A Narrative Inquiry: The Experiences of African American Female Students as a Result
of Exclusionary School Suspensions

A Dissertation submitted
To the Graduate School
Valdosta State University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

In Leadership

In the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology
Of the Dewar College of Education and Human Services

November 1, 2022

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ABSTRACT

I investigated six African American female students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and its impact on their education. I examined how their childhood and school years shaped their roles as high school students. This study contributes to the limited academic literature on African American female students, focusing on the intersection of their race and gender obstacles they overcame to find success as high school graduates. It also uses women's voices in rural South Georgia to tell their own stories. To understand the young women's main characteristics of receiving exclusionary discipline and affecting their risk of dropping out of high school, I used two theoretical frameworks: Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought. I developed three analytical themes from the data: 1) strained relationships, 2) power of one, and 3) fighting to survive. The findings suggest that African American female students felt targeted and unheard in school. Many participants made choices based on their home and community experiences. The findings also suggest that African American female students adapted their behaviors to survive in a White middle-class school system. The participants illustrated resilience and persistence to graduate. The social, political, and economic challenges African American female students face in their day-to-day lives influenced their school behavior and academic performance. The findings from this study are significant for educators, parents, students, teacher preparation programs, and lawmakers because the exclusionary discipline of African American female students needs to be addressed in an effort to reduce the number of suspensions.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, James and Billie Cantrell. You have taught me since I was a child to finish what I started. I finished! Thank you for creating the desire in me to look for opportunities to learn and grow. I love you.

Chapter I

Introduction

One of the subtlest challenges we face, if we are not to betray the hard-

won gains of the last forty years, is how to relegitimate the national

discussion of racial, ethnic, and gender tensions so that we can get past the

Catch-22 in which merely talking about it is considered an act of war, in

which not talking about it is complete capitulation to the status quo.

(Williams, 1997, p. 40)

Following the deaths of George Floyd, Brianna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks in

2020, citizens of the United States (U.S.) renewed concerns about systemic racism and

White privilege. This shift in attitudes and conversations about racial inequities in the

U.S. has led to a nationwide uprising. In major cities, people gathered across the country

during the summer of 2020 to voice their concerns about the treatment of people of color

in America, mainly African Americans. Williams (1997) reflected over 25 years ago,

people worldwide need to discuss race, ethnicity, and gender, and they should expect a

change, as the status quo is no longer acceptable.

Racism is present on the streets and in schools (Valant, 2020). Education is vital

because it is the pathway to achievement; however, the path is easier for some than others

(Montecel, 2013). African American students face barriers that do not burden White

students (Tatum, 2019). The differences in academic achievement and disciplinary

practices by race suggest that schools miss the mark in preparing students of color for

their futures (Wallace et al., 2008). The percentage of African American students

suspended from school is more significant than any other racial group (Wallace et al.,

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2008). Nationwide, African American male students are the highest percentage of students administered out of school suspensions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Given the pervasive nature of racism and how it unduly affects African Americans, gaining a deeper understanding of the impacts and influences of race in school discipline is valuable (Marchbanks & Blake, 2018).

Statement of Problem

Despite laws and procedures aimed at preventing it, the implications of race and gender disproportionality exist in school discipline (Skiba et al., 2010). African American female students face higher suspension, expulsion, and arrest rates than their White classmates (Morris et al., 2018). In 2017-2018, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2021) detected a disparity in the suspensions of African American female students compared to all other female groups. The rate of suspensions of African American female students was almost twice the enrollment percentage of African American female students (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2021). During the school year 2021, The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (n.d.-b) in Georgia reported that in grades K-12, 51% of female students suspended were African American compared to only 33% being White female students.

School discipline policies create negative school experiences that push students out of school (Skiba et al., 2014). The graduation rate for African American female students is lower than that for White female students in small, rural South Georgia high schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2020). The racial disparities are particularly distressing because suspensions and expulsions significantly correlate with decreased academic achievement, lower attendance, and increased dropout rates (Losen et al., 2015;

Marchbanks & Blake, 2018; Onyeka-Crawford et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2014). Exclusionary discipline, such as suspensions and expulsions, "encompasses any type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes a student from his or her usual educational setting" (American Psychological Association, n.d., para. 1). Expulsion occurs when a school system suspends a student from a public school beyond the current school semester (National Center for Safe Supportive Learning, 2021). Gregory et al. (2016) contended that exclusionary discipline matters immensely to the education of students because "even a single suspension or referral to the juvenile court system increases the odds of low achievement and dropping out of school altogether" (p. 39). Exclusionary suspensions increase the likelihood African American female students will struggle to succeed in classes and graduate from high school (Gregory et al., 2016; Losen et al., 2015; Marchbanks & Blake, 2018; Onyeka-Crawford et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2014).

Disparities in school discipline towards African American female students concern parents, educators, law enforcement, and lawmakers. Annamma et al. (2016) emphasized that the "dearth of scholarship around Black girls' experiences have rendered them largely invisible" (p. 213). Many educators lack an understanding of how discipline policies impact African American female students because teachers' and administrators' perceptions of African American female students' experiences are often flawed (Annamma et al., 2016).

Educators respond more negatively toward African American female students' misbehaviors than non-African American female students' similar actions (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Losen (2015) argued that educators are unlikely to close the achievement gap

while ignoring the discipline gap. The suspensions and expulsions for African American students are disproportionately higher than for all other races and ethnic groups (Martin et al., 2016). The discipline gap demonstrates that African American youth have higher sanctioning rates and are overrepresented, even when misconduct levels are similar to those of White students (Bottiani et al., 2016; Butler et al., 2012; Martin et al., 2016). Thus, educators must consider initiating change in school disciplinary approaches that allow and encourage students to remain involved in their learning (Gregory et al., 2014).

Researchers often write about African American males' discipline experiences (Lewis et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2010); however, literature is scarce concerning the experiences of African American female students (Blake et al., 2010; Morris, 2012; Ricks, 2014). Only a few researchers have attempted to analyze which facets of African American female students' status and social standing in the school setting make them more susceptible to disparate discipline rates (Blake et al., 2010). For the past 10 years, researchers have calculated the percentage of African American female students receiving out of school suspension (Blake et al., 2010; Losen, 2015; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Onyeka-Crawford et al., 2017). Losen et al. (2015) reported that in the 2009-2010 school year, African American female students were three times more likely to receive out of school suspension (OSS) than White female students. Just four years later, the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) reported that African American female students' suspension was over five times more likely than their White schoolmates. According to Onyeka-Crawford et al. (2017), being suspended out of school "resulted in lost class time and increased school pushout" (p. 13). Further compounding the impacts of school suspensions, African American female students receive multiple

suspensions, more than any other gender or race of students (Blake et al., 2010; Onyeka-Crawford et al., 2017). As such, there is a need for a better understanding of how African American female students experience school discipline and how trends reported nationally occur in local settings, producing patterns and possible explanations for these patterns that need to be recognized and explained (Annamma et al., 2016; Blake et al., 2010; Losen, 2015; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Onyeka-Crawford et al., 2017).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate African American female students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and the impact exclusionary discipline had on their education. By examining African American female students' life, school, and discipline experiences, the goal was to guide others in reducing gender and racial bias in school discipline.

Research Question

The following research question guided this study:

RQ - What are the life and school experiences of African American female students with exclusionary discipline in selected rural South Georgia schools?

Significance of the Study

This research will benefit departments of education, teacher preparation programs, administrators, and teachers because the research can provide insight into African American female students' perceptions. Knowledge of these perceptions can impact how aspiring teachers and administrators are trained. This study expands the current literature by examining African American female students' discipline experiences

and perceptions separate from African American male students. African American female students' voices were raised and added to the existing literature to bring further awareness to exclusionary discipline disparities.

The disciplinary consequences of African American males have garnered the majority of the literature due to their increased risk of being suspended or expelled from school (Carter et al., 2017; Gregory et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2010: Losen, 2015; Losen et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2002, 2010, 2011, 2014; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). In the U.S., the risk of exclusionary discipline is more significant for African American males (Blake et al., 2010). However, researchers should not rule out African American female students' experiences of inequitable discipline practices (Blake et al., 2010). During this study, I shared the voices of young African American women impacted by punitive and exclusionary discipline policies. From their voices I created recommendations for eliminating possible inequities.

Wallace et al. (2008) examined school discipline among students and documented the degree of racial and ethnic variances in disproportionality frequency. Although the rates for male students of all races and ethnicities were significantly higher than for female students, the disparities between African American and White female students were the highest (Wallace et al.). The results of this study may strengthen the relationships between adults and students in the school environment. Educators

The study is significant given the need for awareness and dialogue regarding race and racism in schools. It examines the intersectionality of race and gender embedded in African American female students' experiences within a rural South Georgia high school context. In this context, the increased awareness of racism's persistence informs others in

the educational environment. Bottiani et al. (2016) recommended further studies to find interventions to eliminate the discipline gap. Finding strategies and practices that administrators and teachers can utilize in the high school setting to prevent African American female students from receiving exclusionary discipline practices is essential to keeping them engaged in the learning process (Bottiani et al., 2016).

Consequently, by engaging in conversations with African American female students about their experiences with school discipline, administrators can implement policies that promote school equity and limit systemic racism. Critical race theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought (BFT) lenses shaped participant stories to acknowledge how society's embedded racism shaped their experiences.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework informs the research while aligning questions and methods, integrating data, findings, and literature as the study advances (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). While constructing my conceptual framework, my purpose was "not only descriptive, but also critical" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 41). I strengthened my argument by providing context, communicating issues in previous research, revealing contradictions in existing views, and contributing new ideas to existing literature (Harris, 2014; Maxwell, 2013). I used the literature review to discuss my study plan. Specifically, "what is going on with these things and why" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 39).

I used CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 2016; Yosso et al., 2004) and BFT (Collins, 2000) were the existing theories included. CRT is defined as an intellectual framework with the core idea that race is a social construct, and that racism is not individual bias but instead embedded in legal systems and policies (Delgado & Stefancic,

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2017). BFT is defined as a field of knowledge focused on the perspectives and experiences of Black women (Collins, 1986). Fundamental to CRT is the position that institutional ideals, policies, and practices benefit and favor one racial group over all others (Anyon et al., 2018). As such, both of these theoretical frameworks are appropriate for this study.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggested using CRT to explain school racial inequities. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) indicated there are five tenets to CRT: (1) race is socially constructed, (2) racism is normal and not an aberration, (3) interest convergence, (4) storytelling and counter-storytelling, and (5) intersectionality. My literature review included discussions on several theories: interest convergence theory (Bell, 1980), White privilege (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), counter-storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), stereotypes (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020; Manke, 2019; Pilgrim, 2012; Thompson, 2019), colorblindness (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 2016) and intersectionality (Brah & Phoenix, 2016; Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 2016).

I also examined the core themes of BFT. The prevailing narratives regarding African American female students connect to how race operates in American schools (Ladson-Billings, 2016a). African American women experience "multiple marginalized identities" (Annamma et al., 2016, p. 217); therefore, I drew on intersectionality and BFT (Collins, 2000) to build on CRT. Intersectionality examines how race, gender, class, and other characteristics overlap (Crenshaw, 1989). I used the lens of race and gender and how they intersected as I collected African American female students' stories. Through this study, I hoped to acknowledge that African American women have uniquely different

experiences from White women, White men, and even African American men (Crenshaw, 2015).

When examining the role of race in education, it is essential to review schools' stereotypes and biases. I used the tenets of CRT and the dimensions of BFT to provide ways of understanding racial disparities. I share the history of school discipline and how zero-tolerance policies influenced school discipline. Administrators and teachers view discipline as either objective (drugs, alcohol, fights, smoking) or subjective (insubordination, rude, disrespect) (Balderas, 2014). Previous literature on suspensions contains recommendations for possible solutions to reduce the number of suspensions, including implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012) and restorative justice (Bickmore, 2001).

Methodology

I used narrative inquiry was to investigate African American female students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and the impact exclusionary discipline had on their education at an identified rural South Georgia school system. Participants told life narratives in story form and provided their first-person accounts (Merriam, 2002). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) claimed, "Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p. 2). Stories become the raw data when using a narrative inquiry as a research method (Butina, 2015; Priest et al., 2002). Kim (2016) stated that narratives integrate "the feelings, goals, perceptions, and values of the people whom we want to understand" (p. 36).

Creswell (2014) recommended only using one or two participants when completing narrative research. I purposefully selected and interviewed six African

American female participants who experienced suspension out of school from high school. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 20 when I conducted the interviews. While two participants were current high school seniors and four students were graduates, they were all adults reflecting on the experiences related to their suspensions. All the participants attended school in the same South Georgia school district. I limited the ages of the participants because their ages would not be far removed from current students in the school system.

I did not want so many stories that, when analyzed, the students' voices became fragmented (Patton, 2015). Patton noted the researcher should choose participants because they are "information-rich" (p. 46). The primary data collection utilized was semi-structured interviews (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Data analysis included coding, categorizing, and thematizing. I took necessary precautions to ensure the validity of the findings, including collecting detailed, thick descriptions, identification of researcher bias and reflexivity, and increasing the generalizability of the results (Ponterotto, 2006).

Delimitations

I based my selection criteria on age, race, gender, and those formerly suspended out of school. The study sample was delimited to six African American female students who had been suspended from a rural South Georgia school. The participants were at least 18 years old but not older than 20. I did not want the participants' ages to be far removed from current high school students. The conclusions of this study referred to an identified rural school district located in South Georgia.

Limitations

This research study included several limitations. I placed myself as the interpreter of the narratives of African American female students who differ from me socioeconomically and racially. I recognize that interpreting through my cultural lens filters the students' narratives. While I interpreted through the lens of a middle-aged White female with a position of authority in the school the students either attended at the time of the interview or previously attended before they graduated, I used reflexivity to help me in centering the participants' voices. I considered the complexities of being the research instrument throughout this research, given that I am a White middle-class female assistant principal researching the experiences and perspectives of African American female participants. The participants' ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds are unlike mine. I struggled against my biases and assumptions as a middle-aged woman who experienced high school during a different generation nearly four decades ago.

I am a member of the dominant White majority. The participants in this student were African American, who are an underrepresented group at CSSD. The participants' responses could elicit uncomfortable experiences. I listened and learned from the participants because they were the authorities of their experiences and their views of the school and world.

My personal experiences include my upbringing, schooling, adult life, and profession. I was cognizant of privilege and power connections. I recognized the differences between the participants and myself as a White adult woman. I minimized the dynamics by communicating to the participants that their contribution was important and that I had a lot to learn from them. As an assistant principal at the CSSD traditional high

school, I was connected and enmeshed with the participants and the world of the CSSD traditional high school.

I do not have an outside standpoint to gather data. I engage with students, parents, and teachers about students' well-being and academic success. The role I play in the CSSD traditional high school varies daily. I support teachers as they plan and teach lessons by giving them constructive feedback. I meet with 9th-grade students about their grades. I also meet with students about discipline issues. Given these opportunities and experiences in the CSSD, I bring to this study biases and assumptions. My first assumption is that individuals and groups from different ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds bring social value and knowledge from their life experiences that I have much to learn. The second assumption is that students want to learn and be successful in school, and educators want to help students achieve. Third, trials affect student success and opportunities in school. My fourth assumption is my experience as a female White middle-class assistant principal influences my interpretation of the participants' narratives. My fifth assumption is that zero tolerance policies are fair because all students receive the same consequences. I cannot separate my personal identity, education, profession, and experiences from this research, and my beliefs and assumptions influenced me. I used reflexivity and self-awareness while conducting interviews and analyzing the data.

Personal Connection to the Study

I have multiple connections to this study, which overlap with my personal, professional, and academic experiences. I am a White, middle-aged woman. The participants in this study were young African American women. My career in education

began in a South Georgia high school as a mathematics teacher. I moved throughout Georgia and continued teaching mathematics at the high school level. In 2006, the state of Georgia created the position of Graduation Coach (GC). I became the GC at my high school, and my responsibilities included tracking students who were at risk of not graduating on time. During this period, passing the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT) required a high school diploma. The state of Georgia considered students who passed all the required courses to graduate but did not pass one or more portions of the graduation test as dropouts. While working as the GC, I dug deep into the data to discover trends at my school. African American students were more at risk of not passing the GHSGT and thereby not graduating. Administrators assigned African American students to ISS or OSS more than any other group. I believed my job as a GC included trying to save all students, and I advocated for them with teachers and administrators.

When I became an Assistant Principal, the principal assigned me to the 9th-grade class for discipline and academics, and I had to switch my focus from saving individual students to preserving the school's culture and climate. As an administrator, I received more discipline referrals for African American students than any other subgroup. Perry (2018) stated, "After all, who invests in a problem or a deficit when investing in a solution is so much more attractive? Education is littered with white saviors fixing black children for this reason" (para. 9). When I read this statement, it resonated with me. Instead of fixing individual students, the problem or deficit needs investigation and correction. I was interested in studying the racial disparity in schools' discipline and the personal and school experiences of students suspended from school.

The setting for this research is a South Georgia school district. At the time of the research, the school system employed me as an assistant principal and school test coordinator in the traditional high school, and I knew the participants prior to the interviews. All the participants attended the traditional high school during a portion of their high school years. As an assistant principal, I had access to attendance, discipline, and academic data upon permission. The superintendent gave me permission to use the data for this research project. The participants also permitted me to view their school records.

Part of my duties at the high school includes monitoring students in the hallways during class change and during lunch periods. Through these moments of monitoring students, I observed interactions between students and teachers, students and students, and students and administrators. While I felt that I had a good relationship with the participants in the study, I recognized the power I hold as an administrator and as a middle-aged White woman.

Definition of Terms

Colorblindness. Colorblindness is the practice of claiming not to see a student's race yet performing covertly racist acts (Bonilla-Silva, 2014)

Counterstorytelling. Counterstorytelling is a method of storytelling from people of color, women, homosexuals, and economically disadvantaged whose realities are sporadically told (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Disparate discipline. Disparate discipline in education is the discipline gap between subgroups of students (Gregory et al., 2017).

Dropout rate. According to The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (n.d.-a) in Georgia, the dropout rate is the number of students with a withdrawal code (marriage, expelled, financial hardship, incarcerated, low grades, military, adult education, pregnant, removed for lack of attendance, serious illness/accident, or unknown) divided by the number of students who attended the school.

Exclusionary discipline. Exclusionary discipline includes any school disciplinary action that removes a student from the educational setting (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Expulsion. Expulsion occurs when a student is suspended from school for more than a semester (National Center for Safe Supportive Learning, 2021).

Four-year cohort adjusted graduation rate. Georgia calculates the four-year high school graduation rate using the number of students who graduate within four years of beginning high school as ninth-graders (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.-a).

Implicit bias. Implicit bias is an unconscious manifestation of stereotypes and attitudes (Ruhl, 2020).

In-School Suspension. In-school suspension is any program that serves the instructional needs of students suspended from the student's regular classroom for no more than 10 consecutive days (Georgia Department of Education, 2018).

Interest convergence. Interest convergence stipulates that African Americans only gain civil rights victories when Whites' and African Americans' interests converge (Bell, 1980).

Intersectionality. Intersectionality is how gender and race interact to form multiple African American women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989).

Long-term out of school suspension. Long-term suspension occurs when a student is suspended from school for more than 10 days but less than a semester (National Center for Safe Supportive Learning, 2021).

Rural school system. Georgia defines a local education authority as rural if it serves less than 25 students per square mile (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2016).

Short-term out of school suspension. The short-term suspension is out of school suspension for 1 to 10 school days (National Center for Safe Supportive Learning, 2021).

Stereotypes. Stereotypes are mental constructs about a group of people based on the perceiver's beliefs and expectations (Peffley et al., 1997, p. 31).

Zero tolerance policy. Students who violate certain school rules, regardless of the circumstances, face mandatory disciplinary dispositions, including suspension and referral to law enforcement (Gjelten, 2019).

Chapter Summary

Although researchers have relatively established suspension and expulsion differences between African American and White female students, they have not captured the African American female students' experiences (Skiba et al., 2010). This study gives voice to the experiences of African American female students. CRT and BFT were lenses that allowed me to study and present with fidelity the results from my interviews with African American female students.

I organized the study into five chapters. In Chapter I, I present the introduction, the problem statement, the purpose, the research questions, the significance, the conceptual framework, a summary of the methods, the limitations and delimitations of the study, and the definitions of terms used. In Chapter II, I review the literature related to CRT, BFT, African American women, exclusionary discipline, rural settings, and racial disparity. In Chapter III, I present the methodology used for the study. I offer participant narratives in Chapter IV. In Chapter V, I provide an in-depth discussion of the results, implications, recommendations for practice, and future studies and conclusions.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The literature review indicates a need for this study by examining prior research related to the impact of disproportionate suspensions on African American female students and linking it to recent school-related experiences of those students who have been expelled or suspended from school. I searched for terms connected to the study's topic: racial disparity, exclusionary discipline, zero-tolerance, out of school suspension, rural schools, Title I schools, student achievement, graduation rates, dropout rates, teacher bias, and African American women. I used numerous databases to search the terms independently and in different groupings, including EBSCO eBooks Academic Collection, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest, Georgia Library Learning Online (GALILEO), and Google Scholar.

The literature review begins with a historical background of school discipline. In this section, I chronicled discipline from corporal punishment to the school-to-prison pipeline. I include a description of CRT and its tenets and key ideas in BFT.

Researchers have well documented the disproportionate suspensions of African American students in school discipline (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Losen, 2015; Losen et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2016; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014, 2020). There is a contentious debate within the United States education system about school discipline practices (Hess, 2016; Mizell, 1978). Hess (2016) stated school personnel is responsible for ensuring schools are safe. School administrators use out of school suspensions (OSS) and expulsions to maintain discipline (Hess, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2017). Yet, both interventions pose a significant

risk to all students' educational opportunities, especially African American women (Morris & Perry, 2017).

The History of School Discipline

The definition of school discipline includes "any intervention that ensures the safety of the school environment or guarantees an environment conducive to learning" (Skiba et al., 2010, p. 1079). McCann (2017) maintained school discipline has historically not followed a conventional path due to diverse attitudes toward numerous disciplines and methods over time. School administrators, guided by laws and statutes created by state legislatures for local education agencies (LEAs), can subject students to disciplinary measures for any behavior that threatens other students' safety or disrupts the learning environment (Skiba et al., 2010). The consequences of misbehavior include "verbal reprimands, corporal punishment, afterschool detention, in-school suspension, out of school suspension, and even fines" (McCann, 2017, p. 3). Because LEAs determine disciplinary outcomes, there is a lack of consistency (McCann, 2017).

Corporal Punishment

As of 2022, in the United States, 31 states prohibit schools from using corporal punishment (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2019). Schools use corporal punishment to discipline misbehaving students (Dupper & Montgomery Dingus, 2008). The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) defined corporal punishment as modifying a child's behavior with open-handed non-injurious hitting (Sege, 2018). Historians traced corporal punishment or spankings back to the Middle Ages (History of Corporal Punishment, 2009). As populations grew, physically chastising students for being obstinate became less favorable (Dupper & Montgomery Dingus, 2008). *Baker v.*

Owens (1975) and *Ingraham v. Wright* (1977) supported school personnel's right to administer corporal punishment because *in loco parentis*—a Latin phrase meaning in place of a parent, applied (Streitmatter, 1985). Corporal punishment is illegal in 31 states; however, it is legal in Georgia (Gershoff & Font, 2016).

African American culture considers corporal punishment as normal (Straus & Stewart, 1998). Straus & Stewart found in a study of 991 American parents, hitting a child with a belt or paddle was more prevalent in African American and economically disadvantaged homes. A Pew Research Center survey (2015) found that African American parents were twice as likely as White and Latin-American parents to use corporal punishment. According to Patton (2017), African Americans adopted beating children from White enslavers. There was no sign of physical discipline in West African societies until Europeans colonized Africa and began the Atlantic slave trade (Patton, 2017). Patton (2020) explained to African American parents, "whupping their children is one of the whitest things they can do" (para. 20).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued a policy against corporal punishment in 2018 (Sege, 2018). In contrast, some African American pediatricians hold more positive attitudes toward corporal punishment (Patton, 2020). Patton (2020) explained the AAP policy demonizes African American communities where spankings are the cultural norm. Thomas and Dettlaff (2011) found African American parents believe spankings will prepare their children to face discrimination. Patton (2020) reported that some African American parents think spanking their children will keep them out of the streets and from ending up in jail. Patton is opposed to the idea of corporal punishment. She said that whipping their children is one of the whitest things

African American parents can do. Pinderhughes et al. (2000) found that African American parents more vigorously approved of corporal punishment as a parenting technique than White parents. Grogan-Kaylor and Otis (2007) also concluded in their study that African American parents favor spanking than White or Hispanic parents.

Many critics believe corporal punishment teaches that physical aggression is the answer to eliminating unwanted behaviors (History of Corporal Punishment, 2009). Students disciplined with corporal punishment develop more aggressive behaviors (Sege, 2018). With an increase in zero-tolerance policies, many states and school systems are diminishing the use of corporal punishment (Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

Out of school Suspension (OSS)

School administrators began adopting OSS as a discipline method as early as the 1960s (Allman & Slate, 2011). Many administrators utilize OSS to maintain order and preserve the learning environment (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Yet, suspended students are less likely to graduate (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). Allman and Slate (2011) suggested that automatically removing students from class or school for violating a school rule promoted poor behavior and encouraged students to become repeat offenders. School discipline generally consists of levels or tiers (Allman & Slate). Zero-tolerance policies do not consider past behavior and are applied regardless of the circumstances (Maxime, 2018). Costenbader and Markson (1998) surveyed 620 students from rural and inner-city schools and found suspensions did little to deter future behaviors. Students argued suspensions were not helpful, and 32% believed they would likely be suspended from school again. In the *Goss v. Lopez* landmark case in 1975, a group of Ohio students challenged the practice of suspending students out of school (Streitmatter, 1985). The

court ruled that suspending a student without a hearing violated the students' 14th Amendment's Due Process Clause. Thus, school administrators created in-school suspension (ISS), in addition to OSS, as a temporary and convenient fix for some of the students' minor infractions (Allman & Slate, 2011; Cholewa et al., 2018; O'Brien, 1976).

In-School Suspension (ISS)

O'Brien (1976) provided the first formal account of ISS. Minneapolis school systems designed ISS as an alternative to ineffective OSS. They intended to use ISS to help students accept the penalties for their behaviors and reflect on their actions. Students placed in ISS must attend school; however, administrators remove students from their regular classroom and classroom routines and instead send them to an isolated classroom (Foster & Kight, 1988). While in the ISS room, students work on assignments sent to them by their teachers (Foster & Kight, 1988). Although ISS was designed to serve as a less severe approach to discipline and satisfied many critics who opposed OSS, it too was quickly condemned by researchers (Cholewa et al., 2018; Morris & Howard, 2003). Cholewa et al. (2018) reported that Black male students who were either economically disadvantaged or listed as special education students were more prone to receive ISS. Allman and Slate (2011) explained ISS might negatively impact students' self-esteem and increase the risk of dropping out. In schools where ISS replaced OSS, ISS was linked with an elevated dropout rate, which raised caution about the use of ISS (Cholewa et al., 2018). Finally, the American Institutes for Research released a study showing ISS and OSS are ineffective methods for punishing the misbehaviors of students (LiCalsi et al., 2021).

Zero-Tolerance Policy Implementation

School systems nationwide introduced zero-tolerance policies in the 1980s and 1990s to deter violence and drug activity on school campuses (Bell, 2015). Zero tolerance policies "mandate the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context" (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 852). Zero-tolerance policies Schools mandated harsh punishments for minor and significant infractions labeled under zero-tolerance policies (Cole, 2020). The federal government passed the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986 (Drug-Free School Act), which prohibited alcohol and drugs (Mallett, 2016).

