contrast between long, straight European hair and the tight curls of African hair has exposed African American females to ridicule and shame. Over the centuries, since the 1619 landing in Virginia, African American hair has been deemed unattractive and described in pejorative terms like woolly or matted. Enslaved African women were forced to cover their hair with coarse fabric because their enslavers were "offended" at the sight of the

spirally coils, or the hair had to be covered with a wig. This repulsion continues today and adds to the marginalization, dismissal and in the extreme, suspension of African American female students. In addition to hair serving to attract derision, skin color does as well. Colorism is the skin color hierarchy of African American women where those whose complexion is lighter are treated kindlier and are more aesthetically appreciated (Townsend, Neilands, Thomas, & Jackson, 2010). Pre-teen girls are aware that their value is associated with beauty and such a connection can contribute to taunting and teasing in the classroom. In a dispute between a light and dark-skinned girl, the lighter-skinned girl often gets the benefit of the doubt, as well as a second chance. Based on teacher perception, skin tone has also been identified as a factor that influences the decision to refer an African American female and ultimately, to suspend her (Hannon, DeFina, & Bruch, 2013). African American females with dark complexion were suspended more than twice as often as their White female counterparts; while African American females with lighter-hued skin were not found to have the same risk (Blake, Keith, Luo, Le, & Salter, 2017). The authors also found that the more phenotypically African a student is, the more a stereotypical and prejudiced action is evoked.

Verbal exuberance in African American females is a major factor for their academic success; nevertheless, it does not comport with the standard model of womanhood and causes them to be labeled as "loud" (Morris, 2007). "Loudness", along with aggressive are descriptions that align with high rates of suspension of African American female students. Morris further states that teachers tend to focus on students' presence and deportment than on their academic progress. Morris notes that teachers scolded African American girls for challenging authority, for being loud, and for not being ladylike. This assessment ignores the strident and independent scholarly pursuits of young students and further alienates them as unfeminine. Talking with

attitude (TWA) is another way African American girls' voices are illegitimatized (Koonce, 2012). The trope of the angry African American female with the swerving neck and rolling eyes notwithstanding, TWA is a way of walking and talking attributed to African American women in a way that exudes strength and determination but is appropriated as a negative attribute. Koonce reports that African American females repurpose TWA as a form of resistance against what they perceive as hostility and disrespect. TWA is a means by which African American girls have a voice.

Fordham (1993) notes that African American female's loudness is not without merit or purpose. She contends that the loudness is intended to resist the perception of African American females as "Other". But attention for academic acceptance is not the only reason for loudness. Sometimes African American females' loudness is a cry for help due to unaddressed and underlying trauma (Crenshaw, Ocean, & Nanda, 2016). Teachers are advised to take note of and to learn strategies to de-escalate emotional outbursts (Keels, 2018). The Trauma Responsive Educational Practices Project (TREPProject) provides organizational capacity to schools with students who are growing up in communities with elevated levels of toxic stress. They suggest ways to maintain school engagement in the presence of high levels of depression, inattention, and aggression and particularly, among African American [female] students. Adults are encouraged to become competent in de-escalation skills to counteract the high rate of suspensions that are associated with racial and ethnic biases (Voisin & Elsaesser, 2013). Trauma-based misconduct can obscure the student's pubescence and suggest their actions are based on mature reasoning.

Adultification is a term that BGS has eased into the vernacular, and has two essential contexts (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017). First, adultification is manifested when children

find themselves in a social situation where they must function at a more mature developmental level than their chronological age. The second form of adultification occurs when children are subjected to adults' stereotypes, largely based on misinformation and race. It is also referred to as age compression, where African American girls are tagged with adult-like attributes and are compared more with adults than with other children (Epstein, Blake, & González). They operate under the strain of inappropriate expectations that are incongruent with the student's age, thus contributing to adultification (Green, 2017; Hines & Andrews, 2017). Historically, claims of African American women's hypersexuality have rationalized the dehumanization that predominated the period of African enslavement beginning in 1619, in Jamestown, Virginia (Townsend, Neilands, Thomas, & Jackson, 2010). The extreme depictions of African American women ran the gamut from the seductress (Jezebel) to the asexual mammy: the former of light complexion and "good hair" and the latter, corpulent, dark and obedient. The ubiquitous trope of the emasculating, loud, crude, and combative Sapphire exacerbates the African American woman's ongoing battle to elude those stereotypes. The authors suggest that African American girls who adopt these distorted perceptions of African American womanhood have difficulty traversing their identity formation. This inability to align with an "ideal body" increases the likelihood of their succumbing to the risky behaviors that are common during adolescence. Their poor choices elicit a view of them "…as less child-like and less in need of protection than their white peers" (Green, 2017). The burden of the many manifestations of anti-blackness and anti-black girl terrorism, at some point, takes its toll on the young woman's essence.

Love (2016) defines spirit murdering in the academy, "…the denial of inclusion, protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance because of fixed, yet fluid and moldable structures of racism" (p.2). Spirit murdering, according to Love, extinguishes the individual's passion to

strive due to the humiliation borne of racism and anti-black terrorism. Unlike immediate physical death, spirit murdering is slow and steady. Hines and Wilmot (2018) report that spirit murdering is cultural cancer. Combined with adultification and criminalization, spirit murdering, in the academy, engulfs African American girls in the litany of anti-black aggressions and racially discriminatory disciplinary policies. The authors offer the three-tiered Anti-Black Aggression Model to describe the anti-black racism meted upon African American girls through harsh disciplinary, zero-tolerance policies. The verbal and non-verbal violence directed at African American girls, according to the model, lays out stratum one: anti-Black microaggressions. Stratum two: anti-Black institutionalized racism reflected in policies and programs that reinforce White racial superiority. Stratum three is the anti-Black macroaggressions that maintain ideologies that dehumanize the African American body. The authors dissuade the readers from the belief that an African American girl's physical survival substantiates her exemption from spirit murdering. Spirit murdering must be replaced with spirit healing which includes decentering whiteness and eradicating disciplinary policies that promote murdering African American girls' spirits (Hines & Wilmot, 2018). This study offers benevolent and corrective humor as one means of spirit healing.

Through the lens of BGS, a wide range of approaches to resolving the multiple layers of African American girl terrorism are introduced. Despite the overwhelming challenges adolescent African American girls face, the horizon is not all bleak. Humor has long been cited as a valuable tool for use with children, including children in conflict (Berg & VanBrockern, 1995; Powers, 2005). Humor has been described as a stress reliever (Cooper, Kong, & Crossley, 2018). A frequent assertion is that humor can serve as a coping strategy and an "…emotion-related temperament trait" (Gray & Weir, 2002, p.49; Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, year). This

study offers humor as a tool to mitigate against the adultification, spirit murdering and overall anti-black girl challenges facing African American girls in the academy.

Humor and Educational Leadership

Rüch and Hofmann (2017) have reported numerous reasons to consider the use of humor as a positive intervention. Rüch and Hofmann (2017) write, "...humor is a key component that may make an institution a positive institution." (p. 66). Humor can aid in coping with stress and enhancing one's peace of mind. Elevated levels of humor correlate with lower levels of depression and negative emotions.

It has been a formidable task for humor related researchers to receive academic acceptance (Morreall, 2008). Davies, Morreall, Rüch, Raskin, and Martin (2008) are foundational to a serious discussion of humor, humor research, and the application and benefits of humor. They also are the pillars of humor measurement standards (Morreall, 2008). These humor luminaries created a primer that contains the body of knowledge of humor studies for budding exploration, especially by those whose disciplinary area is removed from a study of humor. A humor primer attempts to dissuade the academic world of the habit of marginalizing humor to joke-telling.

