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"THEY THINK WE'RE THE DRAMA-MAKERS": EXAMINING MIDDLE-CLASS

AFRICAN AMERICAN GIRL PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AND

MISTREATMENT

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
August 2019

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ABSTRACT

"THEY THINK WE'RE THE DRAMA-MAKERS": EXAMINING MIDDLE-CLASS
AFRICAN AMERICAN GIRL PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AND
MISTREATMENT

Asha M. Ralph
Old Dominion University, 2019
Director: Dr. Ruth Triplett

Historically in the United States, African Americans have faced much adversity in the fight towards educational equality. Beginning with the complete denial of education during slavery, the struggle to attain an education continued following the Civil War, throughout Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow. Their formal education remained segregated from white students and was often severely underfunded. Ultimately, *Plessy v. Ferguson's* 1896 "separate but equal" decision was challenged and the Supreme Court justices unanimously voted that racial segregation of children in public-schools was unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. Although major advances have been seen over time, African American youth continue to face discrimination and mistreatment within this public institution, particularly by way of school discipline. African American youth are disproportionately suspended and expelled, and there has been an increase in suspension rates for black girls. Currently, African American girls are five times more likely than white girls to report being suspended or expelled and are usually disciplined for defiance, inappropriate dress, and physical fighting. Due to this spike in suspension rates, it is important to gain insight from black girls to further understand how they perceive their school experiences within an institution that has historically excluded them. For the purposes of this study, a qualitative approach was utilized in the form of one-on-one, in-depth interviews with 20 middle-class African American girls ages 14 to 18 in a rural

public-school district. This research seeks to understand how the girls perceive and understand the fairness in school disciplinary policies, reasons regarding why black girls are punished, better understand their relationships with faculty/staff and other girls in the school, and provide guidance on how both parties could assist in fostering healthy relationships in the school setting. Additionally, this work will help to understand how middle-class African American girls navigate an institution that exposes them to the subtleties of racism and currently criminalizes them, and those within other social classes, in schools across the country for their blackness.

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Yvonne Moore, who always believed greatness awaited in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Enduring the pressures of pursuing a PhD has been both rewarding and challenging at times. Someone once said, "it's a marathon, not a spring," a statement that has stuck with me over the past four years. Now that it is completed, I reflect and understand that I would not have continued the program without the support of so many different individuals. My faith in God, love from family, and constant encouragement from my peers assisted in the successful completion of the program. I would also like to acknowledge the Division on People of Color and Crime's Helen Taylor Greene and Vernetta D. Young Graduate Fellowship for funding my dissertation research.

I honor Jesus Christ, my savior, for the strength that he provided me during this time. There were points that I wanted to give up, felt unworthy of the opportunity, and that I simply was not good enough. However, I was constantly reminded that there is purpose for my life. I am thankful for the many sermons given by Bishop Courtney McBath at Calvary Revival Church. His messages truly pushed me forward at very low points. I know that God is real and my best friend forever.

Old Dominion University has truly become home. I have made lifelong friendships with wonderful people within the department. I always inform others that Ruth Triplett was the ray of sunshine that I needed when making my decision to attend this university. Her sweet and peaceful spirit was comforting, and I knew she would serve as a wonderful support. Later, she would serve as my dissertation chair and guide me to the finish line. Thank you for your knowledge and wisdom, patience, and peace that I needed during my internal battle of imposter's syndrome. I would also like to thank the other committee members, Allison Chappell, Nishaun Battle, and Randy Myers. Your feedback and insight were all necessary in order to make the

cannot wait to see where life takes us all. Thank you for the laughs and bolstering me during difficult times. You all are amazing individuals and I consider you my extended family. Continue to do amazing things and stomp out ignorance one day at a time.