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act (Reagan, 1986). The Act harshly penalized drug offenders, regardless of the degree of the violation (Reagan, 1986). As gangs, drugs, and weapons began to infiltrate the schools, school officials had to find a solution to the growing problem (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). When President Bill Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994, schools began implementing exclusionary discipline policies (Anderson, 2015). The law mandated public schools to expel students for one calendar year if they brought a gun to school (Anderson, 2015). The law did not allow administrators or school officials to differentiate the discipline for students prone to violence from those who meant no harm (Cerrone, 1999). Per the requirements of the GFSA, Georgia followed federal law, except there was no provision for referral to law enforcement and no provision for due process (Cerrone, 1999). Recently, schools have added minor offenses to the list of behaviors that can result

in being suspended or expelled from school (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). As suspension rates continue to increase, transforming discipline policies is critical (Skiba, 2014).

With the Guns Free School Act of 1994, all schools receiving federal funds must expel any student for an entire school year who brings a gun to school (Anderson, 2015). Many local school systems took the policy further by mandating the suspension or expulsion of any student who brought a weapon to school instead of limiting the suspension to only bringing a gun to school (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). After the nationwide implementation of the Guns Free School Act, zero-tolerance policies became standard in schools (Allman & Slate, 2011; Bell, 2015; Heilbrun et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2016; Martinez, 2009; Skiba, 2014).

Sugai and Horner (1999) asserted schools also suspend students for non-threatening behaviors such as delinquency in class and school, insubordination, and smoking. These non-threatening behaviors often result in students receiving ISS or OSS (Sugai & Horner). By 1997, nearly 94% of schools had adopted zero-tolerance policies for firearm and weapons possession (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). In the late 1990s, 87% of schools had zero-tolerance guidelines for alcohol possession, and 79% had zero-tolerance for on-campus violence and tobacco possession (Skiba & Knesting, 2001).

School leaders have historically emphasized how vital a safe learning environment is for students and staff to ensure effective teaching and learning (Trump, 1998). Zero-tolerance policies aim to change students' behavior and remove disruptive students to improve the school climate (Heilbrun et al., 2015; Martinez, 2009). Skiba (2014) wrote vigorous enforcement of the zero-tolerance policy is presumed "to act as a deterrent to other potentially disruptive students" (p. 28). Principals who support zero-

tolerance policies report higher suspension rates (Heilbrun et al., 2015; Skiba, 2014). Students cite teachers and administrators using a zero-tolerance approach to implement stricter punishments (Heilbrun et al., 2015). "Problems with fairness, impartiality, uniformity, and flexibility have caused the effectiveness, validity, and justification of zero-tolerance policies to be questioned" (American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health, 2013). The American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health concluded that zero-tolerance and other exclusionary policies might harm students. Suspended students often stay home alone, increasing the chance of behaviors that could lead to an arrest or to becoming the victim of a crime (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). When students return to school after being suspended, they lose academic ground, causing students to act out further due to boredom or frustration (Losen, 2013).

Skiba (2014) conducted a zero-tolerance policy study and found suspensions and expulsions did not reduce school disruptions. Zero-tolerance policies "overwhelmingly failed to demonstrate that school exclusion and increasing levels of punishment keep our schools and streets safer" (p. 28). Martinez (2009) indicated administrators use zero-tolerance policies as a quick fix and often do not consider any mitigating circumstances associated with students' behavior. The use of OSS is essential when there is an immediate threat to school safety (Vaccar, 2010). However, Vaccar (2010) noted OSS is not used only for infractions that threaten schools' safety. Thus, the strict application of the code of conduct in schools has increased the number of suspensions nationwide.

School discipline policies create negative school experiences that can push students out of school (Skiba et al., 2014). School administrators have been under pressure to transform strict discipline policies and find alternate methods (Shah, 2012). In

2014, President Barack Obama released discipline guidelines for public schools to move away from exclusionary discipline and toward restorative justice (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Exclusionary discipline policies increase OSS, alternative school placements, and placement in youth detention centers (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2019).

School Resource Officers

Many schools introduced school resource officers (SROs) in the mid-1950s (Weiler & Cray, 2011). Mowen (2014) reported that SROs are now found in 55% of high schools nationwide, increasing 25% since 1997. There was a significant push for SROs following school shootings in the 1990s with the passing of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (Cerrone, 1999). Welch and Payne (2011) indicated schools use SROs combined with zero-tolerance or exclusionary discipline policies. Lavarello and Trump (2001) described SROs as serving in a triad model: police officers, counselors, and teachers, as parents, students, teachers, and community members describe school safety as a top priority.

Following the introduction of SROs to schools in the 1990s, a study completed by Johnson (1999), utilizing discipline records, interview data from students, school personnel, and SROs, found the number of significant discipline offenses decreased following the placement of SROs in the schools. In the study, students reported feeling safer with an SRO. However, Johnson's (1999) findings are not consistent with later studies. Rios (2011) completed an ethnographic study of 40 African American and Latin-American male teenagers in San Francisco. Using in-depth interviews, Rios found that increased surveillance of at-risk students fostered the behavior schools intended to

prevent. The students vocalized they felt harassed and profiled before committing any crimes because they were labeled at-risk (Rios).

In a survey of 294 public schools, Welch and Payne (2011) reported more security measures and heightened SRO presence were more likely in schools African American students attended. In a three-year longitudinal study of 28 schools, Theriot (2009) examined the connections between school-based arrests and SROs. Theriot revealed students were more likely to be arrested for subjective offenses if a school had an SRO. In the study, socioeconomic status was the only noteworthy predictor of an arrest. According to Greflund et al. (2014), subjective offenses are dependent on the opinion of the teacher and require the teacher to make a judgment call (e.g., rude, disrespectful, disorderly conduct, or insubordination). Theriot and Orme (2014) evaluated how interactions with SROs at school were connected with students' feelings of safety and found an association between students' experiences and students' feelings of security.

Fenton (2021) called for schools to be police-free, citing the disproportionate harm to African American students. According to Fenton, African American students receive extreme punishments for minor offenses and experience anxiety when in the presence of SROs. In a 2018 Texas-based study, the Justice and Prevention Research Center found increasing the number of SROs led to a decline in the high school graduation rate (Weisburst, 2021). A 2017 investigation in Chicago found due to SROs having little training or accountability, African American students are at a higher risk of incarceration (Masterson, 2017). African American students are not given the same grace as White students because SROs and teachers view them as more mature (Fenton, 2021).

The Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council requires SROs to be at least 21 years old, have certification as Peace Officers, and complete required courses (Child Trends & EMT Associates, 2020). SROs have the same law enforcement powers on school property as in their respective county or municipality, including the power of arrest (Child Trends & EMT Associates, 2020). Cole (2020) acknowledged the presence of SROs is for student protection and safety on school campuses. However, Cole also noted when SROs handle discipline incidents, minor infractions can turn into criminal incidents. Once a student contacts law enforcement, data indicate graduation is unlikely for the student (Cole, 2020).

Effects of Suspensions

In the early years of zero-tolerance suspensions, administrators viewed suspensions as an effective deterrent for violence and weapons (Bell, 2015). Yet, Bell questioned the motive behind zero-tolerance and stated this is not in the best interest of our children. The punitive climate of schools has increased (Bell). Schools suspend or expel 3,000,000 students each year (Kirkman et al., 2016). The consequences of being suspended include lower literacy and numeracy levels, an increase in retention rates, an increase in negative attitudes toward schools, a decrease in the percentage of students attending a post-secondary institute, and an increase in possible contact with juvenile justice (Bottiani et al., 2016; Cagle, 2017; Kirkman et al., 2016). In a study of first-year students in Florida, Balfanz et al. (2015) found students reduce their odds of graduating by 20% with each suspension. Suspended students experience a lower level of school belonging (Bottiani et al., 2016) and are more likely to use alcohol and marijuana (Kirkman et al., 2016). In the American Civil Liberties Union's report in 2009, a student

suspended three or more times has a 50% chance of eventually dropping out of school (Bell, 2015).

A common finding from studies about exclusionary discipline is the high inconsistency in the school climate and teachers' and administrators' attitudes impact school discipline (Skiba, 2014). In 1974, school administrators suspended about 3.7% of students from high school (Petras et al., 2011). The suspension of students grew to 7.6% in 2016 (Kamenetz, 2019). The effectiveness and fairness of the zero-tolerance policies remain in question (Hoffman, 2012). Zero-tolerance policies are one explanation scholars use for disparate discipline, also known as the discipline gap between subgroups (Gregory et al., 2017). Thus, within the past 10 years, school administrators have been under pressure to transform strict discipline policies and find alternate methods (Shah, 2012).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) reported public schools retained approximately 2.9% of African American students. Howard (2010) stated a high correlation exists between the retention rate, suspension rate, and dropout rate. These data indicate that "the same group of students who struggle with reading and math proficiency are most likely to be suspended, retained, or subsequently expelled from school" (Howard, 2010, p. 21). President Barack Obama signed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). ESSA specified one way to support school learning is to reduce exclusionary discipline (Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

School-to-Prison Pipeline

Zero-tolerance policies were originally promoted to prevent youth violence; however, the school-to-prison pipeline began with zero-tolerance policy suspension

(Skiba, 2014, p. 28). The school-to-prison pipeline is a tagline generated by supporters who contend school discipline has progressively become a gateway to the juvenile system and adult prison (Creger & Hewitt, 2011; Kim et al., 2012). The American Civil Liberties Union (n.d.) described the school-to-prison pipeline as a "trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems" (para. 1). One of the unintentional outcomes of zero-tolerance policies is that students suspended or expelled from school increase their risk for contact with the juvenile justice system (Monahan et al., 2014). Hirschfield (2008) noted that zero-tolerance policies "stipulate that students are treated like actual or suspected criminals" (p. 83). The schools and juvenile justice systems have increased their collaboration (Hirschfield, 2008). Having SROs in schools has sometimes led to the criminalization of students for behaviors that schools should handle (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.).

Cole (2020) indicated the U.S. government supports the school-to-prison pipeline due to budgetary decisions. The funding for prisons increased by 200% from 1987 to 2007. Budgets for higher education grew by 21%. The school-to-prison pipeline primarily impacts African American students, and this representation of African American students suspended from schools mirrors the over-representation of African Americans in America's jails (Cole, 2020).

Cramer et al. (2014) asserted schools should be more precautionary in combatting the school-to-prison pipeline by using cohesive education models. Cramer et al. recommended schools move away from approaches that embody deficit-based perspectives and inclusive, integrated learning models. Price (2009) insisted the school-to-prison pipeline resulted from SROs in schools. The arrest of too many students in the

high school setting may undermine the value of officers in the schools. The school-to-prison pipeline can diminish feelings of safety if a student's behavioral misconduct is subject to having to appear in the juvenile justice system.

Disparate Discipline

On January 8, 2014, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division issued a "Dear Colleague" letter to public elementary and secondary schools. The letter issued guidance for schools to meet their obligations in administering discipline without discriminating. The letter stated,

> In their investigations of school discipline, the Departments have noted that the initial referral of a student to the principal's office for misconduct is a decision point that can raise concerns, to the extent that it entails the subjective exercise of unguided discretion in which racial biases or stereotypes may be manifested. If a school refers students for discipline because of their race, the school has engaged in discriminatory conduct regardless of whether the student referred has engaged in misbehavior. And even if the referrals do not ultimately lead to the imposition of disciplinary sanctions, the referrals alone result in reduced classroom time and academic instruction for the referred student. Furthermore, if a sanction from a discriminatory referral becomes part of the student's school record, it could potentially enhance the penalty for subsequent misconduct and follow the student throughout the student's academic career. Therefore, it is incumbent upon a school to take effective steps to eliminate all racial discrimination in initial discipline referrals.

Although the "Dear Colleague" letter was rescinded in December 2018 by U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, the racial disparities in school discipline are still present (Gupta, 2018).

Gregory and Fergus (2017) wrote the discipline gap between White and African American students begins in preschool. National data collected in 2014 indicated only 19% of preschool students were African American. However, 47% of the preschool students suspended from school are African American. Race is more of a predictor of disciplinary outcomes than gender (Skiba et al., 2014). In a Losen and Skiba study (2010), the suspension rates of African American male students were 28.3%, and African American female students were 18%. Losen and Skiba further concluded schools suspend both groups at higher rates than White and Hispanic female students. In a study of 11,000 middle school students in 1994, Skiba et al. (2002) explored factors contributing to school discipline disparities and found African American students received referrals to the office for disrespect, insubordination, and defiance. In contrast, White students received referrals for objective violations, including skipping classes, smoking, and fighting. Skiba et al. (2002) concluded African American students were referred more often but were not more disruptive.

Minority students are susceptible to pushout trends (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2011). Heilbrun et al. (2015) reported students denote an imbalance of penalties. Teachers refer more African American students for less severe and more subjective offenses than White students (Martin et al., 2016). Minority students are more likely to receive punishment based on the use of security cameras and metal detectors (Heilbrun et al., 2015). Martin et al. (2016) examined the disparity between the

administration of discipline between African Americans, Native Americans, and other ethnic groups. They reported the percentage of African Americans disciplined was higher than any other ethnic group. Schools suspend African American male and female students from the school at a much higher rate than any other race (Martin et al., 2016). Minority students frequently receive discipline referrals for alleged disrespect, defiance, and argumentation (Martin et al., 2016). Finn and Servoss (2015) argued the students' race determined the punishment level, not the degree of misbehavior.

In a study by Annamma et al. (2016), African American female students were "punished largely for perceptions of threat, non-compliance, and harm" (p. 230). Whether intentional or not, racial bias impacted the pattern of referrals because the African American female students violated the implicit standards held by teachers and administrators (Annamma et al., 2016). Skiba et al. (2002) claimed individual teachers and administrators perceive harmful and threatening differently. Teachers refer African American female students to the office for behaviors that "reflect common stereotypes" (Annamma et al., 2016, p. 230). Morris (2007) stated punishments directed at African American female students were "aimed to make them more 'ladylike,' yet this same process appeared to discourage behaviors that could lead to educational success" (p. 494). Teachers and administrators lack or have a limited understanding of how racism and race affect African American female students' lives (Annamma et al., 2016).

The experiences associated with suspensions by African American students negatively affect their achievement (Martin et al., 2016). As a result, Cagle (2017) recommended cultural and racial awareness in teachers' and administrators' behavior management training. He encouraged educators to better understand the characteristics of

different cultural groups. Previous studies indicated school administrators punish African American students more harshly than their White peers (Blake et al., 2020; Carter et al., 2017; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Gregory et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2010; Losen, 2015; Martin et al., 2016; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2002, 2011, 2014). When African American students notice differential treatment combined with teachers' low expectations, students and school connections are unlikely (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Without a relationship, the chance of future misconduct and school dropout increase (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Few studies have focused on African American women's disciplinary experiences (Annamma et al., 2016; Edwards, 2017; Morris, 2007; Watson, 2016; Wun, 2016). According to Brewster et al. (2014), African American males' suspension is for more subjective offenses that challenge authority, such as disrespect, insubordination, and threat. White students receive disciplinary consequences for more objective offenses, such as smoking, skipping, and profanity. White males are less likely to be expelled or suspended than African American males for the same behavior (Mowen, 2014). The same actions considered threatening when committed by African American male students, are often regarded as typical behaviors of White male students (Martin et al., 2016). Data released by the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) indicated African American male students were three times more likely to be suspended during their K12 schooling than White male students and African American female students were over five times as likely to be suspended as White female students.

Georgia's Black Belt

Initially, *the Black Belt* described the soil fertility in the southeastern states (Evans, 2019). The land was primarily used for cotton and was extremely valuable (Evans). White men controlled the plantations, and enslaved African Americans mainly worked the plantations. Booker T. Washington (1901) wrote in his memoir *Up from Slavery* that since the Civil War, "the term is used wholly in a political sense--that is, to designate the counties where the black people outnumber the white" (p. 3). Thus, the definition of the Black Belt was no longer based on the color of the soil.

In December 1865, Georgia's General Assembly ratified the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, abolishing slavery (Carson, 2003). According to Carson, in 1868, the new state constitution instructed Georgia lawmakers to provide all children a free public education. From 1896 until 1954, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) legalized racial segregation (Evans, 2019). Using the premise of separate but equal, White people restricted the movement of African American people, including in schools (Evans, 2019). However, the schools attended by African American students were inferior to those attended by White students (Carson, 2003). For example, in 1920, Georgia allocated eight times more money for each White student than for each African American student (Carson, 2003).

Following the Supreme Court's decision against separate but equal in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), legal protection of racial segregation ended. Yet, Georgia made it a felony for any school official to spend money on integrated schools and required all African American teachers to denounce their membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Carson, 2003).

Currently, the Black Belt comprises 69 school districts. Of these districts, approximately 47% of the students in the Black Belt are economically disadvantaged, and 57.9% are African American (Evans, 2019). The school systems in the Black Belt have a median enrollment of 2,227 students, whereas the median registration for schools not in the Black Belt is 4,224 (Evans, 2019).

Rural Schools

Classifying a school or district as rural can be confusing (The Rural School and Community Trust, 2013). In an article published in 2013, The Rural School and Community Trust discussed the different agencies, grants, and programs that classify schools as rural. The U.S. Department of Agriculture classifies schools as rural for loans and grants if the community population is less than 50,000. The Rural Education Achievement Program has two categories: the Small, Rural School Achievement Program (SRSA) and the Rural and Low-Income School Program (RLIS). The SRSA is for districts with fewer than 600 students or a county population of 10 people per square mile. The RLIS is available to districts with at least 20% of students served from families below the poverty line. National Center for Education Statistics defines every school as rural with a population of less than 25,000 (Brown University, n.d.). The National Center for Education Statistics (2007) began assigning Locale Codes to schools and school districts in 2006 using location and population assistance from the Census Bureau. The Census Bureau defines rural areas as not inside an urbanized area or cluster (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

With nearly one-third of schools in Georgia located in a rural setting, Georgia is ranked third nationwide in the number of rural schools, with close to 380,000 students

(Sampson, 2019). Sampson (2019) reported Georgia's rural schools are some of the largest nationally, as often, school systems consolidate rural schools. The schools still serve as the main centers within counties, yet the schools are often not located close to the local communities. Twenty-five percent of school systems in Georgia reported that high school students ride on the school bus over the maximum recommended time of 60 minutes. With students traveling to remote campuses, students and their families have expressed a lack of connection. Students who live in sparsely populated rural communities and have long bus rides are more likely to have unemployed parents, less likely to be classified as gifted, and more likely to have an increased risk of becoming a high school dropout (Sampson, 2019).

Tagami (2019) reported rural school systems to find recruiting and retaining teachers challenging. Tagami cited Alan Richard, a Georgia School Board Association Rural Task Force member, saying, "Georgia has among the lowest levels of spending on instruction for rural students in the country" (para. 4). The staff in rural schools are often limited, and resources are scarce due to a sparse tax base (Sampson, 2019). Without qualified teachers, programming and course offerings are limited, directly impacting student outcomes (Sampson, 2019). The Center for American Progress Action Fund released the 2014 rankings of states, and Georgia was fourth nationwide, with 19% of the state living in poverty (Baron, 2014). Approximately 26.2% of children ages 18 and under live in poverty (Baron, 2014).

Theoretical Frameworks

While constructing my conceptual framework, I realized that there is limited literature containing the stories told by African American women about their experiences

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in school. I strengthened my argument with context, previous research, revealing

contradictions, and adding new ideas to existing literature (Maxwell, 2013).

CRT was the existing theory included (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 2016;

Yosso et al., 2004). I used CRT to explain racial inequities in schools and how the

disparities influence the attitudes, behaviors, and reactions of African American women

(Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 2015). Through this study, I wanted to share African American

women's unique stories (Crenshaw, 2015).

Critical Race Theory

CRT surfaced in the 1980s as an offshoot of critical legal studies (Bell, 2016;

Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2016a, 2016b; Taylor, 2016; Yosso et al.,

2004). It is defined as an intellectual and social movement academic framework that

denotes that systemic racism is part of American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Critical race theorists recognize racism as a permanent part of life in the U.S. (Bell,

2016). Ladson-Billings (2016b) described CRT as a philosophy that unmasks and

exposes racism with the hope of achieving racial justice. Yosso et al. (2004) expanded on

this idea by noting, "CRT scholars in education have theorized, examined, and challenged

how race and racism shape schooling structures, practices, and discourses" (p. 3).

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) contended most racism stays hidden under a facade of

normality. However, teachers and administrators used CRT to identify and challenge the

microaggressions experienced by minorities (Yosso et al., 2004). CRT challenges White

experiences as the standard and instead is grounded in the unique experiences of minority

races (Ladson-Billings, 2016b; Taylor, 2016). Smith et al. (2007) claimed although CRT

was formed initially in terms of African American and White race relations, it has

expanded to include other groups: women (FemCrit), Asian Americans (AsianCrit), Latin American (LatCrit), and Native Americans (TribalCrit).

Taylor (2016) stated reform began to stall after the civil rights movement and the desegregation of schools per *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Judges showed "a general hostility" (Taylor, 2016, p. 2) towards racial policies. Many legal scholars started to publicly condemn the role law played in racially-based oppression (Taylor, 2016). This group of legal scholars included Derrick Bell, Kimberle' Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Alan Freeman, Lani Guinier, and Charles Lawrence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 2016). Derrick Bell was the first African American instructor to become tenured at Harvard Law School (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 2016). When Bell left Harvard to become the Dean at the University of Oregon Law School, African American students, such as Crenshaw, wanted Harvard to hire an African American professor to teach Bell's class *Race, Racism, and American Law* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 2016). Instead, Harvard hired two noted civil rights attorneys to teach (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 2016). The students created a course and used Bell's book (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 2016). Different civil rights scholars, namely Delgado and Lawrence, were invited to teach each week (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Taylor, 2016). The class became "one of the first institutionalized expressions of critical race theory" (Taylor, 2016, p. 3). Crenshaw and David Trubek organized the first CRT workshop at which Bell, Delgado, and others developed CRT and began writing about it (Taylor, 2016). CRT became "a lifeline, the source of an explanatory model, and a wellspring of tools for action" (Taylor, 2016, p. 7). CRT scholars agree on two common themes:

understanding how White supremacy has continued to subordinate minorities and breaking the bond between racial power and law (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Tenets of Critical Race Theory

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) describe the five tenets of CRT as the normality of racism, interest convergence, social construction, counterstorytelling, and intersectionality. The number of tenets listed for CRT varies based on the writer.

Normality of Racism. Race is socially constructed and not biologically natural (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). White superiority assumptions are ingrained in educational structures (Delgado & Stefancic). According to Taylor (2016), White supremacy is "all-encompassing and omnipresent, it cannot be easily recognized by its beneficiaries" (p. 4). White society cannot comprehend the world that they themselves have created (Taylor). All of their benefits are invisible to them; White people find it challenging to grasp the non-White viewpoint that White dominance has produced (Taylor).

Interest Convergence. Bell (1980) coined the term interest convergence as one of the tenants of CRT. Milner (2008) stated interest convergence occurs when the pursuit of "racial equality and equity for people of color" (p. 333) converges with the needs and ideologies of Whites. According to Bell (1980), civil rights advancements for African Americans corresponded with changing economic conditions and the self-interest of elite White people. When Brown v. Board of Education (1954) reversed the separate but equal doctrine of Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), critical race theorists thought it transpired because, at that time, the appearance of the United States as a racist civilization threatened to weaken its influence abroad (Bell, 1980).

Milner (2008) recommended using interest convergence as a tool in teacher preparation programs to explain race and racism in the school setting. There is tension in interest convergence due to the loss and gain binary (Milner). Bell stated the dominant group often negotiates and gives up something to align the interests. Although Whites support social justice policies, they believe they can alleviate inequalities without altering Whites' status (Bell, 1980). Interest convergence ultimately is the belief that Whites will stomach and spread the interests of African Americans "only when they promote the self-interests of Whites" (López, 2003, p. 84). Therefore, Whites only support African Americans if their interests align (Bell, 1980; López, 2003).

Social Construction. As a tenet of CRT, the social construction thesis holds that races are the outcomes of social thought and relations. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) defined social construction as the 'process of endowing a group or concept with a delineation, name, or reality" (p.184). Races do not correspond with any biological reality. Society invented racial groupings to create a hierarchy and a belief in White authority (Ladson-Billings, 2016b).

Counterstorytelling. Stories strengthen and often duplicate dominant cultural perceptions (Williams, 2004). Using narratives or counterstories allows marginalized groups to name their truth (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). According to Grillo and Wildman (1991), narratives are essential because researchers cannot replicate the understanding that personal experiences add. Stories from people of color can reveal gaps in perceptions (Williams, 2004). Marginalized groups use "stories, parables, parody, and satire to tell their experiences" (Williams, 2004, p. 166). Counterstories often expose inconsistencies in a White culture that argument cannot challenge, displacing and

mocking the accepted premises and myths (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Williams, 2004). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) explained narratives through counterstorytelling "reduce alienation for members of excluded groups while offering opportunities for members of the majority group to meet them halfway" (p. 52). Williams (2004) emphasized the value of narratives and storytelling stems from the fact they do not replace one story with another story. Counterstorytelling of African American students can help remind students, teachers, and administrators, not through passive acceptance, of the imbalanced schooling and hostile racial environment of K-12 campuses (Yosso et al., 2004).

Intersectionality. According to Collins (2019), identities such as sexuality, age, race, ethnicity, gender, and class create a unique intersectionality system. Our cultural structures around binaries (e.g., African American and White) make intersectionality a challenge to study (Deliovsky & Kitossa, 2013). Crenshaw (1989) suggested eliminating gender from CRT results in theories that only speak of African American men's experiences. Intersectionality is the belief that people have overlapping traits (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Gillborn (2015) explained intersectionality as a widely used concept in social sciences to address inequality and identity varieties in different settings.

African American women's perspectives, experiences, and circumstances are unique because they face sexism *and* racism (Collins, 2000). Crenshaw (1991) initially coined the term intersectionality to discuss the ways gender and race interact to form multiple dimensions of African American women's experiences. African American women experience racism differently than African American men and sexism differently than White women (Berry & Cook, 2018; Crenshaw, 1991; Lanehart, 2019). Berry and Cook (2018) observed African American women are "no more women than they are

bodies of color" (p. 89). If intersectionality is not acknowledged, African American women will be "forced to choose from a hierarchy of oppressions despite experiencing both racism and sexism" (Berry & Cook, 2018, p. 90). Women cannot choose to be either female or African American; African American women are both (Berry & Cook, 2018). The current study included the intersectionality of race and gender in that it examines the perceptions of African American women on their experiences.

Critique

While I acknowledge the connection of CRT as a theoretical framework for this study, CRT is not without its critics. CRT critics disparage it because it relies on narratives and storytelling. Opponents include Judge Richard Posner of the U.S. 7th Circuit Court of Appeals, Judge Alex Kozinski of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, and University of Minnesota law professors, Daniel Farber and Suzanna Sherry (Farber & Sherry, 1997; Hutchinson, 2004; Kozinski, 1997; Posner, 1997). Posner (1997) dismissed CRT as "radical legal egalitarianism" (p. 40). The arguments against narratives and counterstorytelling included the fact they are uncontestable, poorly written, and not grounded in empiricism (Farber & Sherry, 1997; Hutchinson, 2004). Robinson (2000) attacked CRT's use of race talk and argued CRT should abandon it as he contended race exists simply because people continually and intentionally think about race. Robinson (2000) also suggested African Americans perpetuate their marginalization when constructing their identities around race. Crenshaw et al. (1995) stated that CRT scholars disagree on doctrines. Yet, despite the attacks, CRT has been around for nearly 40 years.