Humor is a topic of study in fields like medicine (Dowling, 2003; Nicklaus Hospital, 2015); business (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2017; Morreall, 2008; Yam, Christian, Wei, Liao & Nai, 2018); and organizational leadership (Aufrecht, 2001; Heath, 2011; Priest & Swain, 2002). Organizational humor consists of "...amusing communications that produce positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, group, or organization" (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006, p.59). Humor boosts leadership by anchoring the status of the supervisor and diminishing the social distance between leaders and followers. Proper humor styles that consider gender, race, and

ethnicity should be carefully explored to determine what style works best and is an organizational fit. Humor has become an essential condition that ameliorates the need to broach sensitive topics in a non-threatening or punitive manner (Heath, 2011). For centuries it was accepted that humor and effective leadership were diametrical opposites even though humor is a trait that is found in every culture and eclipses geography and language (Mesmer-Magnus, Glew, & Viswesvaran, 2012). Goldstein (1987) reports that in the absence of empirical support, it continues to be believed that humor benefits one's physical and psychological well-being. This makes humor and education an intriguing combination.

Wanzer, Frymier, and Irwin (2010) encourage the use of humor in the classroom. They support the idea that humor plays a role in enhancing student learning, particularly, if it is used in a positive and prosocial way. Humor and education are a good match, too, because humor is associated with intelligence and creativity. An educator does not need to have professional comedic skills. Teachers who make an honest attempt at humor have been found to enhance the learning environment and are more appreciated than teachers who make no effort to be humorous (Jonas, 2010). There is a gap in the literature, however, that supports the use of humor by educational administrators and specifically, as it relates to their authority to suspend students. Change is not always easy or welcomed (Morreall, 2008). As school leaders and other educational stakeholders consider alternatives to zero-tolerance disciplinary policies, humor can catalyze change from punitive and oppressive regimens to more compassionate and restorative practices. Transformational leaders welcome the opportunity to be imaginative and to re-frame the role of humor in their quest to provide innovative disciplinary strategies (W. Rüch personal communication, Bonn, Germany, July 4, 2019).

A recurring reason for the avoidance of playfulness is the fear of igniting an atmosphere of disrespect for authority (Morreall, 2008). A contrasting view in support of blending humor with educational leadership is that questioning is essential to a well-rounded education and that humor would improve classroom discussion and invigorate critical thinking skills. Student engagement is heightened when their humor is expressed, which fuels respect for and cooperation with the teacher (Wallinger, 1997). The transformation process in the schoolhouse blends power relations, shared orientations, cognition and motivation, and bureaucratic expectations to yield optimum organizational goals. A key element of the social system is the environment and the environmental climate that maximizes goal attainment (Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

The relationship between humor and school climate also exists between humor and leadership styles (Jonas, 2009). "The more you promote laughter in the class and in the school, the more connected teachers will be with teachers, students with students, and teachers with students" (p.15). Jonas quotes Dewey, "...to be playful and serious at the same time is possible, and it defines the ideal mental condition..." (p.13). Jonas contends there is a positive correlation between lighthearted humor and supportive leadership styles. Honing humor related skills is essential to fostering a positive school climate. Humor can be a guide to reaching organizational goals, as well as attaining personal fulfillment.

Humor is a multifunctional tool for management that enhances group adhesion and reduces stress (Moccia, 2013). In addition to being contagious, humor raises productivity and increases the number of "happy people". Moccia goes on to assert that when people are happy, better decisions are made, energy levels are higher, and problems are fixed sans complaints. Hurren's (2016) observation that there is a paucity of study in the broad areas of

humor and educational leadership bodes well for an examination of humor and the role it can play in the critical issue of the disproportionate suspension of African American females. Principals have numerous opportunities to communicate with students and each communicative opportunity opens the door to the use of humor. Hurren cites four states: New York, Texas, Michigan, and Arizona, where the principal's humor played a significant role in forging positive school climate and school culture. A continuum of leadership styles ranges from laissez-faire or passive leadership to transformational leadership with transactional leadership in between (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Transactional leadership occurs largely when the leader and the followers agree to an exchange of reward for services rendered. Transformational leaders are proactive and are guided by four I's: a) Idealized influence, b) Inspirational motivation, c) Intellectual stimulation and d) Individualized consideration (Hoy & Miskel, pp. 446-448).

Humor that is based on virtues is proffered as a model for management (Moccia, 2013). This approach portends to work well in an organization because it can lead to concrete and desirable organizational (school) outcomes. Virtue and happiness play a vital role in the workplace, including the academy. Schools can be as happy a place as a happy company. Priest and Swain (2002) concluded that a very strong relationship exists between leadership effectiveness and a warm humor style. Humor provides a non-serious means by which leaders can symbolize their organization (Crawford, 1994). That is, it allows leaders to use symbols (communication) about the organization that can be clearly understood by employees (students). Humor broadens the range of communicative strategies available to those in positions of leadership. As powerful and as positive a device as humor is, it continues to be misunderstood and underused (Crawford). However, when leaders use humor, Crawford offers a few cautionary

notes: " a) humor should not be avoided, b) keep the humor relevant to the situation/context, and c) remember to attack the position through humor; not the person's dignity" (Crawford, 1995, pp.27-28). Followers are more receptive to and appreciative of leaders who are adept at using appropriate humor (Heath, 2011). The leader's image is impugned when they use negative humor. On the other hand, their credibility is enhanced when humor is used for the good. The power of humor as a change agent should not be underestimated (Heath). Humor and leadership, whether in the commercial or academic setting, is touted as an under-resourced tool. It has been shown to strengthen intercommunication between leaders and followers (e.g., principals and teachers, teachers, and students).

Because of the wide range of the benefits of humor, Hurren (2006) proposes that more research should be conducted to substantiate the value of implementing humor into sober settings like education to more fully understand humor's powerful and positive potential. Humor in the classroom has been shown to yield positive outcomes for teachers and students. When principals share their humor skills, their school's culture, and climate improve. The impact of the principal's use of (benevolent) humor to prevent suspension has not been studied. This study endeavors to add to that body of knowledge.

Wallinger (1997) reports that the need for control is not oppositional to the use of humor in the classroom. Humor is both a powerful and productive device that can enable even new teachers to improve communication and to relieve stress. What is lost in the discussion, however, is whether humor plays a role in helping principals to reduce the suspension rate of African American female students. This is further support for this study to examine the relationship between benevolent and corrective humor and the suspension rate of African American female students. Solutions to disciplinary disparities include both program and policy-

based alternatives (Welsh & Little, 2018). Among the many proposed methods and procedures for improving school climate and reducing suspension rates of African American female students, none includes an omnipresent and free tool: humor.

Benevolent and Corrective Humor

The conventional view of humor is that it is either a source of laughter that results from one's appreciation of humor or of one's skill at creating humor. On the other end of the "humor spectrum" is sarcasm and mockery that are used to make people feel bad. Rüch and Heintz (2016) found that a "virtue gap" in humor existed because humor was not conceptualized from the perspective of "good character" or the morally good. They fill "the gap" with benevolent and corrective humor. With benevolent humor, one exhibits a humorous outlook on life while observing and understanding human weaknesses and imperfections. The humor is a non-critical response that is forgiving and understands that we all make mistakes. It is forgiving of those who succumb to the vicissitudes of life and is positively correlated with character traits like love of learning, social intelligence, and forgiveness. Corrective humor, on the other hand, is "good sarcasm/mockery." It is the use of humor to ridicule vices and abuses and to shame the pompous and the fake into improvement. It correlates with character strengths like bravery, creativity, and leadership (Rüch & Heintz, 2016). This study will examine how benevolent and corrective humor, when used by administrators, can motivate students to be better as opposed to using punitive and dismissive language that results in student disengagement and low self-esteem. The absence of compassion, good character, and moral values is what creates the "virtue gap".