Moreover, I want to acknowledge some of my very best friends who have always been there when I needed them most - Leanese, Katoya, Terresa, Shante, and Faithe. I know I am awful with expressing my emotions and typically keep my feelings bottled up, but when I need to talk or a quick getaway, I know I can count on you all. Thank you for the group chats, the phone calls, and the random weekends away just to de-stress. Those times away allowed me to regroup and come back to school with a renewed mind. Our support for each other is something that should be commended. I pray you all will continue to flourish, dream, and live life to the fullest. I cannot wait to continue sharing life experiences and making memories we will never forget.

Finally, I have to acknowledge my family and biggest supporters. There is nothing that I cannot do in their eyes and they push me to be better than my best. Thank you to my parents, Tammy and Jimmy, brothers, grandparents, and Monty and Lisa. Until my stepfather entered into my life, I was raised by a single mother who worked extremely hard to provide for my brothers and me. She enrolled in school to obtain her master's degree, taught high school English during the day and at a community college at night, served as my high school cheer coach, and took my brothers to sporting practices, all while maintaining our household. In my eyes, she is superwoman and my inspiration. Facing much adversity, she persevered. Her strength and determination were motivational factors for me during challenging moments. Her love, honesty, and continued support has and will continue to push me forward in life. I love my family and thank you for riding this PhD train with me.

Once someone gains mental clarity regarding their life, I believe he or she is unstoppable. I may not have a clear view regarding the next step in life, but I believe that it will be great. My goal is to be unstoppable and make Old Dominion University proud of my future accomplishments. Thank you to the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice for a wonderful and fulfilling four years.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The journey towards educational equality for African Americans has proven to be difficult, as they are met with adversity at every turn. During slavery, individuals of African descent were at risk of punishment under slave codes if found learning how to read and/or write (Morris, 2016). Even as slavery came to an end, African Americans continued to fight for literacy, as their white counterparts placed many barriers in their way when trying to obtain an education. They lacked necessary resources, and funding for their education was limited. During Reconstruction, the Freedmen's Bureau was implemented by the government to assist blacks in the transition from slavery to freedom and provided funding to educate them (Bentley, 1955). However, its tenure ended in 1872 due to shortage of funds and personnel, along with the politics of race and Reconstruction.

Due to the lack of support from the government and community, African Americans responded to this adversity by drawing on their own resources to provide education to their own communities. Shortly after slavery ended (late 1800s – early 1900s), black club women organizations were created and black women took it upon themselves to educate their own communities if they could not gain support from the general public (Ward, 2012; Young & Reviere, 2015; Young & Reviere, 2006). Although they were involved in various areas regarding issues in the African American community (i.e. women's suffrage, child welfare), educating their own was a primary focus and they often educated students within their own homes. Moreover, Rosenwald schools, founded by Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald, were opened in the south to educate black students (Butchart, 2010; Hoffschwelle, 2012). Contributions from

Rosenwald and the black community created an opportunity for several schools to be built throughout the south during the early 1900s.

African Americans utilized many strategies to obtain education in America, including the legal fight for educational equality. *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled "separate but equal" as unconstitutional in 1954, however, the integration of schools was not met with immediate acceptance and did not create equal opportunity in the public-school environment for black and brown youth (Bell, 2004).

Unfortunately, educational equality for African American youth remains a concern today, as they continue to face discrimination and mistreatment within the academic setting. Specifically, schools are using exclusionary discipline as a means to remove black youth from the classrooms. African American students are punished, suspended, and expelled at higher rates than their white counterparts, even when behaviors are similar (Morris, 2007; Finn & Servoss, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011). They are also punished for subjective offenses in which they are perceived to be disrespectful to authority figures (i.e. teachers, principals, counselors) (Liiv, 2015). Subjective offenses include disobedience, insubordination, and defiance.

