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# **For Colored Girls Who Have Experienced Institutional Racism Because the Discipline Code Is Not Enuf: Principals and Assistant Principals, School Discipline Policies, and Discipline Disparities Faced by Black Girls**

LeCinda R. Jennings

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FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED INSTITUTIONAL RACISM  
BECAUSE THE DISCIPLINE CODE IS NOT ENUF: PRINCIPALS AND ASSISTANT  
PRINCIPALS, SCHOOL DISCIPLINE POLICIES, AND DISCIPLINE DISPARITIES FACED  
BY BLACK GIRLS

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to Black girls who are told they are TOO. Too vocal, too quiet, too angry, too meek, too light, too dark, too quick, and too slow. Too much. You are phenomenal in and never forget you are every good and perfect gift. (James 1:17).

I dedicate this work to the Black girls who have experienced institutional racism. This work is dedicated to those for whom the discipline code was written to displace, discredit, and distance from a safe environment to learn, create, grow, and thrive. Specifically this work is dedicated to those who have had their light dimmed and snuffed out. For those who were taken from us far too soon. I dedicate this work to those who fight daily to honor Black girls and tell their stories-to those committed to doing the work to destroy discipline and learning disparities.

Finally, this work is dedicated to two of my early educators: Dr. Eli Baker, my elementary principal who fanned the embers of my spark and worked to protect my spirit and compelling me to shine bright and fierce. To Mrs. Sara Walker, my second grade teacher who loved me like her own child and to this day still asks my mother, “How is my girl?” Thank you for watering me.

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## **ABSTRACT**

For many years, school discipline has been a research focus, particularly the disparities in discipline between Black and White males. Black girls are suspended at a rate that is 5.3 times that of White girls and approximately the same rate as Black boys. Black girls represent the fastest growing group of students who receive discipline disparities. The goal of this case study was to explore if and how principals and assistant principals contribute to discipline disparities faced by Black girls. I discussed the lived experiences of high school administrators to capture their encounters with race, gender, and the implementation of school discipline policies. In addition, I analyzed and reported the findings from one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with high school administrators. Further, I analyzed the school discipline data and the school discipline policies. The findings added to current educational knowledge concerning Black girls and school discipline inequalities by bringing school administrators' experiences to the heart of discipline disparities faced by Black girls through the perspective of implementation methods. This study discovered school administrators negatively or positively influenced the impact of discipline disparities experienced by Black girls. School administrators influenced disciplinary outcomes for Black children in general and Black girls in particular when they allowed positive and culturally informed professional and personal experiences to govern how they approached school punishment policies. Furthermore, school administrators who attempt to handle school discipline offenses with resources such as counseling and restorative practices rather than punitive and

exclusionary sanctions can ensure that school policies do not promote the push out of Black girls.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDC.....	Center for Disease Control and Prevention
CRDC.....	Civil Rights Data Collection
CRT.....	Critical Race Theory
IRB.....	International Review Board
ISS.....	In School Suspension
NCLB.....	No Child Left Behind
OSS.....	Out of School Suspension
PBIS .....	Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports
SWPBIS.....	School wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

“In the end anti-black, anti-female, and all forms of discrimination are equivalent to the same thing: anti-humanism.”

-Shirley Chisholm

Student slammed! A disturbing video shows a White deputy wrestling, dragging, and throwing a Black female student who sat without moving in her desk. She was later arrested. This headline was the news that accompanied a video shared by almost every news and social media outlet on October 26, 2015, and for weeks after the incident. I cannot recall the clothes I wore to work that day. I cannot recall where I was when the story first broke. After seeing this video, I cannot remember my first words, but I can remember what I saw and felt—extremely nauseated, along with an overwhelming sense of anger and sadness. The #assaultatspringvalley was hard to stomach. A White adult male assaulting a young, Black female like a limp doll was too brutal to comprehend. Another segment of the video scene was even more disturbing: the school administrator stood idly by observing as the entire incident unfolded.

Mental health experts have revealed that these violent incidents and trauma manifest in the brain and body. Victims of trauma can become numb, exhausted, agitated, confused, sad, or depict any combination of these symptoms. I recall the anxiety I experienced after the incident described concerning the assault on the young girl and how feelings manifested in my limbs until I was exhausted. On Tuesday, September 11, 2001,

I recalled a similar feeling as I watched videos of the airliners crashing into the buildings 2 times. My survival strategy in 2001 and on October 26, 2015, was to disconnect. I self-imposed a pause from all media for my well-being. When each of these events occurred, I was a school employee; first, in 2001 as a teacher in an elementary school and in 2015 as an elementary school administrator in Richland County, South Carolina, where the assault occurred.

As a Black woman, I witnessed these two traumatic events at public schools, as do many Black girls every day. Schools worldwide use diverse approaches to support safe environments for students and staff. A primary goal of school leaders is to create a safe learning environment in the school and classrooms (Ylimaki et al., 2007). However, school safety is not synonymous with school discipline. Schools and other child-care institutions must work diligently to remain:

organized around strong, developmentally supportive relationships; coherent and well-integrated approaches to supports, including home and school connections; well-scaffolded instruction that intentionally supports the development of social, emotional, and academic skills, habits, and mindsets; and culturally competent, personalized response to the assets and needs that each child present. (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018, p. 36)

There are many ways to cultivate school safety in the United States public schools; unfortunately, school safety is often defined by punitive discipline policies. Punitive discipline policies and procedures can cause harm to children mentally, emotionally, physically, and socially. (King, 2016).

Rural, suburban, and urban schools in the United States (U.S.) face unique challenges when approaching school discipline because there is no one-size-fits-all approach (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010). When students feel a sense of belonging in school, their identity, dignity, and respect are affirmed. Additionally, students with a sense of belonging are more likely to be engaged (Biag, 2014). Biag (2014) asserted that when students perceive they are mistreated or see their peers treated unfairly by school staff, their emotional safety is affected, and they have difficulties forming bonds with teachers and peers.

### **School Discipline**

Over three million students experience out-of-school suspensions each year in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014). This number accounts for 6% of all students enrolled in schools nationally. African American students are 3.6 times more likely to receive one or more suspensions than White students (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Despite its limitations, suspension and other types of punishment can effectively deter of behavior issues when accompanied by positive and proactive alternatives to suspension (Bear, 2012).

On the national level, President Barack Obama launched several initiatives as a part of the Rethink Discipline efforts (White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2016). President Obama sought to implement initiatives and programs to address discipline disparities and school climate. A component of the initiative included a letter jointly written by the Department of Education and the Department of Justice strongly encouraging states to consider, adopt, and implement alternative school discipline measures. Alternative school discipline measures included: trauma-informed approaches, social emotional learning, use of restorative practices, and positive behavior interventions

and supports (PBIS). The letter also warned schools that the continuation of current punitive punishment and exclusionary practices might unlawfully discriminate against students of color (White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2016)).

### **Significance of the Study**

The results of this study could lead to insights regarding the perspectives of secondary school administrators as they engage with Black girls. Minimal research exists on disparities in discipline for Black girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Thus, the findings also could contribute to the body of research focused on the disproportionate use of discipline with Black girls in secondary school. This study could inform superintendents, school board members, and school administrators to prompt them to review school discipline policies. Moreover, the findings could be relevant to implementing discipline at the district and school levels. Finally, the study results might be used by practicing school principals and assistant principals to ensure school policies are not enforced in a discriminatory manner.

### **Background, Context, and Theoretical Framework**

#### **Common Approaches to School Discipline**

In the first sections of this review, I studied three standard practices associated with implementing school discipline. This examination included common approaches to school discipline: restorative practices, positive behavior intervention and supports, and punitive punishment. Table 1.1 contains definitions of these approaches.

Table 1.1 Definitions of Three Common Approaches to School Discipline

Approach	Definition
Restorative practices	A non-punitive approach to classroom management and school discipline in which schools actively work to create a positive campus climate to prevent misbehavior by cultivating strong relationships between and among students and educators characterized by allowing students to repair the harm caused by misbehavior over punishment when misbehavior occurs (Dhaliwal et al., 2021).
Positive behavior intervention and supports	A three-tiered, proactive school-wide behavior management philosophy designed to meet the needs of students who struggle academically and behaviorally in traditional classroom settings (Clayton et al., 2020)
Punitive punishment	A set of school discipline responses that have negative consequences for students due to negative behavior focused on punishing the harm-doer such as suspension, expulsion, restraint, change of placement, and corporal punishment (Gagnon et al., 2017).

Payne and Welch (2015) found that schools with a higher number of racial and ethnic minority students were less likely to use restorative practices despite findings showing better results from discipline when restorative practices were used instead of punitive approaches. One explanation discussed in their study is the racial threat perspective centered on social control by schools and the criminal justice system. Payne and Welch (2015) asserted that where large numbers of historically marginalized populations exist, the White majority perceived economic, political, and criminal threats. Payne and Welch (2015) concluded the use of restorative practices in schools with relatively high percentages of historically marginalized populations rather than punitive discipline were critical for student success and the creation of the school community. This approach also showed promise in decreasing student misbehavior.



## **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

The PBIS framework contains a three-tiered, supportive behavior management philosophy tailored to meet students' academic and behavioral needs using data-based decisions to align curriculum and behavioral supports (Clayton et al., 2020). Clayton et al. (2020) explored the outcomes when using PBIS to promote positive behaviors in staff and students. In addition, the teachers and staff taught, modeled, and monitored behaviors to establish a positive learning culture. Clayton et al. (2020) reiterated that a reward system, such as tickets, coins, or other tangibles, was a critical component of PBIS to support and incentivize positive student behavior. Hollingshead et al. (2016) explored the efficacy of PBIS combined with behavioral strategies to improve on-task behavior. In a case study, Hollingshead et al. (2016) examined discipline practices when implementing PBIS concurrently with other techniques with 31 seventh-grade students in a predominately African American urban school. The approaches included using fewer teacher reprimands with behavior-specific praise, and the authors found improved student behavior (Hollingshead et al., 2016). When the staff used PBIS with fewer teacher reprimands, students' class-wide improved their on-task behavior.

## **Punitive Punishment**

Punitive punishments or removal practices to address student behavior have included exclusionary practices, such as corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion. Black children were 3 times more likely than White children to receive corporal punishment in schools (Gershoff & Font, 2016). In 2016, corporal punishment remained legal in 19 states: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho,

Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wyoming (Gershoff et al., 2016).

In November of 2016, U.S. Secretary of Education King penned a letter to states calling for an end to corporal punishment in schools. In his letter, King described corporal punishment as “harmful, ineffective, and disproportionately applied to students of color and students with disabilities” (King, 2016, p. 2). Additionally, King (2016) cited statistics from the 2013-2014 school year:

- African American boys are 1.8 times more likely to receive corporal punishment than White boys.
- African American girls are 2.9 times more likely to receive corporal punishment than White girls.
- Eighty percent of students who received corporal punishment in schools during the 2013-2014 school year were male.

Following President Obama’s Rethink Discipline initiatives (White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2016), little change has been made regarding the use of exclusionary discipline practices. Between the 2015-2016 and 2017-2018 school years, there was a 2% decrease in exclusionary discipline practices in the United States (U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights, 2021). However, reports also indicated an increase in three discipline practices: school-related arrests, expulsions with educational services, and referrals to law enforcement (U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights, 2021). A final sobering fact from the CRDC data identified Black girls as the only group of girls with a discipline gap among all other racial and ethnic groups. Black girls received in-school suspensions (11.2%) and out-of-school suspensions (13.3%) at

about twice the rate of total student enrollment (7.4%) (U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights, 2021). Figure 1 provides information from the 2021 CRDC report and displays school suspensions by race/ethnicity in 2017-2018.

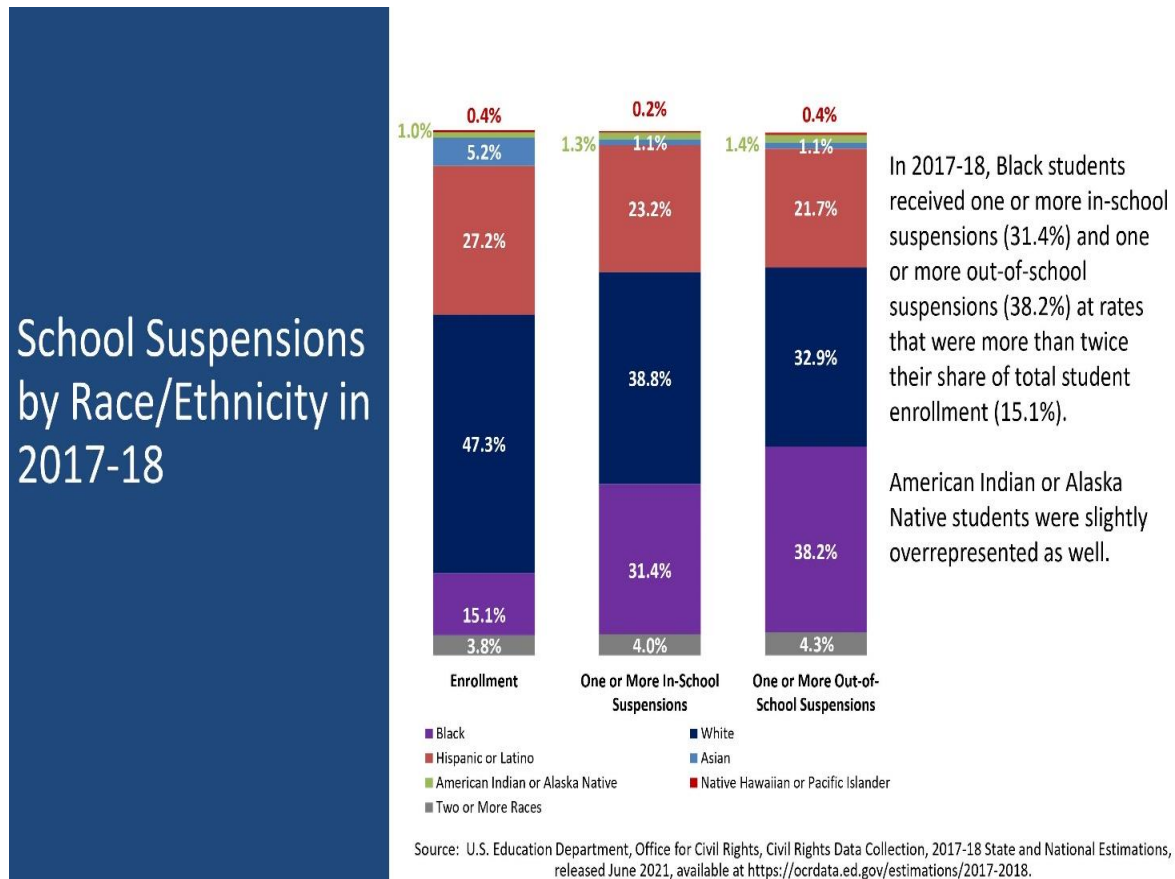


Figure 1.1: *CRDC School Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity in 2017-2018*

*Note.* “An Overview of Exclusionary Discipline Practices In Public Schools For The 2017-18 School Year, U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017-18 State and National Estimation,” (p. 16), By U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021.

Figure 2 displays the CRDC statistics from the report on School Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity and Sex in 2017-2018. As revealed in this report, Black girls were the

only group of girls across all races/ethnicities where a disparity was observed; Black girls received 11.2% of ISS and 13.3% of OSS, rates that double their enrollment of 7.4%.

## School Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity and Sex in 2017-18

Race/Ethnicity	BOYS			GIRLS		
	Enrollment	One or More In School Suspensions	One or More Out-of-School Suspensions	Enrollment	One or More In School Suspensions	One or More Out-of-School Suspensions
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.5%	0.9%	1.0%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%
Asian	2.6%	0.8%	0.9%	2.5%	0.2%	0.2%
Hispanic or Latino	13.9%	15.8%	15.3%	13.3%	7.4%	6.4%
Black	7.7%	20.1%	24.9%	7.4%	11.2%	13.3%
White	24.4%	28.7%	24.9%	22.9%	10.2%	7.9%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
Two or More Races	1.9%	2.7%	3.0%	1.9%	1.3%	1.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51.4%</b>	<b>69.2%</b>	<b>70.3%</b>	<b>48.6%</b>	<b>30.8%</b>	<b>29.7%</b>

Black girls were the only group across all races/ethnicities for girls where a disparity was observed. Black girls received in-school suspensions (11.2%) and out-of-school suspensions (13.3%) at rates almost two times their share of total student enrollment (7.4%).

Black boys received both in-school suspensions (20.1%) and out-of-school suspensions (24.9%) suspensions at rates more than three times their share of total student enrollment (7.7%)—the largest disparity across all race/ethnicity and sex groupings. White boys experienced higher rates of in-schools suspensions (28.7%) relative to their share of total student enrollment (24.4%). American Indian or Alaska Native and multiracial boys also experienced disparities in school suspensions.

Source: U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017-18 State and National Estimations, released June 2021, available at <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/estimations/2017-2018>.

Figure 1.2: *CDRC report of Suspensions by Race/Ethnicity and Sex in 2017-2018*

*Note.* “An Overview of Exclusionary Discipline Practices In Public Schools For The 2017-18 School Year, U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017-18 State and National Estimation,” (p. 17), By U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Black girls disproportionately receive exclusionary discipline, with 12% receiving this form of discipline compared to 2% for White girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016). Additionally, about 13% of out-of-school suspensions are received by Black girls compared to 8% of White girls and 6% of Latina girls (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021). When students are excluded from school, they are “placed in a direct link to the prison system” (Fenning & Rose, 2007, p. 537) and other pathways to confinement. Disproportionate exclusionary discipline can lead to adverse outcomes for students, such as lower academic performance and a significant tendency toward paths leading to school dropout, juvenile detention centers, and prison (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020; Morris, 2013).

Principals often believe they act in fairness despite evidence that racial discipline gaps persist (DeMatthews et al., 2017). A study of 10 secondary principals who participated in two rounds of interviews and two focus groups investigated how principals’ beliefs and disciplinary approaches reduce or uphold racial discipline gaps. The 10 principals consisted of six men and four women, including four White principals, three Black principals, and three Hispanic principals. They found dominant ways of thinking can affect how school administrators enact discipline. These disparities continue to expand due to principals' discipline-related decisions related to suspension, expulsions, and alternate school placements. Principals were tasked to collect information about student misbehavior, conduct investigations, and often apply consequences from beliefs or supposed facts that do not consider the personalities or cultural norms of the students they serve (DeMatthews et al., 2017). DeMatthews et al. (2017) asserted that principals

might be complicit and unknowing participants in sustaining school discipline gaps rather than closing gaps.

DeMatthews et al. (2017) classified some principals as “overt racial justifiers” who held biased views of Black parenting (p. 546). The administrators used their views to justify the harsh discipline used to teach Black students rules they believed were not taught at home. Furthermore, the results showed that principals believed they were fair and impartial, but their language and behaviors reflected the language of criminality. As a result, racial disparities were diminished or maintained depending on underlying beliefs and disciplining measures. These findings supported interpretations of Critical Race Theory (CRT) consistent with the notion that principals have failed to recognize that many factors affect student failure and misbehavior. One of the most important factors was the systematic and interpersonal racism that plagued the lives of students of color, their families, and their communities. As a result, the students’ schools become yet another example of institutionalized racism.

Disparities exist in how discipline is meted out for Black girls. Although school administrators can access guidance in implementing school discipline by adopting and using school discipline policies, school administrators’ biases likely play a role in how policies are implemented (Gullo & Beachum, 2020). Gullo and Beachum (2020) showed that administrators in the same schools and districts, and even at different schools, might implement discipline policies differently for a similar student infraction. While research is limited, recommendations for future research include a focus on the implementation of school discipline and how the bias of school administrators influences their decisions.

Recognizing that boys and girls are positioned differently in schools for disciplinary outcomes, researchers should consider the intersections of race and gender and how principals implement school discipline. Again research studies are limited, but recommendations for future research could include focusing on the implementation of school discipline and how school administrators' decisions are influenced. The specific reasons and influences on implementation are unknown but were explored in the current study research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality are the theoretical frameworks to underpin this research study. Following a brief overview, Chapter Two includes a discussion of each framework in detail. A key tenet of CRT is the central subject of racism as a normalized part of American culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). They refuted the notion that racist occurrences are isolated but are indicative of institutional and system racism. Schools are American institutions and, thus, are not exempt from racism. The practices and policies enforced in schools often negate schools as safe places for students of color. Black girls are a marginalized population in school settings and are at a disadvantage due to culturally insensitive policies. Policies that disproportionately impact children of color jeopardize their academic performance. For example, Black girls experience cultural bias regarding dress code regulations barring natural Black hairstyles. In this current study using the CRT framework, Intersectionality was used to explain how Black girls' identities at the intersections of race and gender lend distinct viewpoints to the unique situations of disproportionate school discipline (Crenshaw, 1989).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative case study was to add to the existing body of literature by exploring if and how principals and assistant principals contribute to discipline disparities faced by Black girls at a high school in a school district in the southeast. The case study research design included (a) interviews with principals and assistant principals in a high school, (b) a review of the school district policies, and (c) a review of school disciplinary statistics from the selected school.