The use of benevolent and corrective humor does not require professional training in humor although one can be trained (Rüch, Heintz, Platt, Wagner, & Proyer, 2018). "Benevolent humor treats human weaknesses and wrongdoings benevolently, while corrective humor aims at

correcting and bettering them" (Heintz et al., 2018, p.1). Having established that the virtue gap

in humor can be filled with benevolent and corrective humor, which is based on their relationship

to character strengths, this study is positioned to contribute to both humor studies and

educational policy research. Despite benevolent and corrective humor's nascence, its

introduction to more than twenty countries has yielded encouraging results for crafting its use in

the workplace (schools) (Heintz et al., 2018).

Appropriateness is a major factor that determines whether the attempt at humor is

successful (Bitterly et al., 2016). Cautionary calls to use humor positively is

needless. Benevolent and corrective humor satisfies this admonition for use by educational

leaders because it is rooted in positive psychology and based on character strengths (Mesmer-

Magnus, Glew, & Viswesvaran, 2012).

Rüch (2004) explains that the use of benevolent and corrective humor is not centered on

the cognitive dimension of humor where one's ability to contextualize funny things is

reflected. Benevolent and corrective humor is centered on the affective dimension of humor

where one's motivation is benevolence or malevolence. Corrective humor pokes fun at the

powerful and the haughty to correct an injustice. The foundation of benevolent humor is

compassion, morality, transcendence, justice, and courage. The use of benevolent humor is

predicated on morals and forgiveness and puts the user at low risk of losing status while

providing, in the case of the academy, a promising technique that will be an added value for

positive school climate, student achievement and reduced suspensions of African American girls

in the middle grades (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Chapter 3 will describe the

methodology, the sample population, the data collection, data analysis, and the chapter summary

for this study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter will set forth the methodological approach of the study. As stated in chapters one and two, this study examined whether the benevolent and corrective humor score had a predictive value for the suspension rate of African American school-age females. Educational decisions are increasingly based on research data to inform decisions. The process of systematically using empirical methods to answer questions is known as research; and research can be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods (Penuel, 2018). Quantitative research seeks answers through the collection and analysis of numerical data that is gathered through questionnaires or other pen and paper or electronic instruments. Research can serve many purposes and one is to help practitioners to think differently about an issue or to consider an imaginative way to solve school problems. When the goal is to determine whether or not there is a relationship between two variables and if there is, to what degree, correlational research is an appropriate design (Gay & Airasian, 2000).

Sullivan, Klingbeil, and Van Norman (2013) identified that administrators' attitudes toward zero-tolerance disciplinary policies played a leading role in determining the degree to which a school suspends students. Rudd (2014) reported teachers' implicit bias as a contributing factor to the high rate of suspension of African American students; while Fenning and Rose (2007) concur that teacher perception, as a function of disproportionate suspension of African American students, is established research. Losen (2011) suggests that better teacher-student engagement is a preventive, as well as the palliative process that will curtail the upward trajectory of the disproportionate suspension of African American students.

Rumberger and Losen (2016) report that the cost of dropping out of school, a frequent consequence of harsh punishment, is more than $35 billion. This cost is generated from the dropout rate associated with suspensions in the 10th grade. Calls from community groups and school reformers, to change from zero-tolerance policies to the disciplinary policies that do not yield these unintended consequences, have gotten increasingly positive responses. Promising interventions like Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline (CMCD), On-Campus Intervention Program (OCIP), and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are student-centered with foci on scholastic and behavioral outcomes (Rosch & Iselin, 2010).

Some administrators hold onto strict disciplinary policies and claim there is a paucity of interventions that would replace zero-tolerance policies while other stakeholders discount that claim. Ayers and Dohrm (2000) write:

"We need teachers, educators, parents, and school boards to reclaim schools as sites of learning and growth – places where incidents of misbehavior, poor choices, wrongdoing and, yes, even crimes, are generally handled *within* the school setting based on principles of repairing the harm, recognizing the consequences, and developing talents and assets…old fashioned remedies like detention halls, time out, letters of apology…restorative justice approaches…could be part of a context of learning that engages youth in a question of vital interest to them: What's fair?" (p. 2)

A quantitative, one-way ANOVA and correlational analysis were selected to address the research question. The results of the analysis provided a lead into a further study about ways to reduce the suspension rate of African American school-age females.

Research Question

This study examined whether an administrator's benevolent and corrective humor plays a role in reducing the rate of suspensions of African American school-age females. The question that guided the study: (1) does the benevolent and corrective humor score has a predictive value for the suspension rate of African American school-age females?

The Survey Instrument

University and college professors in disciplines like the Arts and Humanities, Education, and Biological and Social Sciences are among the members of The International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS). This organization focuses on promoting the professional and scholarly advancement of humor research. The society strives to examine the many uses of humor in areas like counseling, management, and business, and to explore how humor is intertwined with culture, age, and gender. The organization maintains a catalog of testing resources that measure coping humor (Coping Humor Scale-CHS), humor styles (Humor Styles Questionnaire-HSQ), and a sense of humor (Sense of Humor Questionnaire-SHQ) (ISHS, 2019). The Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) measures four humor styles: a) affiliative, b) self-enhancing, c) aggressive, and d) self-defeating. These styles are described as amusing others with humor, coping with stress with a humorous outlook, using disparaging humor, and extreme self-disparagement, respectively. According to the description of the Humor Styles Questionnaire, sense of humor is how much people appreciate and laugh about jokes. On the other hand, style of humor is sarcasm (Stoet, 2018). Another test, the Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale (MSHS) addresses the complex and intricate nature of sense of humor and measures four dimensions of one's overall sense of humor, it also considers a) one's creative use of humor, b) one's use of humor as a coping tool, c) one's appreciation for other people's humor, and d) one's attitude

toward humor (ISHS). Martin and Lefcourt (1984) describe the Situational Humor Response Questionnaire (SHRQ) as an instrument that assesses an individual's sense of humor that was devised to avoid the flaws in other humor measurement tools, like not accounting for humor in people's daily lives.

The wide-ranging span of areas of interest in the world of humor studies notwithstanding, Rüch and Heintz (2016) observed the absence of a conceptualization of humor from the perspective of good character. Inspired by rising attention to positive psychology, the researchers found what they term, the "virtue gap". The "gap," which is a lack of humor that was associated with virtues. There was a need for humor that went beyond the desire to make people laugh but was guided by character strengths and that responded to the vicissitudes and failings of life with kindness. They called this kind of humor benevolent and corrective humor. Benevolent humor relates to character and virtue strengths like justice, temperance, and transcendence. Corrective humor is "skilled mockery" that ridicules folly and abuse. The mockery is moderated by virtues like wisdom, courage, fairness, justice, and a love of learning. Benevolent and corrective humor fills the virtue gap in humor by taking note of life's incongruities (benevolent) and to make corrections (corrective) in a just and balanced way (Rüch & Heintz, 2016).