Critical Race Theory in Education

Gloria Ladson-Billings, William Tate, Daniel Solórzano, and Tara Yosso introduced CRT to K12 education (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Applying CRT to educational scholarship is multifaceted. Dixson and Rousseau (2005) asserted the importance of combining contemporary studies with CRT's founding tenets. Ladson-Billings (2005) cautioned scholars about the appeal of CRT and warned about the attraction of the storytelling aspect without CRT's central ideas. Thus, she suggested scholars strive for "richer, more detailed stories that place our stories in more robust and powerful contexts" (Ladson-Billings, 2005, p. 117). The richer, detailed stories offer understanding and opportunities to break down and through existing barriers (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

In K12 education settings, the literature around CRT typically addresses one or more of the following themes: curriculum and pedagogy, teaching and learning, schooling in general, and policy and community engagement (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). When examining education in general, CRT analyzes how White supremacy shapes practices (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015).

Whiteness

According to Ladson-Billings (2016a), the embeddedness of racism uses a new language and is covert. Categories such as middle class, intelligence, and school achievement are related to Whiteness, while Blackness is associated with the underclass, welfare, and gangs (Ladson-Billings, 2016b). Dillard (2020) noted Whiteness is used as a weapon daily in schools, describing the weaponization of Whiteness as a "sense of entitlement, anger, and a need for retaliation, feigned fear and, finally, white fragility" (p.

20). Minor issues can escalate quickly to more severe problems when educators feel challenged, as they often perceive African American students as more insubordinate and defiant than their White peers (Dillard, 2020).

Colorblindness

Educators often refer to themselves as being *colorblind*, a practice of claiming not to see a student's race yet performing covertly racist acts (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Bonilla-Silva (2014) called colorblindness the new racism. Mustian (2016) explained, "White people can guiltlessly subscribe to colorblindness because they are usually unaware of how race affects people of color" (p. 82). Mustian contended teachers and administrators do not examine stereotypes and cultural differences in context because colorblindness relates to conflict at an individual level. Teachers and administrators often honestly believe the best way to teach and discipline students is by ignoring race and treating all students equally (Mustian, 2016). Educators' failure to acknowledge different cultural identities makes recognizing unconscious biases challenging (Burke, 2019; Mustian, 2016).

Bonilla-Silva (2014) described the four frames of colorblindness. The frames include abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Whites use abstract liberalism as a frame when making statements about everyone having equal opportunities and choices. Abstract liberals fail to recognize institutional racism. The naturalization frame rationalizes race issues as naturally occurring, i.e., school and neighborhood segregation is normal. Relying on negative stereotypes, the third frame of colorblindness is cultural racism. Cultural racism blames the victims for racial inequalities due to a lack of effort or values. The last frame of colorblindness, the

minimization of racism, invalidates discrimination and discredits the effect race has on the lives of people of color. Using the frame of minimization, Bonilla-Silva argued Whites believe racism is a part of the past. He continued by proferring Whites accuse African Americans of being hypersensitive. As such, avoiding talking about racism allows Whites to form groups and ignore racial inequities in America.

The lasting effects of colorblindness on students are often as damaging as profiling, racial slurs, and hate crimes (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Butler-Barnes et al. (2020) suggested African Americans suffer from racial battle fatigue due to colorblindness damage. Racial battle fatigue is racialized microaggressions resulting in prolonged discrimination (Burke, 2019). The stress manifests as anxiety, anger, disappointment, or fear (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020).

Stereotype

Acts of violence against African Americans became covert following the Civil Rights Act (Brown, 2018). The stereotypes of African Americans drive racial incidents (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020). Butler-Barnes et al. (2020) stated many Whites perceive African Americans as lawbreakers and suspicious, and these stereotypes can result in racial profiling (Crenshaw, 2015). Racial profiling is "the discriminatory practice by law enforcement of targeting individuals suspicious of a crime based on their racial/ethnic group membership, religion, and/or national origin" (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020, p. 110). African Americans are often treated differently based on their ethnic background (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020).

There are four general stereotypes associated with African American women. The first is "Jezebel." A Jezebel is sexually promiscuous and engages in risky behaviors

(Pilgrim, 2012). The Jezebel stereotype negatively affects African American women because they internalize the negativity (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020). "Mammy" is the second stereotype and is subservient (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020; Pilgrim, 2012; Thompson, 2019). African American women report low self-esteem when stereotyped as mammy (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020). An aggressive African American woman is labeled "Sapphire" and is characterized as loud and angry (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020). The last stereotype is the "Strong Black Woman" (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020; Manke, 2019). The strong Black woman is strong and generous (Manke, 2019). Manke (2019) shared Black women are "feeling pressured to act like superwomen, projecting themselves as strong, self-sacrificing, and free of emotion to cope with the stress of race- and gender-based discrimination in their daily lives" (para. 2). A strong Black woman often experiences issues with mental health because of stress and depression (Manke, 2019). According to Butler-Barnes et al. (2020), all four stereotypes harm African American women. Another area that causes stress for African American women is knowing "that others hold negative beliefs and attitudes" (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020, p. 116). This additional stress elevates the levels of anger, anxiety, and depression.

Racist policies and procedures in schools reinforce stereotypes. Teachers decide throughout the school day how to respond to students in both academic and behavioral situations (McIntosh et al., 2014). McIntosh et al. (2014) argued administrators and parents expect teachers to make quick and accurate choices. They base stereotypes on observable characteristics (e.g., race, gender, age, or social class). Morris (2007) studied the perception of African American female students in a middle school. He noted educators focused their attention on the African American female students' conduct and

social etiquette rather than on their academic progress. He wrote some teachers described African American female students as "coarse and overly assertive" (p. 491). When the teachers disciplined the African American female students, it stemmed from their perceptions of the students challenging authority and not being ladylike. Morris added teachers did not want the African American female students to "reflect dominant stereotypes of Black women" (p. 505). Thus, race and gender influence African American female students' unique treatment and stereotypes (Morris, 2007).

Implicit Bias

Staats et al. (2015) defined implicit biases as ubiquitous and "the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner" (p. 62). Because implicit biases have enormous repercussions, educators need to identify their biases, take time to understand their biases, and begin to mitigate the biases' effects (Staats et al., 2015). Implicit bias is a decisive factor in the racial disparities in school disciplinary data (Welsh & Little, 2018). Welsh and Little (2018) asserted teachers' expectations, perceptions, and interactions with the student's expectations and perceptions may explain disparities in school discipline. Okonofua et al. (2016) speculated the dynamics between teachers and students often result in a "vicious cycle" (p. 381) of perceptions, biases, and expectations undermining the student-teacher relationship. Bradshaw et al. (2010) held that this broken relationship between students and teachers may explain the lack of connection African American students felt with their school. Okonofua et al. theorized that racially stigmatized students' harsher treatment is biased. Welsh and Little (2018) maintained being treated harsher by teachers leads racially stigmatized students to disengage and mistrust teachers and administrators.

Most educators describe their beliefs as inclusive and equitable for all students (Beachum & Gullo, 2019). Despite educators' explicit beliefs, implicit biases often result in automatically favorable decisions for specific populations (Beachum & Gullo, 2019). Children are subjected to media exposure, parental views, stereotypes, and experiences (Beachum & McCray, 2011; Staats et al., 2015). Neurological categorizations occur when exposure to discriminatory and stereotypical biases is widespread (McIntosh et al., 2014). McIntosh et al. (2014) named the automated decisions produced by categorizing vulnerable decision points (VDP). Vulnerable decision points occur when educators make choices under high stress or incomplete information, and a decision needs to be completed rapidly (McIntosh et al., 2014). The implicit biases during VDP "often tarnishes the choices made by even the least explicitly biased educators" (Beachum & Gullo, 2019, p. 3). Beachum and Gullo (2019) indicated educators could act without bias when they are not rushed and have all the necessary information.

When a student receives a discipline referral, there are several processes involved. The first is that the teacher determined the student misbehaved. Following the determination of misbehavior, the teacher reacts to the behavior. When the administrator receives the discipline referral, they respond to the referral. Anywhere along the way, implicit biases enter the decision-making process. If any of the choices throughout the discipline referral process occur as a VDP, implicit bias can interfere (Beachum & Gullo, 2019).

Kunesh and Noltemeyer (2015) examined the role of stereotypes in the disproportionality of discipline in schools. In the study, teachers read vignettes about a student's behavior and decided on the likelihood of future misbehavior. Most teachers

decided African American students were more likely to misbehave. Gullo (2017) studied the implicit biases of principals and assistant principals regarding school discipline. Gullo linked more severe discipline outcomes for minority students when offenses were subjective to administrators' implicit biases. Kennedy et al. (2017) studied the discipline decision-making experiences of principals and determined principals were concerned with subjectivity and fairness when making decisions. Yet, subjectivity, even when based on the needs of the student, allows implicit biases to impact decisions.

Teacher Bias

When teachers base their expectations of their students on anything other than prior academic achievement, teacher bias occurs (Casad & Bryant, 2017). Teachers often use race, gender, socioeconomic status, or information gained from another educator or parent as the basis for their biases (Casad & Bryant). Based on these biases, teachers treat students differently (Casad & Bryant). The teacher treats a student more positively if the teacher thinks the student is smart. Conversely, the teacher treats students negatively if the teacher thinks the student is less capable (Casad & Bryant). Often, African American students, female students, and economically disadvantaged students are the target of lower teacher expectations (Casad & Bryant).

Riddle and Sinclair (2019) found educators hold a pro-White and anti-Black implicit bias. Educators of color display lower than average bias compared to White teachers, with African American teachers showing the least anti-Black bias (Riddle & Sinclair). However, there are far fewer African American teachers than White teachers. According to Zippia (2021), there are nearly 4.5 million teachers in the United States and 74.3% are women, and the most common ethnicity of teachers is White (72.3%).

Teachers' implicit biases have possible consequences for students (Quinn, 2017; Starck et al., 2020). Educators' biases might provide biased evaluations of students' academic performance, which can negatively affect African American students through self-fulfilling prophecies (Papageorge et al., 2016). In the study completed by Papageorge et al., educators were largely over-optimistic about students' abilities; however, the amount of over-optimism was greater for White students than African American students. Often students will avoid challenging assignments, reject teacher feedback, and disassociate from school once they perceive educator biases (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Neal et al. (2003) found that teachers were more likely to perceive African American students who strolled and White students who "acted Black" as have higher rates of aggression and lower academic achievement. Gershenson et al. (2015) used longitudinal data of 10th grade students to examine whether the teacher-student race mismatch influenced teachers expectations. African American teachers' academic expectations for African American students were 30-40% higher than those of non African-American teachers (Gershenson et al.).

Gregory et al. (2010) explained that teacher biases contribute to racial disparities in school discipline outcomes. The biases may impact the manner in which White teachers interpret students' behaviors. Ferguson (2020) stated strongly biased teachers are more likely to interpret African American students' behaviors as threatening and discipline the students more harshly.

Black Feminist Thought

A Black feminist perspective considers race and gender to be integrated to such a degree that racial identity determines and accompanies gender identity (Higginbotham,

1992). Alexander-Floyd (2010) stressed the Black feminist viewpoint involves the depiction of Black women's lives. BFT primarily focuses on African American women by interpreting race, gender, and class (Alexander-Floyd, 2010). Collins (2000) built on the concept of intersectionality by arguing society pressures African American women to choose between their identity as African Americans and their identity as women. Collins shared that if an African American woman chooses solidarity with her race, her struggles and identity are lost, and if she chooses solidarity with her gender, her perspective as an African American is lost. Collins further stated African American women are not in control of their image but are often blamed for being the source of their problems.

hooks (2015) contended African American women contributing their stories and experiences was not enough because the development of theory and its application needs to be advanced to eradicate sexism and other forms of oppression. hooks used the term White supremacy rather than racism. She stated racism centers on Whiteness, and White superiority spoke to an individual's relationship to political action. The phrase hooks (2015) used, "White supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (p. 4), examined the interlocking classifications of power in humanity and considered the participation of people of any race, gender, sex, nationality, class, or sexual orientation in maintaining the powers of racism and imperialist involvement. hooks further contended that Euro-American males might not see their class privilege, power, and dominance.

BFT developed in direct opposition to White male insiders (Collins, 2000). One of the critical concepts of BFT is the matrix of domination. According to Collins, the matrix of domination illustrates how oppression is systemically structured. There are four main domains within the matrix of domination: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and

interpersonal. The structural domain organizes power and oppression, while the disciplinary domain manages the oppression. Oppression legitimizes the hegemonic domain, and the interactions of individuals are controlled in the interpersonal domain (Collins, 2000).

Collins (1986) wrote, "As outsiders within, Black feminist scholars may be one of many distinct groups of marginal intellectuals whose standpoints promise to enrich contemporary sociological discourse" (p. S15). Being the outsider-within gives African American women a unique perspective on social, intellectual, economic, and political realities (Collins, 2000) Although males of any race and While females marginalize African American women, the African American women deliver a nuanced viewpoint to feminist and social thought (Collins, 2000). Stereotypical images and representations of African American women continue to normalize oppression (Collins). The controlling images include the mammy and the jezebel as well as others. The resistance shown by African American women to the stereotypes and images was integral in the development of BFT. Even with progress in the advancement of BFT, there is a struggle in inserting pragmatically balanced epistemology about African American women in a While male dominant world (Collins, 2000).

Summary

When exploring the causalities of racial disparities in school discipline and the starting point of the school-to-prison pipeline, much of the current literature references male students and African American male students. Zero-tolerance policies have increased the number of suspensions since the late 1990s. The addition of SROs in

schools increased school-related arrests and further pushed students into the juvenile justice system.

CRT examines implicit bias, stereotypes, and colorblindness. BFT gives a voice to women who previously had to choose whether to identify with African Americans or identify with a feminist. Selecting to identify solely with either group suppresses the experiences of the other group.

The next chapter discusses the methodology and conceptual frameworks for the current study under investigation. I used narrative inquiry and framed the study with CRT and BFT. I described the setting and how the participants were purposefully selected. Also, I discussed the methods for collecting data and analyzing the data.

Chapter III

Methodology

Educators often lack understanding of how discipline policies affect African American female students because teachers' and administrators' perceptions of African American female students' experiences are often flawed (Annamma et al., 2016). In this study, I focused on how previously suspended or expelled African American female students experienced life and school while suspended and following suspension. The purpose of this study was to investigate African American female students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and the impact exclusionary discipline had on their education. In this chapter, I present the research question and explore the study's design.

Research Question

The following research question guided this study:

Research Question - What are the life and school experiences of African American female students with exclusionary discipline in selected rural South Georgia schools?

Research Design and Rationale

The purpose of this study was to investigate African American female students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and the impact exclusionary discipline had on their education. I used a qualitative study to investigate these issues from the perspective of African American female students. According to Kim (2016), qualitative researchers focus "on understanding human action through interpretation rather than prediction and control" (p. 22). I gathered the participants' perspectives from their words.

The qualitative research approach was the most suitable research method for this study. According to Merriam (2002), qualitative researchers are concerned with understanding the constructions and interpretations "at a particular point in time and in a particular context" (p. 4). Qualitative research includes collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand complex concepts, views, or experiences (Merriam). I gathered in-depth insights into a pervasive race problem and generated new ideas to help schools solve student discipline issues. As a qualitative researcher, I was the primary instrument in research because I filtered all observations, interpretations, and analyses through multiple lenses, including my personal and professional experiences, my understanding of the literature, and my interactions with the participants whom I knew outside of this study.

I used a narrative inquiry, defined as a common, qualitative method used to study a human's experiences, according to Connelly and Clandinin (1990). "People live stories and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 415). Thus, narrative inquiry constructs and reconstructs personal stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Life narratives are first person accounts told in story form (Merriam, 2002). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) claimed, "Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p. 2). Kim (2016) stated narratives incorporate "the feelings, goals, perceptions, and values of the people whom we want to understand" (p. 36). Thus, stories become the raw data using a narrative inquiry as a research method (Butina, 2015; Priest et al., 2002).

At its essence, narrative inquiry is an approach that intensifies the voices and experiences of individuals whose stories might otherwise not be shared (Clandinin,

2016). Narrative inquiry draws on the individual's experiences to capture the audience's imagination (Clandinin, 2016). Clandinin described four words within the narrative inquiry framework: lives, telling, retelling, and reliving. First, the participant lives out the experience they share with the researcher. Second, participants share their experiences by telling the story as the events occur or retelling the story later. Finally, retelling the story can lead to the participant reliving the experience when they share it. When participants retell the story, rather than nesting the story in spatial, social, and temporal contexts when the event occurred, it is nested in the current context.

CRT is a method of investigating race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Using a qualitative study, CRT provides a "window by which to analyze a project aimed at confronting the systemic effects of racism" (Stovall, 2005). When using CRT, the researcher stresses the value of discovering a way for diverse people to communicate their experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT focuses on individuals affected by racism and those who perpetrate and are seemingly unaffected by racial prejudice. According to Bhambra (2017), CRT reminds us of the omnirelevance of race. Although race is not always the single "determining factor of a given inequality" (Bhambra, 2017, para. 5), studies are incomplete without discussing race and the importance of understanding inequality regimes.

Setting

Participants in this study were current or former students in a rural public school system in South Georgia. I used the pseudonym Center System School District (CSSD). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), the identified county in rural South Georgia had roughly 44,451 people, with 57.6% of the population listed as White, 36.2% African

American, 3.9% Hispanic, and 2.3% as other races. The median income for households in the county was $43,740, with 18% of the population living in poverty. According to the latest data from the Georgia Department of Education (2021), the three high schools in CSSD had 1,808 students in grades 9-12. The student population was comprised of 51.7% female students and 48.3% male students, 54.7% White, 33.5% African American, 7.2% Hispanic, and 4.51% classified as other (Georgia Department of Education, 2021).

CSSD's secondary school demographics mimicked those of the county. The breakdown was as follows: 113 faculty members, of which 70 were women and 43 were men. The faculty had 98 White teachers, 11 African American teachers, and four Hispanic teachers. Through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA, n.d.) Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), school breakfast and lunch were free to all students (USDA). Community Eligibility Provision allowed Center System to claim 100% of students as economically disadvantaged. Center System's graduation rate in 2019-2020 was 90.2% (Georgia Department of Education, 2021).

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) awarded high schools in Center System between three-star and four-star climate ratings in the 2019 College and Career Ready Performance Index (Georgia Department of Education, 2019). The GaDOE calculates the School Climate Star Rating using the Student Health Survey, School Personnel Survey, Parent Survey, student discipline data, and attendance records for students, faculty, and staff. The GaDOE uses the following factors to measure student discipline data: student drug-related incidents, violent incidents, and bullying and harassment incidents. It also includes in-school suspension, OSS, expulsions, and placements at alternative schools. The GaDOE has not released new data because the

U.S. Department of Education approved GaDOE to waive the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirement of reporting assessments and accountability data due to COVID-19 (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.).

Traditional High School

The traditional high school in the Center System had 1,560 students in grades 9-12 in the 2021-2022 school year. The school ran a seven-period day with classes lasting 50 minutes. Students took English, mathematics, science, and social studies courses along with their choice of three additional elective classes. Elective classes include Career, Technical, and Agriculture Education (CTAE), Advanced Placement, foreign language, fine arts, and physical education.

The bell schedule allotted five minutes between classes for students to get to the next class. There were three different lunch periods (A, B, and C) of 30 minutes each. Each lunch period accommodates approximately 500 students. The hallway determined lunch assignments for students based on the location of their fifth period class. Students sat in either the lunchroom, commons area (courtyard in the center of the school campus), or the media center. The school day began at 8:00 a.m. and ended at 3:05 p.m.

There were seven administrators assigned to the traditional high school. Two administrators reviewed 9th grade discipline, one administrator each for tenth and eleventh grade, and one administrator for twelfth grade. The Dean of Students reviews students' grades and conferences with students about graduation plans. At the time of the interviews, the school employed three guidance counselors. There were two school resource officers assigned to the traditional high school also.

When the traditional high school suspended a student out of school, the student, parent, guidance counselor, and assistant principal met following the suspension. All parties signed a behavior intervention plan (BIP). The BIP served as a contract between all parties to help the student succeed at the traditional high school. As part of the BIP, the student met with the counselor at least once a month, attended all classes, completed all assignments, and treated all students and faculty with respect. The school members agreed to provide tutoring and counseling. Violation of the BIP did not automatically mean the administrators at the traditional high school asked for placement of the student at the alternative school. Students accumulated a variety of discipline events. The administrators asked for a tribunal hearing for some students immediately after the student violated the BIP and other students accumulated several smaller discipline referrals.

A tribunal panel consists of administrators from other schools in CSSD. During the tribunal process, the student pleads either guilty or not guilty of the offense. If the student pleads not guilty, the school presents the offense(s) committed by the student to the tribunal panel. The student and parents can tell their side to the panel. The panel determines from the evidence presented whether the student is guilty or not guilty. If the panel finds the student not guilty, the student returns to school at the end of the suspension. If the panel finds the student guilty, the school recommends a punishment to the tribunal panel. The punishment can range from time served during suspension to expulsion. The student and parents recommend a punishment they feel is fair. The tribunal panel decides the punishment, which is often placement at the CSSD alternative school.

The school system offers students and parents the opportunity to sign a waiver instead of going before the tribunal panel. The waiver states the student admits guilt and accepts placement at the alternative school for the time recommended by the school administrator.

Charter School

Originally, the Center System charter school admitted only 100 students at a time. Beginning in the 2021-2022 school year, the charter school increased its enrollment to 200. Students applied for acceptance to the charter school. A lottery system was in place because there were more students applying for admission than there were open slots. The charter school is located in a building adjacent to the CSSD board office. Students at the charter school attended school from 8:25 – 2:25. Students attended six 55 minute classes each day. The school had two lunch periods (A and B). Each lunch period accommodated 100 students. The charter school had two administrators and a part-time counselor. Students wear khakis and a black or green shirt with the school's crest on it.

The charter school did not have in-school suspension as a punishment for discipline incidents. For serious offenses, students received out of school suspension or parental suspension. Parental suspension means the student remains at home until the parent attends a parent conference with the school administrators. During the parent conference, the parent, student, counselor, and administrator signed a behavior intervention plan (BIP). The BIP served as a contract between the parties to help the student succeed at the charter school. Both the traditional high school and the charter school use the same BIP. When the student violates the BIP at the charter school, the administrators either send the student back to the traditional high school or send the

student before a tribunal panel. The charter school utilizes the same protocol for tribunal panels as the traditional high school.

CSSD places students at the alternative school either by tribunal hearing or by a waiver. If a student commits an offense deemed by the traditional or charter schools to be a zero-tolerance discipline event, the school suspends the student out of school with the possibility of having to go before a tribunal panel.

Alternative School

Center System's alternative school is also located adjacent to the CSSD board office. School administrators recommend that students be placed at the alternative school. The student either signs a waiver agreeing to a set amount of time to attend the alternative school or goes before a tribunal panel. The tribunal panel determines the length of time a student is assigned to the alternative school.

Students attending classes at the alternative school must enter each morning through a metal detector. While entering the school, teachers at the alternative school check student attire. Students wear a uniform at the alternative school consisting of khaki pants and either white or blue polo shirts. Students attend six 55 minute classes from 8-2:30. Students attend academic classes in two rooms. The students change rooms after lunch. The alternative school and the charter school share a gymnasium. Ninth grade students take Health and Personal Fitness in the gymnasium. The school does not provide transportation for regular education students. CSSD provides busing for special education students assigned to the alternative school.

Some students take online classes instead of attending school in person. There are a variety of reasons behind students attending school virtually, including the students

may be a threat to other students. Virtual alternative school students must successfully complete a semester of classes in person before being allowed to return to the traditional high school or transition to the charter high school.

The administrator at the alternative school will lengthen a student's time should the student participate in a discipline event. The alternative school principal utilizes ISS, OSS, and expulsion for discipline events. Students who continue to break the rules at the alternative school or violate a zero-tolerance rule (e.g., drugs, alcohol, or weapons) go before the tribunal panel. The tribunal panel can recommend the virtual alternative school, night school, or expulsion if the panel finds the student guilty.

School Resource Officers (SROs)

The traditional high school employs two school resource officers (SROs), and the alternative and charter schools share an SRO. The SROs are sheriff's deputies assigned to the schools. SROs act as a liaison between the school system and the sheriff's office. Students seek advice about legal issues from the SROs. When a disciplinary event involves a law being broken, school administrators consult the SROs for guidance.

Discipline Data

During the 2021-2022 school year, administrators in CSSD suspended 369 students. African American students comprised 59% of the students suspended from school using zero-tolerance policies. African American female students comprised 27% of the suspensions compared to 9% of White female students. The traditional high school placed 46 students at the alternative school by waiver or tribunal hearing. Forty-six percent of students sent to the alternative school were African American female students. Administrators at the traditional high school did not place any White female students at

the alternative school from the traditional high school. The charter high school suspended 43 students from school for offenses including vaping, fighting, and threatening others. In contrast, the CSSD charter school suspended more White students from school than African American students. However, the charter school sent more than twice as many African American students to the alternative school as White students. Administrators suspended White students for non-subjective violations such as possession of vapes. In comparison, the African American students' discipline events included more subjective offenses (e.g., disrespect, insubordination, fighting, and threats).

Table 1 provides disposition counts for each race and gender from the CSSD in grades K12. CSSD's Information Systems Coordinator provided the discipline data. The data did not include students' names, only gender and race. Currently, CSSD only marks gender for students based on biological sex. The code of conduct for CSSD has 22 offenses, resulting in students' automatic suspension from school (see Appendix A).

Table 1

Center System School District Discipline Data

Demographics	OSS	Alternative Placement
Male Students	224	55
African American	115	34
White	78	16
Hispanic	13	1
Multi-racial	16	1
Asian	2	0
Female Students	145	29
African American	101	24
White	32	3
Hispanic	4	0
Multi-racial	8	2

Participant Selection

According to Maxwell (2013), purposeful selection is a strategy that deliberately selects participants to "provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals, and that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 97). The population for my study comprised African American female secondary students in South Georgia.

Principals from three CSSD high schools recommended students to contact because they met the participation requirements for the study. I contacted the potential participants via email and asked if they were interested in participating in a research study about the experiences of African American female students previously suspended

from school at least once during high school. I emailed 24 current and former students. I knew all the participants because they all attended CSSD traditional high school at some point during their high school years. I worked as an assistant principal at CSSD traditional high school.

Finally, six participants agreed to participate and be interviewed. The participants gave me permission to access their attendance, academic, discipline, and enrollment records via Infinite Campus, the school information system. The participants' school records provided background information about their experiences in high school. The participants and I looked over the documents and discussed grades, enrollment, and behavior incidents. I protected participant identities by using pseudonyms, which the participants approved. I based my selection criteria on age, race, gender, and school suspension. Homogenous sampling involves selecting a small group of similar participants, and group characteristic sampling helped me "reveal and illuminate important group patterns" (Patton, 2015, p. 267). I purposefully and homogeneously selected six participants for this study. See Table 2 for general information about the participants. Participants were at least 18 years old and current or former students of an identified South Georgia high school in CSSD.

Table 2

Research Participant General Information

Participant	Age	Number of Discipline Events	Discipline Resolutions	Graduation	Current Status
Imani	19	7	Alternative School	Alternative School	Unemployed

Precious	19	35	OSS	Charter School	Attended Technical School/Worked at FLP
Aliyah	20	4	Alternative School	Alternative School	Worked at Walgreens
Shanice	19	3	OSS	Traditional High School	Worked at Ellianos
Tiara	18	9	Alternative School	Traditional High School	Not employed
Nekia	18	10	OSS	Traditional High School	Worked at Walmart

Note. OSS refers to Out of School Suspension

I used narrative inquiry in this research to record the experiences and perceptions of African American female participants. The participants were suspended or expelled while in high school. According to Patton (2015), a minimum sample size will keep the participants' voices from becoming fragmented. I interviewed six participants. I stopped recruiting participants when I reached data saturation. The participants shared many of the same experiences and perceptions. I interviewed two participants from each high school in the CSSD. There was some overlap as participants at the alternative school first attended the traditional high school; I wanted to ensure the data was information rich (Patton, 2015). Before the first interview began, participants provided verbal consent. I used interviews as my primary source of collecting data.