### **Research Questions**

Data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted to respond to the following research question:

1. How do school administrators' implementation of school discipline policies contribute to the disparities in school discipline faced by Black girls?
2. How do school administrators describe the influence of school district discipline policies on their decision-making on discipline infractions?
3. How do school administrators characterize the effects of discipline policies on Black girls?
4. How do school administrators describe the influence of professional and personal experiences with Black children and Black girls, in particular, on their decisions to implement school discipline in their schools?

### **Nature of the Study**

Potential participants were first asked to respond to a demographic questionnaire to identify participants who met the following criteria: serve as a school principal or administrator in the selected site and possess administrative duties that involve implementing discipline policies that directly impact students in the school district.



Interviews were conducted with one principal and four assistant principals from the same school and district. I then coded the data and used thematic analysis using in vivo, descriptive and values coding in the first cycle of coding, followed by thematic coding and analysis.

Due to the worldwide coronavirus pandemic and recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2021), interviews were conducted on an internet chat platform using semi-structured interview questions developed to address the research question. Each interview took approximately an hour to complete. During and after the interviews I took observational notes. Following each interview I transcribed the interviews before beginning thematic coding and analysis. Additionally, the respondents undertook reflective journaling after the interview. These reflections consisted of watching a 3-minute video on unconscious bias and responding to journal prompts. I created an engaging environment with each participant and encouraged follow-up discussions; member checking was also used.

### **Definition of Terms**

Merriam Webster defines school discipline as the system of rules, consequences, and behavioral methods required for the management of children and to maintain school order. Of the various discipline approaches in schools, there are some standard definitions. Table 1.2 contains some common terms associated with school discipline practices.

Table 1.2: Common School Discipline Terms

Discipline Terminology	Definition
Restorative practice	Problem-solving approach based on the concept that when wrongdoing or harm has been done, it creates obligations and liabilities
Social justice	The belief that the administration of law conforms to the natural law that all people are treated equally without prejudice
Peer mediation	A problem-solving technique where two or more students who are involved in a dispute meet in a safe, private setting to work out problems with the assistance of a trained mediator
Behavior	The way someone conducts oneself
Intervention	Action taken to improve a situation; can be used as an academic or behavioral support
Discipline policy	Set of procedures used to maintain standards of conduct within a setting
Victim	One who is acted on usually adversely by a force or agent
Offender	One who causes difficulty, discomfort, or injury
Zero tolerance	Policies where students receive predetermined penalties for any offense no matter how minor (most often on weapons, drugs, or bullying infractions)
Suspension	Temporary removal of a student from his or her regular educational setting for a violation of school policies or rules
Out of school suspension	A temporary, complete exclusion from school and activities.
In-school suspension	Removal of a student from a regular educational setting and placing of a student under the supervision of a school authority
Exclusionary discipline	Any type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes a student from their usual educational setting
Expulsion	The action of depriving someone of membership in an organization
Code of conduct	A set of principles, expectations, and rules that are given to students and parents to make sure that the expectations the school has for behavior are communicated

## Assumptions

The assumptions for case study research include first-hand accounts of participants; in this study, their lived experiences include witnessing administrators' adverse reactions to Black girls' behaviors in the classroom of K-12 schools, which have a punitive school culture. As illustrated in the literature, the assumptions are valid and

grounded, especially those concerning disproportionality and the adverse effects on Black girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2007, 2013). Thus, a case study design is chosen to understand the complexities and distinctions of disparities in discipline experienced by Black girls in high school (Glesne, 2016).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The study included principals and assistant principals in middle and high schools with historically marginalized populations of at least 40% and whose primary roles include implementing student discipline. The study included school disciplinary statistics for the school year 2018-2019.

The delimitations of the study included principals and assistant principals who do not work in the middle or high school setting. Principals and assistant principals who do not perform duties involving the implementation of school discipline policies were not included.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study are that the findings are not meant to be generalizable to all principals and assistant principals in other middle or high schools. Limitations include school disciplinary statistics outside of the 2018-2019 school year. Additionally, while participants were gender diverse, they were not diverse in racial composition. All participants in the research study were Black school administrators. While White school administrators were invited to participate in the study, no White school administrators responded affirmatively to participate. Taie and Goldring (2019) asserted that the racial makeup of school administrators in the United States is most often unbalanced relative to the racial demographic profile of students they serve. Through a national survey of

teachers and principals, Taie and Goldring revealed that of 90,900 public school principals, 78% were White, 11% Black, 9% Hispanic, and 1% Asian. Finally, because I used interviews as a data collection method, I recognize that positionality as a Black woman school administrator in the southeastern United States could elicit biased responses from participants.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This literature review includes and explores the available published research on understanding the perceptions of disciplinary actions taken by school leaders. Furthermore, an analysis was undertaken of how discipline practices have been implemented, specifically related to disparities experienced by Black girls as they interact with administrators and school discipline policies.

CRT consists of theoretical concepts originating from law schools in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s (Crenshaw, 2010). The theory is prevalent across many disciplines, allowing practitioners to examine racism in various institutions, including schools, businesses, government, and even professional sports teams (Wadhwa, 2010). Among the theoretical concepts of CRT, one transcends the others: racism is normalized and unquestioned as embedded in United States society. From the more extensive theoretical work encompassing CRT that scholars use, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) underscore five of the critical tenets of CRT:

- (1) Racism and other forms of oppression are central to the experiences of people of color;
- (2) Dominant, majoritarian ideologies justify the status quo/structural oppression and must be challenged;
- (3) Lived experience and experiential knowledge are foundational in CRT scholarship;

(4) Interdisciplinary perspectives across academic disciplines should be pursued in CRT scholarship;

(5) Scholarship and engagement are centered on social and racial justice. (p. 24).

The premise that racism is both permanent and endemic can support an understanding of the persistently poor outcomes for members of historically marginalized groups and the overrepresentation of disciplinary actions for historically marginalized populations particularly Black students. In addition to other characteristics, such as class and gender, race continues to be highly influential in disciplinary outcomes (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Through the policies incorporated to educate students and enforce discipline, school districts and the schools they govern can perpetuate prejudice.

According to the CRT tenet of interest convergence, racial inequities for people of color are pursued and advanced when their interests and ideologies align with White people (Milner, 2008). When White people have something to gain, American culture places higher importance on outcomes (Bell, 2004). As discussed by Bell (2004), the landmark 1954 case *Brown v. Board of Education* is one such educational example. In this well-known case, pleas for equal educational opportunities were ignored until the economic interests of southern White Americans were jeopardized. Faced with pressure to industrialize and maintain a status of global influence, the decision in the landmark case created substantial legal outcomes (Bell, 2004). However, with no clear outline or schedule to bring separate but equal to an end, the decision in the landmark case produced a mirage and fell short of a true victory.

CRT is an academic and activist movement by scholars interested in challenging American society's views on race and racism. CRT includes the contradiction of

meritocratic belief systems and how they shape the lives and experiences of Black people in various ways, one being in education. This study was conceptualized through a CRT lens. I support that the disproportionate disciplinary actions received by Black girls in the educational systems directly undermine their freedoms in school and beyond.

Additionally, Bell (1992) asserted that CRT is a foundation for revolutionizing the culture through a radical assessment. This radical assessment includes illustrations, anecdotes, and allegories to transform culture or society into something better.

Skiba et al. (2011) reviewed office discipline referrals of over 300 elementary and middle schools from 2005 to 2006. Reports obtained from web-based school discipline management data were analyzed using regression analyses. Findings conclusively indicated that African American students were 2.19 to 3.78 times more likely to receive discipline referrals than White students. As discussed previously, these conclusions made several noteworthy contributions to understanding the racial discipline gap. In addition, similar results were obtained concerning Latino students' discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions compared to their White peers. Skiba et al. (2011) concluded that these results were congruent with the history of similar results, and they argued for direct efforts in policy, practice, and research to address ubiquitous racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline.

### **Intersectionality**

Credited to Crenshaw (1993), the theory of Intersectionality explicitly includes the marginalization of Black women and emphasizes the specific challenges that Black women experience at the intersections of race and gender. She coined the phrase to highlight how advocacy concerning violence against women failed to include the unique

experiences of women of color. According to Intersectionality, inequalities and identities of race, class, and gender must be examined concurrently rather than independently (Morris & Perry, 2017). The current study aimed to understand how the interplay of race and gender produces distinct and troubling punitive inequities for Black girls in institutions and organizations.

A survey of over 14,000 students from kindergarten to fifth grade found that teachers possessed negative perceptions of Black girls as early as four years old (Zimmermann, 2018). The results showed that teachers and other school staff viewed girls in kindergarten as unfeminine and overly aggressive. In addition, teachers viewed young Black girls through the dominant White femininity construct. As early as elementary settings, schools became a hostile environment for Black girls. Lei (2003) focused on two distinct populations, Black girls and Southeast Asian American males. In analyzing perceptions of these students, patterns emerged concerning how teachers, principals, students, and other school staff viewed Black girls. Interviews over 2 years revealed that some judged Black girls according to the development of their bodies. In a qualitative study focused on the experiences of seven Black high school girls, Kelly (2018) used interviews and focus groups to investigate specific resistance to bias and self-advocacy strategies. In this study, girls reported that when schools were hostile environments, they sought support from peers and educators to no avail. As a result, they advocated for themselves through digital and social media outlets.

Similarly, a 2-year ethnographic study of seventh and eighth-grade girls in a neighborhood middle school found that Black girls' felt neglected in education (Morris, 2007). Black girls reported being encouraged to adopt more docile forms of femininity



when perceived as a challenge and as “loudies” by teachers and staff. They often responded negatively to the lack of support from school staff when they were sexually harassed by boys and ignored. Morris (2007) found when Black girls fought back, school staff perceived their behavior and dress as unladylike. This study found schools sought to control Black girls through various disciplinary measures, including uniforms to counteract staff perceptions of the provocative dress. Black girls responded with resistance which also catalyzed academic pursuits (Morris, 2007).

### **Common Approaches to School Discipline**

#### **Restorative Justice and Practices**

Restorative practices first appeared in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom and led to the restorative justice movement in the 1990s in the United States (Roche, 2006). According to Zehr (1997 p. 68), restorative practice is a school discipline approach based on three fundamental concepts, “the focus is on the harm that has been done to people and relationships, wrongdoing creates obligations and liabilities, and to make things right after wrongdoing and heal harm involves the offender, victim, and community.”

Through restorative justice practices, victims and offenders come together to discuss the effects of an incident and the steps necessary to move forward. Restorative practices often involve scripted prompts and require specific training to acquire the proper skill and effectiveness. As presented in Table 2, Gregory et al. (2016) described the crucial elements of restorative practices used as a part of school discipline.

Table 2.1 Elements of Restorative Practices

Goal	Element	Description
Prevention	Proactive circles	Students discuss ideas to help build community, usually while seated in a circle
	Talking circle	Participants sit in a circle and share their views as well as listen to the viewpoint of others; an inanimate object is used and passed around the circle. The one who holds the object has the floor to speak (talking stick)
	Circle keeper	The person who shapes the topic to be discussed and monitors the passing of the talking stick
Intervention	Responsive circles	Students discuss who has been harmed and what can be done to make things right; typically completed after a serious infraction
	Restorative circles	A scripted approach in response to a severe incident is used to help to repair the harm that has occurred to the victim
	Management of shame	Emotions of the victim and offender are acknowledged

The Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction conducted a study involving six school districts participating in a restorative justice experiment (Chmelynski, 2005). All six districts were required to use researched-based restorative practices to prevent negative behaviors of students who were expelled. Through collaborations and community service, restorative justice practices supported expelled students and helped them return to school. The experiment showed that restorative practices led to fewer numbers of students being expelled and enhanced students' commitment to their communities and school after reentry.

Jackson (2021) completed an in-depth case study that employed the tenets of CRT to examine how a mediation approach by high school practitioners failed to protect three

over-aged Black girls. The girls were also without sufficient credits to graduate. The study's findings helped educators become more knowledgeable about anti-Blackness attitudes that could permeate some restorative practices. In addition, the results contributed to creating culturally and contextually relevant approaches to mediation for Black girls in high schools. Wilson et al. (2020) used a critical ethnography with the CRT framework in education to argue that several interconnected barriers prevented the progress of children of color when subjected to exclusionary discipline. Wilson et al. (2020) considered that despite implementing a pilot program of restorative practice, White fragility silenced the discussion of race and the culture of colorblindness. Additionally, the researchers suggested that the persistence of a zero-tolerance framework prevents progress toward racial equity in an urban school system.

### **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

The reauthorization of the No Child Left behind Act of 2001 emphasized the implementation of research-based data-driven models for discipline and learning (Gastic, 2010). As a result of this law, PBIS received national recognition and became more institutionally accepted as a practical, alternative framework extensively used as a school disciplinary tool (Gastic, 2020).

PBIS is focused on establishing positive behaviors with the ultimate goal of institutionalizing positive behaviors within schools. Nese et al. (2021) contended that educators and practitioners should stress this new paradigm, which requires administrators and teachers to teach, model, and monitor behaviors. This method established a positive learning culture (Nese, 2021). In addition, the framework required a reward system that included materials, such as tickets, coins, or other tangibles. The

reward system was a critical element of PBIS to support and incentivize positive student behavior. Using the three-tiered systematic approach created and developed by Todd and Sufai (National Center for PBIS), the staff were to teach model, and monitor expected behaviors for common areas of schools and specific classroom expectations. When necessary, they also retaught expectations as needed.

According to Nese et al. (2021), the primary rationale for PBIS is to improve preventive practices and student supports to affect meaningful student and school outcomes. They asserted that academic success, positive school climate, and supportive relationships between peers and adults are influenced using a multi-tiered approach. Nese et al. described each tier of the system. Tier I practices are universal and apply to all students when teaching prosocial behavioral norms with a continuum of proactive options for dealing with undesirable behaviors. Tier II practices target students who require academic or behavioral support beyond universal practices. All the Tier II level educators implement uniform research-based interventions using social skills programs. Tier III interventions and supports are designed for those students with the most severe behavioral and academic demands. Students at the Tier III level receive the most intensive assistance designed for individual students' needs.

Hollingshead et al. (2016) explored the efficacy of PBIS combined with behavioral strategies to improve on-task behavior. In a case study of 31 seventh-grade students in a predominately African American urban school, they examined disciplinary practices implementing PBIS concurrently with other strategies. The strategies included having teachers give fewer reprimands and offering students behavior-specific praise. After implementing these strategies, the school experienced improved student behavior.

Results of this study suggested a need for further exploration of a multiple-strategy approach to discipline. These researchers purported that a one-size-fits-all mentality may not tackle multiple angles of disciplinary issues. This multiple approach perspective contradicted much of current practice and research focused on using one approach at a time within schools (Hollingshead et al., 2016).

Waasdorp et al. (2012) analyzed reports from teachers in Maryland public elementary schools to determine the effectiveness of school-wide PBIS (SWPBIS). The study spanned four school years and included over 12,000 students, among which 52.9% were boys, 45.1% were African American, and 46% were White. Teacher reports illustrated the effectiveness of SWPBIS in addressing bullying incidents with students as victims and perpetrators. The findings detailed lower rates of bullying due to the implementation of SWPBIS, which also supported the belief that alternative disciplinary approaches were more effective against bullying behaviors than zero-tolerance policies.

Bradshaw et al. (2008) examined the impact of PBIS implementation in 37 elementary schools. Using a large randomized controlled trial, researchers analyzed data from 2,500 school personnel to determine the effect of the implementation of PBIS in schools over 3 years. When used as a prevention model with the potential for sustained influence on student performance, the findings indicated that PBIS substantially impacted the positive changes in school climate.

Eiraldi et al. (2019) conducted a pilot study concerning the implementation and effects of a SWPBIS program, including mental health support of group cognitive behavioral therapy in two K-8 urban schools. Researchers found that tier I interventions were linked to fewer office discipline referrals. In addition, students receiving cognitive

behavioral group therapy experienced significantly lower mental health diagnostic severity at the end of treatment. Additionally, Garbacz et al. (2018) investigated how 302 schools from three states implemented PBIS to engage families in tier I systems. They found that communicating with families about PBIS and supporting families to help their children follow school expectations were directly related to the fidelity of PBIS implementation. Other common ways of implementation that aided in program fidelity were family collaboration and partnerships to support PBIS.

### **Punitive Punishment**

Punitive punishments or removal practices to address student behavior included exclusionary practices such as corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion. Corporal punishment remains legal in 19 schools in the United States. In November of 2016, the Secretary of Education King (2016) released a statement to these states encouraging them to end corporal punishment in schools. In this letter, King stressed the adverse effects of corporal punishment and how it is used disproportionately with students of color and those with disabilities.

Most recent CRDC data from 2017-2018 (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021) revealed that 31.4% of Black students experienced in-school suspensions, and 38.2% incurred one or more out-of-school suspensions. These rates are more than twice the total student enrollment (15.1%) of Black students. In addition, these statistics showed that boys were expelled at a higher rate than girls. Boys with educational assistance received 72.5% of all expulsions, and those without educational services experienced 73.8% of expulsions. Although Black students composed only 15.1% of student enrollment, they were expelled at more than twice their total enrollment

level, with 38.8% of expulsions when they received educational assistance and 33.3% of expulsions without educational services. Native American and Alaska Native students were expelled at rates higher than their 1% proportion of total student enrollment at 1.1% and 1.8%, respectively (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021).

Maiti (2021) found that corporal punishment has a statistically significant adverse impact on children's academic achievement and self-esteem. Furthermore, students with low self-esteem were at risk of developing problem behaviors that led to school disciplinary referrals. When Black students receive punitive punishment, their academic outcomes are negatively affected, lowering their learning potential and increasing potentially adverse life outcomes.

Zero-tolerance policies were included as a component of the punitive punishment school disciplinary approach which originated with the passing of The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994. The Gun Free Act ushered in harsh consequences for specific behaviors, such as possessing weapons and drugs (Skiba et al., 2011).

Gagnon et al. (2017) explored statewide trends in Florida and compared the use of punitive punishment practices. Schools that allow corporal punishment were compared to those that do not use corporal punishment. Using 2010-2011 data obtained from the Florida Department of Education, the study analyzed the use of punitive punishment practices on students by gender, race, and grade level. Results were obtained from multilevel regression analyses, tests, and comparisons and indicated that punitive punishment is more likely to be used at schools with a high percentage of students with free or reduced lunch status and historically marginalized populations. Moreover, these

practices were used more frequently when addressing the misbehavior of boys and African American students.

### **Research on School Discipline and Race**

The racial discipline gap is depicted by more frequent and harsh disciplinary actions for African Americans and Latino students than their White peers for similar behavior incidents (Monroe, 2005a). Exclusionary discipline tends to be applied disproportionately to students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities. According to Skiba et al. (2011), national student discipline data revealed that African American students were almost four times more likely to receive punitive disciplinary referrals to the office and suspension or expulsion for identical behaviors than White students. These disparities exist with such magnitude that schools appear to violate Federal Civil Rights Laws (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Contributions of school leaders that include their biases were coupled with formal state and district policies for classifying student misbehavior and the recommended consequences.

Academic struggles can lead to frustration and contribute to disruptive behaviors in school. Ladson-Billings (2006) directly correlated the discipline and achievement gaps for historically marginalized students. Pfleger and Wiley (2012) analyzed the nature of studies conducted in Colorado. Their findings, which took place over a 2-year school period, included behavior categories including disobedience, detrimental behaviors, and “other” violations, which accounted for 85.5% of student behavioral incidents. Schools were ultimately more likely to assign out-of-school suspensions than any other disciplinary action, with higher percentages of African American, American Indian, and Latino students receiving disciplinary actions than White and Asian American students.



In addition, African American students were assigned more out-of-school suspensions than whites and Asians. Based on the work of Pflieger and Wiley (2012), out-of-school suspensions had negative long-term consequences, such as the causal relationship between suspensions and expulsions and higher dropout rates, thus perpetuating the disparities that exist in historically marginalized communities.

In contrast to common standards, LaCour et al. (2017) rejected the measure of high-quality schools as those with high test scores on standardized assessments. They asserted that high test scores were not the sole indicator of high-quality schools, and indicators should include addressing social and disciplinary inequities. The Schools of Opportunity Project was established to celebrate and recognize schools that have improved or created learning environments that include *all* students. The Schools of Opportunity Project embrace the view that schools that "broaden and enrich the learning environments and create and maintain a healthy school culture that includes disciplinary approaches that resist the trend of pushing students out of school" (LaCour, 2017, p. 1) were recognized as high-quality schools and as exemplars of education and models to follow. LaCour et al. asserted that no one definition existed for what constituted healthy schools. Instead, they defined high-quality as how the schools responded to their unique populations to address academic, social, and disciplinary inequalities.