This study examined whether the Benevolent and Corrective Humor Scale (BenCor) results had a predictive value for the suspension rate of African American school-age females. BenCor is a self-administered, 12-question, survey instrument on a 7-point Likert scale developed by Dr. Willibald Rüch, from the University of Zürich, in Zürich, Switzerland (Rüch & Heintz, 2016). The questionnaire was administered using Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool. The instrument captures whether a person has the "…propensity to engage in benevolent and

corrective humor" (Heintz et al., 2018, p. 3) and measures whether the respondent uses humor in a morally guided way. The 7-point scale ranges from 1 for strongly disagrees to 7 for strongly agrees and consists of six markers for benevolent humor and six markers for corrective humor (Table 1) (Rüch & Heintz, 2016; Heintz, Rüch, Platt, et al., 2018).

   Demographic information was collected from the participants: a) region of the country, b) schools by grade or grade group, c) race of respondents, d) percent of African American female students, e) African American female suspensions, and f) type of school district. Furthermore, information about respondents will include gender, age, and the frequency with which they use humor. It is estimated that the survey can be completed in less than 30 minutes. There will be a 14-day window of opportunity within which administrators may complete the on-line, self-administered questionnaire. The twelve markers for benevolent and corrective humor are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Twelve Markers for Benevolent and Corrective Humor.

No.	Humor	
1.	Benevolent	I am a realistic observer of human weaknesses, and my good-natured humor treats them benevolently.
3.	Benevolent	When my humor is aimed at human weaknesses, I include both myself and others.
5.	Benevolent	On a large and small scale, the world is not perfect, but with a humorous outlook on the world, I can amuse myself at the adversities of life.
7.	Benevolent	I accept the imperfection of human beings and my everyday life often allows me to smile benevolently about it.

Table 1 Continued

9.	Benevolent	Humor is suitable for arousing understanding and sympathy for imperfections and the human condition.
11.	Benevolent	Even when facing unpleasant events, I can keep my distance and discover something amusing or funny in it.
2.	Corrective	I have a critical attitude toward arrogant and unfair people and my mockery serves to establish equality and justice.
4.	Corrective	I parody people's bad habits to fight the bad and foolish behavior.
6.	Corrective	When fellow humans or institutions demonstrate their superiority unjustified, I use biting humor to belittle them.
8.	Corrective	I caricature my fellow humans' wrongdoings in a funny way to gently urge them to change.
10.	Corrective	I like to ridicule moral badness to induce or increase a critical attitude in other people.
12.	Corrective	If the circumstances are not as they actually should be, I poke fun at these moral transgressions or societal wrongdoings, hoping to improve them in the long run.

To facilitate administrators' responses to the survey, the assessment was created and placed online using Qualtrics. It was estimated that the survey could be completed in less than 30 minutes. There was a 14-day window of opportunity within which administrators could complete the on-line, self-administered questionnaire.

Based on results from a principal component analysis (PCA) of the BenCor statements, along with the results of The Values in Action-Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), Rüch and Heintz (2016) found that character strengths, rather than personality are foundational to the use of benevolent and corrective humor. A positive, significant correlation was found between benevolent humor and 20 of 24 character strengths. Corrective humor correlated positively and significantly with three character strengths, a) bravery, b) creativity, and c) humor. Internal consistencies and criterion validity of the two sets of markers, in relation to character strengths, resulted in Cronbach's alpha of .82 for the benevolent scale and .84 for the corrective humor scale. The PCA was used to cluster the statements that highly correlated with benevolence and the statements that highly correlated with corrective. The VIA-IS measured the correlation of benevolent and corrective humor statements with 24 virtue-related, character strengths. When compared with sense of humor, benevolent and corrective humor ranked higher in the virtues of wisdom, courage, humanity, and transcendence (Rüch & Heintz, 2016).

Population and Sample

The American Federation of School Administrators is a national labor union that represents more than twenty thousand educational professionals, administrators, and supervisors, and is affiliated with the AFL-CIO. AFSA assists members and associated groups with services like a) professional learning, b) political action and organizing, and c) contract negotiations and enforcement (American Federation of School Administrators website, 2019). For almost fifty years, the organization has been vocal in securing collective bargaining agreements for supervisors. Their sixteenth triennial constitutional convention, attended by elected delegates, will convene in 2021. They have more than seventy local chapters in the United States, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico.

Convenience sampling is a type of probability sampling that is used to glean a sample based on their accessibility or convenience to the researcher. The advantage of convenience sampling is that there is a homogenous population such that there is slight difference in the outcome of whether the sample is random. A drawback, however, is that convenient samples may contain a high degree of bias (Ayiro, 2012).

Data Collection

In collaboration with AFSA, the researcher extended an invitation to prospective respondents. Prospective respondents were determined by using convenience sampling. Upon acceptance of the invitation, each respondent completed a consent form with information about the study and instructions for participation. The BenCor questionnaire was administered using Qualtrics and the questionnaire link was sent, electronically, to AFSA's email address. AFSA distributed the link to the questionnaire to their list of contacts. Respondents had a 14-day window of opportunity to complete and submit the questionnaire. The questionnaire was anonymized so a general thank you was extended to the AFSA leadership. To maintain the highest level of security and confidentiality, only the researcher and the methodology professor had access to the Qualtrics database and proceeded to analyze the data.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the means of six demographic categories: a) region of the country, b) schools by grade or grade group, c) race of respondents, d) percent of Africa American female students, e) African American female suspensions, and f) type of school district.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the strength of the linear relationship between the principal's BenCor score and the suspension rate of African American school-age females. Assumptions of correlational analysis are a) normal distribution, b) linear relationship, c) homoscedasticity, d) valid and reliable measurement instrument(s), and e) random representative sample. Pearson r will be used to determine the statistical significance of a positive or negative relationship between the variables (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 2003).

Summary

This chapter contains pertinent information regarding the methodology, sample population, survey instrument, data collection, and data analysis. This will be a quantitative study designed to examine whether the administrator's BenCor score has a predictive value for the suspension rate of African American female students. The population will consist of respondents from the American Federation of School Leaders, from across the United States. Once consent forms are received, the questionnaire is completed within the 14-day completion period, data will be collected and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Chapter 4 will examine the study results.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine whether an administrator's score on the benevolent and corrective humor scale had a predictive value for the suspension rate of African American school-age females. The national sample of 190 respondents were school leaders in grades K through 12. The survey measured one's proclivity to use benevolent and corrective humor. The research question was: does an administrator's BenCor score have a predictive value for the suspension rate of African American school-age females? To answer the question, two statistical analyses were conducted, which included a correlation analysis and a one-way Analysis of Variance, or ANOVA.

There was a total of 411 respondents, of which four did not give their consent and nine who previewed the survey. Those who did not give their consent and those who previewed the survey were removed from the data set. Additionally, 206 respondents provided demographic information only and did not provide answers to any of the BenCor questions. They, too, were removed from the data set. A total of 190 completed surveys were used for the statistical analysis.

A correlation analysis was used to determine whether there was a relationship between the administrator's proclivity to use benevolent and corrective humor and their suspension rate of African American female students. The one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the means of six demographic categories for each of the 12 survey questions. The six demographic

categories were a) region of the country, b) schools by grade or grade group, c) race of respondents, d) percent of African American female students, e) African American female suspensions, and f) type of school district. Following are the results of the analyses.

Correlation Analysis

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the respondents' answers to the 12 BenCor questions and their rate of suspension of African American female students. Question 2, a corrective question (*I have a critical attitude toward arrogant and unfair people and my mockery serves to establish equality and justice*), was found to be statistically significant. There was a weak, positive relationship between question 2 and the percentage of African American female students at $r = .149$, $p = .040$. No significant relationship was found for the other eleven questions and percent of African American female students.