Instrumentation

I interviewed six African American female students. Patton (2002) stated the research study's credibility depends on the researcher's skill. Ary et al. (2019)

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recommended the researcher ask questions in a face-to-face setting. During the interview, I rephrased questions or asked more questions for further clarification. During the COVID-19 pandemic, participants had the option of being interviewed via video teleconferencing or in person. As participants answered the questions, I observed the participants. By providing the participants with choices, participants and I found quiet spaces to explore their experiences and the chance to share openly. I interviewed each participant twice and used an audio recorder to record responses. Open-ended research questions allowed the participant to take any direction because I did not ask leading questions (Seidman, 2019). According to Patton (2015), "we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe and to understand what we've observed" (p. 426). Patton explained interviewing allows us to view the world from others' perspectives. Therefore, these data collected included narratives and context (Merriam, 2002).

I maintained a running record of anecdotal notes and memos in my research journal throughout the research process. I wrote my reflections in a research journal from the beginning of this study. Memoing allowed me to participate with the information at a depth that may otherwise have been difficult to achieve (Birks et al., 2008). I used memos to clarify my thinking and provide a mechanism for articulating assumptions and the participants' perspectives. While journaling, I recorded anything that came to mind about my research, ensuring ideas were not lost. I also recorded thoughts and feelings that might have felt irrelevant at the time because those ideas may have proved significant later. Birks et al. (2008) shared memos are essential to initiating and maintaining productivity. I recorded and transcribed the interviews, and

participants read the transcripts for verification. Information observed during the interviews was included in the research journal.

My experience with school discipline provided the background that contributed to selecting the research topic and may have influenced my perceptions and interpretations of the participants' responses. In qualitative studies, the researcher's beliefs and experiences influence her perceptions of the data collected (Patton, 2015). My background includes a specialist degree in educational leadership. At the time of the interview, part of my responsibilities at my school included handling discipline issues. My experience in this area may have influenced my perceptions and interpretations of the participants' responses.

Data Collection

Narrative inquiry is not about looking at a story to find the truth; rather, it is about finding the truth in a story (Bell, 2002). I began collecting data in August 2021. I received the names of potential participants from principals at the CSSD high schools. I conducted the first interview in October 2021. I conducted the last interview in February 2022. I continued communication with the participants via text messages throughout the data analysis phase. I collected data through May 2022.

Using narrative inquiry as an approach, I amplified African American female participants' voices and experiences. I utilized semi-structured interviews when I interviewed the participants twice. The interviews were two to three weeks apart from each other. In the first interview, I asked the participants to share their childhood experiences in the first interview. During the second interview, I asked the participants to describe the disciplinary events that resulted in their being suspended out of school.

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Participants also shared during the second interview their school experiences overall. One participant left the second interview after 15 minutes. She requested that I email her the questions I wanted her to answer. The two interviews provided a rich view of the participants' childhood and educational experiences.

I developed interview guides for this study. The interview guide allowed me to "solicit narrative yet keep consistency and structure in the interview process" (Butina, 2015). I asked open-ended questions with additional probing questions (Bolderston, 2012) in everyday language to encourage storytelling on the student's perspective of their suspension experience: punishment type, due process, academic impact, and relationship with teachers, administrators, and SROs. Open-ended questioning allowed the participants "to voice their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions in a structured discussion" (Carter Andrews et al., 2019, p. 2542). The questions were specifically aimed at drawing information centered on the research questions for this study.

Interviews occurred in public locations selected by the participants or via FaceTime. The first interview's objective was to place participants' "experience into the context of their life history" (Seidman, 2019, p. 21) by having them communicate about themselves. I asked participants to reconstruct their experiences in the community and with peers. During the second interview, participants discussed the high school atmosphere and described the events that led to their suspensions. I asked the participants to recreate the "feelings, perceptions, and actions" (Seidman, 2019, p. 22) associated with their experiences during the day of and days following the suspension(s) or expulsion.

I audio recorded all interviews. After I transcribed the audio recordings, I reviewed them for accuracy against the recordings. I deleted the recordings. Seidman

(2019) stated audio recordings are beneficial because they preserve the words of participants. When the researcher needs clarification on a transcript, she can return to the original audio recording (Seidman, 2019). CSSD's code of conduct provided definitions and guidance for each type of discipline referral.

I maintained a research journal to record any ideas and impressions I noted during the interviews or through the transcription of interviews. I shared interview transcripts with each participant to verify and authenticate these data. After each interview, I immediately recorded my thoughts about the interview and the participant. The journal provided a place to note follow-up questions. The journal entries were for my use only, and I did not share them with the participants. When I began interpreting these data, a personal summary of each participant and her story allowed me to concentrate on each participant individually in context (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007).

I collected documents related to participants' experiences at Center System. The participants agreed to let me access their academic, attendance, and discipline records. As an employee of CSSD, after I obtained the participants' permission, I then obtained permission from the superintendent to view the students' documents also. The documents provided additional insight into the students' academic performances and attendance prior to and after their suspensions. In particular, I collected the participants' transcripts, discipline records, academic records, enrollment records, and attendance records from CSSD to augment my data. I used the documents to gain background information about the participants' school experiences. The participants and I examined the documents together, and participants provided explanations and commentary about grades, enrollment, and attendance. This study's other integral documents included CSSD's

discipline data, code of conduct, and district policies. I used the CSSD documents to aid in describing the policies that led to the suspension of the participants and to demonstrate the disparities in discipline events.

Data Analysis

I used coding to analyze the narratives from the participants (Saldaña, 2016). I analyzed the data using verbatim interviews to create themes. I analyzed the data through cycles of coding using a Black Feminist Thought (BFT) approach utilizing the participants' "specialized knowledge" (Madison, 1993, p. 213). The cycles of coding included In Vivo and Focused (Saldaña, 2016). Madison (1993) described specialized knowledge as elements and themes of Black women's culture. I generated a comprehensive list of codes from the extensive data. I then utilized a more focused list of codes and extracted categories to form major themes (Charmaz, 2014).

To complete qualitative data analysis, the researcher should describe the context, develop sequential themes, and ground the literature's information through tables and discussion (Creswell, 2014). Kim (2016) described the narrative inquiry as distinctive in that the analysis and findings come in the form of creating the narrative itself. After analyzing the transcripts, I conducted an important investigation of the experiences by pulling upon stirring topics from each participant's experiences. Narrative analysis is appropriate for understanding the human experience through a story (Saldaña, 2016).

Data Coding

Before completing the transcriptions, Maxwell (2013) stressed that researchers need to listen to recordings of participants' interviews several times. Prior to coding, I purposefully listened to the interviews, and I took notes while listening. According to

Saldaña (2016), coding reduces data by assigning a word or phrase to capture a portion of data and make these data more manageable. Data in this study completed coding cycles to propagate a deeper understanding of data (Saldaña, 2016).

In the first cycle of coding, I familiarized myself with the transcripts. I immersed myself in the data by repeatedly reading the transcripts. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended reading the transcripts at least once before attempting to code anything. With the second reading, I used In Vivo coding. Saldaña (2016) stated In Vivo coding honors the participants' voices while allowing the researcher to "ground the analysis in their perspectives" (p. 71). Rather than generating codes from my own words and phrases, In Vivo coding allowed me to use the direct language of the participants as codes. I read the participants' transcripts line-by-line and highlighted words or phrases that captured the meaning. The notes provided me with ideas to revisit in future coding phases. While not all participants used the exact same language, I was able to find similar wording in the transcripts. I constructed a master list of codes based on my notes from the In Vivo coding. I worked through the interview transcript methodically and identified interesting pieces in the transcripts. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended, "identifying interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set" (p.18). I coded as many potential themes as possible. I created 54 codes initially. In Table 3, I include examples of initial codes. I was not concerned about creating too many codes because I would condense the number of codes in the next coding cycle.

Table 3

Examples of Some of the Initial Codes Used

RM	Raised by mom
NC	No contact with dad
GP	Relationship with grandparents
HS	Half-siblings
MW	Mom works
BF	Mom is best friend
LO	Loud
FA	False accusation
RA	Racism
RB	Racial bias
GT	Good teaching

During the second coding cycle, I condensed the codes into manageable categories using focused coding. I put data similarly coded into tentative categories (e.g., stereotypes, unfairness, racial bias, and not looking weak). In Table 4, I list examples of tentative categories.

Table 4

Example of Tentative Categories

Category: Stereotypes	
I feel like Black people come off stronger and louder. Because that's how mom is, she will yell, but she doesn't think she is yelling. It is just how she talks.	Stereotypes: Loud
We are big and cannot hide.	Stereotypes: Dress
Others walk around in the same outfit, and no one sends them to the office. It is always us, 'thick girls' getting in trouble.	Stereotypes: Dress

Category: Not Looking Weak	
At some point, every girl fights. I don't know a girl that hasn't fought except those trying to act White.	Not Looking Weak: Every girl fights

If you don't fight, you are labeled a snitch and weak.	Not Looking Weak: Not a snitch
Girls use fighting to prove they ain't scared.	Not Looking Weak: Every girl fights

The final stage of narrative thematic analysis was making meaning of the data

(Creswell, 2014). I studied the categories and their corresponding codes to create

overarching themes. I show the themes with supporting quotes from the participants in

Table 5. When I placed the coded data under themes and subthemes, I was mindful that

the importance of the themes was not determined by the frequency a topic was mentioned

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). I returned to the data to check for additional quotes that

reflected the themes. I discarded some themes because they had little data to support

them. I combined other themes or included them as sub-themes. Finally, I further

developed themes and offered the findings. During this stage, I incorporated the

narratives in order to provide a story that revealed depth and meaning.

Table 5

Themes with Supporting Commentary

Theme	Participant	Supporting Commentary
Strained Relationships	Imani	I feel like kids with a reputation get harsher punishments.
	Precious	My relationship with my dad is kind of iffy; it's not a really strong relationship. I talk to him like every blue moon, and I see him like every blue moon, like on family evenings.
	Aliyah	The incident didn't even happen at school. It shouldn't have even came to the school.
	Shanice	I felt like nobody cared.
	Tiara	The metal detectors at the alternative school were like I was a criminal; I was no criminal.
	Nekia	My mama basically told her that she can't help how Nekia feels…I thought that she

was racist because she would always pick on me about something, and then them three [White girls] will be doing the same thing, and she won't say nothing to them.

Power of One	Imani	Ms. Grisham (pseudonym) never held a grudge against me for the way I acted that day in her class.
	Precious	It's her personality too, like she's just nice and like she helps you out a lot.
	Aliyah	She was always on top of me, gave me work, just threw it at me like, do this so you can graduate early, I believe in you
	Shanice	I loved that class. I only took it when she was there. I feel like she just had a better connection with her students. I was so sad when she left.
	Tiara	We were actually doing something that was entertaining and wasn't boring
	Nekia	In Ms. Martin's class, she's hard on you, but she was hard on you because she knew that you could do it and that you have the potential to do it
Fighting to Survive	Imani	ISS and OSS ain't gonna stop people from fighting. Back in the day, we didn't act like, putting everything on SnapChat. I don't think the COVID shutdown helped anyone get along better.
	Precious	I feel like you really can't stop the fights. That's just how, like children and all like, they don't, they are not mature enough to know what should they, like cause they get into an argument or something, they don't know how to just leave it alone or just ignore it so.
	Aliyah	Get in a fight, alternative school but I wouldn't put ISS or OSS because the students, the kids are still gone fight.
	Shanice	People are not gonna get away with talking about me and mines.
	Tiara	They not, they're just not gonna just walk away. Because people really hold that against you.
	Nekia	Black people nowadays want to fight about everything. The thing is that they beef it and y'all don't know nothing about, like they can walk past each other directly, like in the

hallway and y'all won't know that they are
fixing to fight.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the quality of research. The four criteria of

trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln

& Guba, 1985). Credibility is the expectation that the study's outcomes are approved by

the participants and believable to critical readers (Kimmons, 2022). Transferability is the

expectation that the study findings apply to other contexts and situations. Dependability

is the expectation that methods, logic, and reasoning are clear, stable, and consistent.

Confirmability is the expectation that I base the findings on the participants' responses,

not potential bias or personal motivations. I used member checking, thick descriptions,

peer review, and an audit trail to build trustworthiness.

Merriam (2002) stated that by explaining the researcher's positionality, readers

would better understand how the researcher reached the analyses of the data. I informed

the participants of the purpose of the interviews. I believe I built a rapport with each of

the African American female participants allowing me to enter the participant's world

(Charmaz, 2014).

Member checking is certifying accuracy in transcription, data analysis, and data

representation (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking is an essential practice for

establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants generally appreciate the

member check process because it allows them to verify their statements and fill gaps

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I shared all transcripts and drafts with the participants to ensure

a shared meaning before presenting the narrative inquiry to the dissertation committee or

the public. I corrected any inaccuracies mentioned by the participants. For example, I initially wrote that Imani did not choose to participate in the graduation ceremony at the alternative school. Imani caught the mistake, and I corrected it. In the narrative for Aliyah, I wrote that she attended the alternative school in person after she completed a semester virtually. Aliyah corrected the narrative. Aliyah never attended classes in person; she only met with the alternative school director in person.

Thick, detailed descriptions are consistent with qualitative research (Geertz, 1973). Qualitative research requires deeply detailed accounts of one's research to check for potential applications to other times, places, people, and contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I wrote detailed narratives explaining situations and background contexts. I described a situation and provided background information necessary for understanding the relevance, meanings, and intentions of the interactions with the participants (Holloway, 1997).

Peer review and debriefing includes peers reviewing and providing input during the research (Creswell, 2014). Peers in this study included my dissertation committee. This technique kept me honest by having an independent peer highlight any implications. In addition, having peers review analytic procedures and claims was helpful to attaining additional viewpoints (Creswell).

Ethical Considerations

I submitted a request for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Valdosta State University (VSU) to gain the proper permissions for my research to begin (see Appendix B). Once I had IRB approval at VSU, participant contact, recruitment, and data collection began. I revealed the purpose of the study to the participants and read the

consent statement to all participants before each interview (see Appendix C). I ethically conducted this study and ensured fair treatment of all study participants. I made sure all participants were treated with respect. This study involved sensitive subjects, including racism and sexism. I was fully aware that using interviews to collect data would invade privacy. All participants were allowed to terminate their participation at any point in the research and for any reason. I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. I guaranteed strict confidentiality throughout the research and the dissertation's eventual completion by keeping all interview transcripts, recordings, and participants' school records in a locked filing cabinet in my home.

I stored all audio recordings in a password-protected folder cloud storage created explicitly for this study. I deleted the recordings once I transcribed them and after the participants approved the transcripts. Each participant was aware of all data collection and interview methods from the beginning of the study. I avoided overstating my results or overgeneralizing them. I reflected on my processes and examined my beliefs as a White, middle-aged female school administrator to ensure the participants' voices were the ones being heard and not my own. Finally, I was aware of the state of Georgia's Code of Ethics and remained in direct compliance with them.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the research design, research setting, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis used in this study. In addition, I discussed potential biases and ethical issues that may skew my results. The chapter also included measures of validity.

Chapter IV

Narratives of African American Females Students

Few researchers have attempted to analyze which facets of African American female students' status and social standing in the school setting make them more susceptible to disparate discipline rates by race (Blake et al., 2010, Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris & Perry, 2017; Onyeka-Crawford et al., 2017). Disparate discipline occurs when students belonging to a particular demographic group are exposed to disciplinary measures at a greater rate than students in other demographic groups (National Center for Safe Supportive Learning, 2021). African American female students have higher rates of OSS than White female students (Blake et al., 2010; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris & Perry, 2017; Onyeka-Crawford et al., 2017). Thus, hearing the narratives of African American female students' discipline experiences in school is critical because they express being ignored. Through this narrative inquiry, I examined the experiences of identified African American female participants as they dealt with the disproportionality problems concerning disciplinary measures they experienced in the CSSD high schools in rural South Georgia. I administered in-person and FaceTime interviews based on participant choice. A flexible interview structure allowed for a basic questioning structure augmented by occasional clarifying and elaboration questions. After each interview, I asked participants to verify transcripts and bring to light any errors.

The following participant profiles provide detailed background narratives, including family and school experiences. See Table 1 in chapter 3 for participants' demographic data.

Participants' Narratives

Imani

Imani was an African American woman who was 19 at the time of the interview. She graduated from the CSSD alternative school in May 2021. I interviewed Imani via FaceTime for both interviews. At the time of both interviews, Imani lived in Tallahassee, Florida. The first interview took place in October 2021, and the second interview was in November 2021. When we connected through FaceTime the first time, Imani immediately walked outdoors to speak with me. Imani lived in an apartment with one of her sisters and her sister's children. Throughout the interview, there were sounds of cars riding on the road. In the beginning, Imani only showed a portion of her face. As we continued to talk, Imani put her entire face on the camera.

Imani lived with her sisters and her retired maternal grandmother until her grandmother died in 2008 when Imani was 6 years old. Imani said she never knew how her grandmother died and that her biological mother was not "a motherly figure." However, after her grandmother died, Imani and her sisters lived with their mother. Imani stated that her mother tried to start acting as a mother should, but "it was too late." Imani still had not "completely accepted her." Imani asserted her sisters "basically raised her." She said her relationship with her mother is "still kind of rocky because I'm 19 now, so you want to come in and try to be a mother figure, but when I needed that the most, you weren't there for me, so, I just feel like I'm at a point in my life to where it's too late." Imani struggled with her relationship with her mother for most of her childhood and now into her adult life. Her relationship with her sisters continues to be strong.

Imani completed her first two years of elementary schooling in Thomasville, Georgia. She then moved to Columbus, Georgia, with her sisters and her mother in 2010 because of her mother's job. Her mother worked in the cellular phone business. Imani said making friends was "really hard because everyone had already known people." The school in Columbus had a lot of cliques. Imani was "angry about moving and did not want to make any friends." In 2011, she moved to Phoenix City, Alabama. She said the school in Phoenix City was better than the school in Columbus because "the students were more welcoming." Imani had a few associates but never really developed close friendships.

In the 6th- 8th grades, Imani lived in Tallahassee, Florida. Making friends in middle school was difficult for Imani because, like in Columbus, the students had already established cliques in middle school. However, during these middle school years, Imani became a dancer. She danced at school and took private lessons. Her dance teacher "played a big role" in Imani's life and "was a good influence." She said that her dance teacher gave her private lessons after school. Imani's mother never attended any of her dance recitals, yet her father attended them all.

Imani moved in with her father in 2017 when she became a freshman in high school. She said, "I didn't really get along with my stepmom, but we eventually overcame our differences. I moved in with [my father] because I had reoccurring problems within my mother's household." Imani said that her father was in her life, "but I just never got the chance to live with him." She said she had a good relationship with her father, stating, "Oh, I love my dad. My dad is my best friend;" he is her "rock." While living in Columbus, Phoenix City, and Tallahassee, she recalled seeing her father was

"not as much as I had hoped," as she traveled to see her father only once or twice a month.

Imani entered a traditional high school in the CSSD. She quickly made friends. The high school had a dance class, and Imani continued dancing until she was placed at CSSD's alternative high school. She did not develop a close relationship with the dance teacher. Imani said, "I never felt like she liked me." While in high school, a science teacher became a mentor for Imani. Imani said, "She was there for me," and "she didn't hold grudges even though I got in trouble in her class." Imani said she believed the teacher took time to listen to her when she needed to vent about issues in her life.

While in the CSSD, Imani received seven discipline referrals. There were five referrals for student incivility, one for fighting, and one for drugs. The dispositions included two principal conferences, three in-school suspensions, and two out of school suspensions. During her first year, Imani got into a fight with a student in the art classroom. An assistant principal suspended Imani from school for four days. Imani could not remember why she fought in the art room, as she did not have a class in the art room. Because it was just her and her father living in their home, Imani stayed home alone while suspended. She said her father had to work, and his reaction to her fighting and being suspended was "disappointed more than anything." While suspended, Imani's best friend at the time brought her assignments to her. "Boring" was how Imani described being suspended from school in just one word.

When I checked Imani's enrollment records, I found that she had withdrawn from high school for two weeks to homeschool in December of her junior year. Although she lived with her father, her mother withdrew her because of an event in school. The

incident involved Imani being assigned in-school suspension (ISS) for using profanity toward another student in the classroom. The classroom teacher physically restrained Imani because she kept screaming and challenging another student to fight. According to Imani, her mother voiced concern to administrators that the school treated her daughter unfairly. Imani said, "The other students were not disciplined for their part in the altercation." Imani's father re-enrolled Imani in school when the spring semester began.

In December of Imani's senior year, she arrived late to school one day under the influence of marijuana. The Welcome Center staff person at CSSD traditional high school reported to the principal that Imani was acting funny and that there was a strong odor of marijuana coming from her car. An assistant principal escorted Imani to the principal's office, where Imani became outraged and immediately called her sister. When asked to hang up, Imani yelled at the administrators in the office, who were women, not to touch her.

The principal called the school resource officer (SRO) to remove Imani from the office. Imani described how the SRO pulled out his handcuffs and threatened to put them on her. She said she became cooperative and left with the SRO. They went to the SRO's office. While with the school resource officer, Imani admitted she smoked marijuana before school in a park. In the presence of an SRO, an assistant principal searched Imani's car. School administrators are authorized to search students and their belongings when the administrators have reasonable suspicion that the search evidence would be found indicating that the student broke the law or a school rule (*New Jersey v. T.L.O.*, 469 U.S. 325, 1984). The assistant principal found traces of what appeared to be

marijuana in her car. The SRO tested the traces for THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) and verified the substance was marijuana.

The principal suspended Imani from school and requested a tribunal per the school's code of conduct. Imani and her father signed a waiver agreeing for Imani to attend the alternative school for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. By signing the waiver, Imani and her father chose not to attend the tribunal hearing and present Imani's defense rather than having Imani go before the tribunal panel resulting in Imani's placement at the alternative school through the end of the 2020-2021 school year.

Included in the waiver was a requirement for Imani to participate in Georgia Pines (GAP, 2021) counseling. GAP has a partnership with several school systems in South Georgia to provide services to students in high school settings. Parents must agree to their students meeting with GAP counselors. The first meeting includes the GAP counselor, student, and parent(s).

Once Imani was placed at the alternative school, she moved to Tallahassee to live with one of her sisters. She said she "needed to separate" herself from friends who were not a good influence and "smoking a lot of marijuana." She completed her high school classes virtually through a program called Odysseyware. Odysseyware is an online program students can complete at home instead of attending classes in person. Students work at their own pace completing lessons, quizzes, and tests. A teacher at the alternative school was assigned to monitor Imani's progress and to grade essays and short answer questions. Imani never met any of the teachers at the alternative school in person. She spoke with the guidance counselor by phone. She graduated in May 2021 with a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.63. Throughout her high school career, Imani

only failed one class, Algebra II. She retook Algebra II during her senior year along with various Career, Teacher, and Agriculture Education (CTAE) courses, including Early Childhood Education, Introduction to Business and Technology, and General Horticulture. Each year in high school, prior to her placement at the alternative school, Imani took Modern Dance.

Precious

Precious was a 19-year-old former student who graduated from a charter high school in May 2021. Precious and I spoke via FaceTime for both interviews. The first interview occurred in November 2021, and the second interview was held in December 2021. Precious was attending the technical college for cosmetology and said she liked doing other people's hair.

At the time of the interview, Precious worked on a production line at FPL, a beefsteak cutting facility. Precious said she eventually wanted to be a veterinarian when she grew up because she loves animals. Specifically, she wanted to study marine biology at Florida A & M University (FAMU). Precious said FAMU was "the only one I want to go to." She had not applied but planned to when she completed her cosmetology diploma.

Precious said she was "close" to her mother, stating, "Me and my mom have a great relationship. We have always got along." As the middle child in her household, Precious grew up with one brother and two sisters in her mother's household. She lived in a neighboring South Georgia town until she was in 3rd grade when she transferred to the CSSD. Precious already knew some students in her new school because some were her relatives. After third grade, she moved two more times but remained in the CSSD school

system until graduation. Precious said, "She was happy to remain in the same school system" and that it was a better home each time her family moved.

Precious had three siblings from her father but never lived with him. She described her relationship with her father as "iffy." She only talked to him "every blue moon" and usually at family events. Her relationship with her three siblings on her father's side, who lived in a nearby town, resembled her relationship with her father.

When asked about her favorite memory from high school, Precious indicated 9th grade as her favorite year. She said nothing she would describe as significant but "just liked the whole year." Precious failed Biology and Algebra 1 during her first year, completing summer school to recover credit for Biology and retaking Algebra 1 during her 10th-grade year. Precious said 10th grade was her easiest year. She said, "The classes just seemed easier." Precious also shared that her close 9th-grade friends were no longer her friends when she got to 10th grade.

Precious said, "My hardest [year] was probably my 11th-grade year." She was a junior in high school when the school went virtual due to COVID-19. The schools in CSSD switched all classes from in person to virtual on March 16, 2020. Before going virtual, Precious was already having trouble with her classes. She described American Literature as especially difficult. She said her teacher never "gave us any breaks. We always had to work on grammar, vocabulary, and read novels." Once classes were virtual because of COVID-19, Precious did not do any of the work, stating she "wasn't keeping up [the] work 'cause I was out of school." When classes resumed in the fall of 2020, Precious said she opted to remain at home and participate virtually in school for her senior year. However, she realized she was not learning and returned to school in person.

When I checked her enrollment records, I found she began her senior year in person and returned to virtual classes at the end of the first 9 weeks grading period. She failed six out of seven classes during the second 9 weeks. In February of her senior year, Precious transferred to the charter school. She dropped her elective classes and only completed the four courses required to receive her high school diploma. Precious graduated from the charter school in May 2021 with a GPA of 2.269.

Precious stated that she never really participated in school events other than attending football games. She was angry because she did not get to attend prom, recalling, "They canceled it both my years of high school." She said, "I was mad…cause I had already bought my dress." She went to the park and took pictures in her prom dress. She said, "I didn't buy a dress my senior year." When school reopened following the COVID-19 shutdown her senior year, "most of the fun activities were still canceled." She said, "There was no Homecoming Dance, pep rallies, club activities, or prom." Precious described school as "boring." She said, "I had to wear a mask all the time. I couldn't hang out with my friends. We didn't even get to eat lunch in the cafeteria. We had to eat breakfast and lunch in the classroom." She vocalized,

> When we [students] got to school, we had to immediately report to our
> first-period classes. Before COVID, we could hang out in the cafeteria or
> commons area before school. We sat around and had fun. But my senior
> year, the teachers were always on our cases to get to class.

Prior to her 12th grade year, Precious would fix her hair in the restroom before school. Once administrators implemented the COVID procedures during the 2020-2021 school year, Precious was not allowed to hang out in the restroom before school.

Precious candidly spoke about her discipline record, sharing, "I don't like being in ISS. You have to be quiet and [are] missing out in class." She continued, "I didn't get to learn or know my topics that we were doing in class." Precious received 34 discipline referrals while in high school. The referrals included 10 for excessive tardiness, 10 for dress code violations, three for cell phone violations, three for skipping/being in unauthorized areas, six for student incivility, one for failing to serve detention, and one for falsifying information. Precious received seven principal conferences, six administrative detentions, four time outs from a class, 12 in-school suspensions, and one out of school suspension. There were four referrals listed that did not have a disposition listed.

Precious playfully asked if she had a lot of dress code referrals. She said, "I remember being sent to the office all the time about dress code." All three female administrators in the school had disciplined Precious for not meeting the school dress code during her high school career. Precious recalled when she did not turn her cell phone in as the teacher requested. She said, "I just felt like I didn't have to because it was my phone." Precious served ISS for not giving her cell phone to the teacher.