### **Black Students and School Discipline**

Based on the conditions of educational inequality in the past and present, recognizing the long-term consequences for students exposed to injustices is critical. Despite the repeal of legal school segregation, Black scholars in the United States have not received equitable education (Bell, 2018). They have been frequently denied access to

the same quality of infrastructure and resources in schools with higher concentrations of historically marginalized populations. Although many variables contributed to these discrepancies, a common thread existed where Black students were treated and perceived differently by teachers and school administrators. For example, certain behaviors by Black students were viewed as more troublesome, and they were punished more harshly than White pupils (Blake et al., 2010).

Furthermore, Blake et al. (2010) asserted that where a discipline gap exists, there is also an achievement gap. Gaps in discipline and achievement led to students experiencing long-lasting effects of teacher biases due to exclusionary disciplinary practices. However avoidable, these practices can have long-term consequences for students' lives beyond the K-12 years.

### **Black Boys and School Discipline**

Black boys as young as preschool-aged receive more exclusionary discipline than their White counterparts. The U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights *2017-2018 Civil Rights Collection Report* (2021) revealed that Black boys were suspended at a rate of 3.3 times higher than White boys. Black boys represented less than 10% of preschool enrollment but 34.2% of out-of-school suspensions (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021).

Punitive discipline, including suspensions and expulsions, was used on the most vulnerable students, positively correlated with entrance to the school-to-confinement pathway (Fenning & Rose, 2007). The behaviors exhibited by Black boys that are criminalized by school policies and zero-tolerance policies were co-contributors to discipline disparities (Monroe, 2005b). School discipline data has shown that Black boys

receive more exclusionary discipline consequences and referrals than any other group of students in K-12 public schools (Monroe, 2005b). School dress codes have been used to criminalize Black Boys when their choice of clothing was perceived as threatening (Pavlakis & Roegman, 2018). When Black boys wore head coverings, they felt targeted and faced dress code violations and discipline more often than their White peers who wore hats without reprimand. Black boys as young as preschool-aged faced pushout due to educators' disproportionately applied disciplinary policies and practices; thus, their early educational experiences were jeopardized (Wesley & Ellis, 2017).

### **Black Girls and Discipline**

Parks et al. (2016) conducted case studies to highlight the need to focus on Black girls and unique risk factors within the cradle to confinement pathway. Using data and case studies, the authors presented the most significant issue confronting Black girls in urban school settings, i.e., the significant racial disparities in suspension, expulsion, and harsh disciplinary practices required, a massive call to action to close troubling gaps. For example, the U.S. Department of Education's (2016) civil rights collection report revealed that Black girls were suspended 5.3 times more often than White girls. Thus, Black girls were suspended at nearly the same rate as Black boys. Additionally, Black girls represented the fastest-growing group in confinement spaces, including prisons and juvenile detention centers (Morris, 2013). Another report from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2021) recommended specific practices for immediate implementation, which aimed to reduce the excessive exercise of disciplinary actions and transform schools into environments for Black girls that promote positive engagement.

Researchers concluded that Black girls were a long-neglected group compared to the predominant focus on Black boys. As a result, Black girls face more significant risks of school dropout and into the cradle to confinement pathways. Morris and Perry (2017) found that Black girls are 3 times more likely than White girls to receive referrals, a gap that is more expansive than Black and White boys.

Narratives about Black women place Black girls under constant surveillance, leaving them more susceptible to the criminalizing of their behaviors (Martin & Beese, 2017). Schools have often been hostile places for many Black girls as they receive direct and indirect disparaging messages that they are not valued (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). In a study of New Jersey's public schools using the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), Black girls were overrepresented in expulsions and out-of-school suspensions. Paul and Araneo (2019) found that this overrepresentation worsened over time, and the pushout of Black girls could become worse in New Jersey public schools than in other areas in the United States. This fact suggested that Black girls in New Jersey were significantly pushed into school to confinement pathways. Morris (2013) conducted a phenomenological research study of Black girls in Northern California sentenced to juvenile court schools. Although some experienced their first suspensions and expulsions in elementary school, the findings from interviews showed that these Black girls valued their education. This study revealed that despite placement in institutions of confinement and histories of exclusionary discipline, Black girls valued education after experiencing the consequences in both traditional schools and while in detention (Morris, 2013).

### **Disparities in School Discipline**

Ladson-Billings (2006) found inequalities in the disciplinary consequences were due to a combination of policies and practices of discrimination aimed toward people of color throughout the history of the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2014), school-aged Black girls receive 12% of out-of-school suspensions, compared to 4% of Latinas and 2% of White girls. These numbers illustrate a significant disparity in the number of suspensions experienced by Black girls and girls of other races. Survey results also highlighted the perception that Black girls needed less nurturing and comforting, knew more about sex, and required less protection and support than White girls. This perception indirectly contributed to harsher punishment by educators, administrators, and school resource officers.

Slate et al. (2016) used Texas statewide data to investigate differences in the disciplinary assignments among White, Black, and Hispanic girls in Grades 4–11. When examining school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and assignments to alternative education placement programs, the results showed significantly more out-of-school suspensions for Black girls at each grade than other groups of girls, demonstrating an apparent lack of equity. Specifically, sixth and ninth grades, considered transition years for all students, revealed an even sharper increase in disciplinary consequences for Black girls.

### **Dominant Definitions of Femininity**

Normative femininity ideals have not been readily applied to Black girls, specifically because notions of innocence are fashioned through the lens of racism and sexism (Annamma et al., 2014). Historically, normative constructions of femininity have been associated with White women and girls. Additionally, Black girls remained on the

opposing end of the normative construct (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). The experiences of Black girls were not included in discussions about girlhood. Hooks (1981) reported that when girlhood discussions occurred, the experiences of White girls and girlhood dominated conversations. According to Deliovsky (2008), European beauty standards, including attitudes and behaviors coupled with patriarchal notions of modesty and fragility, were governed by Whiteness. Black girls were regarded as aggressive, sexually deviant, and unworthy of the same protections, compassions, and considerations granted to White girls (Carter Andrews et al., 2019).

Black girls received more frequent referrals for infractions that targeted disruptive behaviors, dress code violations, disobedience, and aggressive behaviors due to gendered interrelations (Murphy et al., 2013). Black girls were considered more masculine than girls of other races (Morris & Perry, 2017). These interpretations were subjective and gendered compared to traditional White female standards of docile behavior attributes. When Western beauty standards were promoted, Black girls were perceived as loud and defiant in their self-advocacy attempts. Similarly, Evans-Winters (2017) found that Black girls were seen as “dangerous bodies” when they flipped the script to activism and self-advocacy. Through interviews and research, Black girls described how they targeted practices such as enforcing zero-tolerance policies and other school disciplinary policies through protests and education. Black girls and their culture were seen as a threat to themselves, other students, and adults in school spaces. Morris (2007) suggested that Black girls defended themselves, particularly against physical interactions with boys, despite feelings of neglect and other negative teacher perceptions.

Nunn (2018) described the strength and sadness that comprise the complexities of Black girls in a 2-year study that found common themes in the negative relationships Black girls had with students and adults at school. Observation notes, interviews, and other data collection methods showed that teachers described Black girls as having attitudes and defying authority. The experiences of Black girls were not often discussed or included in discussions about girl experiences; instead, these discussions typically depicted the experiences of White girls. The judging of subjective behaviors exhibited by Black girls specifically illustrated their unique experiences at intersections of race and gender.

Epstein et al. (2017) highlighted disproportionate disciplinary practices against Black girls in a study with survey results that revealed participants perceived Black girls as needing less nurturing than other racial/ethnic groups of girls. Additionally, the survey results supported that Black girls knew more about sex and needed to receive comfort and support less often than girls of other races. These perceptions may have contributed to harsher punishment of Black girls by educators and school resource officers.

### **Principal's Role in Discipline**

DeMatthews et al. (2017) studied how race and school context influenced principals' actions and enforcement of disciplinary codes. Principals often believed they acted fairly despite evidence that racial discipline gaps persisted. These disparities have continued to grow due to increased discipline-related decisions regarding suspension, expulsions, and alternate school placements. Principals were tasked to collect information about student misbehavior, conduct investigations, and often apply consequences from these hard facts that did not include diverse students' personalities and cultural norms.

DeMatthews et al. (2017) explained that rather than closing discipline gaps, principals might contribute unknowingly to sustaining school discipline gaps. They classified some principals as holding biased views of Black parents and thus, justified the excessive disciplinary practices as teaching Black students rules they believed that parents did not teach them at home.

## **Summary**

Black girls disproportionately receive exclusionary discipline 12% compared to only 2% for White girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016). Additionally, Black girls accounted for 13% of out-of-school suspension students compared to 8% of White girls and 6% of Latina girls (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021). The researcher asserted that school suspensions and other exclusionary disciplinary practices could increase the likelihood of Black girls entering school to confinement pathways. Historical research has shown the positionality of Black girls as outsiders in school settings that had not planned for their presence. These findings have provided probable explanations for overrepresentation in school disciplinary outcomes. Using CRT and Intersectionality as theoretical frameworks, this qualitative study investigated how school administrators may contribute to discipline inequalities and the impact of school disciplinary rules on the enforcement of school discipline.

Beginning with a historical analysis, Chapter Two provided a detailed literature review of school discipline. I focused on school discipline approaches and the impacts of disproportionate discipline on Black girls, emphasizing relevant theoretical frameworks and identifying areas for further research. The qualitative methodology of the research study, the reasoning for the methodologies chosen, and the research design are all



discussed in Chapter Three. The data gathered and themes uncovered throughout the interview process are discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the results of the study and why they are important to this research study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

Racial disproportionality in the field of education is a national issue. Much of the research describing disparities of students of color in school focuses primarily on the experiences of Black boys. Black students are disciplined more frequently and vigorously than White students (Skiba et al., 2011). Black boys were more likely than Black girls to receive suspensions. However, Black girls are targeted due to the intersections of race and gender and anti-blackness (Morris, 2016; Wun, 2014). Within the past decade, research has emerged to highlight the impact of disparities in school discipline on Black girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015).

This case study describes how school disciplinary policies implemented by principals and assistant principals contribute to the discipline disparities faced by Black girls. Previous research found that Black girls disproportionately receive exclusionary discipline, including suspensions and expulsions, at higher rates (12%) than the 2% of White girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016). Additionally, Black girls make up about 13% of those receiving out-of-school suspensions compared to 8% of White girls and 6% of Latina girls (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021).

Qualitative research design provides ways to understand real-life situations (Glesne, 2016). This research aimed to understand how the implementation of school

discipline policy contributed to the discipline disparities faced by Black girls using interviews and school district documents—as such, attempting to gain this knowledge through a survey or control group would not inform this study. According to Yin (2018), qualitative research allows researchers to remain actively engaged in the data collection process due to investigating a phenomenon in its relevant natural setting. Additionally, Yin’s characteristics of qualitative research suggest that the designs require research questions posed as “how” and “why in nature. Yin’s description is consistent with the current study. All data sources allowed data collection consistent with the how and why of implementing school discipline policy.

A case study is a qualitative research design used to produce a detailed, multi-faceted understanding of a complex problem (Crowe et al., 2011), The core tenet of a case study is to analyze a phenomenon in detail in a real-life setting with the researcher as the main instrument of analysis and data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

According to Yin (2018), case studies can explain, describe, or explore events in the everyday context they occur. Additionally, beyond what would be possible in traditional historical analysis, case studies include the potential to deal with a diverse range of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews of those who may still be involved, and direct observation (Yin, 2018).

### **Approach**

According to Morris et al. (1999), in anthropology and the social and behavioral sciences, emic and etic approaches refer to two types of field study and viewpoints obtained. According to Bergman and Lindgren (2018), a case study involves data gathering by outsiders in response to questions posed by outsiders. They further

elaborated the etic approach and described attempts to explain the social realities they observe using the theoretical apparatus of social sciences. As such, theory or theoretical concepts drove the research design. However, other researchers have studied culture with some preconceived notions. Bergman and Lindgren's approach avoided altering the culture with direct interaction (Pike, 1971). One drawback of the etic approach was the inability to obtain in-depth information because the theory drives the research questions, coding, and analysis, usually resulting in confirmation or disconfirmation of the theory and very little other information.

The emic approach seeks to examine culture-specific phenomena through the perspective of the participants, sometimes insiders, and pertains to the knowledge and interpretations within a culture that is created and used by individuals based on their customs, beliefs, and behaviors (Bergman & Lindgren, 2018; Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Pike, 1971). An emic account involves an individual immersed in a culture describing the cultural rules for behavior. The emic approach investigates how local people think, view, and categorize the world. While this perspective stems from the concepts of immersion in a specific culture, the emic participant is not always a member of that culture or society. As a result, emic studies can often approach in-depth details of the practices and beliefs of a society that may otherwise have been ignored. The weaknesses include difficulties in making what is familiar unique for analyses. If the researcher is a member of the culture, tacit knowledge works against identifying uniqueness.

Both approaches were productive for this case study to answer the four research questions. While neither approach was better than the other, combining the approaches is widely recognized in the interest of human nature and the form and function of human

social systems such as schools. Emic and etic lenses complemented this research study and assisted in making sense of a deeper cultural story. Specifically, as a Black practicing school administrator, I recognized the pull described by Beals et al. (2020) at the edge of the emic and etic divide that could occur in a study. Beals et al. (2020) asserted that researchers should instead “stand on the edge and hold onto our identities while speaking from the margins . . .to create bridges between the space of research (academia) and the place of research (the research location)” (p. 599).

The preexisting theories of CRT and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1993) shaped how this researcher oriented the inquiry. As an outsider to the research site, this researcher made sense of the results of data analysis from an etic perspective as it affected Black girls and disproportionate disciplinary outcomes. Additionally, as a practicing school administrator, this researcher sought to understand multiple ways school administrators thought and implemented school discipline using an emic or insider perspective. This researcher believed findings would identify instances where school personnel implemented disciplinary measures which contributed to the disparities faced by Black girls.

### **Research Aims**

Using a case study approach informed by critical race theory and the theory of intersectionality, this research study investigated the ways school administrators implemented disciplinary policies to determine if policy implementation contributed to disparities in school discipline experienced by Black girls. Additionally, this study concerned whether school administrators' beliefs and attitudes about race impacted disciplinary decisions in implementing school policy. This research was necessary and

urgent because Black girls continue to experience adverse school outcomes (Annamma et al., 2014; Gibson & Decker, 2019). The study aimed to add to the body of research regarding how school administrators' preferences and biases and their personal and professional backgrounds impact decisions that contribute to the racial discipline gap experienced by Black girls. Another aim was that the outcomes could address the intersecting systems of racism embedded in schools that contribute to social and disciplinary inequities impacting Black girls.

### **Research Questions**

Data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted to respond to the following research questions:

1. How do school administrators' implementation of school discipline policies contribute to the disparities in school discipline faced by Black girls?
2. How do school administrators describe the influence of school district discipline policies on their decision-making on discipline infractions?
3. How do school administrators characterize the effects of discipline policies on Black girls?
4. How do school administrators describe the influence of professional and personal experiences with Black children and Black girls, in particular, on their decisions to implement school discipline in their schools?

### **Data Sources**

Multiple data sources were used to improve validity (Crowe et al., 2011). Yin (2018) stated that case study evidence could come from several sources, including physical artifacts, documents, direct observation, interviews, and archival records.

Interviews in this research study supported the understanding of the research participants' views, behaviors, and experiences. Using interviews, a rich source of data was derived from the small number of school administrators implementing school discipline who may have contributed to the disparities faced by Black girls. Interviews contained semi-structured, open-ended questions that were clear and easy to understand.

Additionally, participants were provided a participant journaling reflection to complete after the interview. These reflections consisted of viewing a 3-minute video (TED, 2016) on unconscious bias and responding to journal prompts to collect in-depth information and identify significant themes for further analysis with other data sources. The video depicted a young boy of color as he navigated bias in the school and its impact on his future in this animated live-action film. The film also featured the voices of youngsters as they grew older, recounting their experiences at school and home.

In addition to interviews, this researcher analyzed school discipline data documents and school district code of conduct documents. The school discipline data analyzed consisted of student discipline referrals and the outcomes of the referrals received for the 2018-2019 school year. The school discipline data included student demographic data of student race and gender. The school district code of conduct is a set of principles, expectations, and/or rules presented to stakeholders to communicate behavioral requirements. The school district code of conduct is made available on the school district and individual school websites. Additionally, the code of conduct is included in the student handbook and is disseminated to parents and students as a mechanism for the communication of the school district's rules and policies. I analyzed these documents for informational purposes only. The analysis of these documents

helped to tell a story about the implementation of school discipline and its impact on the disproportionate discipline of Black girls.

### **Setting and Participants**

Research undertaken in the researcher's setting, institution, or organization is known as backyard research (Glesne, 2016). In this study, I avoided the issue by not selecting the district where I am employed. This step can avoid problems arising from research in familiar territory (Glesne, 2016). Instead, research was conducted in a setting where the roles of the researcher and school administrator would not influence research activities as I did not live or work in the research setting. In addition, the research site was selected for travel convenience and constraints brought on by the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic. Thus, a site was chosen in close proximity.

Before selecting participants, the initial steps included assigning pseudonyms to participants to ensure they were unidentifiable by name. First, I sent an email to the Superintendent of school district X, requesting permission to conduct research in the district. Next, an electronic request to conduct research form was sent to school district X with the necessary documentation. After submitting the request to conduct research, a letter was sent by the district to confirm the approval of the request. Finally, this formal approval letter was sent to the principals of two schools: a middle school and a high school.

The administrators recruited from these schools met the following criteria:

1. Must hold current administrator certification and be currently employed as an administrator in school district X



2. Must have current experience serving in a primary role as an implementer and enforcer of school and district discipline policies at the research site.
3. The school discipline records indicate disparities in discipline for Black girls during the 2018-2019 school year.
4. Serve as a principal or assistant principal in a middle or high school that meets the criteria above.

I selected participants to compare and contrast the beliefs and choices of school administrators working in similar settings.

The study population consisted of principals and assistant principals in a school district in the United States. I selected School district X because of its proximity. Additionally, school district X comprised schools with diverse student and staff populations. There were six middle schools, three high schools, and one alternative middle-level school in school district X. Of the middle and high schools in the district, eight schools have at least three combined principal and assistant principal personnel.

I selected one middle school and one high school in school district X as the potential sites for research because the transitions from the sixth and ninth grades pose sharp increases in out-of-school suspensions for Black girls (Slate et al., 2016). After submitting appropriate district research approval documents, a research request approval letter was received from district personnel. The letter was emailed to the and copied to a middle and high school principal based on an initial analysis of student discipline data from the 2018-2019 school year. The preferred and ideal participants for the study included practicing principals and assistant principals employed at the school site during the 2018-2019 school year. In addition, the ideal school sites have women leaders.

Following the school district X research approval letter process, I emailed an invitation letter to both principals. I sent an email with details that outlined the research goal, interview format, confidentiality steps, and contact information. After potential participants responded affirmatively, an initial interview date, time, and format were set.

A questionnaire consisting of demographic questions was administered to collect demographic information from participants. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to interview each of the participating principals and assistant principals at the research site. Each interview lasted about 50 minutes. Participants were provided a copy of the informed consent form and asked to sign electronically (Appendix B). Additional steps to protect participant confidentiality were included in the emails to participants and during individual interviews.

In response to the current worldwide Covid-19s pandemic, CDC issued guidance to minimize risk when planning meetings and gatherings; the guidelines stressed video conferencing or teleconferencing for meetings and gatherings (CDC, 2021). The school administrators participated in the interviews via the videoconferencing service Zoom. Zoom allows businesses and individuals to meet using video. Only one interview was conducted via phone due to scheduling conflicts, and the other three took place using Zoom.

Criterion sampling was used to recruit an appropriate number of participants at the selection site. Patton (2015) defined this as purposeful sampling that includes collecting cases that meet some predetermined criteria of importance (p.238). Criterion sampling was used to recognize and understand information-rich cases.

Participants were emailed or called to determine dates and times of their availability for interviews. Upon receipt of dates and times of availability, participants were provided a Zoom link to join the video chat platform. Once the date and time were established, individual links were shared via email. Interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes, providing sufficient time for notetaking and follow-up questions posed by the researcher and participants.