Although most of the research regarding school disciplinary experiences focuses heavily on African American boys, African American girls are beginning to draw more attention. African American girls are now about 5 to 7 times more likely to be expelled than their white counterparts, even surpassing suspension rates of black boys in some instances (Morris, 2007; Morris, 2016; Crenshaw et al., 2015). Most times, black girls are punished for defiance, physical fighting, and dress code violations (Blake et al., 2011). These offenses deviate from what society deems as acceptable behavior for young women. Since they do not adhere to traditional white feminist ideals, their black feminism is attacked.

School systems represent a hegemonic institution that adopts the same racist and sexist beliefs as society, causing black girls to suffer tremendously. As a result, the girls who do not conform to middle-class, traditional gender norms are pushed out of school by way of exclusionary discipline. Once the "push-out" begins, they are at risk of lower levels of academic achievement, dropping out of school, disconnecting physically and mentally from the educational environment, and future contact with the criminal justice system (Pegeuro & Bracy, 2015). Therefore, it is important to raise awareness of this issue and encourage school administrators to closely monitor their treatment toward students of color and think hard about ways to bridge the gap between faculty/staff and students.

Most research regarding school disciplinary outcomes focus on the effects it has on African American boys (Ferguson, 2001; Heitzeg, 2009; Noguera, 2008; Rios, 2011). There is very limited literature that focuses primarily on the lived experiences of African American girls, especially within the public-school system. Works such as *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* by Monique Morris (2016) and *Between Good and Ghetto* by Nikki Jones (2010) have begun to fill the gap in literature regarding the experiences of African American girls within the schools, detention centers, and the neighborhoods that they reside. Additional research in this area is necessary because if we fail to recognize and acknowledge the disparate treatment of these girls, the school system will continue to relegate them to the same second-class status that they experience in society. Society reaffirms the idea that black girls can only be successful if they assimilate into white, middle-class traditional gender roles – passive, soft-spoken, non-aggressive, etc. However, this idea does not consider that cultural differences make our society unique, not worse. Black girls are not inherently deviant, promiscuous, angry, and in need of correction.

Stressors from society's standards can be contributing factors to explain why they may be perceived as aggressive at times. Prior research has shown that youth who have experienced discrimination or racism report higher rates and risk of anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems (Priest et al., 2013). Even when African American girls subscribe to white, middle-class standards, the impact of racism negatively affects their worldview. So often these young women are silenced and not allowed to express their lived experiences because social institutions are not empathetic regarding the hardships they endure within society. Forcing black girls to hide in the shadows and not express their disdain regarding their positions in society only worsens their conditions and a perpetual cycle of silence and invisibility continues.

As a system, criminal justice scholars and practitioners should also be concerned about the mistreatment and criminalization of African American girls in the public-school system. Research findings show that youth who are continuously suspended or expelled are likely to disengage from school and face much adversity in society, specifically involvement in the juvenile justice system (U.S. Dept. of Education Office for Civil Rights, School Climate, and Discipline, 2017). Research also finds that experiences of trauma contribute to the likelihood of one being deviant and in the criminal justice system (Leone & Weinberg 2010; King et al. 2011; Wasserman & Seracini 2001), offering one explanation for this connection. Being punished within the school simply for actions that are perceived to be disrespectful or threatening can be a traumatic experience for black girls. They recognize that they are mistreated and not given fair disciplinary punishment. Trying to understand that their blackness is being punished can be stressful, weighing on their self-esteem and how they view themselves.

The use of exclusionary discipline further funnels girls into the school-to-prison pipeline, as some may fall victim to believing they are deviant based off how they are treated by school

personnel. Therefore, the school system's mishandling of school discipline then becomes a problem for the juvenile justice system to handle. Since school systems and the criminal justice system work closely together to implement punitive policies to discipline and control students, they should rethink their approach in handling disciplinary issues when they arise to be more culturally aware. Acknowledging the differential treatment of black girls and using alternative forms of punishment to exclusionary discipline can help decrease suspensions and increase their time in the learning environment. When students are engaged in the classroom, it is assumed they are less likely to engage in deviancy. Diverting girls from the school-to-prison pipeline should be the goal of both public-school systems and the juvenile and adult criminal justice system. This research hopes to raise the voices of young black girls, allowing them to speak freely regarding their school experiences without fear of being further marginalized.