Precious's out of school suspension (OSS) was her choice. She was assigned ISS but chose OSS instead because she did not like sitting in ISS. Precious said her mother was okay with her taking OSS over ISS. Precious explained that her mother thought ISS was a waste of time. The school policy in the code of conduct stated that students who opt for OSS instead of ISS would receive zeros for all assignments while suspended. She said, "it made my grades go down because I wasn't able to do work…I wasn't able to learn at all because …I chose OSS over ISS." Precious's suspension from school was due

to a discipline referral from her Spanish teacher. The teacher reported that Precious was eating food brought for the teachers in the teacher's workroom. The teachers' workroom is an unauthorized area for students. Precious stated, "I wasn't stealing none of the treats. He was just telling a story." Precious "never really liked his class" and "used to always get in trouble" in his class. Precious shared:

> I feel like sometimes teachers could actually sit down and talk with the student instead. I feel like ISS or OSS really doesn't work or help because if they still don't like the teacher that sent them to ISS, they are still gonna have a problem when they get back. I feel they should actually talk it out 'cause the same thing is gon' to keep repeating.

Precious said the Dean of Students, her mathematics teacher, her Government teacher, and her World History teacher were the only people in the high school who listened to her. She said, "Sometimes the teacher was in the wrong, and sometimes it was me that did wrong." Precious said her mathematics teacher "actually like got to know me, and I never got in trouble in her class. We were just always cool." Her mathematics teacher made Precious feel like she mattered.

Aliyah

Aliyah was a 20-year-old African American woman who graduated from the alternative school in May 2019. Aliyah went to an alternative school during her junior year of high school. I contacted Aliyah's mother via email to get a current email address or phone number for her. Aliyah was 19 when I first contacted her, but by the time we were finally able to schedule a time to meet face to face, she had turned 20. Initially, I interviewed Aliyah in November 2021. The second interview was in December 2021.

Aliyah brought her two-month-old baby boy with her to the first interview. Aliyah held

her son and rocked him back and forth throughout the interview. She was very animated

while talking to me and made eye contact.

When Aliyah was a small child, she lived with her mother and grandparents.

Through Habitat for Humanity, her mother bought her own house. Aliyah moved with

her mother to the new house and has been with her mother ever since. Aliyah said she is

close to her mother and has "always been a mama's girl." As a little girl, she suffered

from separation anxiety from her mother. When her mother left the house, Aliyah would

"run the car down" and "call her phone 20 times until she answered." Although Aliyah

was with her grandparents after her mother left to go to work, she felt alone when her

mother was gone.

Aliyah's mother and father were never a couple. Aliyah's father went to prison

when she was three. He was a "ladies' guy" and "always did his thing." When he got out

of prison, he was not around much.

Aliyah never really liked school but loved sports. She only enjoyed field days and

PE classes. Aliyah "used to love the 50-yard dash" and "always came in first." She said

she always hung out with the boys playing basketball and racing as a child. While in

elementary school, Aliyah recalled getting ISS for picking on a student for not being

good at basketball. She kept telling him that he was a "sorry" basketball player, and the

boy told the teacher Aliyah was bullying him. Although she disliked schoolwork, she was

always "on top of my work." When Aliyah was a freshman, she transferred to a

neighboring system for a few months. Aliyah shared that she "transferred because me and

a few other students got cut from the basketball team" because the coach "didn't want us

on her team." She transferred back to the Center System because she "wasn't doing anything but just sitting in class, honestly." Aliyah shared she thought the neighboring county's education program was lacking.

Aliyah said she was the "black sheep of the family." She lamented that her mom and grandparents were always stricter with her because she frequently got in trouble. Aliyah said she received many "whoopings" as a child. Her grandmother often made her go outside and quickly pick a switch. She hid behind her granddad, who was her "father figure." Her grandfather taught her how to drive and spent time with her.

Aliyah received seven discipline referrals while in high school. The referrals included one for dress code, one for excessive tardiness, one for failure to serve detention, three for skipping/unauthorized area, and one for threat/intimidation. Aliyah's discipline dispositions included one principal conference, three administrative detentions, two in-school suspensions, and one out of school suspension.

The referral for threat/intimidation was treated as a zero-tolerance event. Aliyah was automatically suspended out of school. Aliyah was uncomfortable talking about her suspension from school during her junior year and became visibly angry, stating she "was wrongly accused." Aliyah maintained she was innocent throughout the interview.

Aliyah blamed other students for her school suspensions. She explained, "I was accused of sending threatening text messages to another student." However, she insisted a friend had used her phone to send the messages on an app and the girl who received the messages told the SRO Aliyah had threatened her. The girl provided the school with screenshots of the messages, yet Aliyah said, "I honestly had nothing-I mean *nothing* at all-to do with it." The principal suspended Aliyah from school for 10 days, requesting a

tribunal hearing. Aliyah's mother supported her and was "hot when I got suspended."

Aliyah emphasized her mother already knew "what was going down" and that she had

"nothing to do with it." However, Aliyah's mother waived the tribunal hearing and

agreed to send Aliyah to the alternative school. Aliyah enrolled in the virtual alternative

school for one semester and then was supposed to complete a semester in person.

While attending the alternative school, Aliyah developed a close relationship with

the school director. Aliyah met weekly with the director and the GAP counselor as a

virtual student at the alternative school but did not like talking to the counselor. The topic

was always about the threat. Aliyah eventually stopped attending the counseling

appointments but continued speaking to the alternative school director. She appreciated

the director, who "really helped [me] out. She really wanted me to go to college." The

director continued to reach out to Aliyah and encourage her to pursue her education.

Aliyah credited the director with her graduating from high school a year early. She said

the director would always tell her she believed in her. Aliyah graduated from the

alternative school with a GPA of 2.694.

After graduation, it took Aliyah about a year to enter the workforce. She bounced

around and held a few jobs, including Walmart, Lowes, and FPL. At the time of the

interview, Aliyah worked at Walgreens as a pharmacy tech. Walgreens paid for Aliyah's

license and is paying for her classes to become a certified pharmacy tech. Aliyah is

planning to get a degree and become a pharmacist when her son gets older. Always the

athlete, Aliyah said, "Ok, so after I finish with Walgreens, I will be trying out for the

Olympics." Aliyah said she was working out in the gym to train for the 100-meter race.

Shanice

Shanice was 18 years old at the time of the interviews. She graduated from the traditional high school in 2021. For both interviews, we met at her workplace, a drive-through coffee shop. I interviewed Shanice the first week and the last week of December. Shanice recommended I meet her after she finished working. We sat at the outdoor picnic tables on a cool sunny day during the first interview. During the second interview, we again met at Shanice's workplace. Shanice shared stories about her suspensions from school. After 15 minutes, Shanice became anxious. She was not comfortable telling me about her suspensions. She was ready to leave and requested I email her the list of follow-up questions.

Shanice grew up in her home with her mother and younger brother. For a short time when Shanice was about 3 or 4 years old, her brother's father lived in the house with them. Shanice said her stepfather tried to be a father figure to her but eventually left and moved to another city. Her stepfather's departure "didn't really affect me because I knew he wasn't my real dad." However, her stepdad's leaving made her brother sad, sharing, "It affected him because his dad left and moved to a different town, but he would come back sometimes." Shanice was close to her brother, although "he's just aggravating." In middle school, Shanice lived with her grandmother. While living with her grandmother, her grandmother disciplined her by whipping her with a switch. Her biological father never lived with her, although she was in contact with him.

Shanice attended the CSSD every year of her school career except during 6th grade when she went to a local church school. Her mother made her switch schools because "I feel like it was more of like a follow the leader thing. My mama had a group

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of friends. They sent their kids there, so we went." She said, "I did not want to switch schools." While Shanice was at the church school, she lived with her grandmother in a neighboring county. She said she could not make many friends because she could not hang out because she is "not really big on friends. I have my people that I talk to. But making new friends, unh-unh." In 7th grade, Shanice returned to the Center System.

Shanice said she had "never been a troubled child," recalling running and playing outside all day as a child. She and her cousins rode four-wheelers and walked to the park to play basketball. She said she "played in middle school and tried out in 9th grade. I made the team, but I don't remember what happened. I think I didn't go to practice one day." When Shanice was cut from the basketball team, she did not go outside much and was mainly on her cell phone.

While in high school, Shanice only received three discipline referrals: fighting, rude/disrespectful, and theft. The first referral was for fighting in the school parking lot after a basketball game on a Saturday night. Shanice had been arguing with a group of girls all week at school. The girls tried to attack her friend in the parking lot, so she jumped in and fought. The principal suspended her from school for four days. Shanice's mother was unaware of the fight until the school called her the following Tuesday to tell her of the suspension. Shanice captured this incident in the following anecdote:

> She called me; I was in class. I was like, 'Ma'am.' Then, Bri [who is
> Shanice's friend who was also fighting], she had already texted me and
> was like, 'Oh, we fixing to get in trouble.' She had already texted me and
> told me, so when my mom called, I knew what was going on, but I tried to
> play it off because I didn't think she knew. I thought she was just calling

to see if I was coming home after school or something. Then she was like,
'So, what happened Saturday?' I'm like, 'Saturday, I went to the game; I
stayed with my auntie and my cousins.' And she was like, 'Stop lying. I'm
on the way up there.'

Shanice's father also came to the school. Shanice was conflicted about whether she
thought she should get in trouble for fighting on the weekend. She said she understood
the school's perspective because she fought in the school parking lot, but it was on the
weekend. She said, "It wasn't during school hours, and it wasn't school-related." While
on suspension, Shanice's mother continued to go to work. Shanice went to her cousin's
house every day and babysat her kids. She said, "It was like I was in trouble at home
too." Her mother did not want her at home alone, and Shanice's cousin needed someone
to watch her kids.

In August of her senior year, Shanice received her second discipline referral for
threatening a student in the hallway. Shanice used proximity to intimidate the other
student. Shanice was very close to the other student without actually touching the student.
According to Shanice, she never said she would do anything harmful to the other student.
However, the other student felt threatened and reported it to one of her teachers. The
principal contacted Shanice's mother. Shanice conferenced with the guidance counselor
about making better choices. Shanice's third discipline referral was in January of her
senior year. A female student who was "an associate" of Shanice's left her purse in the
cafeteria, and Shanice got the bag and removed the money that was inside. Shanice
denied taking the purse at first. She said, "to be honest, I didn't know the purse was hers
cause me, and her were already texting, and she had told me she had lost her purse," but

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the other student did not tell Shanice she lost it at lunch. Shanice asked her if she had checked all of her classrooms. Shanice told the girl to tell the principal that her purse was missing. Shanice admitted, "I think that's where I messed up." One of the assistant principals called Shanice to her office and asked about the money. The girl had told the assistant principal she had $60 in her purse. At first, Shanice denied that she had taken the money, but eventually, she gave the money to the assistant principal. The assistant principal suspended Shanice for nine days per the school's code of conduct for theft.

Everything changed for Shanice following her suspension during her senior year. She did not play basketball again. She hoped to get a scholarship in her senior year, but "it didn't happen." Shanice said, "not being allowed to play basketball made school boring." When she returned to school after suspension, Shanice was in school for one month before the school system went virtual due to COVID-19.

Shanice graduated from the traditional high school in the Center System in 2021 with a GPA of 2.224. She took classes in CTAE, such as Early Childhood Education, Introduction to Healthcare, Essentials of Healthcare, Allied Healthcare, and Spanish. During her senior year, Shanice doubled up and took two mathematics classes to meet college entrance requirements. She had been considering going to Valdosta State University, but after being suspended, she "just wasn't feeling it." Failing Spanish II kept her from meeting the requirements of entering a University System of Georgia school. Immediately following graduation, Shanice got a job. At the time of the interview, she lived at home with her mother and brother and was "working right now, but spring come around, I'm supposed to start tech classes for business." Shanice does not plan to work at the coffee shop when she starts taking classes.

Tiara

Tiara was an 18-year-old senior in high school at the time of the interviews. She met with me in my office and sat on my couch and faced me. She appeared to be very comfortable talking with me. It is my opinion that Tiara and I had a good relationship prior to the interviews.

Tiara had a fraternal twin sister. Tiara said when they were born, their parents lived together in the same house. A couple of months later, her father moved out of the house but remained in the same town. Tiara's mother and father "went their separate ways," and her father was in her life sporadically. At the time of the interview, Tiara did not have a relationship with her father. Tiara had other siblings, an older sister and two brothers from her father. The siblings did not have a relationship with Tiara or her father. She said, "Because they told us that he has more of a relationship with me and mine than he got with them." The last time she saw her father in person was at her paternal grandmother's funeral in 2018. Tiara's grandmother "always be on him about being around more." Tiara had "a close, fun relationship with her paternal grandfather." Her father had not reached out to her in the past three years.

Tiara lived with her mother, half-brother from her mother, and twin sister in her home as a child. At the time of the interview, she lived with her mother, twin sister, stepfather, and stepsister. Her mother remarried in September 2021, and Tiara said the relationship with her stepfather was "okay." Her mother worked at the medical center in town for nearly 23 years as a receptionist. Tiara became emotional, describing her mother's support during a debilitating childhood illness. She tearfully recounted the incident, sharing, "I don't even cry, but I had this disorder for dysphagia which is trouble

swallowing food and stuff." When Tiara was 12, she got sick and was in and out of the hospital for two years. Tiara shared her mother has "been around for everything." Tiara said her mother is her best friend.

While Tiara was having medical issues, she was hospital homebound. The school system uses hospital homebound when a student cannot attend school in person due to medical reasons. The school system hires a teacher to work with the student on assignments the teachers send to the student to complete. The hospital homebound teacher serves as a tutor. Tiara could not remember the name of the online program the school utilized. She said the program did not match the teachings in the classroom, meaning Tiara was not completing the same lessons students sitting in the classroom were completing. Tiara said, "it wasn't really the fit." While Tiara completed her schooling at home, she stayed with her grandmother. Her mother "just basically left [me] over there until she came home at 3:30, and she would pick me up." Her mother could not afford to take off from work. Her maternal grandmother spoiled Tiara. She said, "I ain't gonna lie. I'm one of her favorite grandchildren; she treats me like her own. My mom would try to get on to me, [but] she'd [her grandmother] be [standing] up for me." Tiara's maternal grandparents were still alive, but her grandfather had cancer and was not doing well. Her grandparents divorced six or seven years ago; however, they lived in the same apartment complex and spoke daily.

Tiara and her twin sister began school in a neighboring school system. They completed Pre-K through 5th grade. The sisters transferred to the Center System at the beginning of 6th grade. The elementary school she attended through 5th grade served predominantly White students. The staff was mainly White also. In 6th grade, Tiara

described the student body as "diverse." She said, "the middle school is a huge school, and when you first get there, I was so confused I had to learn what sides of the school to stay in and all." The 6th grade class at the middle school had as many students as the entire elementary school Tiara attended.

> Tiara and her twin played basketball in high school. Tiara said,
>
> My mama still tells me today that when we was a baby, and we were in
>
> the hospital, my daddy looked at me and my feet, and he was like, we gon'
>
> be basketball players. And it's crazy cause now that we've gotten older,
>
> we play basketball and stuff. So, he got us a basketball goal when we were
>
> like 7 or 8, and we've been playing ever since.

Tiara played basketball in her yard and at her friends' houses. She did not begin playing organized basketball until her sophomore year in high school. Her twin sister played basketball for the school since 6th grade. But Tiara did not play in middle school because of her sickness. Tiara got in trouble her freshman year and did not play. Tiara's mother "has always been supportive, but when COVID got back, she was a little iffy." Her mother threatened to withdraw them from the basketball team if they contracted COVID. Tiara's twin got COVID, and the twins were not allowed to finish playing their sophomore year.

> Tiara said her passion was nursing, and she wanted to be a travel nurse. She said, "I'm trying to get my CNA license and then my LPN and RN licenses." Tiara originally dreamed about going to Florida State University or Mercer University but decided to "stay at the Tech (school) for two years and probably go to a big school or college."

Because Tiara has already begun the CNA program at the technical school, she can continue and complete her nursing degree.

Tiara received nine discipline events while in high school. Tiara had three cell phone violations, one class disturbance, one inappropriate behavior, one rude/disrespectful, one aggressive behavior, and two fights. Tiara's first discipline referral occurred in August of her freshman year when her math teacher accused her of refusing to take a math test. Tiara denied the allegation saying, "I was not refusing to take the test." She explained the teacher was helping other students but not her. Tiara continued, "I was just talking to my friends, and we were working in groups, that's the thing I remember. And we were trying to figure out a problem, and we were talking and laughing." Tiara went to the office when the teacher got upset and insisted she "wasn't doing no test. I don't play about tests; I need my grades." The assistant principal assigned Tiara three days of time out from the math teacher's class. She only reported to the ISS room during her math class.

Tiara's next disciplinary issue was a fight in the cafeteria a couple of weeks later. Tiara said, "To be honest, I didn't want to fight her. I didn't know I was gonna fight her." Tiara thought the girl had an issue with someone else on the basketball team. There was an altercation between the girl, the girl's mother, and another student at the Florida State game. Tiara said, "They was going at it, so I was never in it," and "I never knew we had beef." Tiara described the fight:

> I got to school. I was outside. I think I came in. I was giving my best
> friend at the time a hug and was fixing to head…to PE and stuff. And she
> [the girl Tiara eventually fought] had stood from the table, and she was

just crying. And I had looked 'cause she called my name. So I looked, and

she's crying, and she's mad, screaming and stuff, like she wanted to fight,

and yeah, I should have walked away in that moment because I did start

the fight. I did hit her, and we fought and got suspended for four days.

Tiara's mom was not mad at her for being suspended, "but she was disappointed because

I made the decision. I did hit her first." Tiara believed the fight was inevitable because if

they had not fought in the cafeteria, they would have fought when they got to the

basketball locker room. Tiara thinks, "it was best to fight there [cafeteria] because if we

would have fought in the locker room, one of us would have got hurt bad because of the

lockers and benches and toilets and doors and stuff." When Tiara and the other girl

returned to school, they did not speak for a long time. Tiara never asked why the girl

wanted to fight her because "it's irrelevant; it's over." The two female students are still

not friends but talk to each other about basketball.

During an assembly program held in the school gym, Tiara and a group of her

friends were talking to each other and paying attention. The principal made the students

stay behind after the assembly so she could talk to them. Tiara did not remember who

was speaking at the assembly or what the topic was. Tiara remembered the principal

being irate that the students had "embarrassed the school with our behavior." The

principal assigned Tiara and her friend administrative detention.

One of the assistant principals suspended Tiara for fighting a second time three weeks

later. The fight happened during the Powder Puff game. Powder Puff is a flag football

game played by female students. During the Powder Puff game, Tiara's sister scored a

touchdown. Tiara's team was losing by two touchdowns. Her sister and a girl from the

opposing team were "going at it." Tiara did not get involved because it was just "trash talk." She is "used to trash talk since she plays sports." The girls arguing with her sister were "girlie girls" who "don't really play sports." Tiara described the events leading up to the fight:

> I grabbed her [the female student who had earlier had a verbal
> confrontation with Tiara's sister]; I think I had, I don't know how but her
> belt came off, and that's when I heard her talking stuff behind me. I turned
> around, and she grabbed her belt, swung it at my face, and hit me right
> here in the face with her belt. And me being me, I got angry issues. I'm
> not going to just stand there. I hit her, and that's when all the commotion
> happened. Everybody's coming into it and stuff, but that was self-defense.
> I'm not gonna stand there and [get] hit in the face with a flag belt and not
> retaliate.

The assistant principal suspended all the students involved in the fight. Because this was Tiara's second fight, the assistant principal suspended her for 10 days and requested a tribunal hearing. The tribunal panel found Tiara guilty of fighting and sentenced her to the remainder of the semester at the alternative school.

Tiara did not like the alternative school. She explained, "I was not comfortable at all." Every morning she had to walk through a metal detector. Tiara said, "It was weird. You have people in there for real stuff, and I was just over for two fights, and I'm just with these people." Tiara expressed she thought the students assigned to the alternative school were bad students who did drugs and were members of gangs. Tiara shared, "At this time, I was an introvert 'cause I wasn't used to something like this." Tiara only made

friends with two people while at the alternative school. The science teacher interacted with Tiara, but none of the other teachers did. In her English class, the teacher sat at the desk in the front of the room. The students read, answered questions, and wrote essays. Every assignment in English class was "the exact same thing."

Tiara said her favorite classes were not boring. An English teacher during her sophomore year made the class exciting because he was constantly changing things up. The students watched a short video clip and then read, and the class would then have a discussion. Tiara said she loved to read but found "reading an entire class period boring. I need to interact with people." When the classes went virtual in March 2020, Tiara communicated that her teachers were learning to teach online; "it was so new to them, that we really didn't have work." Eventually, the school decided to give everyone a minimum of 70 for the 4th nine-weeks. Tiara and her twin opted to continue working remotely in the fall of 2020. The school system superintendent asked remote students to return to traditional schooling in February 2021, and Tiara and her sister returned to in-person education. Tiara found remote learning "boring." She failed four classes while she was a remote student. However, by the end of her junior year, Tiara earned all passing grades.

Tiara graduated in May 2022 with a GPA of 3.143. She took healthcare science classes at the technical college during her senior year. Tiara completed two Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) pathways: Healthcare Science and Early Childhood Education and Introduction to Business and Technology.

Nekia

Nekia was an 18-year-old senior in the Center System attending a traditional high school when I interviewed her. Nekia graduated from CSSD traditional high school in May 2022. She agreed to speak with me in my office, and I prompted her to tell me about her childhood and growing up. She started by telling me about the people who lived in her household. Nekia lived in a single-parent home with her mother, sister, brother, and three cousins. She was the youngest of her siblings living in her house. The cousins were three, eight, and 14. Nekia's mother had custody of the three cousins because "their mother, she does whatever she wants to do." They lived in a small community in the Center area.

Nekia's mother had six sisters and one brother. Her 39-year-old mother is the oldest, and her youngest aunt is 20. Nekia has a large extended family with 22 cousins. However, her aunts were not very dependable, leaving her mother "to do everything by herself and get on her feet by herself." When Nekia's mother was 15, she became pregnant with Nekia's brother. Nekia and her brother share the same father. Nekia's mother "popped up" with her sister. The father of her sister stayed around for a little while, and after he left, Nekia's mother got pregnant with Nekia. Her mother had one more child a year after Nekia was born; however, she gave that baby girl up for adoption "because she just couldn't handle one more child."

Nekia said her father was "in and out" of her life. When Nekia and her brother were younger, their father was in their lives, but Nekia had no memory of it. She said, "He acted like a father figure to my sister, so she still keeps in contact with him" while he was in and out of jail. Nekia had two additional half-siblings on her father's side who

lived in South Carolina. The siblings were two and four, and Nekia's father frequently drove from Orlando to see them without stopping to see Nekia. Her father spent the holidays with his other family. Nekia shared:

> I don't fool with him because he took my mama through everything, and then he'll say he gon' do something and then don't do it. He'll disappear on birthdays, holidays, anything that you could think of, and then he come back and be like, 'Oh, I had to do this, I had to do that.' So, I just cut him off.

Nekia moved around throughout her childhood. She was born in Orlando, Florida, and lived there until the 4th grade. Many of her mother's sisters and her maternal grandfather lived in Orlando, and her father's family lived in Orlando. Nekia moved to Michigan to live near her grandmother, Nana. Nekia's mother and Nana repaired their relationship. She said they were "close, but they're not that close." Nekia said her aunts also lived in Michigan with Nana, but Nekia was not close to them. She explained the strained relationships by saying that "my aunties did my Nana any kind of way, and my Nana said she wasn't putting up with that no more. So, they're not close, and they moved away first." The aunts told Nekia's mother that they needed help in South Georgia about four months later, so Nekia's family moved to a small South Georgia town to live with her four aunts.

Nekia attended school in a district neighboring the Center System during 5th and 6th grade. Nekia said, "Everything backfired, and they kicked us out." The aunts told Nekia's mother to leave the house. After two years, Nekia's family lived in their car. Her mother worked an assortment of jobs while the children were in school. The goal was to

get enough money to rent a home for the family. Nekia's mother saved enough to rent a home. Nekia began school in the Center System in 7th grade, and Nekia remained in the rental house and the Center System.

Nekia described the year she entered high school as her most challenging year. She shared,

> In 8th grade, I had a lot of discipline problems because we were just now
> getting back on our feet and stuff. And I didn't really have what every
> other kid had, so I would show off at school, and my mom would have to
> come up there, and I was on the verge of failing and stuff. And then the
> crowd that I was hanging around, some of them I still hang around now,
> but some of them I don't. They were a bad influence on me, and my mama
> kept telling me, but, you know, I just felt that I wanted to be friends with
> who I wanted to be friends.

Nekia was a self-described independent girl. She said that is how her mother raised her and her siblings. Nekia said she had a "strong-headed mind. To the point where I won't let nobody do me any type of way or talk to me any type of way." Nekia said her mother sometimes yells at her "because that's the only thing that will get through my mind." Nekia is "more outspoken" and will "say anything that comes to mind." Her mother accused her of walking around "with a nasty attitude." Nekia admitted her attitude got her into trouble a lot of.

When the three cousins moved in with Nekia's family, they did not have anything and had many needs. Nekia explained, "They really didn't have no clothes, no shoes, no haircuts, no nothing." Her mother took the money she spent on Nekia and her siblings

and instead spent it on the cousins. Nekia shared the siblings felt like "she [their mother] would treat them [the cousins] more like her children than she would actually treat her own kids." Later Nekia reflected, "It didn't really change anything financially because we already have 'bout everything anyway." The cousins were not the first extended family members to move in with Nekia's family. Nekia's mother allowed other cousins to live with them because they did not get along with their mother. Their mother was one of Nekia's aunts.

In high school, Nekia received nine discipline referrals. Three of the referrals were for dress code, one was for not serving detention, four were for student incivility, and one was for using profanity toward the Dean of Students. The resolutions for the discipline events included principal conference or warning, administrative detention, time out, ISS, and OSS.

Initially, an assistant principal suspended Nekia from school for 10 days for using profanity towards a school employee. Nekia was walking to her math class. Teachers and administrators required students to walk to the right in the center circle as if in a roundabout. As Nekia was leaving A-hall, she tried to go to the left instead of the right. She "was already running a little behind trying to cut the hallway." The Dean of Students asked Nekia to walk all the way around. Nekia said, "I guess I didn't hear him because I be having my air pods in." The Dean of Students told her she could not go to the left. Nekia had to walk all the way around. Nekia questioned, "I got to walk all the way around. I told him, 'Well, they didn't have to walk around; why I got to walk around if they didn't walk around?'" The Dean of Students again told Nekia to walk all the way

around. Nekia refused to comply and "walked away talking junk." Nekia again discussed how her attitude got her in trouble.

The Dean of Students waited until Nekia made it to the door of the math class to stop her. Nekia felt he could have stopped her before then. Nekia "felt like he was trying to embarrass somebody or something, so I started talking junk." She emphasized, "I did not cuss at him." According to Nekia, she would have to be face-to-face with the person to cuss at someone. Nekia reflected, "I think I said, 'I don't know why he made me walk the F around.'" Nekia admitted that she used profanity but not towards the Dean of Students.

Nekia said, "at first, she [her mother] was like, 'That's why you need to watch what you say and how you say certain stuff.'" Initially, her mother was angry about a 10-day suspension as she thought 10 days was too many. Nekia shared that the principal watched the video recording of the event a few days later after talking with Nekia's mother. She determined that Nekia had not directed the profanity toward the principal but instead was talking to another student about the Dean of Students. The principal changed the suspension to 4 days. Nekia said, "I knew the video would show that I didn't curse at him."