### **Interview Protocol and Interviews**

The interview protocol was created using information from the literature review, gaps in knowledge from the research, and the research questions as a guide. I first considered the research questions and created a list of probing questions that provided opportunities to learn more from the participants. I added broad questions to provide participants with an opportunity to share knowledge while simultaneously building rapport and to help participants feel at ease. Narrower interview questions were added to the list to provide participants with opportunities to expound on personal and professional experiences while working as school administrators who implemented discipline consequences involving Black girls. I structured questions to allow follow-up questions for clarity. Once I decided on the final 19 questions to include, the questions were reordered so that similar topics were grouped together.

The final tentative interview protocol was pilot tested with a school administrator who did not participate in the research study to improve data collection. The pilot test participant provided feedback that was used to refine interview questions before interviews with the research participants. I provided participants with intentional opportunities to reflect and hypothesize for their responses while maintaining flexibility. I

posed questions 1 to 14 during the interview, and the remaining questions required participants to view a video on bias and then respond to questions 15 to 19. The animated video was included as a reflection tool for participants. School administrators were asked to participate in a journal reflection to reflect on bias in their school. This reflection tool enhanced this study because the participants were encouraged to reflect on the bias observed in their school. A copy of the interview protocol is included in Appendix D.

Participants were asked to share noteworthy personal and professional experiences throughout their tenure as school administrators. I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with the four school administrators who served at a public high school with a significant historically marginalized population of at least 40% and have a primary role as a disciplinarian. Participants were interviewed once, with follow-up questions when further clarification was needed. Interviews lasted 45 to 82 minutes and were recorded using the video chat platform, Zoom. All interviews took place on a mutually agreed date and time. Of the four interviews, the first was transcribed manually. Later all four were transcribed digitally using Otter.ai, a computer-based software that creates speech-to-text transcription and translation. After digital transcription, the interviews were manually transcribed to ensure accuracy and coded to determine themes. Interview participants were not compensated for participation in the research process.

### **Demographic Questionnaire**

During the preliminary interview process, a demographic questionnaire was posed to participants to gather additional information about the participants' educational and administrative backgrounds. The questionnaire was specifically designed to gather additional information about the participants' background characteristics while

simultaneously preserving interview time for the open-ended interview questions of the interview protocol. Appendix C contains a copy of the demographic questionnaire.

### **Procedure**

I described the location and participants of the case study in the preceding sections. Chapter Three described the thematic analysis developed from categories through multiple rounds of coding from which themes and subsidiary themes were discovered. Finally, these themes were more deeply interpreted by returning to original transcripts to develop meaning.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Before presenting a summary of the findings, the researcher recommended caution in interpreting their meaning. This research included parameters that could skew the results. First, this study included principals and assistant principals who work in a high school with historically marginalized populations of at least 40% and whose primary roles include implementing student discipline. Second, this study was limited by including only 1 year of school disciplinary data from the 2018-2019 school year. Therefore, the results do not extrapolate beyond 1 year. The 2018-2019 school disciplinary data were the most recent prior to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Third, while participants were diverse in gender, they were not diverse in racial makeup. The research participants were all Black school administrators. Finally, as a Black woman and school administrator, I have positionality that could elicit bias.

### **Description of Participants**

Administrator 1 is a 38-year-old African American male born and raised in the city that encompasses school district X. He graduated from an in-state university where

he obtained a Master's degree in Educational Administration. This participant has served as a teacher, coach, assistant administrator, and assistant principal at the high school level before becoming principal at Marine High School. Administrator 1 served more than ten years in education, with less than ten years served years as an administrator. He served less than five years as a school administrator in school district X. He enjoyed working with students and serving as a role model for Black boys. He candidly shared his thoughts and experiences in various roles during the interview process and how these contributed to his leadership style. In the interview, he reflected on accomplishing the goal of returning to his hometown to make an impact.

Administrator 2 was an African American woman who has served in education for more than 20 years. She has served more than 15 years as an administrator. Before serving as a school administrator, she worked as a teacher for 5 years. Administrator 2 has served mainly as an administrator and an assistant principal at Marine High for more than 5 years. She earned a doctorate in education and has various experiences in special education, curriculum and instruction, and teacher evaluation. Administrator 2 enjoys helping teachers understand the evaluation process and assisting new teachers to enter education successfully. Additionally, she takes pride in serving as an advocate for both students and teachers at Marine High School.

Administrator 3 is an African American woman who served as a specialist in special education prior to becoming an assistant principal. She holds two Master's degrees: counseling and administration and supervision. Although new to administration, her more than 15 years of experience in education have been primarily at the middle school level in various districts within the state. Administrator 3 has served at Marine

High School for less than 5 years, and her administrative duties include working in special education, teacher evaluations, and student discipline. During the interview process, this participant spoke about how she utilizes counseling skills to build relationships with students and works to improve students' academics and behavioral concerns.

Administrator 4 is an African American woman who first served as a math teacher in a neighboring district. She shared experiences about leaving her previous district to obtain an administrator's position and how she landed in school district X. Administrator 4 earned two Master's degrees. She participated in an in-district program in her previous district to train aspiring administrators. This participant served in education for less than 15 years and less than 5 years in school district X as an assistant principal. Her primary duties as an assistant principal include curriculum and instruction and student discipline. As an assistant principal, Administrator 4 specifically enjoyed the opportunity to influence more students than when she was a classroom teacher. She was learning the role of an administrator in the post-pandemic era and noted that the environment was often fast-paced and ever-changing. Additionally, this participant noted that she must take on roles for which she was unprepared due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A semi-structured interview protocol was used. Each interview consisted of open-ended questions (Appendix C). During interviews, I wrote observational notes. Member checking was used to validate participant responses and provide credibility to results. I returned each participant's verbatim transcriptions to them via email. The member checking process was described to participants in lay terms, and they were provided an

opportunity to review their responses. Of the four participants only one participant shared a correction to a portion of the transcript that was grammatical in nature. Data sources included video recordings of interviews with the four school administrators. Additional data sources included the research site's 2018-2019 school discipline data and the 2018-2019 school discipline policy, or student code of conduct, of the research site.

### **Data Coding and Analysis**

This research study explored if and how principals and assistant principals contribute to discipline disparities faced by Black girls. School administrators respond to student behavior based on their interpretations of official policy. Diamond and Lewis (2019) asserted that school discipline was a phenomenon shaped by school policy and adults involved in executing discipline routines. They theorized that school discipline involves collecting facts and navigating through the disciplinary process, including investigating events and implementing consequences.

Data analysis was ongoing, using the following data sources: (a) one-on-one in-depth interviews and observations with each participant at the research site during the 2018-2019 school year, (b) document analysis of the discipline data for the 2018-2019 school year, and (c) document analysis of disciplinary policy at the research site during the 2018-2019 school year. I analyzed discipline data and the student code of conduct, and the thoughts shared from the research questions via individual interviews. Analysis was performed using participants' verbatim responses during interviews, and results were synthesized on recurring themes to provide an in-depth understanding of the individuals' experiences. The results were organized as (a) descriptions of demographic data, including total years of experience in education, district, and administrative role; (b)



responses to the interview questions; (c) presentation of consistent themes related to the research questions. Individual participant interviews were recorded using the recording function of the video chat platform, Zoom.

I began the analysis process by transcribing and coding data segments of the first interview line by line. Next, I listened to audio recordings and transcribed each word verbatim during the transcription process. After transcribing the data, an analytic memo was written to capture the process and feelings about the next steps. I aimed to document the initial steps of the transcription process to facilitate reproducing this process for subsequent interview data.

The videos were analyzed to observe participants' body language during responses to questions about Black students. I began the coding process using in vivo codes to identify the words and statements of the first participant, who was a principal. I assigned descriptive codes to represent essential topics from interviews and values codes for perceived attitudes and beliefs (Saldana, 2016). This process was repeated for the second participant; however, I enlisted digital tools for transcription due to the length of the second interview.

Individual participant interviews were recorded using the recording function of the video chat platform Zoom. Afterward, recordings were transcribed using a transcription tool, Otter.ai, a computer-based software that creates speech-to-text transcription and translation. I then reviewed the recordings and compared them with the written transcriptions. Corrections for accuracy were made on written transcriptions to correspond to the recorded voice interviews.

The interview data files were imported into NVivo 1.6, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software that reduces and organizes data into more manageable portions. While using NVivo, I re-read and completed another coding round on the data set. New patterns and concepts arose based on knowledge of the theoretical frameworks and research on the disproportionate practices of disciplining Black girls. I found that the first coding cycle provided themes and potential codes for the remaining data.

During this stage of data analysis, I wrote analytic memos on the ways positionality emerged during the data collection process. The first coding of the data set generated 80 codes. Next, I worked through four additional coding cycles to condense the codes into 20 categories. Table 3 lists the initial in vivo, descriptive, and values codes generated during the researcher's first cycle. Following member checking, the interview data were analyzed and coded to create themes emerging from participants' responses. These conversations helped in the creation of emerging themes concerning school administrators' use of disciplinary policy and how their implementation could lead to discipline disparities for Black girls.

Schools maintain disciplinary policies that communicate how students interact with teachers, administrators, and other students. These codes of conduct are typically written and readily available to all stakeholders. These expectations for behavior apply to all students and have the purpose of creating safe environments that empower learning. However, school discipline data research has revealed disparities for students based on race, gender, and socio-economic status (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Analysis of documents from the study site revealed how disparities are related to implementing school discipline. Document analysis consisted of school discipline incidents during the 2018-2019 school

year and the school discipline policy. The data were organized to identify patterns and themes within and across categories. Table 3 displays 78 initial codes.

Table 3.1 Table of Initial Codes

In vivo	Descriptive
“fresh start”	New beginnings
“Golden Rule”	Treatment for others
“fear of Black boys”	Reason for bias
“holding kids accountable	Reason for bias
“treat all students the same”	Teacher approach
“bend over backwards”	Successful teacher-student relationships
“caring and understanding”	Building relationships with students
“she’s messing with me”	What Black boys say
“Outspoken and fearless”	Black student attribute
“building relationships”	Building relationships with students
“our school is community based”	A part of the community
“family feel”	A part of the community
“you live in my neighborhood”	A part of the community
“they stick together”	Student –student relationships
“ I wanted to give him a chance”	Desire to help
“we have to be firm and we have to be consistent”	Need for consistency
“girls don’t wear slips anymore”	Girls and clothing
“Dress code discussions”	Girls and clothing
“being an influence on more kids outside of your 30”	Enjoy about administration
“really help the teachers”	Enjoy about administration
“not on my watch”	Administrator as advocate
“are you looking under her desk”	Administrator wonderings
“ building a culture”	Building a community
“code of conduct”	Following policies

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“making examples of students”	Response to discipline
“need to control Black girls”	Reason for bias
“alternative school”	Discipline consequences
“She’s lying on me”	What Black girls say
“she was lenient last time”	What Black girls say
“So you just have to listen”	Responses to students
“roll their eyes at two”	Black girl nonverbal
“so we’re on the same page”	Need for consistency
“don’t force the issue”	Giving students space
“she don’t know how to talk to people”	What Black girls say
“that’s how I let them cool off”	Giving students space
“there’s this circle”	A part of the community
“simply a guide”	Following policies
“have to have those conversations”	Courageous conversations
“some type of empathy training”	Professional development need
“contact them through Facebook”	Communication methods
“utilize my counseling skills”	Using past experiences
“this is how I set the tone”	Individual approach
“you may want to take a closer look”	Addressing bias
“some will allow their bias to change depending on who was involved in the situation”	How bias shows up

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During the interview process I observed significantly more information was shared primarily by two of the administrators in comparison to the others. Administrators 1 and 2 both had significantly more experience serving as school administrators than Administrators 3 and 4. While the lived experiences of all of the participants were valuable and contributed to this research, Administrators 1 and 2 generally shared more experiences over the course of their respective terms as school administrators

### **Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis was the beliefs and choices of administrators regarding school discipline and school discipline of Black girls. Table 4 depicts the relationship between the research questions and the data sources used.

Table 3.2 Relationship across research questions and data sources

Research Question	Data Source
How do school administrators' implementation of school discipline policies contribute to the disparities in school discipline faced by Black girls?	Participant interviews School discipline data 2018-2019 School discipline policy 2018-2019
How do school administrators describe the influence of school district discipline policies on their decision-making on discipline infractions?	Participant interviews School discipline data 2018-2019 School discipline policy 2018-2019
How do school administrators characterize the effects of discipline policies on Black girls?	School discipline data 2018-2019 school year School discipline policy 2018-2019 Participant interviews
How do school administrators describe the influence of professional and personal experiences with Black children and Black girls, in particular, on their decisions to implement school discipline in their schools?	Participant interviews School discipline data 2018-2019 School discipline policy 2018-2019

I designed a semi-structured interview protocol Interview questions were created to align with the research questions, and the open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate their responses. Additionally, initial questions allowed for follow-up questions for clarity. To improve the validity of the interviews, the final protocol was field-tested

with a school administrator who did not participate in the research study. The field test participant provided feedback that I used to refine interview questions before interviews with the participants. The final interview protocol utilized for the research is available in Appendix D.

I contacted potential participants via email with an invitation to participate in the study. Interviews were completed with a semi-structured interview protocol with four school administrators. Participants were interviewed once, and a follow-up conversation was held when elaboration was needed. I scheduled interviews at a mutually agreed upon date and time. Interviews lasted about an hour using Zoom's video chat platform. Interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai, an online transcription software. To maintain the accuracy of participant responses, I manually checked transcriptions against the recordings. The interviews were then coded to determine group and individual themes. School administrators received no compensation for participation in interviews.

### **Coding Choices**

Coding is the sorting and identification of the pieces of data gathered that are relevant to the research purpose (Glesne, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). Coding is a “cyclical act that is not just labeling, it is linking” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 9); the process helps make substantial amounts of data more accessible for analysis. Coding was used as a way of indexing or mapping data to provide an overview of specific data that allowed sense-making from the data as aligned with the research questions (Elliott, 2018). Coding plans must remain specific to each data source and each coding cycle.

The first coding cycle occurred during the initial coding of the data, while the second coding cycle comprised reanalyzing information into smaller and more selective

categories or themes derived from the first coding cycle (Saldaña, 2016). The researcher used descriptive coding in the first coding cycle to analyze the interviews with school administrators. Next, descriptive coding was used to analyze the fundamental data to discover relevant themes (Saldaña, 2016). In the first coding cycle, in vivo coding was used. In vivo coding is a qualitative data analysis method that emphasizes the participants' actual spoken words (Elliott, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). When researchers engage with participants from a particular culture or micro-culture, this type of coding may be beneficial to emphasize the distinctions in how participants use unique terms or phrases that might not be understood when using other coding types. In addition, in vivo coding helped highlight participants' voices and supported them in giving meaning to their data. Finally, the researcher used values coding to determine if interview responses illustrated people, groups, or structures fighting for control. Values coding is the application of codes indicating values, attitudes, and beliefs and reflecting worldviews (Saldaña, 2016). This coding helps reveal participants' beliefs and behaviors, personal knowledge, perceptions, views, biases, principles, and other meanings and uncover the integrated values or beliefs of participants or organizations (Saldaña, 2016).

Descriptive coding, in vivo coding, values coding, and thematic analysis were used when analyzing the school discipline data and school discipline policy during the first cycle. Additionally, analytic memos were written to reflect on the coding process while the process unfolded. An analytical memo is a reflection written using the coding method about data analysis and how researchers think about the codes (Saldaña, 2016). Analytical memos are intended to improve logical thinking and support researchers in questioning their convictions. In addition, the process should bridge perceived gaps



between codes. When coding and collecting data, analytic memos help materialize ongoing thoughts to contribute later to richer explanations of the research study.

### **Research Orientations**

The primary tool in a case research study for data collection and interpretation is the researcher. Researchers must acknowledge and consider their own biases throughout the research process (Glesne, 2016). For example, positionality is defined as where one stands in relation to others and how the researchers' identity informs their research (Merriam et al., 2011, p. 411). Positionality concerns where the researcher stands relative to the participants in the study; that is, how the researcher views themselves and how the participants view them.

According to Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) and Innes (2009), insider/outsider status can assist the researcher in gaining unique perspectives. The insider role of this researcher is that of a Black woman who serves as a practicing administrator. Using the advantages of this insider/outsider status, this researcher has a vested interest in contributing to improvements in the lives of Black girls and this chosen profession. In the past decade, there have been many reports of physical assaults on Black girls in the school setting due to discipline policies and practices (Gupta-Kagan, 2017). Finally, this researcher serves as an employee of a district that participates in ongoing conversations concerning the national attention cast on the assault of a Black girl. These discussions of the incident were followed by professional development for teachers, administrators, and other support staff, catalyzed reform to discipline policies. I know of this account from professional lived experience.

I am a practicing school administrator. One of the primary responsibilities in this position is receiving disciplinary concerns from teachers and implementing the district disciplinary policy. Once a referral is received, I conduct a thorough investigation to determine the consequence, if any, the student should receive. I have been in this role for 6 years, and during this tenure, have observed many inequities involving students of color. This experience is consistent with evidence showing that students of color are referred more often and receive more exclusionary discipline actions than peers who are not members of historically marginalized populations (Skiba et al., 2011). In addition, the consequences assigned vary on the specific administrators' decisions and the school they attend. This researcher began this research study as a Black woman who is a school administrator and doctoral student with some predisposed ideas concerning school discipline and disparities imposed on Black girls. During this research, my positionality was further influenced; however, self-reflection provided additional consciousness of how positionality might affect the study outcomes and mitigate the impacts.

This identity as a Black woman impacted my role as a researcher in the following ways. First, my Blackness gave each of the participants who were also Black a sense of comfort and freedom to speak about issues of racism and bias pertaining to Black students. Second, a shared racial identity made each participant more comfortable discussing race issues. Third, this lack of shared identity may have contributed to other school administrators' hesitancy to participate in the research because they may have felt uncomfortable doing so.

Gender may have had a comparable effect on the participants. Three of the four participants were women. Gender identity may have made it easier to engage in a

conversation about problems concerning female students. The male participant spoke freely and did not appear to have any concerns about the researcher's gender when she posed pointed questions about women and girls.

I also shared the same occupation as the participants in this research study, which strengthened the interactions with each participant. Participants could freely share their responses to interview questions while interspersing workplace jargon shared in the field of education and school administrators more specifically. This common language served as a vehicle to build rapport with participants because the word choices did not require much, if any, explanation, which could lead to less fluency in the conversational style of the interview process.

Finally, the role as a doctoral candidate and researcher could have also impacted participant interactions. The role of a doctoral candidate may have been intimidating to some participants and could have placed the researcher as an expert on school discipline. However, one of the participants possessed a terminal degree, and this participant may not have viewed the researcher as the expert. This participant understood the researchers' process because that participant had also successfully navigated the process. Additionally, this participant proved essential in convincing two White administrators to participate in the study. While the efforts proved unsuccessful, this researcher appreciated voluntary efforts to assist in the research.

During the study, I had had an opportunity to gain more theoretical and historical knowledge about race, racism, and how it embeds in institutions and society, specifically educational institutions (Bell, 1992). CRT and Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1993) both served as guides on this topic. As a school administrator,

observations showed the racism embedded in educational institutions. I recognized the impacts of racism on students of color, specifically Black boys and girls. As this knowledge increases, so does an awareness of bias and prejudice. This case study allowed for self-reflection on the topic and position as a Black woman, administrator, and researcher discovering how school administrators might contribute to discipline disparities Black girls face in school.

Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) suggested that qualitative researchers remain mindful of how study participants view them and how they, as researchers, perceive the participants. These self-reflections created further reflections on the researchers' dual status as both an insider and outsider and the advantages and disadvantages of these positions. Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) described insider status as membership in the research group and outsider status as not holding membership in the research group. Banks (1998) further described four types of insider/outsider differences: indigenous-insider, indigenous-outsider, external-insider, and external-outsider, and defined them. Banks described that the indigenous insider "endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her primordial community and culture and is perceived by people within the community as legitimate community members who can speak with authority about it" (p. 8). Furthermore, an indigenous-outsider "was socialized within their Indigenous community but has experienced elevated levels of cultural assimilation into an outsider or oppositional culture" (p. 8). Moreover, Banks included that this individual's "values, beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge are identical to those of the outside community" and that the "indigenous outsider is perceived by indigenous people in the community as an outsider (p. 8)."

In contrast, Banks (1998) explained that the external insider, was socialized within another culture and acquired its beliefs, values, behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge. However, because of their unique experiences, the individual rejects many of their indigenous community's values, beliefs, and knowledge claims and endorses those studied. The external insider is viewed by the new community as an “adopted” insider.” (p. 8)

Banks labeled the external outsider as having been

socialized within a community different from the one they are researching. The external outsider has a partial understanding of a little appreciation for the values, perspectives, and knowledge of the community they are studying and consequently often misunderstands and misinterprets the behaviors within the studied community. (p.8)

As an indigenous insider, I can “endorse my community's specific values, experiences, attitudes, opinions, and experiences and speak with authority” (Banks, 1998, p. 7) as a Black girl and woman and a school administrator. However, I did not serve at the research site and was both an insider and an outsider to the participants and research site.