ANOVA Findings

Region of country. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the difference between the BenCor scale and the demographic category region of the country. There was a statistically significant difference for Bencor benevolent question 11 (*even when facing unpleasant events, I can keep my distance and discover something amusing or funny in it*) at ($F (4, 189) = 2.641$, $p = .035$). A Tukey post hoc indicated a statistically significant difference between the Midwest region and the West region at $p = .046$. Results of the one-way ANOVA for the region are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analysis of Variance by Region

Table 2 Continued

Variable	n	M	SD	F(4, 185)	p
Scale 1 (Benevolent): Realistic observer	190	5.76	1.26	1.601	.176
Scale 2 (Corrective): Critical attitude	190	3.75	1.56	.460	.765
Scale 3 (Benevolent): Human weakness	190	5.25	1.64	1.971	.101
Scale 4 (Corrective): Parody bad habit	190	2.95	1.75	1.081	.367
Scale 5 (Benevolent): Humorous outlook	190	5.22	1.62	1.354	.252
Scale 6 (Corrective): Humor to belittle	190	2.36	1.39	.955	.433
Scale 7 (Benevolent): Smile benevolently	190	5.36	1.29	.483	.749
Scale 8 (Corrective): Caricature wrongdoings	190	3.68	1.63	1.553	.189
Scale 9 (Benevolent): Arousing understanding	190	5.13	1.54	.206	.935
Scale 10 (Corrective): Ridicule moral badness	190	3.20	1.16	1.433	.225
Scale 11 (Benevolent): Facing unpleasant events	190	4.64	1.62	2.641	.035
Scale 12 (Corrective): Poke fun	190	3.65	1.77	.841	.501

*Statistically significant $p < .05$

Note: Scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

The above table shows that benevolent scale 11, facing unpleasant events, was the only scale where there was a statistically significant difference between the four regions of the country, Northeast, South, Midwest and West. Among the four, results show the difference was between the Midwest and West.

Grade group. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the difference between the BenCor benevolent scale and grade group. There was a statistically significant difference

between BenCor benevolent question 5 (*on a large and small scale, the world is not perfect, but with a humorous outlook on the world I can amuse myself at the adversities of life)* at ($F =$ (4,185), = 2.986, $p = .032$). Tukey post hoc indicated a statistically significant difference between the elementary grade group and the middle school grade group with, $p = .032$. There was a statistically significant difference for BenCor benevolent question 7 (*I accept the imperfection of human beings and my everyday life often gives me the opportunity to smile benevolently about it)* at ($F = (4, 185) = 3.675, p = .013$). A Tukey post hoc indicated a statistically significant difference between the middle school grade group and the high school grade group at $p = .007$. Results of the one-way ANOVA for the grade group are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analysis of Variance by Grade Group

Variable	n	M	SD	$F(4, 185)$	p
Scale 1 (Benevolent): Realistic observer	190	5.76	1.26	1.222	.303
Scale 2 (Corrective): Critical attitude	190	3.75	1.56	.905	.440
Scale 3 (Benevolent): Human weakness	190	5.25	1.64	1.035	.378
Scale 4 (Corrective): Parody bad habit	190	2.95	1.75	.493	.688
Scale 5 (Benevolent): Humorous outlook	190	5.22	1.62	2.986	.032
Scale 6 (Corrective): Humor to belittle	190	2.36	1.39	1.156	.328
Scale 7 (Benevolent): Smile benevolently	190	5.63	1.27	3.675	.013
Scale 8 (Corrective): Caricature wrongdoings	190	3.68	1.63	.583	.627

Table 3 Continued

Scale 9 (Benevolent): Arousing understanding	190	5.13	1.54	1.807	.147
Scale 10 (Corrective): Ridicule moral badness	190	3.20	1.16	.285	.836
Scale 11 (Benevolent): Facing unpleasant events	190	4.64	1.62	1.508	.214
Scale 12 (Corrective): Poke fun	190	3.65	1.77	.529	.663

*Statistically significant $p < .05$

Note: Scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

The above table shows that benevolent scale 5, humorous outlook, was one of two scales where there were statistically significant differences between the three grade groups, elementary, middle and high school. Among the three, results show the difference elementary and middle. For benevolent scale 7, smile benevolently, there was a statistically significant difference between the middle and high school levels.

Race of respondents. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the difference between the BenCor scale and the race of respondents. There was a statistically significant difference for BenCor corrective question 4 (*I parody people's bad habits to fight the bad and foolish behavior)* at (F (3, 186) = 3.337, p = .021). Tukey post hoc indicated a statistically significant difference between African American and Other at p = .027. Results of the one-way ANOVA for the race of respondents are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analysis of Variance by Race of Participants

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*F(3, 186)*	*p*

Table 4 Continued

Scale 1 (Benevolent): Realistic observer	190	5.76	1.26	1.459	.227
Scale 2 (Corrective): Critical attitude	190	3.75	1.56	.740	.530
Scale 3 (Benevolent): Human weakness	190	5.25	1.64	.161	.995
Scale 4 (Corrective): Parody bad habit	190	2.95	1.75	3.337	.021*
Scale 5 (Benevolent): Humorous outlook	190	5.22	1.62	.616	.606
Scale 6 (Corrective): Humor to belittle	190	2.36	1.39	.638	.595
Scale 7 (Benevolent): Smile benevolently	190	5.63	1.29	.882	.451
Scale 8 (Corrective): Caricature wrongdoings	190	3.68	1.63	2.466	.064
Scale 9 (Benevolent): Arousing understanding	190	5.13	1.54	2.176	.095
Scale 10 (Corrective): Ridicule moral badness	190	3.20	1.16	.830	.479
Scale 11 (Benevolent): Facing unpleasant events	190	4.64	1.62	.975	.406
Scale 12 (Corrective): Poke fun	190	3.65	1.77	.192	.902

 *Statistically significant $p < .05$

Note: Scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

The above table shows that corrective scale 4, parody bad habit, was the only scale where there was a statistically significant difference between the three categories of race, African American/Black, White and Other . Among the three, results show the difference was between African American/Black and Other.

Percent of African American female students. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the difference between the BenCor scale and the percent of African American female

students in school. No statistically significant difference was found. Results for the one-way

ANOVA for percent of African American female students in school are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.

Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analysis of Variance by Percent of African American

Female Students in School

Variable	n	M	SD	$F(3, 186)$	p
Scale 1 (Benevolent): Realistic observer	190	5.76	1.26	1.152	.334
Scale 2 (Corrective): Critical attitude	190	3.75	1.56	1.236	.297
Scale 3 (Benevolent): Human weakness	190	5.25	1.64	1.192	.316
Scale 4 (Corrective): Parody bad habit	190	2.95	1.75	.214	.930
Scale 5 (Benevolent): Humorous outlook	190	5.22	1.62	.967	.427
Scale 6 (Corrective): Humor to belittle	190	2.36	1.39	1.131	.343
Scale 7 (Benevolent): Smile benevolently	190	5.63	1.29	1.457	.217
Scale 8 (Corrective): Caricature wrongdoings	190	3.68	1.63	.355	.840
Scale 9 (Benevolent): Arousing understanding	190	5.13	1.54	.522	.720
Scale 10 (Corrective): Ridicule moral badness	190	3.20	1.16	.688	.601
Scale 11 (Benevolent): Facing unpleasant events	190	4.64	1.62	.252	.908
Scale 12 (Corrective): Poke fun	190	3.65	1.77	1.300	.272

*Statistically significant $p < .05$

Note: Scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

African American female student suspensions. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the difference between the BenCor scale and African American female student suspensions. No statistically significant difference was found. Results for the one-way ANOVA for percent of African American female student suspensions are presented in Table 6.

Table 6.

Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analysis of Variance by African American Female Student Suspensions (Yes/No)

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*F(4, 185)*	*p*
Scale 1 (Benevolent): Realistic observer	190	5.76	1.26	1.152	.334
Scale 2 (Corrective): Critical attitude	190	3.75	1.56	1.236	.297
Scale 3 (Benevolent): Human weakness	190	5.25	1.64	1.192	.316
Scale 4 (Corrective): Parody bad habit	190	2.95	1.75	.214	.930
Scale 5 (Benevolent): Humorous outlook	190	5.22	1.62	.967	.427
Scale 6 (Corrective): Humor to belittle	190	2.36	1.39	1.31	.343
Scale 7 (Benevolent): Smile benevolently	190	5.63	1.29	1.457	.217
Scale 8 (Corrective): Caricature wrongdoings	190	3.68	1.63	.355	.840
Scale 9 (Benevolent): Arousing understanding	190	5.13	1.54	.522	.720
Scale 10 (Corrective): Ridicule moral badness	190	3.20	116	.688	.601
Scale 11 (Benevolent): Facing unpleasant events	190	4.64	1.62	.252	.908
Scale 12 (Corrective): Poke fun	190	3.65	1077	1.300	.272

*Statistically significant *p* < .05

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School district. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the difference between the BenCor scale and the school district. No statistically significant difference was found. Results for the one-way ANOVA for the school district are presented in Table 7.

Table 7.

Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analysis of Variance by District

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*F(3, 186)*	*p*
Scale 1 (Benevolent): Realistic observer	190	5.76	1.26	1.822	.126
Scale 2 (Corrective): Critical attitude	190	3.75	1.56	.458	.766
Scale 3 (Benevolent): Human weakness	190	5.25	164	1.115	.357
Scale 4 (Corrective): Parody bad habit	190	2.95	1.75	.526	.717
Scale 5 (Benevolent): Humorous outlook	190	5.22	1.62	.345	.847
Scale 6 (Corrective): Humor to belittle	190	2.36	1.39	.330	.858
Scale 7 (Benevolent): Smile benevolently	190	5.63	1.29	.856	.491
Scale 8 (Corrective): Caricature wrongdoings	190	3.68	1.63	.555	.696
Scale 9 (Benevolent): Arousing understanding	190	5.13	1.54	.586	.673
Scale 10 (Corrective): Ridicule moral badness	190	3.20	1.16	.377	.825
Scale 11 (Benevolent): Facing unpleasant events	190	4.64	1.62	1.363	.248
Scale 12 (Corrective): Poke fun	190	3.65	1.77	.624	.646

*Statistically significant *p* < .05

Descriptive Statistics

       Although only question 2 of the BenCor scale indicated a statistically significant relationship with the percentage of African American female students, Table 4 indicates that respondents' mean scores were higher for the odd-numbered benevolent questions than for the even-numbered corrective questions. The mean scores for benevolent questions ranged from 4.64 to 5.76 with responses ranging slightly agree to strongly agree. The mean scores for corrective questions ranged from 2.36 to 3.75 with responses ranging from strongly disagree and slightly disagree. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 8.

Table 8.

Descriptive Statistics Bencor Questions - Student Suspensions

Bencor Question	Description	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Scale 1 (Benevolent)	Realistic observer	190	5.76	1.26
Scale 2 (Corrective)	Critical attitude	190	3.75	1.56
Scale 3 (Benevolent)	Human weakness	190	5.25	1.64
Scale 4 (Corrective)	Parody bad habits	190	2.95	1.75
Scale 5 (Benevolent)	Humorous outlook	190	5.22	1.62
Scale 6 (Corrective)	Humor to belittle	190	2.36	1.92
Scale 7 (Benevolent)	Smile benevolently	190	5.63	1.29
Scale 8 (Corrective)	Caricature wrongdoings	190	3.68	1.63
Scale 9 (Benevolent)	Arousing understanding	190	5.13	1.54

Table 8 Continued

Scale 10 (Corrective)	Ridicule moral badness	190	3.20	1.16
Scale 11 (Benevolent)	Facing unpleasant events	190	4.64	1.62
Scale 12 (Corrective)	Poke fun	190	3.65	1.70

Note: Scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

Participant characteristics. Respondents were asked to identify their region of the country as a) Northeast, b) Midwest, c) South, and d) West. The regional designations were based on the United States Census map. The majority of respondents led schools located in the South and the Northeast, 28.9%, and 27.9%, respectively. The majority of respondents identified their school district as urban (33.7%) and suburban (31.1%). More than 32% of the school leaders headed a high school, grades 9 – 12. Of the 190 respondents, more than 70 or 36.8% recorded their African American female student population was less than 5%.

Table 9 presents the descriptive characteristics of the region of the country, school district, group grade, and percentage of African American female students.

Table 9.

Characteristics of Survey Participants' Schools

Characteristics	n	%
Region		
Northeast	53	27.9%
Midwest	35	18.4%

Table 9 Continued

South	55	28.9%
West	38	20.0%
No Answer	9	4.7%
School District		
Rural	55	28.9%
Suburban	59	31.1%
Urban	64	33.7%
No Answer	12	6.3%
Grade Group		
Elementary (K-8, 5-8)	45	23.7%
Middle (6-7, 7-8, 7-9)	28	14.7%
High School (9-12)	61	32.1%
Unspecified	56	29.5%
African American Female Student Percentage		
Less than 5%	70	36.8%
5% to 20%	51	26.8%
21% to 50%	32	16.8%
Greater than 50%	37	19.5%

Note: N = 190

Of the 190 participants who completed the BenCor Humor Scale, more than 70% held the title Principal. The majority of the respondents (86.8%) had a tenure of more than two years in

their current position. Eighty-three or 43.7% of the respondents identify as White and 41.1% are

female. Table 10 presents the demographic characteristic of the survey participants.

Table 10.

Characteristics of Survey Participants

Characteristics	n	%
Position		
Principal	133	70.0%
Assistant or Vice Principal	28	14.7%
Other	29	15.3%
Tenure		
One year or less	6	3.2%
Two years	19	10.0%
More than two years	165	86.8%
Race		
African American/Black	37	19.5%
White	83	43.7%
Other	70	32.1%
Gender		
Male	55	28.9%
Female	78	41.1%
No Answer	57	30.0%

Note: N = 190

Cross tabulations. Respondents from the Midwest (48.6%) and the West (50.0%) regions reported having a population of African American female students of less than 5%. However, participants in at least half of those in the West region (55.3%) and the Midwest region (51.1%) reported that African American females were suspended during the academic years 2018 – 2020. Two-thirds of participants in the Northeast (67.9%) responded "yes" to the question of whether they had suspended an African American female student during the academic years 2018 – 2020. And more than half of the respondents in the South (56.3%) reported "yes" to the question of whether they had suspended an African American female student during the academic years 2018 – 2020.

Table 11 presents the cross-tabulation results of the percentage of African American female students by region, and Table 12 presents the cross-tabulation results of African American female student suspensions by region.

Table 11.

Cross Tabulation of % of African American Female Students by Region

Region	n	> 5%	5%-20%	21%-50%	< 50%
Northeast	53	22.6%	35.9%	17.0%	24.5%
Midwest	35	48.6%	22.8%	14.3%	14.3%
South	55	23.6%	20.0%	27.3%	29.1%
West	38	50.0%	34.2%	7.9%	7.9%
Total	190	36.8%	26.8%	16.8%	19.6%

Table 12.