Nekia treated her suspension as "a vacation." A friend came over every day and hung out with Nekia. When her mother got home from work each day, she asked Nekia if she had completed her schoolwork. She told her mother *yes*. However, Nekia admitted, "I didn't do it 'cause I'm at home. Who wants to do schoolwork while they are at home?" Her grades dropped. One teacher allowed her to complete the work when she returned to school. Other teachers gave Nekia zeros. Nekia did not want to return to school after the

four-day suspension. She said, "I get tired of coming to school." She did return to school. Nekia had not received any other discipline referrals since the suspension.

The American Literature teacher from her junior year was Nekia's favorite teacher. She recalled, "She was hard on you, but it's because she knows that you can do it and have the potential to do it. She is like a mom to us at school. But you know not to play with her." The teacher made students "tell her what's going on about our day." Nekia's math teacher was also influential in her life. She said, "I love that lady to death. She [is] nice; she knows how to put up with my attitude." Nekia accused her other teachers of favoritism. She explained, "Two people will do the same thing, and since they like the other one better than they like the other, they'll discipline that one." Nekia said she felt like teachers were always watching her and getting on to her.

Nekia graduated in May 2022. She had a GPA of 2.942. While in high school, Nekia completed several CTAE courses, such as Introduction to Early Childhood Education I and II, Early Childhood Education Practicum, Work-based Learning (WBL), Introduction to Business and Technology, and Spanish I and II.

Nekia said she wants to teach first, second, or third grade and her Work Based Learning (WBL) job was at a local elementary school. However, she wants to attend Wiregrass Technical School and complete the cosmetology program. She plans to get an education degree after becoming a licensed cosmetologist. Her mother recommended that she "have a backup plan." Nekia plans to move to Valdosta. She said, "I don't want to move too far away from my mom, but I'm trying to get away from her and my sister." Nekia wants to make her own decisions without having to ask for permission.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented narratives to capture the two interviews with each of the six participants. These storylines provide a synopsis of the students' families, education, discipline events, and plans. The information provided the groundwork for data analysis and themes discussed in the next chapter. Rich, significant responses from participants and my observations created a joint account to create meaning of participants' experiences. The participants in the study all attended the same traditional high school at some point during their high school careers. The participants were familiar to me before the interviews due to my school administrator background.

Chapter V

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

Scholars have documented the existence of racial and gender disparities in school discipline (Gregory et al., 2016; Losen et al., 2015; Marchbanks & Blake, 2018; Onyeka-Crawford et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2014). This study investigated African American female students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and the impact exclusionary discipline had on their education in selected rural South Georgia schools. The findings in this research have a direct connection to the theoretical frameworks of CRT and BFT used for this study. Through the lens of CRT, African American women utilize counterstorytelling and intersectionality. According to BFT, African American women navigate a racist and sexist society (Collins, 2000).

The participants in this study spoke about their experiences that were distinct from African American men and White women (Collins, 2000). The participants did not separate their experiences into two categories based on race and gender but shared their stories as African American women navigating the space of the public school setting. Although not all participants saw a direct connection between their unequal treatment and race, some saw race as a factor in discipline practices in their school, especially in regard to the school system's dress code.

I developed three main themes developed from the stories of six African American female students suspended from school during their high school careers. The three themes include strained relationships, power of one, and fighting to survive. The themes added to my understanding of African American female students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and the impact exclusionary discipline had on their education.

The theme of strained relationships includes subthemes of zero-tolerance policies, racial bias, and no one will listen. I expanded the theme of fighting to survive to include subthemes of cell phones and social media, self-defense, conflict resolution and restorative practices. This study's findings may inform national policymakers, federal and state departments of education, regional educational service agencies, the local board of education, university and college teacher preparation programs, administrators, teachers, and parents on how to decrease the disparity affecting African American female students' suspensions and increase their academic success by sharing with them the experiences of other African American female students.

Description of Themes

The participants expressed how their mothers raised them and how that determined how they acted in school. The themes reflected participants' voices regarding their high school experiences. In the following section, I present the experiences conveyed by the participants and the key findings I uncovered about each theme. Data analysis revealed the themes of strained relationships, power of one, and fighting to survive. I discuss the three themes separately, although similar concepts are echoed in the three themes simultaneously. Table 2 in Chapter 3 provides a review of the participants along with their similarities and difference. Five of the participants lived with their mothers in high school. Imani moved in with her father in 9th grade. While all participants received OSS during high school, the outcomes were different for each. Students received between three and ten days of OSS. Administrators assigned more days of OSS based on the level of the offense. I clarify the themes created from the data collected in subsequent sections.

Strained Relationships

Participants recalled several events that highlighted the strained relationships that occurred between themselves and school personnel, school personnel and the students' primary caregiver, and themselves and the other students. Participants voiced their struggles with a Eurocentric school discipline style that emphasized zero tolerance policies and supported racial biases, which affected socialization, widened the trust gap, ignored the voices of the students themselves, and did not account for differences in family dynamics. Participants also recalled how a lack of parental support enhanced these negative issues occurring at school.

Eurocentricity

Eurocentric school discipline style involves analyzing the result or the effect of a problem rather than determining the root cause of a problem (Nantambu, 2006). The predominance of Eurocentricity in the school curriculum, which is evident in books and texts educators use to discuss racism, hides African Americans' knowledge from the curriculum, the effects on students' identity, belonging, and sense of community are long-lasting (Soprunova, 2020). In a similar way, participants expressed that the type of discipline they experienced influenced their identity and sense of community by forcing them to hide their side of the story.

All participants expressed that teachers and administrators did not allow them to explain themselves when disciplinary events occurred. Participants often indicated that the reasons for being suspended from school were unclear or unfair. The participants shared that their mothers were upset about their suspensions because the reasoning behind the suspension was fuzzy. The participants felt it might have changed the

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discipline resolution if they were allowed to tell their side. Similarly, Lightfoot (2021) found educators give minimal concern to the background or justification that explains the behavior.

Teachers and administrators believe upholding effective discipline systems must balance "recognizing students' unique circumstances and creating a safe and welcoming campus for everyone" (Youth Truth Student Survey, n.d., para. 2). According to the Youth Truth Student Survey, the balancing act has not been successful in the eyes of the African American students. Only 33% believed the punishment was appropriate at their school (Youth Truth Student Survey, n.d.). According to Wirtz (2021), referrals are a turning point in the student-teacher relationship. Once a teacher completes a referral, the student views the relationship between herself and the teacher as punitive (Wirtz).

Precious chose OSS instead of ISS because a teacher accused her of taking food out of the teachers' workroom. Precious felt like no one would listen to her. She said,

> I feel like sometimes teachers could actually sit down and talk with the
> student instead of like, I feel like ISS or OSS really doesn't work or help
> because if they still don't like the teacher or the teacher that sent them to
> ISS or whatever, they still gonna have a problem when they get back. I
> feel like they should actually talk it out.

Precious felt that not communicating ruins the relationship and the pattern will keep repeating. The student and teacher will keep animosity there. She also recommended teachers get to know their students because students may be acting up because they have things going on at home.

Nekia hit a student with her bookbag. The other student retaliated, and the two began yelling at each other. The teacher intervened. Nekia described the interactions between the teacher and herself:

> I was trying to reason with her, but she continued to fuss. Your freaking writing me up for no freaking reason. Then she said, 'Is that you? That sounds like you, don't it? Intentionally hitting another student, so you got ISS for that.'

Nekia said teachers and administrators do not allow students to tell their sides. Educators administer the discipline quickly and move on to the next issue.

Aliyah expressed that many times the principal would not listen to her. Aliyah's perception was that the principal and the SRO believed the student who filed the complaint against her. Aliyah said, "I ended up getting in trouble. I ended up becoming the one that said the threats. I don't know how. It wasn't even on my phone." Aliyah was visibly irritated as she remembered the events leading up to her suspension. Aliyah talked about her mother's reaction to her suspension from school. Aliyah said, "She was hot because she knew I had nothing to do with it because my mama already knew what was going down." Aliyah had explained to her mother about her two friends who were fussing and cussing each other out. Her mother told her to stay out of it because "you don't got nothing to do with that." Once the principal suspended Aliyah, her mother came to the school to defend Aliyah. Her mother planned to fight for Aliyah at the tribunal hearing but ultimately signed the waiver, placing Aliyah at the alternative school for the remainder of the school year. The tribunal paperwork read the punishment ranged from a

return to school to expulsion from the school system. Aliyah's mother did not trust the tribunal panel not to expel her daughter from school for an entire year.

Tiara conveyed her teachers did not listen to her. During Tiara's sophomore year, there was an incident involving Tiara and her healthcare science teacher. Tiara did not answer the roll when the teacher called her name. She kept her head down on the desk. When the teacher tapped her shoulder, Tiara yelled, "Get out of my face!" The teacher told Tiara to go to the office. Tiara never responded to the teacher, so the teacher called an administrator to the classroom to remove Tiara. Tiara shared, "No one ever asks you if you are okay. Or what is going on? They just immediately send you to the office." The assistant principal escorted Tiara to the ISS room.

Referrals are a decisive moment in the relationships students and teachers form. A student views the student-teacher relationship as punitive following a referral submission. The use of suspension negatively impacts achievement school-wide (American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health, 2013). Gibson and Haight (2013) reported parents described suspensions as morally problematic, unfair, and inappropriate. The literature has shown exclusionary punishments are associated with damaging academic outcomes, including school failure and retention, negativity toward school, and an increased likelihood of dropping out (Welch & Payne, 2011). These policies do not consider why events occur, why a student is involved, or what part of the student's history is attributed to the behavior (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). While administrators and teachers have a legal obligation to keep their schools safe, there are many instances where schools get it wrong (Barrett et al., 2017).

The predominance of Eurocentricity in the school curriculum is evident in books and texts educators use to discuss racism. Schools use books similar to 'To Kill a Mockingbird' to launch discussions about racism; however, White men and women write most of the books schools use. Schools use a Eurocentric lens to tell the stories of African Americans instead of promoting the stories written and narrated by those impacted by racism. When school districts hide African Americans' knowledge from the curriculum, the effects on students' identity, belonging, and sense of community are long-lasting (Soprunova, 2020).

Georgia legislature banned schools from teaching "divisive racial concepts" in April 2022 (Bernstein, 2022). The bill signed by the governor prohibits any assertions that the United States is essentially racist (Bernstein, 2022). Precious expressed that the schools should include the perspectives of African Americans when teaching history courses, and she thought teachers glossed over anything considered controversial, including racism and slavery. Imani commented that she had never heard much about the history of African Americans in high school. She stated that the school would share information on the daily news program during February, Black History Month, but that was pretty much it.

Eurocentric school discipline style involves analyzing the result or the effect of a problem rather than determining the root cause of a problem (Nantambu, 2006). This Eurocentric mindset was evident in remarks the participants made. All participants expressed that teachers and administrators did not allow them to explain themselves when disciplinary events occurred. Participants often indicated that the reasons for being suspended from school were unclear or unfair. The participants shared that their mothers

were upset about their suspensions because the reasoning behind the suspension was fuzzy. The participants felt it might have changed the discipline resolution if they were allowed to tell their side. Similarly, Lightfoot (2021) found educators give minimal concern to the background or justification that explains the behavior.

Trust is a measure of legitimacy and satisfaction with a school system (Loveless, 1997). A considerable amount of literature examines school trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Loveless, 1997; Yeager et al., 2017). When parents and students do not trust teachers and administrators, the loss of community investment is detrimental to the school system (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Participants in this study conveyed that African American female students experienced strained relationships with teachers and administrators in CSSD. The participants depicted the lack of students' voices and perceived biases for the lack of trust. In the literature, African American parents' interactions and attitudes toward their children's schools, teachers, and administrators confirm their lack of trust and confidence (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Building trust is difficult between African American parents and educators due to socio-cultural discrepancies and power imbalances dating back to slavery (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). As described by the participants, educators adhere to a belief that equality for all necessitates conforming to the norms of the dominant culture, the White middle class. Therefore, the mothers have racially socialized their daughters.

Zero-tolerance policies

The participants discussed how zero-tolerance policies played into their suspensions. When administrators or teachers did not allow the participants to explain any extenuating circumstances surrounding their discipline events, the participants

described how they felt ignored. Many participants shared the racial bias they experienced in high school when teachers and administrators acted and viewed things through a Eurocentric lens.

Zero-tolerance policies demand schools suspend a student for a predetermined number of days when the student violates certain items in the code of conduct (Gjelten, 2019). Administrators rarely take into consideration why a student broke a rule. Zero-tolerance policies in the CSSD's code of conduct punish students for non-criminal as well as criminal offenses. Students in this study were subject to mandatory suspensions for fighting, using profanity towards adults, theft, and threatening other students. Participants described not being allowed to tell their side of what happened. They felt administrators were rushing to send them home.

According to Gjelten (2019), however, zero-tolerance does not improve school climate or safety because zero-tolerance policies have not been proven effective in changing student behavior for the better (Gjelten). In this study, I found that zero-tolerance policies most affect African American students (see Table 1). African American female students are disciplined at a higher rate than White female students (Blake et al., 2017; Morris & Perry, 2017; Skiba et al., 2010). Gullo (2017) documented similar results in her study of biases in discipline decisions.

Behavior Violations. School administrators suspended participants in this study for various reasons. Precious's discipline event was the only event that did not fall into the zero-tolerance category because she was originally assigned ISS. An administrator initially gave Precious ISS, and she chose to take OSS instead. All other participants fell

into the zero-tolerance category, and Imani, Aliyah, and Tiara received the most severe punishment. CSSD assigned them to the alternative school.

Aliyah was the most adamant about being falsely accused. School authorities placed Aliyah at the alternative school for sending a threatening message to her girlfriend via the anonymous texting app, Text Now. Aliyah said, "I honestly had nothing, I mean nothing at all, to do with it." The SRO called Aliyah to her office and asked to see Aliyah's phone. Aliyah refused to give the SRO her phone until her mother was present. Aliyah angrily shared, "I don't understand why would you take something that didn't happen at school to the schoolhouse?" Aliyah expressed throughout the interview that things that happen off campus should not be subject to school discipline.

Tiara fought twice while in 9th grade. The first fight resulted in Tiara's suspension from school for four days. According to the Code of Conduct for CSSD, the second offense of fighting results in a disposition of 10 days OSS, parent notification, tribunal notification, and notification of law enforcement. The tribunal panel assigned Tiara a 9-week placement at the alternative school. Tiara was the only female student sent to the alternative school for fighting twice in the same school year during the 2018-2019 school year. More recently, in the 2021-2022 school year, the school suspended 46 students out of school for fighting. Twenty were African American female students. Either school administrators or tribunal panels placed 10 of them at the alternative school.

Shanice was suspended from school for four days for fighting when she was a sophomore. Next, she was suspended again for nine days in her senior year for theft. Fourteen students were suspended from school for theft the year Shanice was suspended

for stealing money from a purse in the cafeteria. CSSD did not differentiate the disposition based on the value of the item(s) stolen.

CSSD administrators suspended five of the six participants from school using the zero-tolerance policy. Blake et al. (2016) and Cheng (2017) attributed the disparities in the discipline at a school to the racial composition of the faculty. The faculty in the CSSD school system is predominantly White. Implicit and racial bias of White teachers may be connected to the disparities in discipline (Gregory et al., 2010; Staats, 2015).

The participants agreed that OSS (out of school suspension) does not change a student's behavior. Imani shared, "I'd say OSS doesn't change anything. It's like most of the students who act out have problems at home or other things like that. OSS and ISS won't change that." Tiara also stated, "I think the students come back from OSS and continue doing what they were doing." LiCalsi et al. (2021) supported the participants' opinions. They found that assigning ISS or OSS does not decrease future misconduct for the disciplined students or their peers. Neither the students' academic achievement improved nor did the students' perceptions of a positive school climate improve. The participants expressed that being suspended took them out of class and made them fall behind in their schoolwork.

Dress Code Violations. Participants voiced concern about the school's enforcement of the dress code. They expressed that it discriminated against them. CSSD's dress code prohibits the length of dresses, skirts, and shorts from being more than four inches above the knee, and shirts cannot expose undergarments or a student's midriff, and students may not have holes in jeans above the knee (see Appendix D). For example, in the traditional high school, Nekia received three dress code violation referrals for wearing

jeans with holes above the knee, a crop-top shirt that exposed her midriff, and a dress that was too short. Nekia felt unfairly disciplined because other students wore similar outfits and were not reported to administrators. Nekia said, "Sometimes I feel like its [dress code] a little extreme." She continued,

> Like the slits in the pants [jeans that have holes but still have strings going across], I just feel like what is splits in the pants gonna do…but they don't show that much skin. I feel that if we get dress coded for something like that, then that's a little extreme. I just feel like it's a little extra, you know.

Nekia voiced concern about a White female student who laughed when Nekia received a dress code referral. The White female student had three large holes in her jeans but did not get sent to an administrator. Nekia shared that teachers always checked to see if she met the dress code.

At the traditional high school, a teacher sends a student to an administrator if the teacher determines the student does not meet the dress code. On the first offense, the administrator asks the student to correct the violation. This could include calling a parent to bring a change of clothing, asking a friend for an article of clothing, or changing into other clothes the student brought with them to school. The second offense results in administrative detention, and all future offenses result in ISS. With each incident, the student is asked to correct the dress code violation. The administrator notifies the parent of each dress code offense.

Precious received 10 dress code referrals while a student at the traditional high school. The teachers sent Precious to the office for violating the dress code. She received administrative detention several times and was assigned ISS once for dress code

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violations. A student serves administrative detention in the ISS room either before school or after school. Administrative detention lasts 30 minutes. When a teacher judges a student to be out of the dress code, the teacher sends the student to the center office. The student misses class time while waiting for someone to bring her a change of clothing. If the student cannot obtain a suitable change of clothing, the student must sit in the in-school suspension (ISS) room. Precious wore jeans with holes above the knee and dresses that were too short. Precious did not think the dress code was fair. Precious said, "Other girls walk around in the same outfit, and no one sends them to the office. It is always us, 'thick girls,' getting in trouble."

In the Infinite Campus data pulled from the CSSD traditional high school, teachers referred 179 students for violating the dress code during the 2021-2022 school year. Female students represent 131 of the referrals, and African American female students represent 93 of the students referred. When a teacher enters a referral for dress code, the teacher includes a description of the violation. Teachers referred female students mainly for holes in their jeans. Precious voiced concern about gender discrimination, saying that often male students were out of the dress code for having hoods on in the building or sagging pants, and teachers told them to take their hoods off or pull their pants up. Nekia said teachers and administrators unfairly applied the dress code,

> I feel like if you do the dress code, then you gotta make sure everybody is following the dress code because if one person sees one person mess up in the dress code and they don't get in trouble for that, and somebody go back and tell that they didn't get in trouble for that then it's gone cause a

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bigger situation and black people now days they wanna fight about

everything.

Imani's thoughts were similar to Nekia's. Imani criticized the school's lack of consistent enforcement of the dress code. She said she wore the same jeans with holes in them above the knee several times. Some days she was sent to the office, and others, she was not.

On the first dress code offense for students at the charter school, the administrators have the parents bring a change of clothing for the student. On the second and third offenses of dress code violations, the parents bring a change of clothing, and the student is assigned lunch detentions. On the fourth offense, the student is suspended from school for the day. Any future dress code offenses at the charter school result in the student being withdrawn and sent back to her home school.

The administrator at the alternative school on the first offense gives students at the alternative school a change of clothing to remedy the dress code violation. Because the students all enter the alternative school through the same door, the administrator can address dress code violations at the beginning of the day. The school provides a shirt or a pair of pants that meet the dress code. The student receives a warning. The administrator notifies the parents. Any dress code referrals after that result in the student being sent home. However, during the 2021-2022 school year, the charter school and alternative school administrators did not record any dress code violations in Infinite Campus as discipline events.

The participants' complaints about the dress code add to the idea of the unfair application of the dress code to girls. School dress codes are under scrutiny for shaming

girls (Pomerantz, 2008). A federal appeals court ruled in August 2021 that Title IX's promise of equal opportunity for young women applies to discriminatory dress codes (Walsh, 2021). Title IX states, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (U.S. Department of Education, 2021a, para. 1). The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) enforces Title IX (U.S. Department of Education, 2021a). Dress codes are biased against women because many rules apply only to women (Pomerantz, 2008). Six items in the CSSD's dress code specifically address female students. The other 10 items are gender-neutral. Wilder and Key (2018) stated schools use dress codes to teach students to conform and obey authority; however, dress codes suppress individuality and student's voice.

Racial Bias

Participants in the study also perceived racial bias towards them as expressing teachers expected them to misbehave because of their race and gender. This notion is consistent with researchers, who suggested that social and ethnic differences between students of color and primarily White teachers add to the selection of students of color for disciplinary concerns (Bireda, 2010; Gay, 2010).

Amemiya et al. (2020) also aligned with participants' complaints of racial bias when arguing that students lose respect for teachers when the students observe biased punishment. Four of the participants spoke about administrators monitoring them more closely than their White peers. Nekia shared that White students were sneakier about the rules they broke, or maybe the teachers ignored what the White students were doing.

African American female students attending CSSD were three times more likely to receive an out of school suspension and eight times more likely to be placed at an alternative school. Green et al. (2020) reported data similar to CSSD's discipline data, indicating that schools suspend African American female students out of school five times more often than White female students.

When educators hold White students to a lower standard of behavior, African American students perceive the school as not welcoming (Ispa-Landa, 2018). In multiple studies, African American students reported feeling that teachers and administrators would discipline them regardless of their actual behavior because of the color of their skin (Annamma et al., 2016; Latimore et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2014; Wirtz, 2021). When African American students carry their culture with them in school, teachers and administrators will use hyper-surveillance and quickly punish them (Annamma et al., 2016, p. 213).

Participants' statements suggest that the school did not honor and respect their beliefs, interpersonal styles, attitudes, and behaviors as African Americans. When examining the discipline data provided by CSSD Information System Coordinator, I found that teachers in CSSD referred African American female students to administrators for reasons that reflect common stereotypes about this population. The common stereotypes of African American women from the literature include Jezebel, Mammy, Sapphire, and Strong Black Woman (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020).

Adding another lens to the female students' dress code debate, for example, Butler-Barnes et al. (2020) reported that when teachers referred to African American female students for dressing too provocatively, teachers either consciously or

unconsciously applied the Jezebel stereotype. In other words, White teachers consider African American female students were breaking the dress code by dressing provocatively. Wearing a crop top was interpreted as being provocative by White teachers because participants were showing their stomachs. As such, the provocative dress was punished. When participants were punished for dressing provocatively, they were removed from class. This removal from class made it more difficult for participants academically because the participants did not receive direct instruction from the teacher.

Precious said her teachers always looked at her to find something wrong with what she was wearing. Nekia assumed that Black girls who were bigger were subjected to more dress code referrals. She cried, "We are big and cannot hide."

Another example hints at a bias toward the tone and volume participants use when speaking with school personnel and their peers. Participants expressed that when administrators at the traditional high school asked them to stop yelling during conversations, they were not yelling; it was just the way they talked. Behaviors deemed rude and disrespectful followed a pattern of racial stereotypes about young African American women who are too loud or have a bad attitude, like the Sapphire stereotype (Blake et al., 2010; Butler-Barnes et al., 2020; Fordham, 1996; Morris, 2007). Nekia explained, "More of the Black people are getting disciplined than the White people cause the Black people, they more 'ghetto' with it." African American female students at CSSD traditional high school were referred more than any other subgroup for rude/disrespectful behaviors, including yelling at teachers. Shanice explained, "I feel like Black people come off stronger and louder. Because that's how mom is, she will yell, but she doesn't think she is yelling. It sounds like she's yelling. It is just how she talks."

Shanice mentioned that teachers need more training in interacting with African American students. She continued by saying that White teachers try to make African American students act White. A fundamental issue African American students face in school and society is whether they want to succeed in the Black community or the White community (Fordham, 1996). This struggle is highlighted in the widening trust-gap.

The Trust-Gap. The trust-gap emerges when African American students perceive that teachers and administrators treat them unfairly (Walker, 2017). Participants expressed school officials do not treat them fairly because they are African American. Some participants reported instances of perceived racial discrimination at the hands of their teachers.

The pervasive trust gap starts with the original sin of this country – slavery. Unlike Europeans who colonized America to escape oppression, Africans came in chains as enslaved people to a nation of oppressors (Redding, 1950/1973). He emphasized educators must recognize the differences in social existence between Europeans and Africans to understand the contrast in their views on racial discrimination and barriers.

While *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ended segregation, an unintended consequence following the ruling was less control of African American students' education within their communities (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). As students attended schools outside their local community, a barrier between parents and educators emerged (Cooper, 2007). African American parents distrust schools molded by generations of institutional inequality and racial discrimination (Uslaner, 2002). Public schools have a long history of racism, from funding inequities to over-policing African American students (Lynch, 2019).

African American parents intervene when discipline, respect, or safety are involved (Cooper, 2007). However, some educators view low-income mothers' culturally-based guarded stance as hostile and uncooperative (Cooper). When Nekia's sister was in high school, her mother accused an assistant principal of being racist, called him a "cracker," and spoke to him using profanity. Nekia's mother went to the board office to report the administrator for being racist. Her mother did not like the response from the superintendent and was served no-trespass papers by the sheriff's department. Nekia stated, "My mama was no longer allowed to come to the school. When she would sign me out, I would have to walk to the end of the driveway." All meetings between her mother and school officials were held at the board office, with an SRO always present.

Yeager et al. (2017) found African American students perceived racial bias in disciplinary dispositions, including expecting that they would be disciplined while their White peers are not for the same events. "Perceived bias and mistrust reinforce each other. And like a stone rolling down a hill that triggers an avalanche, the loss of trust could accumulate behavioral consequences over time" (p. 667). Participants also reported seeing and expecting disrespect and injustice. Once negatively stereotyped, the participants disengaged from school and lost trust in CSSD. They believed teachers and administrators mistreated them in the past and would continue to oppress them.

Nekia told of an incident in her Early Childhood Education class where she and a White female student argued over a seat in the classroom. The teacher accused Nekia of trying to fight the other student. The teacher "jumped down [Nekia's] throat and said you're not gonna fight." Nekia expressed that she felt the teacher mistreated her by only sending her to the office and not the other student. An administrator called Nekia's

mother about the incident. Her immediate reaction was to ask what had happened to the other student. When the administrator told Nekia's mother that she could not know what happened to the other student because of Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), she kept telling the administrator that "something had better have happened to the other girl." Under FERPA, school officials must safeguard the confidentiality of student education records (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b).

The deterioration in trust seemed to increase the likelihood of discipline infractions, creating the very social reality that triggered it (Yeager et al., 2017). The National Newspaper Publishers Association Every Student Succeeds Act (2017) reported low expectations from educators and increasing discipline disparities for misconduct add to the disparate oppression of African American students in schools nationwide, expanding the distrust for authority by students.

Socialization. Participants indicated their mothers prepared them for school and life using racial socialization. Racial socialization is how parents teach their daughters how to navigate and survive contradictory messages in the media and includes how mothers also teach their daughters what it means to be Black (Gaskin, 2015). Sometimes the lessons are intentional, and other times they are happenstance. It is apparent in the data that the participants felt their mothers had racially socialized them for success in predominantly Eurocentric school culture.

Nekia categorized herself as independent. She said, "We raised up to be independent 'cause that's how my mom was." Nekia described herself as strong-minded. She said, "I won't let nobody do me any type of way or talk to me any type of way." Her strong will and independence were evident in her reaction to teachers and administrators

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while in school. Nekia said that she would often argue with adults in the building when she felt she was slighted or misjudged. Nekia pointed out that her mother had a rough childhood. She grew up in and out of foster care. Mothers want their daughters to have a strong education and even exceed their level of education (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2014). Nekia's mother did not complete high school. Her goal was for her children to finish high school and attend college if they wanted.

Aliyah's mother regularly had conversations with her about the importance of school. Aliyah elaborated, "I was always on top of my work." She completed high school in three years instead of four.