Outsiders and insiders face various obstacles (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). The insider role was that of a Black woman practicing administrator. There were both advantages and disadvantages to this insider role. One advantage of this positioning was understanding the community involved in the research. Questions unique to school administrators implementing discipline were developed and posed to participants. As a Black woman scholar, this researcher had an awareness and understanding of theories such as CRT and Intersectionality, which impact Black girls as they hold space in the

world. Questions posed as an insider served to identify the awareness of challenges and issues faced as a member of both groups. Understanding how the topic intersected with Black women's lives could point the researcher to the disadvantages of the insider role. The closeness to the position as a Black woman administrator made the researcher aware of the deep connection and care for Black girls' lives in schools. Additionally, my experiences as a Black woman were a part of the deep connection to care for them and the sense of protection for them. I care for all students served but I was aware of similarities and intersections of identity when reflecting on Black girls' experiences.

As an insider, greater familiarity may have been established during the interview, which could have led to the opportunity for further questioning and richer responses. Finally, over-rapport was an ever-present danger for an insider in research. Over-rapport can occur when researchers' connection to the group they are researching is distorted, and the researcher is unable to distance themselves from the process to critically analyze information (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Innes, 2009).

The role of a stranger to the research site and participants posed both advantages and disadvantages. An outsider advantage was that the researcher could be more successful in maintaining an emotional distance from the participants and analyze the data critically. Furthermore, as an outsider, I was in a better position to ask novel questions (Innes, 2009) as I was not privy to the culture of the research site or individual participants. On the other hand, I had to gain trust and credibility with the research participants (Innes, 2009). Additionally, I was unaware of the nonverbal language and gestures that participants might display.

According to Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) and Innes (2009), insider/outsider status can assist researchers in gaining unique perspectives. Researchers should be aware of the nuances surrounding insider/outsider status and understand that bias occurs. Therefore, multiple interpretations of data could become valuable and multidimensional (Brayboy & Deyhle). In this study, careful attention was paid to participant responses shared. Different people perceived the same incident distinctively due to their personal experiences, personalities, and perceptions of incidents. By interacting with different participants and analyzing various documents, I created knowledge from the communication of participants' experiences.

### **Epistemological Orientation**

The orientation toward social justice offers an understanding of the epistemological orientation. Epistemology is defined as the extent to which the values and preconceptions of what I saw, heard, and recorded (Patton, 2015). As a critical theorist, this researcher showed interest in how social systems and institutions operate and how many individuals were disadvantaged while others were privileged. Glesne (2016) stated that critical theorists “work to situate the experiences and perspectives of the oppressed group in a social, historical context, revealing how conditions serve certain groups and not others” (p. 11). This school administrator and researcher became more knowledgeable about the links between race and disciplinary outcomes (Crenshaw et al., 2015; DeMatthews et al., 2017; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020). Researchers using critical theory recognized research as a political act because it depends not only on value systems but questions value systems and reflects on power (Glesne, 2016). The power structure between students and school was the focus of this

research study. Additionally, as a critical theorist, I used research to critique historical and structural conditions of oppression as illustrated by the inequities in discipline received by Black girls and consider the transformation of those conditions. By analyzing the experiences, beliefs, and preconceptions of school administrators and various documents used to implement school discipline policies, I aimed to understand and raise awareness among participants.

### **Case Study Advantages and Disadvantages**

“Case studies are, and have always been, a hot topic for discussion when it comes to its use as a scientific method” (Krusenvik, 2016, p. 9). Case studies are a qualitative research approach that examines a phenomenon within its real-life context (Crowe et al., 2011; Flyvbjerg, 2006). The case study was flexible and involved the intensive study of a case that could be reasonably reproduced and applied to comparable situations. The focus should be on a particular unit, an individual, a group, an organization, or a community (Krusenvik, 2016). Case study research involves document collection and analysis, in-depth interviewing, and participant observation, all leading to different and more concrete knowledge. Case study research resonates with knowledge and understanding, helping researchers compare the case to their experiences (Glesne, 2016).

Newcomer et al. (2015) suggested that a descriptive case study “presents a complete description of an event within its context” (p. 164). There were advantages and disadvantages to this type of study. Data collection in this descriptive case study included responses to open-ended interview questions and document analysis of historical data from the immediate school year. The research design is highly descriptive and detailed to emphasize the contextual specificities given by administrators implementing school



discipline policies for Black girls. The aim was to understand the complex social phenomena of the implementation of school discipline as they contribute to the discipline disparities experienced by Black girls. When conducting a case study I was required to use transparency and fairness in reporting evidence. For this study, bias was addressed through member checking, analytic memos, and an awareness of her biases. Case studies enable researchers to study using observations that support other researchers in replicating the study (Yin, 2018). Other researchers could replicate this research study. Additionally, the results could add to the existing literature about the discipline disparities faced by Black girls. Case studies are advantageous when the researcher has no control over events.

Case study research can create large amounts of data for the researcher to sift through, making it labor-intensive. This research study included interviews, documents for analysis, analytic memos, and observation notes. One of the most significant critiques of case studies is the lack of rigor (Yin, 2018); however, initial assumptions and hypotheses can be revised based on outcomes. For example, during interviews, participants could provide self-protective and falsified answers.

### **Credibility, Validity, and Trustworthiness**

Steps were taken to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the research findings. Member checking and triangulation on the data were included in the design to support trustworthiness in this research study. Member checking allows the researcher to consult with interview participants and school administrators to determine the accuracy of their transcripts (Saldaña, 2016). I emailed interview transcripts and a draft of the final report to research participants to obtain their feedback and interpretations. Each of the four

school principals and assistant principals had an opportunity to submit the transcript with corrections via email. This process ensured trustworthiness by improving the accuracy of the data via firm guidelines established for qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016).

Triangulation was another strategy that contributed to the trustworthiness of a study. Triangulation is defined as using different methods of data collection, multiple sources, multiple researchers, or multiple theoretical perspectives (Glesne, 2016). The use of various methods and sources for data collection improves the reliability of findings and allows data analysis to include numerous interpretations and definitions (Flick, 2014). Multiple data sources were incorporated; the primary data collection was through interviews with school principals and assistant principals. Additional data sources included school discipline records, the school's discipline policy, and observations and reflections about the study site, participants, and school district. I drew on several techniques to document and collect research data, leading to richer, multidimensional outcomes (Glesne, 2016; Yin, 2018). The practice of triangulation assisted researchers in strengthening the construct validity of the case study by providing multiple assessments of the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The thematic analysis was contingent on the triangulation established across the three data sources.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

To ensure research ethics, I took several steps to ensure the integrity of the study and the anonymity of study participants. During this study, breach of confidentiality was always a risk; however, steps were taken to lower the risks of exposing information related to participants' identities. Initially, administrators were informed that their

participation in the study was voluntary, and their identities and responses would remain confidential throughout the process. Consent forms were provided to and signed by each participant. After participant consent forms were collected, a pseudonym was assigned to the participants in interviews and observational notes to safeguard their identities. There was little physiological or physical risk to study participants.

Pseudonyms were assigned to counties, school districts, schools, and school administrators to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Additional identifiers that could link interview responses to participants or their locations were withheld. After transcription, I emailed transcripts to school principals and assistant principals for review. Each of the four school principals and assistant principals had an opportunity to return the transcripts with corrections. The email stated a brief definition of member checking in simple to understand terms. The email also informed participants that their identities were protected by the use of pseudonyms assigned to their responses. Participants were informed that if I did not receive corrections within about 48 hours, then the researcher could presume the participant did not plan to make corrections. Additionally, as data were analyzed and coded, care and discretion were used when handling data. All research data were saved on a password-protected device, including notes, audiotapes, transcriptions, and consent forms.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) process emphasizes many ethical requirements. Therefore, I filed a thorough IRB approval application with the University of South Carolina's review board. Concerns about participant risks, as well as other ethical considerations, were addressed through the IRB application. Appendix E contains the IRB letter of approval.

## **Research Significance**

This study aimed to add to the existing body of research concerning Black girls and school discipline. At the time of the study, minimal research existed on this topic; thus, this study may contribute to additional knowledge focused on the disproportionate exercise of discipline among high school Black girls. The research results may lead to insights into the perspectives of high school administrators as they engage with Black girls. The results could inform policymakers such as superintendents, school board members, and school administrators and prompt them to review how school disciplinary policies were developed and why they disproportionately affect Black girls. Results of the study might be used by practicing school principals and assistant principals to ensure school policies are not used in a discriminatory manner.

## **Implications**

This researcher identified a few implications for this research study. First, administrators could study discipline data and encourage in-depth conversations with staff members, colleagues, district personnel, and school board members about patterns in high school discipline policies that negatively impact Black girls. Stakeholders could then advocate for Black girls by working together to transform disciplinary practices and policies that negatively affect Black girls.

An additional indicator revealed that administrators were better able to address the lack of cultural knowledge and foster greater respect for Black girls on their campuses when they participated in and secured professional growth opportunities and facilitated continuing professional growth for their staff. Administrators could provide teachers with resources to resolve the inequalities affecting Black girls, including Restorative Practices,

and approaching discipline using a trauma informed lens. With comprehensive training, teachers could learn to support the behavioral needs of culturally diverse students in the classroom by ceasing to punish Black girls for actions that do not adapt to because of their cultural standards. This can decrease disproportionate discipline experienced by Black girls.

### **Summary**

Chapter Three described how semi-structured, open-ended interviews were used to collect, evaluate, and code. Trustworthiness, dependability, and validity procedures were described. This chapter also contained measures to ensure research ethics. Finally, this study filled a gap in the literature, which allowed policymakers and educational leaders to use the findings to lessen the inequities in school discipline suffered by Black girls.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this case study was to explore if and how principals and assistant principals contribute to the discipline disparities faced by Black girls. Black girls disproportionately receive exclusionary discipline (12%) compared to White girls (2%, Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016). Additionally, Black girls account for just over 13% of students who receive out-of-school suspension compared to 8% of White girls and 6% of Latina girls (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021). When students are excluded from school, they become linked and vulnerable to placement in the prison system (Fenning & Rose, 2007) and other pathways of confinement. Disproportionate exclusionary discipline can lead to several adverse outcomes for students: poor academic performance and greater likelihood of school dropout, residence in juvenile detention centers and prison (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020; Morris, 2013).

This chapter contains descriptions of the research location, the four school administrator participants, the findings, the themes and subthemes, and a summary. I used case study analysis as a design to analyze the participant responses to open-ended interview questions concerning student discipline. The analysis of participant interview responses, discipline data, and the student code of conduct supported exploring and understanding the reasons underlying disproportionate disciplinary practices toward

Black girls. CRT and Intersectionality are used in this study to investigate and comprehend disproportionality toward Black girls. Due to the essential role that race and class play in discipline disparities, components of CRT are beneficial for exploring disproportionality (Crenshaw et al., 2015). The second theoretical framework, Intersectionality, emphasizes the essential impact that race, gender, and socioeconomic status play in inequities faced by Black girls.

This study includes an analysis of discipline data, the student code of conduct, and interviews of four high school administrators in a southeastern state. The results were synthesized on recurring themes and verbatim responses to interview questions to provide an in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences. The interview data were organized as (a) description of demographic data, including the participants' years of experience in education, district, and administrative roles; (b) responses to the interview questions; (c) presentation of consistent themes related to the research questions.

The interview questions reflected my experiences as an African American woman in the role of a school administrator and the literature examined in Chapter Two. I expected a critical aspect of data collection to be a need to avoid interview questions that supported researcher bias by conveying personal viewpoints on the topic. As a result, I created open-ended interview questions for participants to elaborate on issues; this method led to a more thorough understanding of the study questions. The research questions addressed in the study are as follows:

1. How do school administrators' implementation of school discipline policies contribute to the disparities in school discipline faced by Black girls?

2. How do school administrators describe the influence of school district discipline policies on their decision-making on discipline infractions?
3. How do school administrators characterize the effects of discipline policies on Black girls?
4. How do school administrators describe the influence of professional and personal experiences with Black children and Black girls, in particular, on their decisions to implement school discipline in their schools?

### **Description of Research Location**

School district X is a mid-sized school district with 14 elementary schools, six middle schools, three high schools, one college preparatory academy serving students in Grades preschool–8, and one career and technology center serving students in Grades 10th–12th. School district X is in a southeastern state with 80 school districts and an enrollment of over 15,000 children in prekindergarten through Grade 12. This school district employs over 3,000 people.

Marine High School is one of three public high schools in school district X. Marine High School serves approximately 1,030 students in Grades 9 to 12. The average class size is 27 students. Marine High School employs one principal, five assistant principals, 52 teachers, and seven other support staff members. Among these faculty, approximately 62% hold advanced degrees.

Of the student population at Marine High School, 530 are boys, and 516 are girls. Among these students, 305 were Black males and 300 Black females. The student body contained 16 male Hispanic or Latino American students and 23 female Hispanic or Latina American students. There were nine Asian American boys and three Asian



American girls enrolled. There are two Native Hawaiian boys and one Native Hawaiian girl. Additionally, the student population includes one Native American or Alaska Native boy and one Native American Indian or Alaska Native. Figure 4.1 provides data about the gender of the student population at Marine High School.

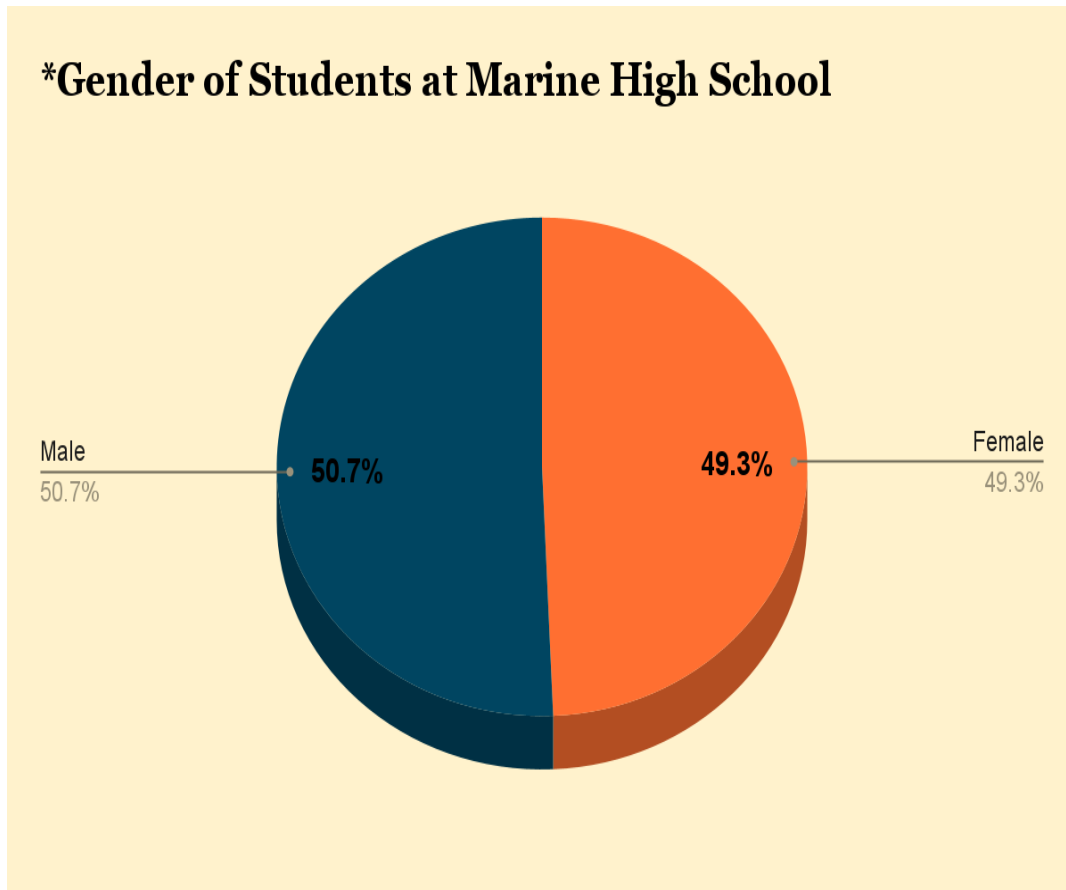


Figure 4.1: Gender Makeup of Students at Marine High School

Figure 4.2 provides data of the racial makeup of students at Marine High School.

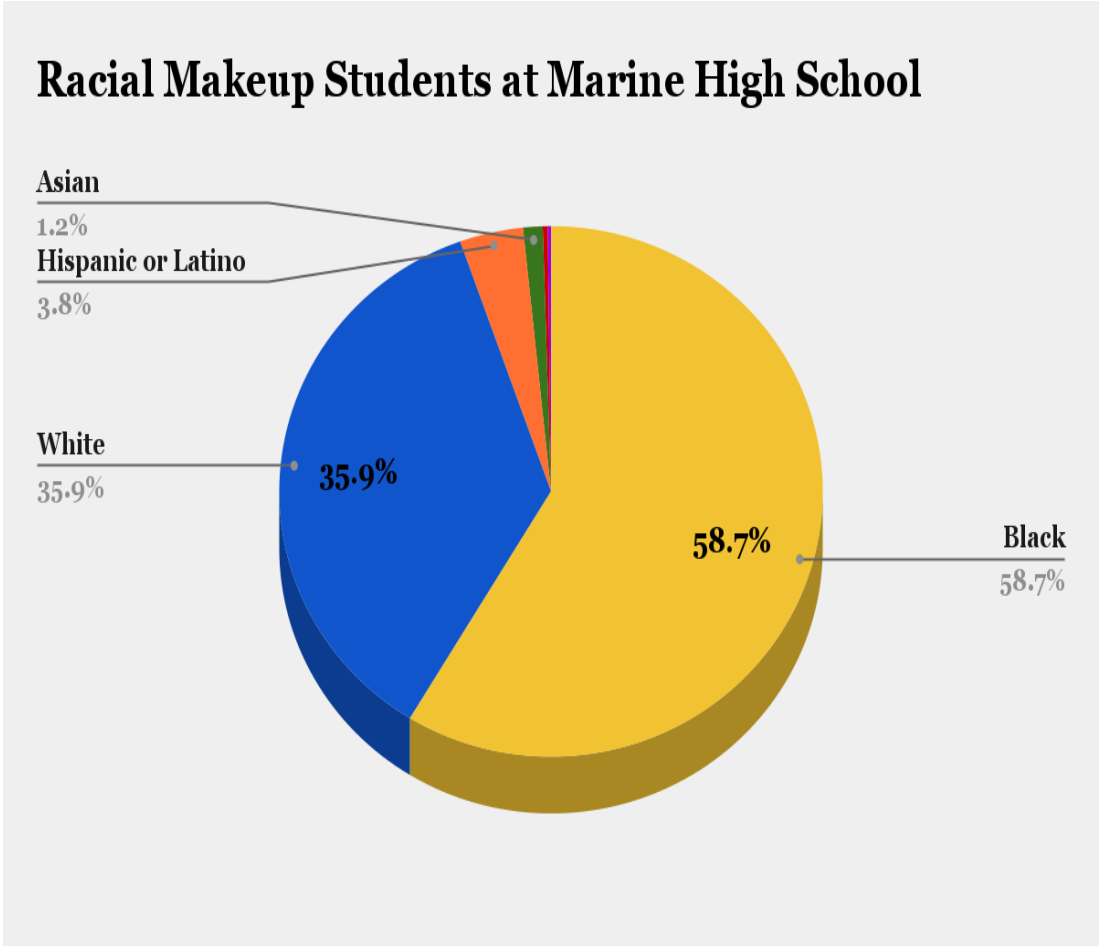


Figure 4.2: Racial Makeup of Students at Marine High School

Figure 4.2 presents data of disciplinary referrals by gender and race at Marine High School during the 2018-2019 school year. This table compares discipline data of boys and girls by race with measurable data.