Cross Tabulation of African American Female Student Suspensions by Region

Suspensions of African American Female Students Academic Years 2018-2020 (Yes/No)

Region	n	Yes	No	No Response
Northeast	53	67.9%	9.4%	22.6%
Midwest	35	51.1%	11.4%	37.1%
South	55	56.3%	10.9%	32.7%
West	38	55.3%	5.3%	39.5%
Total	190	55.9%	8.9%	35.3%

Summary

The BenCor Humor Scale was used to measure an administrator's propensity to use benevolent and corrective humor. In this study, the relationship between an administrator's BenCor score and the suspension of African American school-age females was examined. The hypothesis tested was that a high BenCor score would be associated with a low rate of suspension of African American school-age females. The nationwide survey was completed by 190 respondents who serve as school leaders, representing grades K through 12. There was a weak, positive relationship between question 2, critical attitude, and the percentage of African American female students, $r = .149, p = .040$. There was a statistically significant difference by region of the country on the response to benevolent question 11, facing unpleasant events, at the $p < .05$ level ($F_{(4, 185)} = 2.641, p = .035$). There was a statistically significant difference of by grade group on the response to benevolent question 5, humorous outlook, at the $p = .05$ level (F

(3, 185) = 2.986, p = .032). And there was a statistically significant difference by race on the response to corrective question 4 at the p <.05 level (F (3, 186 = 3.337, p = .021). Mean scores for benevolent questions were higher than the mean scores for corrective questions. The mean scores for benevolent questions ranged from 4.64 to 5.76. The mean scores for corrective questions ranged from 2.36 to 3.75.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine whether an administrator's BenCor score had a predictive value for the suspension of African American school-age females. The BenCor Humor Scale measures one's propensity to use benevolent and corrective humor. Benevolent and corrective humor is a concept of humor that is based on morals and character strengths like courage, transcendence, and forgiveness. It was hypothesized that there was a negative correlation between the administrator's BenCor score and the suspension rate of African American school-age females. As the administrator's score increased, the suspension rate would decrease. This chapter includes a discussion of major findings as related to the literature on transformational leadership, disproportionate suspensions of African American school-age females, and benevolent and corrective humor, and what implications may be valuable for use by educational leaders and disciplinary policymakers. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, areas for future research, and a summary.

It was expected that administrators' BenCor scores would reveal a relationship to their suspension rate of African American female students. The study found a correlation between BenCor benevolent scale 5 (*on a large and small scale, the world is not perfect, but with a humorous outlook on the world I can amuse myself at the adversities of life*) and the rate of suspension of African American female students. There was a weak, positive relationship between question 2 (*I have a critical attitude toward arrogant and unfair people and my mockery serves to establish equality and* justice) and the percent of African American female students. No significant relationship was found for the percent of African American students and the other eleven questions.

One-way ANOVAs were conducted to compare the difference between the BenCor scale and six demographic categories: a) region of the country, b) grade group, c) race of respondents, d) percent of African American female students in school, e) African American female student suspensions, and d) school district. Respondents scored higher on benevolent questions with mean scores ranging from 4.64 to 5.76, than on corrective questions with mean scores ranging from 2.36 to 3.75.

Respondents were from the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West regions of the country. They represented rural, suburban, and urban districts from elementary through high school grades. Fewer than 20% (19.5%) of respondents had a population of African American female students of more than 50%. Administrators from the South region (29.1%) reported having an African American female student population of more than 50%. However, administrators from the Northeast region had the highest percentage (67.9%) of yes responses to the question of whether they had suspended an African American female student during the 2018 – 2020 academic years.

Implications

Transformational leadership theory has become increasingly attractive to principals and other school leaders (English, 2006). The attractiveness of this style of leadership over an autocratic style is the emphasis on the human dimension of the organization (school) (Owens & Valesky, 2011). Transformational leaders are expected to oversee organizations (schools) that exhibit social justice (English, 2006). It could be inferred that respondents with high BenCor scores would also be transformational practitioners. Benevolent humor correlated significantly positively with character strengths like the love of learning, forgiveness, and humor. Corrective humor correlated with character strengths like creativity, bravery, and humor (Rüch & Heintz,

2016). Although there was a weak positive relationship between the BenCor scores and the suspension rate of African American school-age females, the benevolent scores were higher than the corrective scores of the respondents.

High rates of suspension of African American school-age females have been reported in southern states more than in any other region of the country (Smith & Harper, 2015). In this study, the highest percentage of respondents were leaders of schools in the South region (28.9%). Smith and Harper contend that the data presented in their volume were "attributable to racist practices and policies in K-12 public schools across the South" (p.1). (Schools in the South region also had the highest percentage of 50% or more African American female students (29.1%). And the South region, second to the Northeast region (67.9%), reported 56.3% of respondents answering "yes" to whether they had suspended an African American female student during the 2018 – 2020 academic years. Heintz (2019) reported that most people's sense of humor falls along a spectrum of broad concepts of humor or comic styles. These styles are shaped by personality and character and reflect one's cognitive or affective approach to humor. The former is inclined to seriousness and sober communication while the latter has a low threshold for smiling and laughter. The respondents' high benevolent scores suggest their self-evaluation of their humor belies their behavior as a disciplinarian.

Rudd (2014) and Baker (2012) noted that a teacher's implicit bias and ethnicity play a significant role in office referrals and ultimately, the suspension of African American female students. According to Baker (2012), there were fewer African American students reported by African American teachers for behavioral problems. BenCor corrective question 4 is, "*I parody people's bad habits to fight the bad and foolish behavior*." The mean score was 2.95 and there was a statistically significant difference between African American respondents and Other

respondents $p = .027$ as measured by the BenCor scale between those who identified as African American and those who identified as Other.

According to Losen and Skiba (2010), when students struggle during their middle-level grade years, it is predictive of their later involvement with the juvenile justice system and incarceration. Middle-level schools play a leading role in determining a student's academic success. BenCor benevolent questions 5 (*on a large and small scale, the world is not perfect, but with a humorous outlook on the world I can amuse myself at the adversities of life*) and 7 (*I accept the imperfection of human beings and my everyday life often gives me the opportunity to smile benevolently about it*) were statistically significant between elementary and middle school $p = .032$ and between middle school and high school, respectively, as measured by the BenCor scale between grade groups. Both had mean scores above 5, slightly agree and higher.

More than half of the nation's school suspensions (55%) occur in 13 Southern states. African American female students comprise a higher percentage of suspensions (56%) and expulsions (45%) from southern public schools than all categories of students (Smith & Harper, 2015). There was a statistically significant difference for BenCor benevolent question 11 (*even when facing unpleasant events, I can keep my distance and discover something amusing or funny*) by region of the country. There was a statistically significant difference between the West and Midwest $p = .046$ as measured by the BenCor scale between the Midwest and West regions.

This study aligns with the hypotheses of Black Girlhood Studies and Benevolent and Corrective humor as vehicles to improve student outcomes for African American females. The findings in this study offer a path toward interlacing transformational leadership with a depth of knowledge of African American girlhood that is associated with benevolent and corrective humor skills. The high scores for benevolent humor suggest administrators view humor as an

admirable attribute. This is an encouraging sign that school leaders would be open to honing

their benevolent tendency and to view it as a mark of successful administrative practice.

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

The results of this study offer several considerations for educational administrators,

policymakers, and those who train and prepare educational leaders. Centering the affective, the

human component of an organization (school) is essential to making long-lasting, substantive,

and positive changes. A successful, creative transformational leader seeks out and embraces new

and creative ways to make their subordinates involved in the leader's vision. A transformational

leader would welcome an approach that blends the principles of Black Girlhood Studies and

benevolent and corrective humor. On the other hand, those who do not exhibit a

transformational leadership style might be encouraged to pursue a more human-centered,

decision sharing style that would enable them to, over time, consider replacing zero-tolerance

policies with benevolent and corrective humor skills.