While participants reflected on their mothers' thoughts that education was important, they also indicated that their mothers distrusted school officials in the CSSD. Smith (2010) validated the idea that African American parents distrust educators and schools to protect their children. Lower-income African American parents approach school officials with attitudes perceived by teachers and administrators as guarded and confrontational (Cooper, 2007). However, African American mothers are especially protective of their daughters when there is a possibility of discrimination (Cooper).

Social science research has acknowledged the gap in generalized trust between African Americans and White Americans (Smith, 2010). Imani expressed her mother did not like high school. Following an altercation in a science classroom, her mother withdrew her from the traditional high school. Imani's father intervened and re-enrolled Imani a couple of weeks later. When the other students involved in the class disruption were not assigned ISS, Imani said, "I guess she was mad, and she never liked this school anyway." All involved in the classroom disruption were African American, but Imani's

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mom accused the assistant principal of mistreating her daughter. The distrust among African Americans is not surprising and sprouted from a history of longstanding racism, socio-political ostracism, and discrimination (Smith, 2010; Uslaner, 2002).

Tiara's mother focused on self-worth and egalitarianism. Her mother never discouraged her from pursuing her dreams. Tiara said she wanted to be a nurse, and her mother never tried to change her mind. Tatum (1997) indicated others around us shape our self-perception through the messages we receive from them. However, Precious did not feel like her mother taught her how to have racial pride. Her mother chose to ignore discussions about race in their home. While other participants focused on their mothers, Shanice felt that her grandmother supported her more than her mother did. Her grandmother spoke with her about racial pride and self-worth. Both Imani's mother and father spoke with her about racial pride. Imani conveyed, "I am proud of my Black heritage." She said that she never tried to act White.

None of the participants mentioned racial discrimination from other students. Several participants spoke about teachers not treating all students the same. Nekia was the most outspoken about educators allowing White students to "get away" with behaviors that African American students could not. Shanice voiced that administrators target Black girls because "we are loud and draw attention to ourselves." Precious described how the dress code seemed to only apply to large Black girls. While none of the participants dropped out of high school, they communicated a lack of support because they did not feel school personnel understood where they were coming from and how their home life influenced their school behaviors.

No One Will Listen. Participants in the study frequently spoke about teachers and administrators not listening to them. Educators not providing students an outlet to tell their side of the story adds to the deficit already present in the trust gap. Aliyah shared that the school administrators never listened to her. She said that every time she was called to the office for being tardy or skipping, the administrator never asked why she broke the rule. When she was accused of threatening the other student via the texting app, she kept denying she had sent the text. The SRO and the administrator would not listen to her. Aliyah said, "It was not on my phone, but because she [the girl accusing Aliyah of threatening her] said I sent it, they took her word." Aliyah said she was angry that no one would listen to her.

Nekia talked about the incident with the Dean of Students. She said that because another teacher told him that she had used profanity toward him, he would not listen or believe her when she told him she was not cursing at him.

Tiara gave up on the school staff listening to her in her freshman year. She said that when the math teacher accused her of not taking the test. She tried to explain what she was doing. The teacher nor the administrator would listen. The administrator removed her from the classroom instead.

Lack of Paternal Support. More than one in four children live without a father (biological, step, or adoptive) in the home (Anderson et al., 2022). According to Martin et al. (2015), over 71% of African American babies are born to unwed mothers, and 57% of children are fatherless (Winquist et al., 2001). An absent father is not present in the life of his child, whether it is emotionally, physically, or both. Most single-parent homes are single-mother homes (Martin et al., 2015).

A fundamental cause for the disproportionate behavior problems among African American students living in single-mother homes is the challenges in balancing the demands of work and family (McLoyd et al., 2008). Gillette and Gudmunson (2013) concluded in a study of 532 subjects a fatherless home leads to economic stress in a family. The literature indicated that parents miss work to stay home with their suspended child, damaging the school-family relationship (Losen, 2013). However, the participants in this study did not stay at home with their mothers. Because they lived in single-parent households, the parent could not afford to miss work for multiple days. Instead, the students either stayed home alone or stayed with extended family members. Each participant in the study mentioned her mother working while she was suspended.

Lack of paternal involvement in an African American youth's life can result in adverse outcomes, including perceived abandonment (Allen & Daly, 2007). Robinson and Harris (2014) described parental involvement as

> Practices that entail parent communication with their children about
> education, beliefs, or behaviors parents hold or engage in with the
> exclusive aim of increasing academic outcomes and parental engagement
> with schools and teachers. (p. 4).

Teenagers raised without their fathers may resent fatherly figures due to perceived estrangement (Poehlmann, 2005). Teenagers' feelings of lack of trust and heightened sense of anger may increase which makes making it difficult for them to create relationships (Poehlmann, 2005). Aliyah and Tiara revealed having anger issues. The anger issues were not always loud and rowdy. Shanice spoke about silent anger that builds up over time. This quiet anger becomes volatile for her. Imani and Tiara indicated

they are quick to anger. Schwartz (2004) substantiated the connection between being fatherless and having anger issues with tendencies toward violence. Schwartz described the coping mechanisms of fatherless young women to reduce violent responses when provoked eroded.

When a father leaves or is not involved in a child's upbringing, the child creates her own scenario and blames themselves (Baker, 2008). This blame leads to self-esteem issues. Tiara's father left shortly after she came home from the hospital. She questioned what would have made him stay throughout her childhood. Aliyah's father went to prison when she was three. When he was released from prison, Aliyah said, "My dad, he still wasn't there." Nekia's father was in and out of jail. She does not trust him and has no meaningful relationship with him. Shanice never lived in the same house as her father. She knows who her father is and talks to him occasionally. Precious's relationship with her father is "kind of iffy" and "not a real strong relationship" because she typically does not talk to him. Imani had the strongest paternal relationship of all the participants. Imani did not grow up living in the same house as her father, but she did see her father once or twice a month. Imani moved to live with her father when she was a 9th grader.

Establishing and continuing strong friendships was hard for most of the participants. Nekia admitted she only had two friends in school. Everyone else she called associates. Nekia described a friend as "somebody that you can count on or a shoulder to lean on when you call; they are there." Shanice said, "I'm not really big like on friends. Like I have my people I talk to." She kept her life private and remained socially isolated at school, and mostly hung out with her cousins at home. Imani did not want to make friends when she moved to Center System schools during her 9th-grade year. Because she

moved so frequently in elementary and middle school, Imani was not interested in starting new friendships and put walls up around herself. Thomas (2018) reaffirmed in her book, *Fatherless Daughters*, that daughters of absent fathers find it difficult to form lasting relationships. Participants referred to the people they hung out with as associates. The relationships described by the participants were superficial.

Researchers have found a connection between fatherlessness and poor academic performance for African American young women (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2013; Poehlmann, 2005; Schwartz, 2004). African American young women may perceive their future as stressful based on their childhood. In Gillette and Gudmunson's (2013) study, young African American women living in fatherless homes suffering economic stress choose employment after high school rather than post-secondary education based on survival instinct. The study results showed African American women who grew up fatherless and in an economic crisis decided to have a paycheck was more stable than getting a college education. Four of the six participants in this study graduated from high school and immediately entered the workforce. Imani worked at a clothing store in the mall. Precious worked at a meat processing plant. Aliyah worked at a pharmacy. Justice worked at a coffee shop. Nekia worked from the time she turned 16 and planned to work while attending a technical college. Tiara will continue taking classes at Southern Regional College in the fall and did not mention getting a job.

All the participants told stories about growing up without their fathers. Some participants had scheduled contact with their fathers. Others had minimal contact with their fathers. With the exception of Imani, the participants expressed a lack of support from their fathers. Each participant discussed their fathers having children from multiple

women. None of the participants spoke about a relationship with their half-siblings from their father's side.

Power of One

While racial bias contributes to strained relationships, the findings of this research are in sync with Ispa-Landa's (2018) and Skiba et al.'s (2014) notions that racial bias decreases as stronger relationships between teachers and students develop outside the classroom. Implicit bias decreases as teachers get to know their students (Latimore et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2014; Wirtz, 2021). When teachers make an effort to show students they are interested in them, students sense that teachers care, which helps them become successful and more motivated to attend school (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). da Luz (2015) also found that teachers making a personal connection with students increases a students' intrinsic motivation. Sanders et al. (2016) reported students were more successful when teachers demonstrated they were committed to them and accepted them when others in the school had rejected them.

All participants in the study had at least one teacher with whom they developed a strong relationship. The participants reported not getting in trouble or receiving referrals to the office in those teachers' classes because of the strength of the relationships. Shanice did not indicate she had a strong relationship with any teacher in the school after her 9th grade year.

Participants in the study reflected on the impact at least one adult in the building had on their success. When an educator pays attention to a student, it might be the first time a teacher has shown interest in her, and she may begin to feel optimism about her future (Wirtz, 2021). I have given the teachers and administrators pseudonyms.

Imani bonded with her science teacher, Ms. Grisham, and her math teacher, Ms. Butler. Imani liked that even though she fought in Ms. Grisham's class, it did not change their dynamic. She said, "Ms. Grisham never held a grudge against me for the way I acted that day in her class." Ms. Butler was always there for Imani. Imani felt like she could tell Ms. Butler anything, and it would remain confidential.

Shanice shared that Ms. Rogers had the most significant impact on her in school. She taught CTAE elective courses. Shanice said, "I loved that class. I only took it when she was there. I feel like she just had a better connection with her students. I was so sad when she left." Shanice did not bond any other teacher she connected with while in high school. Ms. Rogers left at the end of Shanice's sophomore year.

Students exposed to high levels of prolonged, widespread risk can build resilience through ordinary encounters with their teachers (Martin et al., 2015). Nekia described such encounters when she shared thoughts about her American Literature teacher. She said,

> It's like with Ms. Martin's class; she's hard on you, but she was hard on you because she knew that you could do it and that you have the potential to do it. So, it's like with her; she's to some of us, a mom at school...She makes sure that we are doing good. She makes sure that we have no discipline problems, even if we're not in her class. While we were in her class, like most of us in her class last year, she made sure we stayed on our work and were not skipping her class. No phones were coming out in her class. When we are in the hallway, she made sure you told her what's

going on about our day and stuff. I will say that I probably got the closest

relationship with her.

These daily encounters in the hallway and in the classroom were ordinary but kept Nekia

"straight". Educators are responsible for acting as surrogate parents to show students that

education is essential in hopes that the students will agree and continue being engaged in

school (Sanders et al., 2016).

Nekia mentioned the second person she connected with would be her math

teacher, Ms. Butler. Nekia said, "I love that lady to death of me. She is nice. She knows

how to put up with my attitude. She knows when I have my attitude; she is like, 'Oh, don't

mess with her. She got an attitude right now."

Precious shared the same love and respect as Imani and Nekia did for the math

teacher. Precious said, "Ms. Butler made a difference in my life cause she actually got to

know me. It was like we never really got into it; I never got in trouble in her class like we

were just always cool. She was a good teacher too. She gets along with everybody. It's

her personality too like she's just nice and like she helps you out a lot."

Precious also reflected on her relationship with the Dean of Students, Mr. Dunbar.

He took time to let her sit in his office and calm down. He listened to what was "going on

in her life." Precious said, "He knows my whole family. He calls himself the granddaddy

and great-granddaddy of all the students in the school. He was either the principal or

assistant principal here when my mama was in school." Mr. Dunbar met with Precious

when her grades began to drop. She felt he acknowledged she needed support

academically, but his ties with the community helped him understand that there were

many factors contributing to her low grades. When a teacher acknowledges the risks

students face outside of school, students are more likely to remain engaged at school (Sanders et al., 2016). Additionally, for students to remain engaged, teachers are more successful in meeting the needs of at-risk students when they move beyond traditional roles and help compensate for the relational resources missing in their lives (Sanders et al., 2016).

Aliyah remembered her science teacher, Ms. Smith, as "her person." Ms. Smith taught regular and resource science courses at the traditional high school. She said,

> Ms. Smith, my eleventh-grade year, before I went to the alternative
> school…I don't even think I was in school for two months. Yeah, I fell in
> love with Ms. Smith. I don't know why. She came to my graduation. She
> always checked on me when I was at the alternative school. She would
> help me with my earth science class even though I was at the alternative
> school. Yeah, she was good to help then too.

Aliyah described Ms. Mobley as having a significant impact on her also. Ms. Mobley was the director of the alternative school and former traditional high school counselor.

> Ms. Mobley helped me out a lot; she really wanted me to go to college. I
> think that's probably one of my favorite administrators. I see Ms. Mobley
> now, you know, she'll still reach out asking if I still wanted to try to go to
> Spelman. She told me she'd pay for everything for me to go to Spelman,
> but I don't think college is for me. Ms. Mobley is why I graduated a year
> early. She was always on top of me, gave me work, just threw it at me
> like, do this so you can graduate early. I believe in you.

Aliyah was a virtual student at the alternative school. She had to visit the alternative school in person once a week. It was during this time that Aliyah met with Ms. Mobley. McDaniel (2014) recommended teachers foster a sense of community and inclusivity on a classroom level. While Aliyah was not on campus, Ms. Mobely acknowledged her as a part of the school community. Teachers who are influential with students build a relationship based on trust, mutual respect, and a genuine desire to instruct students the best they can (Bottiani et al., 2016; Latimore et al., 2017; Wirtz, 2021).

Tiara described Mr. Gibbs as her favorite teacher. He taught her literature class in tenth grade. Tiara said, "Mr. Gibbs made it fun. He made it exciting, like ok, I'm ready to go to his class and learn. For example, in my sophomore year, in Mr. Gibbs's class, we had a quiz every day, and you had to read." Tiara shared her love of reading. She said,

> You had to read and then do the reading log. He would quiz you about
> what we read. We would also watch videos and stuff and then have a class
> discussion about what we just watched. We debated, and, like, that's so
> much fun. We would have to type paragraphs, and I didn't have a problem
> with that. We were actually doing something that was entertaining and
> wasn't boring.

Tiara talked about Mr. Gibbs meeting with each student individually at the beginning of the year to find out what motivated them and what activities they were interested in pursuing. Mr. Gibbs, like the other school personnel mentioned by the participants, made meaningful connections with his students.

Hattie (2003) wrote the way a teacher treats a student demonstrates whether the teacher respects the students as learners and people and whether the teacher cares and is committed to the students. An expert teacher recognizes possible learning obstacles and seeks ways to overcome these obstacles (Hattie). A teacher must be receptive to the needs of the students (Hattie, 2003; Sanders et al., 2016), and participants described teachers with these characteristics as their strongest allies. An essential adult in a student's life can potentially play a vital role in supporting the student who brings all her baggage to school daily (Sanders et al., 2016). Student engagement is more favorable if the student has a positive relationship with teachers (Martin et al., 2015; Sanders et al., 2016; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Support from adults is the foundation for student engagement and is critical for students to remain present in school (Yazzie-Mintz), an idea participants supported as they described who helped them persevere and graduate despite their academic and behavioral adversities.

Fighting to Survive

Society traditionally views aggressive women as deviant and an abomination of feminine nature (Denson et al., 2018; Lombroso & Ferrero, 1895; Pollak, 1950). The African American female participants in this study lived in low-income neighborhoods while in high school. Five of the six participants in this study fought at some point during their K12 schooling. Brown (2003) argued that in areas where racism and poverty interlock, African American women use fighting to ensure protection and survival.

The participants discussed fights and altercations they had participated in as teenagers. Precious and Shanice said they did not think the schools could stop girls from fighting. Precious fought at school once, boosting or encouraging others to fight with

three others, and threatened to fight a student. Precious remarked that children "are not mature enough" and "they don't know how to just leave it alone or just ignore it." Aliyah never fought at school or at a school event; however, she said students are going to fight, and school officials cannot stop them.

Students who do not intend to fight feel they have to fight to save their reputation (Dance, 2002). Dance wrote African American students show the world their tough exteriors to circumnavigate the multidimensional interactions between the world's assumptions about them and the actual situations surrounding their lives. Shanice fought in middle school and in high school. Shanice stated, "I try to avoid fighting and try to stop other people from doing that type of stuff because I know it's not right but still, I ain't gone let nobody feel like they can bully somebody."

Similarly, Tiara is not one to walk away from confrontations but usually manages to avoid fights because, in general, she is easygoing. Tiara's first fight was in the school cafeteria. She passed by three adults to go to the other student. Tiara shared, "If you don't fight, you are labeled a snitch and weak." She conveyed, "[Students] are just not gonna walk away. Because people really hold that against you." The participants alluded to a label that being weak can result in other young women trying to fight a snitch. The participants viewed fighting as a way to improve their safety rather than to endanger it.

Shanice added girls generally fight at school because "they know if they go at it in public, weapons could be involved" and "mothers could join the fight also." As a result, students predominantly bring neighborhood fights to the school. From my own experience at CSSD traditional high school, students, who live within a block from each other, have waited until they are at school to fight rather than fighting in their

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neighborhood. Tiara said that to bring a fight to a woman's home is total disrespect and can often lead to the mother coming out to fight also. Mothers' steadfast commitment to their daughters' safety also encourages the daughters to escalate the violence because of the assurance of reinforcements (Ness, 2010). The dual generational dynamic is often an essential feature of fighting in low-income communities (Ness).

Being feminine is equated with being docile, fragile, and White (Morris, 2007). In contrast, African American girls defend themselves against real and perceived threats through physical and verbal confrontations because they do not have the luxury of being docile (Morris, 2007). Unlike White and middle-class women, African American women do not defy the feminine norms or social expectations of their neighborhoods where aggression is considered normal (Anderson, 1994). Instead of being encouraged to ignore others who disrespect them, the participants' mothers have taught them not to back down when someone disrespects them. Nekia's mother has told her on more than one occasion to fight her own battle and stand her ground.

Participants noted that fighting is the only way to communicate sometimes. Nekia attested, "At some point, every girl fights. I don't know a girl that hasn't fought except those trying to act White." Following a fight, administrators will ask the students why they did not tell someone they had a conflict. All the participants in the study said telling an adult about the possibility of a fight would result in being labeled a snitch. A common remark from the participants in this study was they were told not to back down from a fight by their mothers. Three of the participants said their mothers told them not to start a fight at school but not to walk away from a fight either.

African American female students display force to build a reputation as someone not to bother. Tiara, Shanice, and Nekia said that being known as a good fighter has great value to them. Reputation and popularity save African American female students from constantly fighting. However, all fights are not related to self-defense; students may use fights to make a statement about who they are. Nekia shared, "When a girl loses a fight, it's going happen again because doesn't want to go down in history as losing." Shanice explained, "Girls use fighting to prove they ain't scared." Worse than losing a fight is walking away from a fight. Tiara commented that other girls would say, "Oh, you better hurry. You scared." According to the participants, a reputation as being a good fighter earns African American women respect in their communities.

Cell Phones and Social Media

Cell phones have created a medium for students to record and share fights. Nekia said, "You know when a fight is getting ready to happen because you see a group with their cell phones out, ready to record." Tiara commented, "You see people recording before a fight even happens like people are already knowing that it's about to happen, and they will be the ones boosting a fight up." Elsaesser (2021) corroborated the participants' opinions in her study about social media. "Internet banging" is the term used to describe the taunts and "disses" between competing groups. Livestreaming, commenting, video sharing, and tagging escalate conflicts (Elsaesser). When someone "slides-up" on her posting and makes a derogatory comment or screenshots of one of her postings on Snapchat, Imani feels that is enough to warrant a fight. Benson (2016) substantiated that Black girls do not like for others to screenshot or troll their social media postings.

Shanice mentioned seeing a Snapchat video of a fight at Center System's traditional high school the week before our second interview. African American female students fought in the commons area during the first lunch period. An administrator was walking two students away from a verbal confrontation when a group of four other students ran up and began punching the students walking with the administrator. Shanice remarked that she "could not believe that was going on at the schoolhouse." Ranney and Mello (2011) contended that female adolescents are more likely to fight in response to a previous verbal altercation. Teenagers are defined by their peers and through their peer groups (Elsaesser, 2021). Elsaesser said that teenagers are very attuned to slights to their reputations, making it difficult to resolve social media conflicts peaceably.

African American female students fight for various reasons. From my observations as an assistant principal in the traditional high school, the most frequent reason that African American female students physically fight is not liking the way a person looks at them. Participants gave reasons such as someone rolling her eyes at them or insulting their mother, being loyal to friends, or fighting over their love interest. Ness (2010) found that "loyalty is in fact pledged to a wide range of associates, though sometimes only on a very temporary basis" (p.41). Shanice had someone's back in one of her fights. Shanice shared that the fight she was involved in after the basketball game was not about an issue she had with any of the participants. She fought to show support for her friend. Women share an understanding that talking to someone else's love interest is forbidden and enough to start a fight. In April 2022, a group of more than 10 females met at an apartment complex to fight. Tiara and Shanice were present and participated. Girls ranging in age from 15 to 24 were in the parking lot fighting. The girls fought over one

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girl stealing another's girlfriend, and ultimately it was so large because of loyalty. The fight was both live streamed and recorded. It was then posted on YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat.

Self-Defense

Students regularly use self-defense as a reason for fighting. Tiara was the only participant to claim self-defense when questioned about her second fight. Tiara described how the other fighter struck her with the flag football belt. She felt justified in hitting the other girl back. According to Georgia state law, it is not illegal to fight as long as the person is defending herself (Tagami, 2017). The Georgia Supreme Court ruled that school districts must allow students to use self-defense as a defense and not automatically apply zero-tolerance policies (Tagami). However, the court left the burden of proof to the student and not the school district (Tagami). Tiara did not convince the tribunal panel that she acted in self-defense. As a result, the tribunal panel placed Tiara at the alternative school for a nine-week grading period.

Conflict Resolution and Restorative Practices

The literature references conflict resolution and peer mediation as a resource to prevent or reduce fighting (Bickmore, 2001). Peer mediation includes participants talking through their disputes with the help of trained students as mediators (Johnson et al., 1992). Conflict resolution requires students who disagree to sit face to face and talk so each point of view is heard and then create a solution together (Lee & Williamson, 2015). However, girls have to agree to participate in mediation. Participants in this study reported talking to a counselor would not have prevented any of the fights they participated in at the time. Tiara said that girls would meet and act like everything is fine

in the guidance office and then post something on social media as soon as they leave the meeting. The point of conflict resolution is to address facts, feelings, and the future by allowing students to be heard, develop new ways of thinking, and enable students to create their own solutions (Lee & Williamson).

Participants reflected that fighting is a ubiquitous action. Students (male and female) generally choose to begin a fight in front of adults at school because they know the adults will intervene and break up the fight (Johns & Carr, 1996). I personally observed two fights during the 2021-2022 school year, where the students stood yelling at each other for over a minute. When adults walked up to them to intervene, the students began throwing punches. The losing student oftentimes attempts to go after the other fighter after being separated in order to appear tough.

Discussion and Conclusions

The fundamental belief underlying CRT is that in the public school system, racism is present and is manifested when educators use value-based judgment to control African American students' behaviors and determine what is considered acceptable (Wirtz, 2021). When educators do not apply the same judgments and expectations to all students, the relationship between educators and students is damaged (Wirtz). Utilizing BFT allowed the participants to describe how racism affected them as African American women.

The purpose of this study was to investigate African American female students' perceptions of exclusionary discipline and the impact exclusionary discipline had on their education.in selected rural South Georgia schools. Notably, the study focused on African American female students' life, school, and discipline experiences, and the goal was to

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guide others in reducing gender and racial bias in school discipline. I recruited six African American current or former female students between the ages of 18-19 from a South Georgia school district.

The following research question guided this study:

RQ - What are the life and school experiences of African American female students with exclusionary discipline in selected rural South Georgia schools?

I interviewed six African American female participants' about their experiences with discipline in high school. I used an open-ended interview guide (Appendix E) for with each participant. During the first interview, I focused the questions and discussions on the participant's life and school experiences. I wanted to learn about the disciplinary event(s) that led to the participant being suspended from school in the second interview. The participants reviewed interview transcripts to verify accuracy. I made corrections to the transcripts as requested by the participants.

I used three data collection methods: interviews, documents (school attendance, enrollment, academic and discipline documents), and memos of my thoughts on the research. Data analysis included coding, categorizing, and reflective writing. The data collected through the interviews led to conclusions about the perceptions that these six participants had about discipline practices in their schools. General discipline data reports from the schools, parent/teacher handbooks, and board system policies provided information about the schools and expectations for student behavior.

Narrative inquiry approach guided the data analysis process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I paid specific attention to meaning and purpose (Clandinin & Connelly). I addressed the trustworthiness of the study by collecting enough data to

provide rich, thick descriptions and conducting member checks to identify researcher bias.

Data analysis started with listening to the audio recordings and transcribing the interviews. I read the transcripts line by line and took notes in my journal. In my first round of coding, I used In Vivo coding. This allowed me to highlight the participants' voices (Saldaña, 2016). During the second phase of coding, I generated codes. This coding cycle included recognizing events, phrases, or behaviors and distinguishing them with codes (Given, 2008). I then condensed the codes into broader categories (Saldaña, 2016). Further analysis of categories allowed for the development of themes (Patton, 2015). I developed three significant themes from the data: strained relationships, power of one, and fighting to survive.

Research Question: Summary Discussion

This section connects the research question to the study's findings through the three themes. I also connected the question to the related literature in order to comprehensively examine African American women's experiences with exclusionary discipline.

RQ - What are the life and school experiences of African American female students with exclusionary discipline in selected rural South Georgia schools?

Participants shared their personal histories in the first interview and their school discipline experiences in the second interview. These stories disclosed the specifics essential to answer the research question. Narrative inquiry provided a way to better understand African American female students and how they change as students and adults (Bell, 2002).

All participants attended CSSD traditional high school at some point in grades 9-12. Five participants grew up in South Georgia. Nekia lived in Florida and Michigan before moving to South Georgia as a 7th grader. The participants grew up in single-parent homes with their mothers. Imani moved to live with her father and stepmother when she entered high school. Tiara's mother remarried when she was a senior in high school. All participants conveyed that their grandparents were a significant part of their childhood and adolescent years. Five spoke fondly of their maternal grandparents. After living with her grandmother in Michigan, Nekia harbored ill feelings towards her.

Each participant had experiences as a child that affected her school enrollment. Tiara developed a disease that required hospitalization and home-schooling. Nekia was homeless and lived in a car with her mother. Tiara, Imani, Aliyah, and Precious enrolled in the school system later from somewhere else. Tiara began school in a neighboring system and enrolled in the CSSD system as a 7th grader. Imani entered the school system as a freshman. Precious entered the CSSD as a 3rd grader. Aliyah bounced between a neighboring school system and CSSD. Shanice was required to live with her grandmother for one year and attend a strict, Black, Christian school. The following year, Shanice returned to CSSD. None of the participants' mothers attended CSSD as a student. Five attended a rival neighboring school system. Except for Imani, the participants mentioned their mothers enrolling them in CSSD because it focused more on academics than neighboring school systems.

All participants had mothers that worked outside the home. When the mother worked, family members were left to take care of the students. Imani, Precious, and Nekia had older siblings to help care for them while their mothers worked, Tiara and

Aliyah had grandparents to look after them while their mothers worked, and Shanice stayed with older cousins. Five of the participants did not have a strong relationship with their fathers. Imani saw her father once or twice a month and eventually moved to live with him when she entered 9th grade. The other participants have no memories of ever living with their fathers.

Earlier studies about girls who grow up in single-parent homes indicated that girls feel the need to work because of economic stress (Gillette & Gudmunson, 2013). Gillette and Gudmunson also reported feeling safe is more important than education. Participant responses in this study mirrored these ideas. After completing high school, Imani worked at a clothing store in the mall. She planned to begin classes at a technical college in the fall of 2022. Precious enrolled in the cosmetology program at a technical college and began working at a meat production plant. Aliyah worked at a meat production plant and then switched to Walgreens. She planned to start classes through Walgreens to become a pharmacy lab technician. Shanice worked at a coffee shop. She wanted to start school in January 2022 but had not applied to any school. Nekia worked at Walmart and began cosmetology classes in the fall of 2022. Tiara continued taking nursing courses at a technical college.