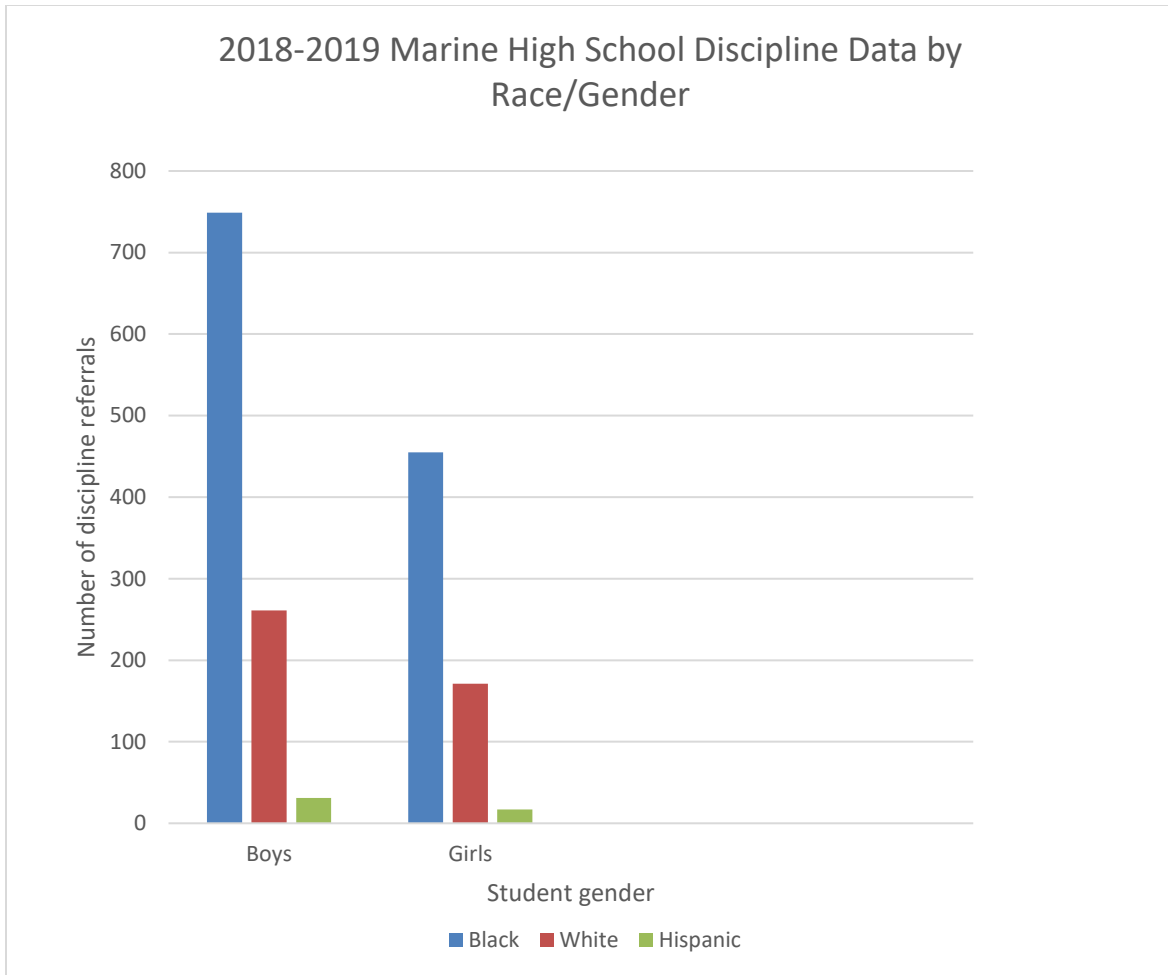


Figure 4.3 Discipline referrals by race and gender 2018-2019 at Marine High School

*Note.* These results display the disciplinary action data by race and gender of students at Marine High School during the 2018-2019 school year. These data were obtained from the school district.

Marine High School operated under the semester block scheduling model. Students participated in various courses and programs, including dual enrollment courses, vocational courses, career training, honors graduate program, early college, Air Force Junior ROTC, and visual and performing arts.

## **Description of Participants**

As described in Chapter Three, participants were selected using criterion sampling. Patton (2015) defined this purposeful sampling as collecting cases that met some predetermined criteria of importance. Criterion sampling was appropriate for recognizing and understanding information-rich cases. Three of the four interviews took place using the videoconferencing service Zoom, and one took place via phone. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and member checking was used to validate participant responses.

Each of the four interview participants was a practicing school administrator at Marine High School. Of the participants, one was a male principal, and three were female assistant principals. All administrators served at the school during the 2018-2019 school year. The participants' experience in education ranged from more than 10 to less than 25 years. Their years of experience as school administrators ranged from less than 5 years to more than 15 years and their experience serving at Marine High was less than 5 years to more than 7 years. 6 years. Each participant has obtained a minimum of a Master of Arts, Master of Education, or Master of Science degree, with one participant having obtained a doctorate. Table 6 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the sample.

The researcher selected a research location with a diverse population of school administrators. The location employed male and female and Black and White administrators. Participation in this research study was voluntary. Each of the six administrators at the study site was invited to participate. All potential participants were recruited using multiple means, including phone calls and emails. Despite several attempts to gain a diverse group of participants, the study sample only included the four

Black school administrators at the research site. Each school administrator participant received and returned an informed consent. A copy of the Informed Consent form was placed in Appendix B.

The next section contains a detailed description of each of the participants. The interviews, as well as field notes and analytic memos, were used to create these descriptions. To build a participant profile, I considered reported data, such as years of expertise in education and years of experience as a school administrator, and personal observations of language and gestures made by the administrators. The descriptive data included information that could, in practice, not affect the participants' privacy.

Table 4.1: Background Information for Administrators

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Years in Education</b>	<b>Years in District</b>	<b>Years in Administration</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Administrator 1	>10	<5	>5	Black	Male
Administrator 2	>20	>20	>15	Black	Female
Administrator 3	>15	<5	<5	Black	Female
Administrator 4	>10	<5	<5	Black	Female

### **Procedure/Data Collection**

This section describes the study's techniques and data processes, and procedures used in the study. The development of the interview protocol and demographic questionnaire was described specifically. In addition, the methodology for implementing the study was described clearly. **Themes**

Four primary themes were created from the conversations with school administrators concerning their lived experiences of implementing school discipline and how these experiences could contribute to disparities faced by Black girls. These themes were (a) administrator behaviors that impact discipline, with the subtheme of aspirational

equitable and creative approaches to discipline; (b) administrator interpretations of decision making and discipline; (c) Black girl responses to discipline; (d) the relationship between discipline and bias. The last theme consisted of the subthemes of student-staff relationships and mentoring influences. The most significant themes were the relationship between bias and discipline and administrator behaviors that impacted discipline. Table 7 represents each of these themes, the corresponding subsidiary themes, and the research question(s) they addressed.

Table 4.2 Themes

Research Questions	Theme	Subtheme
1. How do school administrators' implementation of school discipline policies contribute to disparities faced by Black girls?	Administrator practices	Practices that contribute to discipline disparities  Aspirational equitable and creative approaches
2. How do school administrators describe the influence of school discipline policies on their decision-making on discipline infractions?	Administrator interpretations of decision making and discipline	
3. How do school Administrators characterize the effects of discipline policies on Black girls?	Black girl responses to discipline	
4. How does school administrators describe the influence of personal and professional experiences with Black children and Black girls on their decisions to implement school?	Relationship between discipline and bias	Student-staff relationships  Mentoring influences

**RQ 1: How does the implementation of school discipline policies by school administrators contribute to the disparities in school discipline faced by Black girls?**

This research question concerned understanding how school administrators' implementation of district and school policies could contribute to the disproportionate discipline received by Black girls. The findings of this study included practices in implementing policies by school administrators that contribute to and counter disparities faced by Black girls. The first set of findings illustrates how administrators' practices in the implementation of policies contribute to the disparities.

**Practices that Contribute to Discipline Disparities**

Participants were asked about ways they approach the implementation of school discipline policies in general. The following findings express their discussions when speaking about discipline broadly. Individual participants described the differing ways they view the policies when implementing school discipline policies.

Participants described ways they approach the implementation of school discipline policies. There is no consistent approach among these administrators. For example, Administrator 2 asserted her belief that school discipline policies are open to interpretation and serve as a guide. She stated,

You know, we all get a code of conduct every year with all the policies in there.

And you know, and as administrators, we all know that this is simply a guide,

right? That's how I feel, right, we got to do what we need to do.

While Administrator 4 shared,



The code of conduct takes the thinking out of the consequence for me. Where I would say a parent conference, or 1 day out of school, or even 1 day of in school suspension-it automatically provides that for me.

Administrator 4 continued,

Even within the [same school] we still give out different consequences for the same behavior. For fighting, your first offense is 1-5 days OSS. However your second fight can be a recommendation for expulsion . . . So if that fight is not a brawl . . . I can give you 3 days home, but I know that there are two others on the team that are going to give you an automatic five for fighting. They have a certain sequence. Your first fight is going to be 5 days and your second is going to be recommended for expulsion.

This finding reveals inconsistencies in interpretation of the code of conduct and administrator choices in adhering to the code of conduct. Even where administrators serve within the same school and district, how an individual approaches the policies impact the outcome administered for various disciplinary infractions. These differences can determine whether a student receives restorative practices or a punitive consequence, such as a suspension.

Administrator 2 opined by adding, “Well . . . number one, it depends on the individual administrator...and it all goes back to the relationships.” This excerpt reveals that the relationship between the student and the administrator, whether positive or negative, can influence the consequence the student receives. Notably administrator 1 shared, “When I first got here, I think they [administrators] were just assigning consequences based on feelings.” If administrators who are tasked to interpret policies and assign consequences based on one on one relationships with students and or feelings

their interpretations will not have uniformity. Disparities could occur. Moreover, disparities will persist if administrators do not have consistent and culturally conscious ways to implement disciplinary policies.

Administrators also indicated some rigidity in implementing school discipline policies that stem from their reasoning and that of others. Administrator 1 shared,

Because I had another situation where a [Black boy} just a normal kid, - like 18 [years old] just walked up (to another kid) and beat up a kid at lunch. I locked them up. I put them in handcuffs and walked them out of the building in handcuffs.

Administrator 1 described how members of the school community responded to this arrest:

And they're like, "Oh, my God, this kid went to jail." So and my mentors told me, they said, "Look, man, you going to have to make examples out of a few because that's how you're going to win over your kids for them respecting your discipline. . .if they see that you're going to address it."

Administrators may be preoccupied with setting an example or holding kids accountable as administrator 1 asserted. "And so my thing as an educator is to teach you. I have to hold you accountable for some of your actions." Administrators may choose how they implement school policies to gain perceived respect, but it could be interpreted as fear from students so that infractions are dealt with a swift and authoritarian response to lessen the likelihood of similar incidents occurring. This finding is further supported by a participant who shared their approach to school discipline that leads to punitive punishments, such as suspension or expulsion. Administrator 1 disclosed:

But there's some situations, especially if you look at the history of the kid, you know, you have to say to yourself, Okay, we can expel them, and we're going to provide services, but this type of behavior is not tolerated because what happens is learned behavior. If you go through life with no consequences because you think, for the last 12 years, I've been getting out of it. Let me tell you at the end of the day, I gotta do what's best for this young [person]. If they did this in, in public... in society, there will be no blind eyes. They would be held accountable . . . probably go to jail. I said, so what I'm gonna do is, I'm gonna recommend them for expulsion, and the district will make the decision because we are educators, we have to teach them.

This finding illustrates the findings of DeMatthews et al., (2017) who discovered prevailing patterns of thinking can influence how school administrators administer discipline. These researchers identified some principals as “overt racial justifiers who had biased attitudes about Black parenting and used those beliefs to justify harsh discipline. They found while principals may believe they are acting fairly and impartially, their language and behaviors reflect “language of criminality” (DeMatthews et al., 2017). Finally, when the final decision for consequences is left to district personnel such as hearing officers, who could have a different interpretation of disciplinary policies, students are put at risk to receive suspensions, expulsions, change of placement, or even experiences with law enforcement. These intervening personnel could further the discipline disparities for some students and create pathways to confinement.

### **Practices that Counter Discipline Disparities**

Findings demonstrate that although there are practices in the implementation of discipline policies by school administrators that contribute to disparities faced by Black girls, there are also practices that counter the disparities. These findings are included in the following section.

### **Aspirational Equitable and Creative Approaches**

The theme of equitable and creative approaches emerged to answer this research question. Participants identified instances when exclusionary discipline is not the best answer to a student's disciplinary infraction. School administrators can positively impact discipline disparities experienced by Black girls by finding other avenues to address infractions that do not include punitive practices. Additional resources inside and outside the school and district can reduce exclusionary discipline practices while simultaneously obtaining appropriate help for Black girls to meet their unique needs.

Administrator 3 shared a sentiment related to counseling when expressing that

I think there should be some type of empathy training that would be wonderful for us just to help teachers understand. One thing we did in another district is we would get on the school bus and ride through the community and see where our students live. Just to see where they came from and we would even get off the bus sometimes. I know we can't do now that now, but we would get off for the bus like in the housing development and some of our students would come out and that kind of helped put into perspective to some teachers that all students don't come from where you come from. Some of these students have issues that you wouldn't believe to deal with. And that helped, you know, our staff because it's hard for some people to imagine what some of our students have to go through.

And so I think some type of empathy training every year--maybe twice a year-- is necessary because it just reminds everybody that each person is dealing with something different.

Administrator 4 shared a similar thought about using school policies to provide additional services to students rather than a consequence every time. This administrator stated,

I think that aligning it with knowing that some kids just need counseling. Just find better resources for the students. Maybe letting [students] know that when this is going on, you can have this person to talk to. Just being able to refer them on some of the extreme cases. Because now in schools our number one thing is I've suspended five to six students for vaping. So now we're talking about a possible drug addiction or addiction to nicotine. Counseling so you understand what it's going to do to your body. It may be cool now, but you don't understand what's inside of this.

In addition to thinking outside of the box about how to help students who experience disciplinary infractions, the participants often shared that outreach to parents could produce far-reaching results. Administrator 1 asserted,

Everything does not need to be a referral. Make sure you're contacting parents. I tell them to call parents and build on those relationships but I don't think there's a lot of follow up with that. Teachers are supposed to turn in their [parent contact] logs I just really wish there was some type of way to get involved with them as far as to say give them more examples of what we deal with and give them examples of how teachers could handle situations better.

Although participants acknowledged they follow a uniform student code of conduct issued by the school district, the interpretation of the code of conduct is up to individual schools. When asked about implementing school discipline policies, Administrator 3 responded:

I can't say for sure that they mandate that each school handle everything the same way, but I do know they give us the leeway in our schools to kind of handle things on a situational basis. They do have it outlined where there's a first offense and what you should do with second offense, etc. But ultimately it's left up to the school.

Findings indicate these aspirational equitable and creative approaches to discipline identified by school administrators justify the need to deviate from blindly following written policies. Some participants identify confidence in a sense of leadership freedom while others do not.

**RQ 2: How do school administrators describe the influence of school district discipline policies on their decision-making on discipline infractions?**

While policies exist to assist administrators in discipline implementation, participants expressed their steps for interpreting how they implemented the code of conduct and its impact as they made decisions when addressing an infraction. The theme of the administrator's interpretation includes findings related to research question 2. Individual participants shared how they interpreted and used the code of conduct when implementing school discipline.

When asked how she would describe policies, Administrator 4 shared,

I would say, ma'am, sir, you know, we have a discipline policy in place, because we want to really make sure that your child is getting the best education possible, and the most respectful and safe environment. This is why we have a discipline policy; we want to make sure that everybody is getting the same opportunity.

This participant's statement suggests that some administrators lack awareness of how school policies do not equate to Black students' safety or the best education possible. With disciplinary policies that reinforce the interests of one population over another, everyone cannot have the same opportunities. Administrator 4 continued that sometimes policies are used as a guide, and in other instances, the policy is the final authority. The participant stated:

I mean I let students come in and look at this [code of conduct] and it's powerful. I say you, "Do you see your referral? You just did this 2 weeks ago now you're supposed to have this [consequence] and you're supposed to have this [consequence]". I let them see it because I don't want them to think that I'm just being mean. I tell them I'm going to do my job. I'm sorry. I like you but I'm going to do my job you know I explain it that way to them. Especially at the high school level, they can understand it. Then I'll say, "Look I worked with you last time but I'm sorry this time you're going to have to get this consequence."

This finding suggests that although administrators show leniency in some situations, they will follow the code of conduct precisely in others. Even when using this variance, they demonstrate transparency with students by allowing them to understand when more severe consequences are applied to infractions.

Administrator 2 shared an incident referral received by a Black female student involving a hair accessory. This participant witnessed the emotional effect on the Black girl and explained:

I had a young lady come in here the other day, and she had on a headband. She said well the coach told me to come in here about my headband, and I asked her, “Why didn't you want to take the headband off?” Her eyes immediately got full of water. I asked her tell me. Talk to me. So I go went on to ask her and she said, “Because kids used to pick at me about my forehead.” I mean her eyes were full of water. So I said “That's Ok, but you know what you're not out of dress code. You can wear headbands. Now you can't wear a scarf tight around your head. That's a different story, but a headband was bought to wear in your head.” I told her you're good. I wrote her a pass and I told her to go and get herself straight. She walked out of my office [with her head up] so that's an example of sometimes you just have to listen and go the extra mile.

Administrator 4 described how she interprets school discipline policies.

You know should we have some type of inappropriate language in high school or should it just be profanity? You know inappropriate language is a lesser offense versus profanity. So, we should look at things like that. We have cutting class you know of course and an occasional fight or depending on the teacher and how it was written up disrespect. So we need to have a lot of conversations about disrespect. I mean you know to some teachers sucking your teeth as disrespect. Rolling your eyes is disrespect, but to others it's not.



Participants acknowledged the positive outcomes in the lives of Black girls when they took the time to listen, even after a disciplinary referral was received for an infraction of the student code of conduct. This practice eliminated the need for escalating to the consequence of exclusionary discipline, which can further perpetuate discipline disparities.

Participants responded to specific questions calling for them to describe school disciplinary policies. When asked to discuss disciplinary policies, some participants began by describing the student code of conduct. Administrator 1 provided insight:

We have a matrix as well. We don't have any zero tolerance policies, which is a good thing. But we also, we also haven't expelled any kids in a long time. . . One thing I would disagree with . . . some of the discipline that happens and kids are not really held accountable. And I got to tell them, I will always fight for a kid, but there are some situations that just require an expulsion, because this is what I look at when I'm looking at discipline.

Furthermore, Administrator 2 explained that there is “a very close relationship to school discipline expectations at the school and district level.” Administrator 3 shared her approach:

They do provide us with a policy. I can't say for sure that they mandate that each school handle everything the same way. But I do know, they give us the leeway in our schools to kind of handle things on a situational basis. . . There is an outline where for the first offense, this is what you should do; second offense, this is what you should do. And that way, you know, they are telling us, okay, this is what we want you to do. But if you do it any differently, it's on you. That's how I read it.

Administrator 2 also shared her approach to using the code of conduct as only a guide. This participant described a dress code violation involving a Black female student. The administrator shared a commonsense approach to addressing the infraction. A self-described “common sense approach drove the decision.” She disclosed,

When the child came and stood in front of my desk you know sometimes their pants are frayed. So then the child sits down it kind of spreads out and opens up a little but then I asked the teacher, so are you looking under her desk? I mean teachers have to choose their battles . . . you know we all get a code of conduct every year with all the policies in there and as administrators we all know that this is simply a guide. That’s how I feel. We have to do what we need to do.

When asked whether schools across the district implement the same consequences for behaviors, Administrator 4 explained that policies are implemented differently across the district as well as within the same school by different administrators. This participant stated,

I can’t share a comparison from school to school because I don’t have that data. . . I can speak for the 5 [assistant principals] in my school. . . we have that same code of conduct.

Participants also shared information about an annual revision process. Each year the district engages district personnel and school administrators from each level—elementary, middle, and high schools. District staff meets to discuss frequent discipline infractions occurring throughout the district. Common infractions are discussed at the district level to determine trends. Administrator 4 shared,

There's usually a meeting at the end of the year. They'll put a panel of administrators together, and then we'll review it . . . what needs to change. You know, like, should we have inappropriate language in high school? Or should it just be profanity? You know, inappropriate language is, a lesser offense versus profanity.

While schools have the autonomy to make site-based decisions with the code of conduct as a guide, schools also have access to a shared document to guide discipline infractions. The ideas obtained from district and school administrators' end of the year debrief sessions are aspirational and may or may be implemented.

**RQ 3: How do school administrators characterize the effects of discipline policies on Black girls?**

Research question 3 comprised an opportunity to obtain descriptions from participants about the impact of disciplinary measures on Black girls. The question focused on how school administrators described the impact of school discipline policies on the actions, feelings, and dialogue of Black girls. The theme of Black girl responses to discipline arose from participant responses to interview questions that addressed this research question. Participants described their experiences with Black boys and girls differing responses. Administrator 1 noted the difference in responses between Black boys and girls. He revealed,

The girls are gonna voice their concern more than the boys will. The boys are just, you know, they'll just get upset and curse and walk out. But the girls would just go back and forth. You know. And so I talked to my teachers about picking battles. So some of us fight battles, that don't even that don't even need to be

fought. And then all we do is set the kid up, because at the end of the day, you're the adult. You just give them your expectation and your consequences, and you walk away.