Based on the results of this study, administrators in the Northeast and South regions,

where the population and suspension rates of African American female students is highest,

would do well to explore the range of possibilities to redirect their resources to affective ways to

address student misbehavior. These regions are prime areas for administrators to lead the nation

in overhauling the current punitive and destructive approach to school discipline.

Lastly, for those administrators and other stakeholders for whom is already an alluring

but elusive path to persuasive behavior change, benevolent and corrective humor promises to

meet those needs. Based on the results of this study, the West and Midwest regions appear to be

poised to give serious consideration to benevolent and corrective humor without viewing its use

as a diminution of their authority or the student's dignity. Their responses to benevolent

question 11 (*even when facing unpleasant events I can keep my distance and discover something amusing or funny in* it) aligns with the possibility that administrators from the West and Midwest regions are receptive to a response to student contumacy that is forgiving and not punitive.

Limitations

This study attempted to build on the suggested modes of intervention to reduce the suspension rates of African American female students by examining whether the administrator's BenCor score had a predictive value for the suspension rate of African American school-age females. The purpose of the study was to introduce the concept of benevolent and corrective humor as a viable tool for administrators instead of harsh, zero-tolerance disciplinary tactics; however, three limitations were identified. One limitation was the use of a nationwide sample instead of a more specific region or regions of the country. A second limitation was the use of the BenCor Humor Scale as predictive of administrative behavior. They rate themselves as benevolent but their behavior (yes to suspensions) was high. Lastly, respondents were asked to report the number of African American female students who had been suspended during the 2018 – 2020 academic years as an open-ended question. The responses needed to be calculated as a percentage but because all answers were not numerical, a percentage could not be calculated.

Recommendations for Future Study

To address this study's limitations, future research could potentially focus on the South and Northeast regions for a more comprehensive study and where there are larger populations of African American female students. Additionally, future research will be preceded by separating the sample population into high and low suspension districts, and future researchers can design the survey so that only a number or range of numbers can be selected. Future research that

relates to humor and discipline might delve into the relationship between the teacher's referral of an African American female and the student's attempt at humor. It may be that what students intend to make people laugh is misconstrued as defiance. There are nuances of humor that are culturally based and that in the absence of cultural synchronization would result in a misconstrued intention. Finally, more exploratory demographic questions might be asked. One example would be to ask respondents about their attitude/feelings about humor. An inquiry might also be made about the respondent's experience with humor: whether positive or negative. They might also have an opportunity to share their experiences with the use of humor in the course of their administrative duties concerning disciplinary matters.

Conclusion

African American female suspension rates continue to plague concerned educational leaders and society at large. Harsh, ineffective responses to student misconduct have exacerbated the problem. The search for better responses to student misconduct using restorative justice practices has made inroads to reversing the counterproductive operation and provides an opportunity for the examination of benevolent and corrective humor as a viable tool, freely available to all, to redirect the course of the lives of young women on the path to school disengagement and ultimately, to incarceration. The human cost of suspensions of African American female students is accompanied by the high cost to society in lost taxable wages, increased health care costs, and generational engagement with law enforcement.

For increasing numbers of African American female students, schools are educational hospices where the presence of their African American bodies attracts dehumanization, marginalization, and spirit murdering due, in large part to the over-reliance on harsh, zero-tolerance disciplinary policies. This over-reliance on policies that have consistently been shown

to be ineffective has led to student disengagement, high dropout rates, and early and long-lasting involvement with law enforcement and the juvenile justice apparatus. Restorative justice practices and benevolent and corrective humor make attractive policy companions. Both paradigms are grounded in redemption, compassion, and restoration. Humor provides a perspective of discipline that heretofore had not gotten serious academic attention. Humor has been a useful and vital tool used by industry, medicine, and governments. Educational leadership has a wide swath of examples to model to make a major impact on a salient pedagogical issue.

The results of this study suggest administrators consider a blend of benevolent and corrective humor, Black Girlhood Studies, and transformational leadership theory to effectively and substantively respond to the high numbers of African American female students whose lives are in the balance. It is expected that this study will serve as a first step in raising awareness among administrators and those who prepare administrators, about humor as an integral part of their leadership portfolio.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
MEMPHIS.

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Compliance
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

February 26, 2020

PI Name: Roslyn Bacon
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Angiline Powell
Submission Type: Modification
Title: BENEVOLENT AND CORRECTIVE HUMOR AND SUSPENSIONS OF AFRICAN
GIRLS IN MIDDLE GRADES
IRB ID: PRO-FY2020-275
Level of Review:
Contingency Type:

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your
submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical
principles.

The contingencies are listed below:

`. Attach the full protocol showing the changes as described in the modification
a. Strike thought the portions of the recruitment letter that has been removed and high the
changes that were added

ALL changes made in your <u>attached</u> documents (consent, flyers, scripts, etc.) are to be
highlighted. Once you have addressed the contingencies listed above in your protocol, please
revise, edit, and resubmit your protocol. **In Cayuse, complete Section 6, "Investigator
Response"**. If you have any questions regarding the Board's contingencies, you can contact me
via e-mail (irb@memphis.edu). If you have questions regarding how to submit your revised

Appendix B

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Roslyn E. Bacon
University of Memphis
Memphis, TN

Zurich, 30th of July 2018

Permission to use the instrument "BenCor"

This is to confirm that Roslyn E. Bacon has my permission to use the 12 Item scale "BenCor" in her thesis. Good luck with the research and keep me posted about main findings—if possible.

Sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Willibald Ruch
(Chair, Full Professor, Department of Psychology, Personality and Assessment, University of Zurich, Switzerland)

Appendix C

August 15, 2019

Roslyn E. Bacon
University of Memphis
Memphis, TN

Dear Ms. Bacon,

Thank you for recently contacting me, regarding the Benevolent and Corrective
Humor Study on AFSA members. AFSA looks forward to collaborating with you
on this very important study.

It is my hope that this study will broaden the discussion of restorative justice
practices and help to optimize student learning and administrative success.

Please contact Nick Spina, AFSA Chief of Staff, nspina@AFSAadmin.org,
to coordinate next steps.

Sincerely,

Ernest Logan
AFSA National President

Recruitment

Volunteers Wanted for a Research Study

Benevolent and Corrective Humor and the Suspension of African American females in middle level schools

I am a doctoral student in the Leadership and Policy Studies department, in the College of Education, at the University of Memphis; in Memphis, TN. I am conducting a study on whether or not there is a relationship between the principal's Benevolent and Corrective (BenCor) Humor score and the suspension rate of African American girls in middle level schools. An online, self-administered questionnaire will be used to collect the information from volunteer respondents. The questionnaire, the BenCor Humor Scale, consists of twelve questions on a 7- point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The scale is expected to take roughly 15 minutes to complete and will be accessible online within a 7 day period.

The BenCor Humor scale measures one's propensity to respond to difficult situations with compassion and forgiveness. You need not be a comedian nor to have had acting or comedic experience.

If you are a licensed, certified middle level school principal, with a minimum of two years in your current position, we would like for you to take part. Your school must have a population of African American females. Our goal is to have 200 or more AFSA members participate in this study. By completing this study, we hope to learn how principals can reduce their reliance on zero tolerance disciplinary policies and employ benevolent and corrective humor as a restorative justice and positive school leadership paradigm. This is an attempt to reduce the suspension rate of African American females in middle level schools. This collaborative effort with AFSA promises information that will have valuable societal benefit.