Three of the participants played basketball in high school, although only Tiara completed a season. Imani, Precious, and Nekia took dance classes while in high school. Five of the six students completed a pathway while in school. Imani completed a pathway in Fine Arts. Aliyah completed a pathway in Business Management and Administration. Shanice completed a pathway in Education and Training. Tiara completed two pathways:

Education and Training and Health Science. Nekia completed a pathway in Education and Training. Precious did not complete a pathway.

Strained relationship theme was generated after listening to the students describe their relationships and their mothers' relationships with personnel in CSSD. Although the mothers recognized CSSD as being strong academically, according to the participants, their mothers did not like or respect the choices made regarding school discipline. Finally, the theme of fighting to survive was constructed from the students talking about interactions with other students and educators in CSSD. Administrators, teachers, and counselors may want students to tell them about ongoing conflicts, but it is not in the nature of the participants to divulge anything for fear of being viewed as weak and labeled a snitch.

I framed this study through the lenses of CRT and BFT. The experiences of the participants aligned with both of these theories. The most fundamental notion of BFT is that race and gender are integrated such that racial identity accompanies gender identity (Higginbotham, 1992). The female participants in this study noticed the racial and gender disparity as they navigated through high school. They felt the effects of not being men and not being White. Students reported the code of conduct and, more specifically, the dress code was written against girls and enforced more strongly against African American girls. The stereotypes (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020) applied to African American women were experienced by the participants. Educators applied the Jezebel stereotype (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020) when clothing was too tight or too revealing. Teenagers are adept at detecting unfair treatment based on bias and stereotyping, and these perceptions,

in turn, may cause disengagement in school (Gregory et al., 2017). These concepts were highlighted in the strained relationships theme.

A fundamental belief of CRT is that institutional policies and practices benefit one racial group over all others (Anyon et al., 2018). Bell (1980), Delgado and Stefancic (2017), and others led the CRT movement in the mid-1970s. CRT contends most racism remains hidden beneath a facade of normality. However, CRT is used by educators to identify and challenge the microaggressions that minorities experience (Yosso et al., 2004). CRT is grounded in the unique experiences of minority races and challenges White experiences as the standard (Ladson-Billings, 2016b; Taylor, 2016).

Five of the six participants experienced changes to the educational landscape during the COVID-19 shutdown. Three were juniors in the spring of 2020: Imani, Precious, and Shanice. Tiara and Nekia were sophomores when the school went virtual. Aliyah graduated in 2019, a year ahead of her classmates. All of the participants graduated and received their high school diplomas.

In March 2020, when the school doors closed and lessons were assigned virtually, many participants admitted that they did not do any schoolwork. The teachers began implementing lessons taught virtually. The students in the CSSD high schools already had 1:1 access to Chromebooks. However, the students in rural areas did not have Wi-Fi access. CSSD sent vans to the community libraries with hotspots on the vans for students to access their lessons. CSSD also provided hotspot internet access in the board office parking lot. Although 90% of African American students have home internet access, 11% only have access to the internet through a smartphone (Cai, 2020). School districts in Georgia have the opportunity to democratize learning with high-speed internet because

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the internet offers students access to unlimited information (Evans, 2019). Yet, students in the Black Belt of Georgia are nearly twice as likely to lack access to high-speed internet (Evans, 2019).

Imani and Nekia lived in a small rural community about 20 minutes from the school. While the public library in their community was closer than the school, it was still more than two miles from their houses. Precious, Shanice, and Tiara had city addresses. If they needed access to the internet at the CSSD board office, it was within a couple of miles. The distance was still great for students without access to a vehicle and would have required Shanice and Tiara to cross a major four lane highway if walking. Precious lived within a half mile of the CSSD board office. CSSD did not want to punish students for not having access to the internet, so a decision was made system-wide that students who were passing up until March 2020 would not receive a grade lower than 70 for the 4th nine-week period.

In the fall of 2020, schools opened a month later than the usual first Monday of August. CSSD gave students and parents several options to help meet the needs of their families. Students could complete classes in person, using a hybrid model of teachers in the CSSD system teaching via Zoom or through a virtual school platform. Imani, Precious, and Nekia returned to CSSD traditional high school in person. Shanice and Tiara opted for the hybrid model of learning from their teachers via Zoom and completed assignments through Google Classroom.

Only one of the participants said her suspension impacted her thoughts about dropping out. Shanice said after her suspension in January 2020, she did not really care about school. While Shanice had always been a B and C student, her grades did drop to

include Fs. Her attendance also deteriorated. During the 1st nine weeks of school in fall of 2020, Shanice failed 5 out of 7 classes. Most of the grades in her courses were zeros. According to CSSD policy, teachers are not to give students a grade lower than 60 for the 1st nine-week grading period. By receiving a 60, students will have a better chance of passing if they show improvement during the three remaining grading periods. Shanice returned to in-person classes for the second nine-week period. Her grades improved, and she passed 5 out of 7 classes. Shanice ended up only failing two classes for the year. These courses were not required for graduation but did keep her from meeting admission requirements to schools within the University of Georgia System. Shanice said that the shutdown happened soon after her suspension for taking the girl's money. She lacked the desire to do any schoolwork and lost all motivation.

The other participants struggled to maintain good grades during the middle of the pandemic. Imani missed at least 23 days during the first semester before her suspension in the 2020-2021 school year. She failed two classes in the 1st nine-weeks. Imani's grades improved once she enrolled and began completing coursework at the alternative school. She passed all of her classes and was able to graduate with her cohort. Imani shared, "All of the downtime and fluff was removed." She simply had to complete the assignments at her own pace.

During the 1st nine-week period of 2020-2021, Precious missed anywhere from 16 to 32 classes. Teachers take attendance by class period, so the number of classes missed varies. Precious opted to take classes using the hybrid model at the beginning of the second nine-week period. Precious failed six classes and only passed Forensics. At the end of the semester, Precious and her mother knew she needed to make a change if she

was going to graduate. Precious applied and was accepted into CSSD charter high school. The counselor at the charter school assigned Precious the minimum number of classes for her to graduate with her original cohort. Precious focused on the four classes: an ELA class, two math classes, and a science class. In total during her high school years, Precious served 25 days in ISS and 3 days OSS. Her grades dropped each time she was suspended. Precious said, "I need to be in the classroom to learn. I cannot learn in ISS." I found it interesting that she opted for remote learning when she so felt so strongly that she could not learn while in ISS.

Tiara's mother was fearful of her students catching COVID-19, so she kept Tiara and her twin sister at home. Tiara struggled with her American Literature class due to the remote learning style. At the end of the first semester, Tiara had 1 A, 2 B's, 3 C's, and 1 F. Tiara returned to in-person learning at the end of the first semester. Her grades rapidly improved. She had 6 A's and 1 B for the 4th nine weeks and ended the year with 2 A's, 3 B's, and 2 C's. Tiara admitted that virtual learning was not for her.

One of the coping strategies mentioned by the participants was the importance of having an adult in the building that supported them, which was highlighted in the theme power of one. While the participants mentioned a lack of connection with the school, all of the participants mentioned at least one staff member that positively impacted their lives. Yazzie-Mintz (2007) indicated that support from adults is critical for students to remain present in school and is a foundation for student engagement. Looking at where that adult support came from, participants reported feeling the most support from teachers and the least support from administrators.

Secondly, African American female students cope to reduce the likelihood of being suspended is by adopting a race-less persona. Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) defined being race-less as "the absence of behavioral and attitudinal characteristics related to a particular race" (p. 12). Fordham (1988) described race-less for African American women as denying who they are and adopting the characteristics of the White culture. Students practice silence to get ahead in class (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Participants mentioned not talking in some teachers' classes. The students wanted to blend in and not call attention to themselves. Rather than viewing students' behaviors and attitudes as a response to the microaggressions the African American women faced, educators interpret the behavior as obedience (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

Implications

The data collected from participants through individual interviews sought to answer the research question about the experiences of African American female high school students dealing with racial disparity and exclusionary discipline practices. The data collected through the interviews led to the conclusions about the perceptions that these six students had about discipline disproportionality and discipline practices in CSSD. This section will discuss implications for educators and teacher preparation programs based on the findings of the study in hopes of leading to possible changes in discipline practices in schools as well as potential policy changes.

Implications for Educators

The voices of the African American participants about experiencing teacher bias and racism in school could foster activism within schools. Their views can inform educational reform in teachers locally and regionally. The participants had insights that

merit the attention and responses of educators who hold decision-making power. Clearly, the African American female participants expressed feeling discriminated against with their experiences in school.

There is clearly a need for educators to become cognizant and more sensitive to the unique needs of African American female students who come from challenging backgrounds during their high school years. Because the majority of teachers in the United States are White women (Will, 2020), they are unaware of the reasons why African American students behave as they do. They do not understand that the student behaviors considered inappropriate at school are crucial for survival in the homes and communities. Educators base their code of conduct on White, middle-class norms (Horton-Williams, 2020). African American female students are doomed to fail because they have not been taught the skills necessary to survive in the school setting (Horton-Williams, 2020). According to Ladson-Billings (1995b), African American students are blamed and punished for things they do not know. Educators should provide students with acceptable alternative behaviors instead of punishing them for social norms they have not been taught.

Because freshman year is a difficult period of transition for many students, extra precautions should be implemented during the entire freshmen year to support students in adjusting to high school (Swayne, 2018). In addition to offering tutoring for academically struggling students, educators should also provide onsite counseling services for students. School counselors spend the majority of their time creating course schedules and are not trained to provide the psychological counseling that would serve the needs of African American female students (Whaley, 2001).

Administrators are tasked with being instructional leaders as well as disciplinarians in schools. Administrators should be the last line of defense when classroom infractions occur but are regularly used as the first line of defense by teachers (Anderson, 2018). Too often, administrators are not giving students a voice, and they only believe what teachers tell them. Administrators do not give students the same opportunity to tell their side of the story and are being disciplined by administrators based on one side of the story. Administrators need to properly investigate these situations and provide students with their right to due process.

To help African American female students experience success, administrators must look beyond White-centric approaches and design a program to meet the needs of this specific population (Hyland, 2005). Creativity and new ways of examining problems are required of administrators. Schools and classrooms must become more inclusive and less exclusive. Principals and other administrators should be visible and should attempt to get to know as many students on a personal basis as possible.

School districts need to offer gender and racial bias training to all school level staff in order "to root out discriminatory discipline practices" (Smith-Evans et al., 2014, p. 39) and guarantee that schools are not damaging the success of African American female students (Smith-Evans et al.). All educators and staff members need training to identify signs of distress that may be underlying perceived disrespectful behavior (Rahimi et al., 2021). District personnel and administrators should regularly audit the discipline data and policies at all grade levels K12 (Chapman & Hatt, 2021). Chapman and Hatt recommended districts review discipline data by student subgroups and report them to all stakeholders to determine a plan to address them.

Implications for Teacher Preparation Programs

Nearly 80% of public school teachers and 68% of school administrators are White, according to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019). In rural areas, 89% of teachers are White. According to Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017), African American women comprise approximately 5% of the U.S. teacher workforce. In 2017-2018, African Americans comprised only 7% of schoolteachers (NCES, 2019). In addition, 11% of school principals were African American (NCES).

First, teacher preparation programs need to recruit more African American teachers. The idea that the teacher workforce needs more diversification is not new (Blazar, 2022). Ladson-Billings (1995b) supported the claim that it benefited African American students to have African American teachers. In order to recruit African American teachers, Blazar (2022) recommended exposing potential teachers to the Career Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) Education and Training program of study while students are still in high school. This provides students with the opportunity to learn more about teaching as a career. Students completing the pathway would gain real-world experience in the classroom and could potentially earn college credits through technical colleges.

Second, teacher preparation programs need to include culturally responsive pedagogy in the curriculum. Culturally responsive pedagogy connects students' culture and life experiences with what they learn in school (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). These connections help students access rigorous curricula and develop higher-level academic skills (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). By utilizing culturally responsive teaching, educators can better meet students' needs. African American students and other students

of color face implicit bias because of their race, culture, or language, and their needs usually go undetected (Okonofua et al., 2016). Diversity should be a continual thread during the teacher preparation programs.

Empathy training can influence how teachers handle discipline situations (Okonofua et al., 2016). Professional development needs to be continuous. Fenning and Jenkins (2018) reported a teacher trained to be empathetic is less punitive in their solutions to discipline incidents and less likely to label students as troublemakers. Culturally responsive teaching builds empathy because it allows teachers and students to understand diverse perspectives. Students feel valued when they see themselves represented in the curriculum. This value gives students a sense of belonging.

Delimitations

One delimitation is the small sample size. I narrowed this study to the narratives of six African American female participants who attended schools in one rural South Georgia school district. The school district selected had three high schools: traditional, charter, and alternative. The study recorded the experiences of African American female students who graduated from high school and not students who had dropped out of school. Other delimitations included age, race, and gender.

Limitations

Recognizing the limitations of a study adds to its trustworthiness (Patton, 2015). Because the participants were all African American, transferability to other racial groups could be a limitation. Findings from this study are only generalizable to other school districts with a comparable population and similar discipline code of conduct.

For unknown reasons, many former students did not answer the email. I interviewed two participants virtually in the fall of 2021 because of COVID-19 related issues. I utilized FaceTime to complete the virtual interviews. I could see participants' faces and expressions. I interviewed one participant (Shanice) in person for the first interview and during the second interview; she decided she would rather answer questions via email.

My personal bias was a limitation. According to Milner (2008), a researcher must be aware of the role of her racial positionality and the positionality of others to avoid possible harm to persons of color. I acknowledge that my experiences with school discipline may influence or bias my thoughts and opinions. Collecting thick, detailed data and utilizing member checking allowed me to limit my biases. I provided thorough background narratives for each participant. Following each interview, I emailed each participant a copy of her interview transcript to verify her responses in a member-checking process.

I began collecting data in August 2021 and continued through May 2022. My aim was to tell the stories of African American female students in a rural South Georgia school district who received exclusionary discipline while in high school. The participants shared personal stories about their life experiences throughout their K12 years and included their discipline history in high school. Participants gave me permission to view their enrollment, discipline, and attendance records along with their academic transcripts. These data allowed me to verify the information presented by the participants during the interviews (Maxwell, 2013). Embellishments and omissions in stories would be difficult to preclude.

I limited this narrative inquiry to the stories of the African American female students who participated in the study. I did not discuss the perceptions of exclusionary discipline from other stakeholders.

Recommendations for Future Research

More research is warranted on factors that identify the connections between suspensions and outcomes (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). This study could be replicated in other school systems and with a larger sample to establish further a connection between exclusionary suspensions and the impact on academics. Future research could include current middle school or high school students. Other studies needed include the experiences and perceptions of exclusionary discipline from educators and students who dropped out of school after experiencing exclusionary discipline. Further qualitative studies are warranted to shed more light on the experiences and counter-narratives of African American female students.

Final Conclusions

Wallace et al. (2008) highlighted the racial gap among female students. Blake et al. (2010) provided empirical evidence of rates of suspensions for Black female students as compared to Black male students. However, research continues to omit a critical portion of understanding the disciplinary experiences of African American female students. This dissertation offers a better understanding surrounding disproportionate disciplinary experiences for female students at the district level. This research is important for understanding the extent to which disproportionality exists between races and the categories of violations that female students who are most likely to be suspended.

This information is essential for knowing where more research is needed and how to intervene based on female students' experiences.

Zero-tolerance policies continue to perpetuate an already existing cycle of unfair and unequal disciplinary experiences for African American students. These policies contribute to the broadening racial suspension gap and, finally, the achievement gap. Additionally, administrators use suspensions to remove students from the learning environment rather than working with teachers and counselors to create positive and proactive strategies to respond to students' undesirable behaviors. These data continue to support previous findings. The focus of working with African American female students needs to move to attitude changes and shifts in mindset.

Final Reflection

Participant Update

I have maintained contact with the participants in this study. Imani has not started classes yet. She has completed the application, and the technical college accepted her for admission. She will start cosmetology classes in January 2023. Imani is still living with her father. Precious has nearly completed her cosmetology coursework, and she is still working at FLP. Aliyah began classes through Walgreens to become a licensed pharmacy technician in June 2022. She continues to live with her mother. Shanice resigned from her job at the coffee shop. I am not sure what she is doing now. I have attempted to contact her a few times via email. She has not responded. Tiara is attending the technical college full time to complete her nursing degree. Nekia moved to Valdosta and began cosmetology classes in August 2022.

Personal Reflection

After completing this study, I have changed how I conduct interviews with students when I receive a discipline referral. I ask students to explain what happened, and I listen. I never want another student to feel like she was not heard. Prior to this study, I always took the teacher's side when a referral was submitted. I was guilty of trying to clear the discipline log as fast as I could. The relationships that I have formed with students and specifically African American female students have strengthened because I took what the participants told me and applied it.

Throughout this study, I have shared comments made by the participants with my administrative colleagues. There are still zero-tolerance policies in place; however, the administrative staff is providing students the opportunity to share extenuating circumstances that might have influenced the behavior. The bottom line is this study changed me.

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Appendix A

Zero Tolerance Offenses in Center System's Code of Conduct

Offense	Disposition
Alcohol 2 - Under influence without possession	10 days OSS
Alcohol 3 - Violation of laws or ordinances prohibiting the manufacture, sale, purchase, transportation, possession, or consumption of alcoholic beverages or substances represented as alcohol	10 days OSS
Arson 3 - Intentional damage as a result of arson-related activity or the use of an incendiary device. Includes but not limited to setting fires to school property.	10 days OSS; restitution; possible tribunal recommendation
Battery 2 - Intentional physical attack with the intent to cause bodily harm resulting in mild or moderate bodily injuries. Includes but not limited to pushing, hitting, kicking, shoving, pinching, slapping, and other physical confrontations that result in mild or moderate injuries.	Minimum 4 days OSS
Battery 3 - Intentional physical attack with the intent to cause bodily harm resulting in severe injuries or any physical attack on school personnel. Includes but not limited to choking, pushing, hitting, kicking, shoving, pinching, slapping, and other physical confrontations resulting in severe injuries; Includes any physical attack on school personnel; includes incidents serious enough to warrant calling the police or security	10 days ISS; possible tribunal recommendation
B&E/Burglary 3 - Unlawful or unauthorized forceful entry into a school building or vehicle (with or without intent to commit theft).	10 days OSS; possible tribunal recommendation; notification of law enforcement
Computer Trespass 3 - Unauthorized use of a computer or computer network with the intention of deleting, obstructing, interrupting, altering, damaging, obtaining confidential information or in any way causing the malfunction of the computer, network, program(s) or data; includes disclosure of a number, code, password, or other means of	Maximum 10 days OSS; possible tribunal recommendation

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access to school computers or the school system computer network without proper authorization. Includes but not limited to hacking.

Disorderly Conduct 3 - Creating or contributing to a severe disturbance that substantially disrupts the school environment or poses a threat to the health and safety of others. Includes but not limited to disruptive behavior on school bus, misbehavior during a fire drill or other safety exercise.	Maximum 10 days OSS; possible tribunal recommendation
Drugs 3 - Unlawful use, cultivation, manufacture, distribution, sale, purchase, possession, transportation, or importation of any controlled drug or narcotic substance, or equipment or devices used for preparing or using drugs or narcotics.	10 days OSS; tribunal; notification of law enforcement
Fighting - Mutual participation in a fight involving physical violence where there is no one main offender and intent to harm.	4-10 days OSS; parent notification; possible notification of law officials; BIP implementation; possible tribunal recommendation
Gang-related - Any group of three or more students with a common name or common identifying signs, symbols, tattoos, graffiti, or attire which engage in criminal gang activity (O.C.G.A. § 16- 15-3).	10 days OSS and students who violate this policy may be subject to arrest and/or a disciplinary hearing referral, which could result in expulsion or alternative school placement.
Larceny/Theft 3 - The unlawful taking of property belonging to another person or entity with a value exceeding $250. Level 3 may be used for students that violate the school policy on larceny/theft three or more times during the same school year.	1st Offense: Maximum 10 days OSS; possible tribunal recommendation; restitution; parent notification 2nd Offense: 10 days OSS; restitution; tribunal recommendation; parent notification
Possession of Unapproved Items 3 - The use or possession of unauthorized items including but not limited to toy guns or other items that can be construed as dangerous or harmful to the learning environment; Includes the possession of matches, lighters, incendiary devices or fireworks. Level 3 should be used for students who display a pattern of violating the school policy related to unapproved items. Includes but	Maximum 10 days OSS; parent notification; possible tribunal recommendation; possible notification of law enforcement

are not limited to matches, lighters, or the possession of fireworks, bullets, stink bombs, CO_2 cartridges; includes the use of pepper spray with injury

Refusing to serve assigned ISS	OSS for an equal number of days with loss of opportunity to complete missed work
Robbery - The taking of, or attempting to take, anything of value that is owned by another person or organization under confrontational circumstances by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear	Maximum 10 days OSS; parent notification; tribunal recommendation; notification of law enforcement
Sex Offenses 3 - Engaging in sexual activities on school grounds or during school activities.	10 days OSS; parent notification; tribunal recommendation; notification of law enforcement
Student Incivility 3 - Blatant and repeated insubordination or the use of inappropriate, profane, or obscene language including the use of racial slurs toward staff; issuing false reports on school staff. Level 3 may be used for students that violate the school policy on student incivility three or more times during the same school year.	1st Offense: 9 days OSS; parent notifications; BIP implementation 2nd Offense: 10 days OSS; tribunal recommendation
Threat/Intimidation 3 - School-wide physical, verbal or electronic threat which creates fear of harm without displaying a weapon or subjecting victims to physical attack; Note: Students that display a pattern of behavior that is so severe, persistent, or pervasive so as to have the effect of substantially interfering with a student's education, threatening the educational environment, or causing substantial physical harm, threat of harm or visibly bodily harm may be coded as bullying. Includes but not limited to bomb threats or unauthorized pulling of the fire alarm. Interfering with a student's education, threatening the educational environment, or causing substantial physical harm, threat of harm or visibly bodily harm may be coded as bullying. Includes but not	Threat/Intimidation 3: Maximum 10 days OSS; possible tribunal recommendation; notification of law enforcement

limited to bomb threats or unauthorized pulling of the fire alarm.

Vandalism 3 - Participation in the willful/malicious destruction, damage or defacement of school property or private property without permission; Level 3 may be used for students that violate the school policy on vandalism three or more times during the same school year.	Vandalism 3: Minimum of 3 days OSS and possible tribunal recommendation. Possible notification of law enforcement where students appears to be in violation of the law. Restitution for damages.
Violence Against a Teacher - Intentional physical attack against a teacher with the intent to cause bodily harm resulting in severe injuries or any physical attack against a teacher.	10 days OSS; tribunal recommendation; notification of law enforcement
Weapons/Others - Possession of a weapon, other than firearm, or simile of a weapon that could produce bodily harm or fear of harm.	10 days OSS; parent notification; notification of law enforcement if law is violated; possible tribunal recommendation. A student who uses or threatens to use a weapon on a student or employee will be suspended for a formal hearing. Punishment by the state is a fine of not more than $10,000; imprisonment for not less than two nor more than ten years, or both. (O.C.G.A. 15-11-37)
Weapons/Firearm-Incendiary Device - Intentional or unintentional possession or use of a handgun in a manner that could produce bodily harm or fear of harm.	Students in violation of this policy will be subject to a minimum of a one calendar year expulsion.

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
For the Protection of Human Research Participants

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

Protocol Number: 04202-2021   **Responsible Researcher(s):** Karen Jones

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Rudo Tsemunhu

Project Title: *A Narrative Inquiry: The Experiences of African American Female Students as a Result of Exclusionary Discipline.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations **category 2**. If the nature of the research changes such that exemption criteria no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research study.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *Upon completion of the research study, collected data must be securely maintained (locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher for a minimum of 3 years. At the end of the required time, collected data must be permanently destroyed.*

- *To ensure confidentiality, pseudonym lists must be kept in a separate, secure file from corresponding name lists, email addresses, telephone numbers, etc.*

- *Exempt protocol guidelines permit the recording of interviews, provided recordings are made to create an accurate transcript. Upon creation of the transcript, the recorded interview session must be deleted immediately from all devices. Exempt guidelines prohibit the collection, storage, and/or sharing of recordings.*

- *As part of the informed consent process, interview recordings and transcripts must include the researcher's reading of the consent statement, confirming participant's understanding, and establishing their willingness to take part in the interview. Participants must be offered a copy of the research statement.*

☒ *If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.*

Elizabeth Ann Olphie   *09.01.2021*

Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.

Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-253-2947.

Revised: 06.02.16

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Appendix C

Participant Consent Agreement

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a research study entitled "**A Narrative Inquiry: The Experiences of African American Female Students as a Result of Exclusionary Discipline**," which is being conducted by Karen Jones, a student at Valdosta State University. The purpose of this research is to allow African American female students that have been suspended from high school to tell their stories. You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about how out of school suspension may have impacted the learning of African American female students. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Participation should take approximately 180 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded in order to accurately capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. Once the interview recording has been transcribed, the recording will be deleted from recording devices. *Your name and school will be replaced with a pseudonym in publications or presentations*. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Karen Jones at karejones@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Appendix D

CSSD Dress Code

The following types of clothing are considered inappropriate:

1. Footwear (shoes) must be worn and appropriate for the school setting both in appearance and safety. House shoes/slippers are not acceptable footwear for school.
2. No headgear is permitted in the school building at any time during the school day. The hoods of hooded sweatshirts are not allowed on head while in the building.
3. Clothing or ornamentation, which advertises alcohol or substances that are illegal for minors, or which displays suggestive phrases, designs, markings, or profanities are also prohibited.
4. Clothing that displays weapons, violence, gang affiliations, or other logos that cause dissension are not permitted.
5. No gang related signs, symbols, names, or other items that can be associated with any street gang. The principal or designee shall have the final say in determining if an item is gang related.
6. No tattoos depicting gang signs or symbols will be permitted.
7. Backless or strapless dresses or shirts are not permitted.
8. No midriff shirts or blouses are permitted. Midriff areas must be covered so that no skin is exposed on the torso at any time (front or back). No sheer garments and no low-cut necklines are permitted. Cleavage must not show.
9. Appropriate undergarments must be worn. Clothing must not reveal undergarments.
10. Shorts, dresses and skirts that are more than 4" above the knee are considered too short.
11. Slits in dresses and skirts may be no shorter than fingertip length (standing or sitting).
12. All pants and trousers must be worn at waist level and must fit properly. Pants may not have holes above the knee, unfastened belts, or exposed undergarments.
13. No coveralls or jumpsuits are allowed.
14. Piercings will not be tolerated with the exception of the ears.
15. Distracting hairstyles are prohibited.
16. No pajamas

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

What were the circumstances involved in your suspension from school?

What does it feel like to be suspended from school?

What did you do while you were suspended from school?

Was anyone at home with you while you were suspended?

How did your parent/guardian react to your suspension from school?

How did you learn the material you missed while you were out?

If you had to describe how you felt being suspended from school in one word, what would it be?

Did you look forward to coming back to school? Why or why not?

Have you ever gotten in trouble while on suspension? If yes, were police involved, and what type of offense?

How do you think being suspended affected your grades?

How did other students treat you when you returned to school?

Do you feel out of school suspension work to help students with their behavior? Why or why not?

If you think out of school suspensions do not work, what suggestions for alternatives do you have?

How meaningful are the relationships with adults in the school building to you?

Do you feel like the adults in the school care about you?

Do you feel like you "fit in" with your school community? Why or why not?

How can schools do a better job of helping students make better behavior choices?