Administrator 3 shared an example of what they hear when Black girls come to their office. Black girls express their beliefs about how they have been treated by school staff. When they [Black girls] come, I hear a lot of "Man that lady getting on my nerves" or "She's lying on me!" That's typically what I hear from our Black girls.

### **Black girl responses to discipline**

The next set of findings contains examples of the disciplinary bias involving Black girls, including responses concerning their actions compared to dominant narratives of White, middle-class femininity. These biased views lead to harsher consequences for Black girls because their gestures, body language, and responses are not perceived as "ladylike." For example, when describing subjective behaviors, such as disrespect, Administrator 1 remarked, "The same applies for Black girls. People correlate their gestures and body language to being disrespectful and most times that's why harsh consequences are given to them."

Administrator 1 shared additional thoughts:

Teachers tend to have pre-determined perspectives about students based on how [Black girls] appear. It's unbelievable how someone can make a judgment of someone before getting to truly know them or even understand the student. Bias leads to misunderstandings and unfair discipline practices.

Administrator 2 identified the propensity for Black girls to display specific body language that deviates from the social rules of acceptable behavior from the lens of mainstream historical narratives.

But you know little Black girls learn how to roll their eyes at the age of two. And some of them may roll their neck. So in their household, that is not seen as disrespect. In their household, disrespect is words.

Two of the four participants described firsthand responses they have experienced working with Black girls who experienced discipline based on the biases of the school staff. Black girls are vocal about self-advocacy in response to perceived teacher disrespect. When asked to describe typical comments or reactions heard from Black girls referred to a principal or assistant principal for subjective behaviors, Administrator 1 conveyed,

When it comes to accusations of disrespect from teachers. They always tell me, “She disrespected me first.” Or “She don't know how to talk to people.” You know, and it's not the same with everybody, because they'll tell me all the time. “Some of your teachers are just disrespectful.” They tell me that all the time. “You need to address them.”

Administrator 2 further characterized the effects of discipline policies on Black girls:

What I think contributes to the disproportionate representation of Black girls bias and office referrals is the fact that their teachers feel they cannot control them, and they feel that they are too sassy when they suck their teeth and roll their eyes.

Participant responses revealed that when cultural bias is linked to behaviors there is a likelihood that Black girls will have adverse consequences due to the disciplinary

referrals they receive, thus resulting in increased discipline interactions between school administrators and Black girls. Additionally, when teachers engage in power struggles with Black girls due to teacher biases of Black girls' failures to conform to feminine behavior, these girls are more likely to receive disciplinary referrals, leading to the compounding disparities. Administrators shared that they believe having a sense of cultural competence is key to helping Black girls work through disciplinary infractions where they believe bias is involved. Administrator 2 shared experiences when addressing disciplinary referrals with Black girls. The participant described that giving the girls space, freedom, and the opportunity to release emotions supports Black girls to perceive a staff member who is willing to listen and help them navigate issues. She shared,

So they come in, and they sit down. I have two chairs in front of my desk and they'll say let me tell you this is what happened Ok. And I'm like some of the time they come ready to explain what happened pretty much. I give them that freedom to speak. I always give them that freedom. This is high school and I know they can get hotheaded sometimes. I know they use profanity sometimes, but I give them that freedom. They come in and they say what they have to say, but I tell them, once you step out of my office don't let me hear that, alright? I give them freedom to vent during their visit and let me know what's going on.

Administrator 2 continued to share the specific allowances she provides to Black girls' responses to bias. The administrator described,

They don't want to talk at first because they are mad. They don't want to talk to you. I tell them to sit down and then I keep on doing something at my computer. I'll do something like they're not even there and that's how I'll let them cool off.

So I start doing stuff on my computer like checking my email. And now I'm sitting there for 15-20 minutes. I'll just let them sit there until they start talking. And then they'll say, "Well, um, let me tell you what happened." And that I mean, that's how they do. . . . But the little Black girls, they are hot when they come in. I think that's their mechanism, to keep from crying.

When probed about whether Black girls cry because they are angry, frustrated, or afraid, Administrator 2 stated,

Yeah, and I think it because a lot, you know, a lot of them will cry in here when they don't cry in other places. You know, so they will cry. They will stand up. They'll pace back and forth. I don't even tell them to sit down. And you know, I just get on my computer and act like I'm ignoring them. And I give them time to get themselves together. I don't force the issue. I let them talk when they get ready to talk. And if somebody comes in here to get them-another administrator or something- I say I got it.

Participant descriptions of Black girl responses often do not include passive behaviors. Black girls are vocal about perceived unfairness and are likely to demonstrate physical and emotional responses that contribute to adultification bias. Negative stereotypes such as being loud, confrontational, and aggressive ascribed to Black women are projected onto Black girls. Adultification bias can lead educators to treat Black girls with less empathy and assign harsher treatment (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). These behaviors can lead to the substantiation of disproportionate disciplinary outcomes.

**RQ 4: How do school administrators describe the influence of professional and personal experiences with Black children and Black girls, in particular, on their decisions to implement school discipline in their schools?**

The final research question probed descriptions of how personal and professional experiences of administrators impacted Black children and Black girls and specifically influenced their implementation of school discipline policies. Each of the participants recognized that a relationship exists between bias and discipline. The second part of the interview protocol required participants to watch a 3-minute video on bias in schools. The animated live-action video featured a young student of color who navigates bias in the classroom and its impact on his future. The film also features children's voices as they grow older, recalling their experiences at school and home. Following the video, participants responded to the final five common interview questions. The theme of the relationship between bias and discipline and the subthemes of student-staff relationships and mentoring influences arose as school administrators shared the influences of personal and professional experiences with Black children on their decisions to implement school discipline.

**Relationship between bias and discipline**

When participants were asked about what they believe the relationship between discipline and bias is at their school, each administrator shared a similar perspective. They acknowledged that bias exists in their schools and impacts individuals differently. For example, one form of bias revealed at Marine High School concerns how adults treat students and the actions they take or fail to take on behalf of students. Administrator 3 shared, "Education has a ton of people who are culturally clueless and not willing to learn



about other aspects of their student's lives so that they can educate them properly."

Administrator 2 articulated a consistent response.

I think there is an absolute relationship between bias and discipline. Many people have biases and do not even realize them. . . Watching the video really made me feel sad for a few moments because I have watch students go through this scenario when the teacher or whomever is in charge does not even try to assist a student and automatically believes there is an issue or treats the situation as a discipline problem without even asking a question . . . The relationship between bias and discipline exists because we are human for sure, but mainly because we have been taught to learn to think this way.

When speaking specifically about bias related to Black students, Administrator 2 expressed that often assumptions are made as to what students should know and understand about expectations. Assumptions are made based on an expectation of students' culture, education, and experiences. Administrator 2 shared:

You may think you know what respect is because of what you may deem is disrespectful, it's that child normal way of life but then you know I told one young man in the cafeteria, I said "Stop cursing." He said "Ok." He came back to me a few minutes later and he asked me .....He said, 'What's wrong with cursing?' and I said "Well it's inappropriate." I said "You do have other words [to use]." He said, "Nobody ever told me that." So that means at home that's what he says and what he hears. When our principal came, He said "I know some of these kids. I went to school with their uncles, that's the way they were taught."

Participants shared their experiences working with teachers and support staff in two groups: those who fail to consider bias and those who make efforts to prevent their bias from impacting student discipline. Administrator 2 noted,

Many teachers will not admit their biases. They have tried to convince themselves that they treat all their students the same. Then there are others who will bend over backwards to make sure their biases toward students will not end as a discipline infraction.

The participant expounded further,

As for administrators, most that I have worked with have been caring and understanding because they remember their time as a high school student. When we are honest with ourselves and take ownership to the fact that we did not wake up as administrators one morning, many of us can allow our own life experiences to guide us in the way we see biases and how we handle discipline.

Participants were asked how well they think teachers and other administrators understand the relationship between bias and discipline. In response, Administrator 3 said, “I honestly think it's something that’s done unconsciously. Teachers sometimes don’t realize they are being biased because it’s been a common practice.”

After speaking with a student about a referral, Administrator 2 found it necessary to speak with the teacher about the student’s perceptions.

I told the student, “OK well thank you for your honesty” and then I go on. I have a conversation with the teacher, and I try to be as politically correct as I can. I say now you know you might want to look into the situation because this young man feels that every time you turn around and you look to the left of that room if

someone is talking you always point him out. I say he says that he is not the only one talking and I'm just saying to you that you may want to take a closer look because the next step I'm going to take is I'm going to set up a conference with you and his parents.

Administrator 3 similarly shared an example of a professional experience involving bias and unfair treatment. This participant described how a teacher responded differently to students of different races for the same offense and stated,

Bias is often a determining factor in how students' behaviors are viewed. In some cases if a Black male comes into class and puts his head on the desk he is viewed as disrespectful and defiant. However, if a White male does the same thing he has been offered a pass to the restroom or the nurse.

The findings also reveal personal and professional observations about how teachers and other administrators address issues of bias. Administrator 3 expressed,

Sometimes when the teacher is identified as being biased against a specific group it will be addressed to that teacher individually by an administrator. When there are concerns of bias among administrators, I would imagine that the issue would be addressed by our principal.

This response suggests there is no official process as biases are "sometimes" addressed by school administrators but at other times remain unaddressed. Administrators cannot address bias if they are unaware of bias and uneducated about the unique effects of bias on Black girls. This response indicates no straightforward procedure for addressing teacher or administrator biases. Administrator 1, the principal, shared an instance when he addressed bias with an administrator on his team gained from student feedback.

In this situation, a lot of the opinions that the Black kids had [about this administrator], the White kids had too. And I had to tell one of my administrators that when I first got here. [The students] told me that one of my administrators was racist because he only catered to the White kids. And I just had to have that conversation with them. I said, this is the perspective of the kids. And it's up to you to fix that.

### **Student-staff relationships**

School administrators observed behaviors that impacted discipline positively and negatively. Relationships played a significant role in determining disciplinary outcomes. Strong maintained relationships worked to prevent disciplinary problems, just as a lack of and weak relationships led to exacerbating disciplinary problems. The outcomes for strong or weak relationships had long-term effects on students.

Administrators were asked to describe relationships at Marine High School. Additionally, they were asked to describe how those relationships were maintained and were nurtured at Marine High School. Their responses included whole school efforts down to strategies practiced by individual school administrators, which positively impacted student-staff relationships. Administrator 1 described student-staff relationships when he first arrived and how he worked to improve relationships through student engagement.

I would say 70% ....70% were good, there was about 30% that needed intensive work because they had no compassion. And they were living under the model of this is how we've always done it. Their goal here was if a class is quiet, and kids are doing packets, then we're good. Like for them that was teaching and learning.

The year before I saw the school had spent like \$10,000 on ink and paper. I told him in a meeting I said that tells me one or two things. We don't know how to use technology. So the next year, we're talking curriculum and reading, you know, reading and making sure that things are in alignment with what we're teaching. When asked about other experiences besides professional development implemented to impact student-staff relationships, Administrator 1 continued,

But what I did to affect the culture is every Friday that we had a home football game, I did a [grill and chill]. And so I would cook for the entire faculty every Friday. We set up tents. We had these big industrial fans. We had sodas and water. One of the reasons this actually started is because when I was reading the data, I saw where we were just not a school family, and every school that I had worked at [before] we had that family feel. So we started having tailgates.

Administrator 1 shared a benefit of working to build culture. He described,

I was capturing videos and pictures because they had never experienced that. And so what we would do is it would allow them [staff] to bring their families. I had a lot of international teachers, and they had no family [members] here. So they could come and be a part of something--build relationships with other teachers that they didn't really get to see. But what it did also, is kids that came to the game would see it. We would all walk over to the game and sit together as a faculty and staff.

I probed about the impact of this initiative on building relationships with students, including Black boys and girls. Administrator 1 asserted,

And so the students saw how the faculty was making an effort [to build relationships] and in turn the students tried to do it too. I think that was a big part of it, because they got to see firsthand. ‘Our teachers are tight ...they’re friends. I don't think that they ever had a chance to see them. First of all, I don't think a lot of them came to the games before this. But when they started to come to the tailgates, it was like, man, they’re a family. And I mean, it just changed and changed.

Administrators shared additional experiences to build relationships for positive student-staff relationships. These included being vigilant and proactive when seeking to help students before receiving a disciplinary referral. Administrator 4 described how she worked to build relationships,

To build those relationships and rapport with those students- I'm new-but every day I will introduce myself to a new student or to those who may not know who I am. I make it a point to make those connections.

Administrator 2 similarly stated,

Those students, to me, those are the ones that my experience has taught me to look out for in the hallways. The wall watchers. The ones [who] look down and look to the side when you walk past them. You know I'll take notice and then when they come to lunch, I'll slide into the seat beside them and I'll say, “Hey, what's going on?” Or in the mornings when they get off the bus and you watch them and you can kind of see a look on their faces.

Participants were asked to describe additional personal strategies utilized at Marine High School to maintain positive relationships between students and staff.

Administrator 2 also mentioned how being visible works favorably when building relationships with students.

A lot of them they come they come in that way, upset. They see me at lunch and then I'm the first person they see when they get off the buses in the morning because I have bus duty. I'm also the last person they see before they go home so there's this opportunity to build a relationship . . . the bus is always late. So we get an opportunity to have conversations. They get to know me, and they'll ask me what I like. You know they'll ask me have you got any chewing gum. I give them chewing gum, and we talk.

One participant explained how building positive relationships with some students, in turn, helps to build and maintain relationships with other students. Administrator 2 shared,

I asked a student do you know me then they're like "No ma'am." I asked them "Have you ever heard of me?" and then they will say, "Yes ma'am." And I said well what have you heard? They'll [say] "Well my sister or my friend said she's hard but she's fair."... I introduce myself to them. They say my sister told me if I ever needed anything to come to you. But she said "You don't play!"

Administrators also shared procedures they have to help build and maintain ongoing relationships with students from year to year as students matriculate through high school. Administrator 3 explained,

So we made it a structure where one counselor follows you all through high school. [Because] now you have built a relationship with the family--the student

and the family. If you have that relationship, you know, you can help them as they progress from ninth grade and beyond.

### **Mentoring influences**

In addition to behaviors practiced by school administrators, these findings illustrated staff who shared experiences where they took on mentoring roles, even when these roles were unofficial, which helped positively impact students. Administrator 1 shared a successful strategy implemented as a new building principal.

We had many fights. Kids just didn't respect each other in the building. So I started going to classrooms, and I was having conversations with all of my senior rooms. I had an acronym—WIN--and I would ask them as they came in. I had [a picture of] this big beautiful house that I found. I pulled it up on the promethean board. And as they came in, and I just listened to their conversations [about the house]. They would say things like “Man, look at that house! That must be [the principal’s] house!” . . . they remembered that house. I let them believe [it was my house] . . . What I wanted to accomplish is this. You have to trick them into learning or believing that they can accomplish anything. That builds them up. I would tell them, “Hey, I'm from [your hometown].” “I'm from [school neighborhood] . . . a dirt road that they paved when I got to high school. So y'all know where I'm from.” But I'm able to attain all of this. I wanted them to believe they could attain the same.

Administrator 1 elaborated that after initial conversations were had and students felt a connection, the students readily made efforts to continue the relationship by sharing their progress and improvements made academically or behaviorally. Administrator 2



explored the impact of sharing personal stories and humor to build relationships with students. Administrator 2 said,

I tell some of the students when they come in here [office]. “I grew up with three brothers.” I told them my baby brother went up for expulsion two times and we had the same mom and dad! We were raised the same way, but he was just mischievous. So that's my thing you know, when I talk to the teachers or even when I talked to the students I use a lot of humor. I read something a long time ago even before I started teaching, and it said that students always remember what they heard before and after the laughter.

Participants shared that they also observed other school staff who intentionally and unintentionally serve as mentors and parental figures to students in the school. Administrator 2 shared an example of a staff member who serves as a father figure to many Black female students.

I noticed that a lot of our Black females- we have a couple of men in here that they flock to such as our ROTC instructor. Black girls love him. Some days I'll go down there and he is really giving it to them, you know? “They're not doing this right, they're not doing that right.” They'll come up to me and they'll say “You need to fire that man!” But then they flock right back down to him. And I know it's because this guy has three daughters, and they have formed that relationship with him. They see him as a parental father figure.

These findings substantiate prior research on the importance of mentoring students of color so they can achieve better outcomes. Participant responses demonstrated that school administrators know and implement activities, initiatives, and behaviors

through reflection on experiences that work well to build positive relationships among students and staff. Building relationships that emphasize culture and show students that teachers and staff care positively influence how discipline is implemented with Black boys and girls. Administrators and other school staff who make efforts to connect with students by serving as advocates and mentors develop and are a part of the school community, which works to counter behaviors that obstruct positive student-staff relationships.

Just as participants identified behaviors that positively impact student-staff relationships, their responses demonstrate reflections on personal and professional experiences with behaviors that negatively impact student-staff relationships. Administrator 1 admonished, “When teachers fail to build relationships with students, relationships do not automatically happen.”

One participant acknowledged a behavior that obstructs positive student-staff relationships, specifically between teachers and Black girls. Administrator 2 shared,

Yeah it's the same mainly with the teachers who do not build relationships with them [Black girls]. Because the teachers that do build relationships, we don't get those little minor referrals. So typically it's the teachers who are basically there to say “These are the rules, and you need to follow them!” There are no gray areas at all and there are also no relationships.”

This finding highlights the delicate balance that school administrators must maintain as their roles require them to support students, teachers, and other school staff. While participants agreed that administrators should not have to choose, they acknowledged that complex decisions are made to avoid more precarious situations. For

example, in situations involving Black girls, school administrators acknowledged that in some cases, more time and separation of the student and the adult is the best course of action. Conversely, Administrator 1 shared a different approach.

When a teacher sends me a referral, unless that child is causing bodily harm to someone or themselves, my first question is have you spoken to the parent? I break it down a little further. I say I'm not talking about leaving a voice message. Have you had an actual conversation? So we [have] had to get very specific with that in the last couple of years because our teachers do have a parent connector that they send out every week. They contact parents, but one of the things we addressed is don't just call these parents because their kids do something wrong. How about every time you call one for something bad, call one for something good. . . start that conversation out with something good to that parent about that child. . . . Now they [parents] are more accepting of your conversation and [will be] more receptive to hearing from you in the future. That's something we have to continue to work on hand in hand with the district.

## **Summary**

Findings from all four research questions included participants sharing descriptions of their lived experiences of implementing discipline, the influence of school discipline policies, the effects of disciplinary policies on Black girls, and finally, the influence of personal and professional experiences with Black children. In summary, equitable and creative approaches to school discipline can determine whether school administrators contribute to discipline disparities faced by Black girls. The ways Black girls respond to discipline indicates how they are affected mentally, physically, and

emotionally. Additionally, the relationship between bias and discipline can determine whether students receive referrals fueled by bias that may lead to students receiving unfair treatment. Once students receive a referral, the outcome can lead to discipline disparities, specifically when subjective behaviors are addressed.

Furthermore, some staff exhibit overt bias by assigning different consequences to students for the same offense. Participant findings convey that there is currently no standard procedure to address bias displayed by teachers or school administrators. Finally, student-staff relationships can positively or negatively influence the connections students need to help them matriculate through high school successfully. Administrators and other school employees who try to connect with children by serving as advocates and mentors build and become part of the school community that works to counteract negative student-staff interactions.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Summary of Study**

The purpose of this case study was to explore if and how principals and assistant principals contribute to disciplinary disparities faced by Black girls. Black girls receive exclusionary discipline at higher rates (12%) than White girls (2%, Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016). Additionally, Black girls are about 13% of students receiving out-of-school suspensions, while 8% of White girls and 6% of Latina girls receive these suspensions (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021). When students are excluded from school, their lives become linked to the confinement systems (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Disproportionate exclusionary discipline often leads to adverse outcomes, such as lower academic performance and a significant increase in dropping out of school, entering juvenile detention centers, and becoming imprisoned (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020; Morris, 2013).

The interview questions reflected experiences as an African American woman and school administrator and the literature examined in Chapter II. Interview questions were open-ended to allow participants to elaborate on issues that could lead to a more thorough understanding. The research questions addressed in the study are,

1. How do school administrators' implementation of school discipline policies contribute to the disparities in school discipline faced by Black girls?

2. How do school administrators describe the influence of school district discipline policies on their decision-making on discipline infractions?
3. How do school administrators characterize the effects of discipline policies on Black girls?
4. How do school administrators describe the influence of professional and personal experiences with Black children and Black girls, in particular, on their decisions to implement school discipline in their schools?

The research findings were presented and analyzed in the preceding chapter. Then, these findings, the limitations, and practical and theoretical implications are discussed. Finally, I make recommendations for further research as well as concluding thoughts.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study are not intended to apply to all high school principals and assistant principals as school administrators at only one school in a single school district were included in the study. Additionally, school discipline statistics of only one academic year were included. Finally, while participants possessed varied backgrounds and educational experiences, the demographics of the final participating school administrators proved to be limitation. While there were both male and female participants, each of the participants were Black school administrators. Suggestions for future research are later addressed in this chapter.

## **Summary of Findings**

### **Implementation of school discipline policies**

Research question one explored how the specific implementation of school discipline policies by school administrators contribute to the imbalance experienced by Black girls. The purpose of this research question was to determine if school administrators' approach to investigating and providing consequences to discipline referrals is a factor that leads to this imbalance in outcomes for Black girls. The findings of this study show that there are behaviors in school administrators' policy implementation that contribute to and offset inequities encountered by Black girls. Findings of this research support administrators can engage in practices that offset disparities and practices that contribute to the disparities faced by Black girls.

While individual and diverse interpretations serve as a detriment to equitable implementation of school discipline, another viewpoint emerges known as rational choice theory. Shabazian (2020) described supporters of this viewpoint as those who believe that specific, severe, and rapid sanctions can dissuade criminal behavior. The author further stated that proponents of zero-tolerance rules also held these views and argued that schools are accountable for creating a safe learning environment. Shabazain also reported that proponents claimed "long-term control of school violence will be attained when children recognize that criminal behavior is not tolerated" (p. 73). When administrators ascribe to these beliefs, they may unknowingly also target Black students and other students of color through prejudices about the culture or long-standing stereotypes about students. Specifically, they may perceive Black girls as aggressive, violent, and less innocent, thus placing them at risk for swift and harsh punishments involving law

enforcement. Finally, administrators may unknowingly implement school policies that support deficit views of Black children and children of poverty. When viewed through a CRT lens, their findings suggest that schools are not neutral spaces but frequently mask and promote dominant problematic standards for Black bodies.

### **Influence of school district discipline policies**

Research question 2 concerned how school administrators described the influence of existing school discipline policies on their decisions regarding disciplinary referrals received from teachers and other school staff. This question aimed to explore how policies guided school administrators' decisions regarding school discipline. The stories shared by school administrators were categorized under the theme of administrator interpretations of decision making and discipline. An analysis of this theme revealed specific descriptions of how school administrators' interpretation of school discipline policies may contribute to disparities faced by Black girls. Their reflections revealed that school administrators could mitigate the harmful effects on Black students in general and Black girls explicitly depending on how they choose to interpret school discipline policies.

While race and racism are profoundly embedded in American society (Bell, 1992), they are likewise ingrained and thoroughly embedded in educational policies, practices, procedures, and institutions. For example, many school discipline policies and practices are culturally insensitive as they are male-focused (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Additionally, school policies view Black children and children of poverty from a deficit viewpoint. Using the CRT tenet that racism is endemic, their findings purport that schools are not neutral spaces and frequently mask and promote dominant cultural



standards that are problematic for Black bodies. According to Milner (2008), "racism is present but not even recognizable because it becomes naturalized and normalized" (p. 337). Racism is a power dynamic that oppresses minorities while continually benefitting Whites. As a result, CRT can be utilized to comprehend the persistence of poor outcomes for historically marginalized populations, particularly those that face disproportionate discipline outcomes.

### **Effects of discipline policies on Black girls**

Research question 3 concerned describing how school administrators identify and recognize the impact of disciplinary policies on Black girls. The purpose of this question was to discover if school administrators understood the impact of school policies on Black girls and to identify how these girls are impacted. An analysis of the theme revealed the experiences shared can be categorized with the theme of Black girl responses to discipline. A thematic analysis revealed several ways that school discipline policies impact Black girls.

The findings highlight the theoretical framework of Intersectionality. While it is important to keep Intersectionality in mind in research such as this, further research should specifically consider comparative data of gendered and racial identities. Future research should include comparative data of Black boys and Black girls, and Black girls and White girls.

Black women and girls have a unique perspective (Crenshaw, 2015; Lorde, 1984). As a response to and rejection of inequitable treatment, Black girls feel compelled to self-advocate. Black girls have been taught to react in this way. When Black girls perceive educators are discriminating against them, they are more likely to encounter exclusionary

discipline at school (Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020). According to the findings, educators frequently perceived Black girls as misbehaving because their behaviors violate gender stereotypes of normative femininity (Morris & Perry, 2017). As a result, educators mistake their behaviors as threatening and lacking compliance (Annamma et al., 2014). The results of these misperceptions often further harmful effects on the well-being of Black girls by pushing them out of schools and into carceral systems.

There can be no productive discussions concerning Black girls' school disciplinary experiences unless the intersections of race and gender are considered with how educators treat Black girls and how Black girls respond. Without recognizing the complexities of Black girls' multiple identities, liberation and fair educational outcomes cannot be achieved (Gibson & Decker, 2019).

### **Influence of professional and personal experiences**

Research question 4 concerned discovering the influences that professional and personal encounters with Black students, particularly Black girls, have in school administrators' decisions to apply school punishment in their schools. The purpose of this question was to provide insight into how school administrators describe personal and professional experiences with Black children and Black girls, more specifically in how they choose to implement school discipline. The themes of the relationship between discipline and bias and the subthemes of student-staff relationships and mentoring influences emerged from the findings. In this study, school administrators proved they could recognize the relationship between bias and discipline, intentionally engage in behaviors to promote positive student-staff relationships while deterring behaviors that

obstruct positive relationships, and intentionally focus on how they address disproportionate discipline.

Findings revealed that Black children have fewer discipline issues with educators who help them deal with social and emotional issues. Building and maintaining student-staff relationships can potentially impact the disproportionate discipline of Black and the effects they experience due to disparities. In addition to building relationships, school administrators acknowledge that mentoring influences help Black children. Thus, students who respect their teachers are more likely to be engaged and compliant (Cushman, 2005). In addition, Black girls reported feeling successful with teachers and authorities they perceived as supportive (Murphy et al., 2013).

Administrators also identified several necessary steps to foster better relationships with all students, specifically Black girls. These ranged from diverse ways to interpret disciplinary policies to professional development needs.

Administrator responses also reveal that regardless to the level of education where they serve, they are able to identify bias and the need for training amongst their teachers and staff, but may not be able to identify the need in themselves for training.

## **Implications**

Interviews were used to gather information, and the process proved to be difficult and time-consuming due partly to the COVID-19 epidemic. Health concerns, which eliminated the ability for face-to-face meetings and visits, were one element that contributed to the challenges. As a result, the total number of participants was reduced—another factor contributing to the number of participants in the calculated and aggressive attack on CRT. The researcher speculates if the White administrators at Marine High

School ignored requests to participate due to the theoretical framework, the topic centered on Black girls and school discipline, or other combined reasons. Regardless, future research should incorporate a strategy to include White school administrators to participate in research about discipline disparities of Black girls despite times of adverse political climates. The study's generalizability is limited due to the small number of participants. Moreover, the authentic experiences of the participants were distinctive and, therefore, should not be necessarily extended to all school administrators without consideration of transferability.

Participants offered detailed explanations of how school punishment procedures were applied to Black students. Their stories and reflections show the successes and problems school administrators face when responsible for supporting both teachers and children simultaneously, which may be a challenging undertaking.

This research contributed to the existing educational knowledge about Black girls and school discipline disparities by bringing the experiences of school administrators to the heart of discipline disparities faced by Black girls through the lens of implementation practices. This study revealed that school administrators could positively or negatively impact disparities in school discipline faced by Black girls. When they allow professional and personal experiences to guide how they approach school discipline, school administrators can impact disciplinary outcomes for Black children in general and Black girls, specifically. Moreover, school administrators who seek to utilize resources other than punitive and exclusionary discipline can ensure that students do not experience pushout because they realize suspensions do not correct behavior.

Participants spoke openly and honestly and revealed novel and insightful views about the role of a school administrator in a public school. School administrator accounts demonstrated their awareness of discipline disparities for Black girls and personal and professional experiences that guide their decisions when implementing discipline. Furthermore, because this study was limited to school administrators, the researcher described how this population viewed themselves and characterized the repercussions of discipline on Black girls. Participants identified issues that are also found in the literature. Thus, the results substantiated previous research, purporting that when school administrators and other educators do not understand Black girls' culture and style of communication, Black girls' bodies receive disproportionate surveillance and punishment, reflecting the larger society.

Public schools are filled with the faces of students of color yet staffed by White teachers and school administrators. This creates a cultural mismatch that can potentiate barriers to students whose culture is not reflected in the dominant gaze. CRT can be used to illuminate how the interests of racial and ethnic students in public schools are threatened by creating and enforcing school discipline policies that hold inequitable outcomes. While this study did not include White administrators, further research is recommended to include a diverse group of administrators. This study provides supporting data to previous research that purports better outcomes for Black teachers and students when the principal is Black (Grissom et al., 2021). Through antiracist work, such as intentional learning about race, engaging staff on racial issues, and bringing a critical lens to school data, school administrators can also create equitable schooling experiences

for students from marginalized communities. The scrutiny of school data should include breaking outcomes data down by race and reflection on drivers of disparities.

As previously stated, most public schools serve students of color, teachers and school administrators in power are mostly White (Taie & Goldring, 2019). Achievement gaps continue to widen along with the lack of equity in disciplinary practices. Because attributes like passivity and quietness typically define White femininity, Black girls are positioned as less feminine and innocent when they are strong and vocal, especially when mistreated or misunderstood. Black girls are perceived as extensions of Black womanhood. Black women have historically been viewed as violent, obstinate, hypersexual, and unladylike and deemed to require less protection, receiving more frequent and harsher judgments and consequences.

While it has been heavily researched and confirmed that Black boys are victims of disproportionate discipline, the unique intersections of race and gender position Black girls in a unique space for disparities. As previously discussed, Black girls experience higher instances of exclusionary discipline than many boys across racial-ethnic groups (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Experiences of Black girls in schools reveal that social constructs of gender and femininity intersect with race to impact their educational success (Blake et al., 2010). CRT

In this study, the researcher explored how school administrators' implementation of the school discipline policies contribute to disparities faced by Black girls. The researcher considered the lived experiences shared by school administrators, and the ways subversive rather than overt racism is embedded in school policies and expectations for behavior that impact the lives of Black girls.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

I conducted a case study that explored if and how principals and assistant principals contribute to discipline disparities faced by Black girls. Data were collected to answer a total of four research questions. Although the findings support current research about disproportionate discipline received by Black girls, some limitations of this study point to opportunities for further research.

Suggestions for future studies include increasing the sample size to include administrators from multiple schools at the same level and multiple schools at various levels and across districts and states. Future research should also include lived experiences of Black girls who have experienced disproportionate discipline. Finally, future research should include professional development provided to school districts, administrators, and teachers that positively impact the disproportionate discipline experienced by Black girls.

Research studies that increase the sample size could make the results more generalizable or transferable to other settings as the data would include more than school administrators who serve at the same school or other schools. A larger sample size should include elementary, middle, and high school administrators. Additionally, future research should include schools at various levels and districts and include various states and regions of the county. Enlarging the locations for sampling could provide a broader perspective of discipline disparities experienced by Black girls. Including school discipline statistics prior to 2018-2019 might help researchers track school discipline trends over time.

Larger sample size should also include a diverse group of administrators. Future research should include an increased sample size consisting of a diverse group of school

administrators. While this research study captured both male and female school administrators of varying experience levels, the racial makeup of school administrators was not diverse. Despite multiple and varied attempts to include a diverse group of participants, only Black school administrators at the study site chose to participate in this research. Specifically, White administrators should be included in an increased sample size as most school administrators in the United States are White (Taie & Goldring, 2019). A more diverse group of school administrators would help to strengthen the validity of the research.

Future recommendations for research should include firsthand accounts of Black girls and their families who have experienced disproportionate school discipline. Research that includes a counter-narratives focus would provide district leaders, school administrators, and teachers with personal and firsthand accounts of how disproportionate discipline directly impacts the lives of Black girls and their families. Counter-narratives empower by giving control to members of marginalized communities who contribute their words to narratives representing their circumstances. This knowledge could inform policymakers and educators to learn directly from Black girls about how they are impacted socially, mentally, emotionally, and how they are impacted in the long term. Families of Black girls would be able to share the impact on their lives and what steps they believe schools should take to help end disproportionate discipline with Black girls and other students of color. Lester et al. (2018) encouraged this focus by asserting,

We turn toward our elders who have been here before and listen and heed for the next seven generations. In so doing, we work to generate narratives of defiance,



resist “the powers that be,” and build at a local level. Together, let’s defy, resist, and build (p. 76).

This dissertation topic focused on the effects of school administrators' implementation of school discipline on Black girls; however, similar research could also include other student groups. Research to include other demographic groups such as Hispanic students, students in poverty, and those who speak English as a second language could provide educators and policymakers with a valuable understanding of how students are impacted because of the implementation of school discipline. Research on various racial, ethnic, and income level groups could help prevent discipline disparities and provide school administrators with data to help them serve these various populations more effectively and equitably.

A final recommendation for future research involves taking a closer look to explore professional development that is effective at addressing disciplinary practices. For example, school staff could benefit from ongoing and continuous professional development that educates about dominant narratives and the perpetual harm that is counterproductive to including and creating equity for Black girls. Additionally, professional development research aimed to address diversity and cultural awareness, bias, and awareness of discipline disparities could help lessen Black girls and their families' disparities. For example, research regarding cultural awareness could help educators learn how people from various cultures behave differently and distinctively view subjective behaviors, such as disrespect. Furthermore, research on effective professional development on cultural awareness could help teachers and school administrators better understand students and their motivations. Simultaneously,

educators could also participate in self-reflection and self-awareness to understand how their thoughts and experiences contribute to discipline disparities.

## **Conclusion**

This study represents an effort to spotlight how school administrators' implementation of disciplinary policies contributes to the discipline disparities faced by Black girls. Using a lens of CRT and Intersectionality, I posit that while dominant narratives continue to shape how Black girls are seen in schools, school administrators can be impactful in their practices. I seek to expand the research on Black girls, a marginalized population often overlooked and overrepresented in school discipline reform. While they have been overlooked, the disparities in discipline for Black girls continue to be more pronounced and call for urgency in the reform of school discipline policies and practices.

Educators and other school personnel who regularly interact with Black girls will require specialized professional development that explores historical and current ways racism materializes. When school administrators examine their own bias and find they or other staff members they lead are ignorant or resistant to the ingrained perceptions about Black girls, they must act. Actionable steps should include professional development that educates about and challenge dominant narratives to help educators view characteristics such as assertiveness, creativity, and boldness as positive traits. In addition, school administrators who invest in building relationships and the promotion of mentoring can work to help Black girls feel that schools are welcoming and safe places. Students may feel safe enough to take in simple interactions and believe school adults are not “out to get them” thereby cultivating feelings of belonging and safety.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE**

#### **Implementation of Student Discipline Policy in South Carolina School Districts**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is LeCinda Jennings, and I am an Assistant Principal in Richland School District Two and a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policies Department at the University of South Carolina. I would like to invite you to participate in a study of principals and assistant principals and discipline policies.

I am interested in researching the role of principals and assistant principals in the implementation of school discipline policies as they contribute to discipline disparities faced by Black girls.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for a virtual interview.

The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon date and time and should last about 45 minutes. Interviews will be audiotaped so I can accurately reflect on the discussion. The tapes will only be reviewed by me and a trained third party will accurately transcribe the interview. The tapes will be kept confidential and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the researcher's work office. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but participant identities or the school districts they work in will not be revealed. Pseudonyms will be provided for all participants, counties, school districts and schools to ensure participant confidentiality.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at 980-277-1008 or [ljennings@richland2.org](mailto:ljennings@richland2.org). You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Peter Moyi, at 803-777-1549 or [moyi@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:moyi@mailbox.sc.edu).

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me at the number or email listed below to discuss participating.

With kind regards,

LeCinda Jennings

LeCinda Jennings

980-277-1008

[ljennings@richland2.org](mailto:ljennings@richland2.org)

## APPENDIX B

### INFORMED CONSENT

- I. **Title:** The Blind Side: What is the role of principals and assistant principals in the implementation of school discipline policies as they contribute to discipline disparities faced by Black girls?
- II. **Purpose:** The aim of this study is to explore how school discipline implementation by school administrators contributes to discipline disparities for Black girls.
- III. **Investigator:** The primary investigator for this study is LeCinda Jennings, an Assistant Principal in Richland School District Two and a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policies Department at the University of South Carolina.
- IV. **Interviews:** The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon date and time via the use of a video conferencing service such as Zoom or Google Meet. Each interview will last about 60 minutes. There will be an opportunity for follow-up interviews. The interviews will be audiotaped for accurately reflection of the discussion. After completion of the study, the recordings will be destroyed. The transcriptions will be kept on a password-protected device in a locked office.
- V. There is no known risk involved in participating in this study; however, the participant may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. Participants do not have to answer any questions they do not wish to answer.
- VI. **Confidentiality:** Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the researcher's work office. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but participant identities will not be revealed. Pseudonyms will be provided for all participants, schools, school districts, and counties, to ensure confidentiality.

VII. **Voluntary Participation:** Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also withdraw from the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering. Participation, non-participation or withdrawal are options.

VIII. **Informed Consent:** By signing below I verify the following to be true:

1. I am over the age of 18 years of age;
2. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction;
3. I agree to participate in this research study;
4. I agree to be audio recorded during interviews.

---

Participant Name

Participant Signature

DATE

## **APPENDIX C**

### **DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. Name
2. Age Group
3. Ethnicity
4. Gender/Sex
5. From what college/university did you graduate?
6. Total Years of Experience in Education
7. Total Years of Experience in current district
8. Total Years Served as a principal or assistant principal
9. Total Years at Current school

## **APPENDIX D**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

1. Describe your path to becoming a principal or assistant principal.
2. Primary administrative duties (can list).
  - a. What do you love most about your role?
  - b. What do you enjoy not as much about your role?
3. What stands out to you most when you think about your school?
4. Describe staff-student relationships at your school.
  - Describe teacher-student relationships at your school
  - Describe student-student relationships at your school.
6. How are these relationships maintained and nurtured?
7. Tell me about discipline policies in your district.
8. Tell me about the relationship between the disc policies in your district and the ones in your school.
  - a. close relationship?
  - b. informational relationship?
  - c. no substantive relationship?
  - d. Talk me through an example – (whether it's close, informational, or no relationship)
9. How would you describe your school's approach to discipline to
  - a. a parent/guardian?

b. a student?

10. What does a typical response to discipline look like at your school that involves a:

a. response(s) inside the classroom

b. response(s) involving your leadership

c. response(s) involving your leadership and communication with  
parents/guardians

d. response(s) involving your leadership and communication with  
parents/guardians and other school / district officials

11. How do you think students understand your role when implementing school  
discipline policies?

12. What are some typical comments or reactions that you hear from students when  
referred to a principal or assistant principal for subjective behaviors?

a. Do Black girls make the same or different comments?

b. Do Black boys?

c. Do non-Black students?

13. What personal strategies do you utilize when implementing discipline policies?

14. What additional or new changes would you like to see regarding discipline?

a. resources?

b. training?

c. new approaches for existing policies?

d. Other?

-----END OF FOCUSED INTERVIEW-----

Please watch the following 3 minute 15 second video and email your response to the final 4 questions (15-19). Upon receipt, the researcher will immediately print the response and assign the predetermined pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participant, school, and school district.

<https://www.pbs.org/video/ted-talks-education-revolution-unconscious-bias/>

15. What do you think is the relationship between bias and discipline? (& specifically at your school)

16. How do you think teachers understand the relationship? Other administrators?

17. How do teachers and other administrators address those (#15) issues of bias?

18. What do you think contributes to the disproportionate representation of Black boys in certain office referral categories and exclusionary discipline outcomes at your school?

Black girls?

19. Why do you think (#18) is so?



## APPENDIX E

### IRB LETTER OF APPROVAL



OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

#### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH DECLARATION of NOT RESEARCH

LeCinda Jennings  
P.O. Box 25514  
Columbia, SC 29224

Re: Pro00110572

Dear Ms. LeCinda Jennings:

This is to certify that research study entitled *For Colored Girls Who Have Experienced Institutional Racism Because the Discipline Code is not Enough: Principals and assistant principals, school discipline policies, and discipline disparities faced by Black girls* was reviewed on 4/26/2021 by the Office of Research Compliance, which is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). The Office of Research Compliance, on behalf of the Institutional Review Board, has determined that the referenced research study is not subject to the Protection of Human Subject Regulations in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 et. seq.

No further oversight by the USC IRB is required. However, the investigator should inform the Office of Research Compliance prior to making any substantive changes in the research methods, as this may alter the status of the project and require another review.

If you have questions, contact Lisa M. Johnson at [lisa@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:lisa@mailbox.sc.edu) or (803) 777-6670.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa M. Johnson".

Lisa M. Johnson  
ORC Assistant Director and IRB Manager