For the purposes of this study, a qualitative approach was utilized in the form of one-on-one, in-depth interviews with 20 middle-class African American girls ages 14 to 18 in a rural public-school district. This research seeks to understand how the girls perceive and understand the fairness in school disciplinary policies, reasons regarding why black girls are punished, better understand their relationships with faculty/staff and other girls in the school, and provide guidance on how both parties could assist in fostering healthy relationships in the school setting. Additionally, this work will help to understand how middle-class African American girls navigate an institution that exposes them to the subtleties of racism and currently criminalizes them, and those within other social classes, in schools across the country for their blackness. Not only are they expected to follow institutional rules or abide by a culture of decency, but they also have to live by a similar "code of the street" among their peers to prove that they are cool and to gain respect. Many of the girls within the sample have not directly experienced school discipline,

but rather relay the stories of other African American girls who have been punished and provide their perceptions regarding the fairness in their treatment.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was used to highlight major themes that recur in the interviews. Moreover, a critical race methodology was adopted, which rejects the traditional research paradigm and objectivity, allowing my identities as an African American woman from the researched area to coincide with previous literature and the narratives of the participants to create counter-stories that challenge the stereotypical majoritarian stories told about black women in society. In sum, not only is the goal to shine light on the inequitable treatment of black girls in within the public-school sector, but it is hoped that the issue of discipline and mistreatment will not continue to be reflective of racial and gendered biases. Instead it is hoped that public-schools will recognize and acknowledge the disparate treatment of youth of color and take the proper steps in correcting the issue (disciplinary policy changes, placing responsibility on teachers to handle classroom management issues, cultural competency training, etc.).

Within this document, the following sections are included in this particular order: literature review, methodology, study results and conclusion. The literature review includes a historical overview of school integration and inequality, the move towards punitive school policies, the importance of parental involvement and socioeconomic status in educational success, suspension and expulsion rates for African American youth and their impact, and specifically the school experiences of African American girls. The theoretical framework is found toward the conclusion of the literature review, explaining critical race, intersectionality, and labeling theories, and how they can be used to explain the mistreatment of African American girls within the public-school system. The methodology can then be found, which discusses how

the study was conducted, why this particular town was selected for sampling, and analysis techniques. The results chapter discusses the relationships among girls, reasons for punishment and perceptions of fairness in discipline, network of support (ways to evade punishment), and the internalization of racism, documenting the adoption of white feminism among black middle-class girls. The conclusion will further discuss the interplay of race, class, and gender that emerged from the results, recommendations, theoretical analyses, limitations and future research, and contributions of the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will primarily focus on the journey towards educational freedom and equality for

African Americans. Due to exclusion, African Americans have pushed for education by

providing their own communities with the resources needed to learn and began the courageous

fight for equality through legal arguments. Following legal success and desegregation, African

Americans have continued to face forms of discrimination within public-schools. Particularly,

school discipline and forms of exclusionary discipline continue to disproportionately impact

black students. Within this document, the area of school discipline and its impact among African

American students will be discussed. Lastly, critical race theory, intersectionality, and labeling

theory will be explained, as well as their usage in analyzing forms of mistreatment and unfair

disciplinary practices used against African American girls.

Historical Context

The educational plight of African Americans began long before the United States

Supreme Court upheld separate but equal in Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896. It continues even after

the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 that separate was

inherently not equal. A brief review of that plight and the fight for educational equality from

slavery to today follows.

Before they were legally allowed to learn, African Americans were denied this

fundamental right. Under slavery, individuals of African descent were not allowed to be

educated and could be punished for learning under slave codes. Such punishments could include

whippings and fines. It was believed that "reading challenged the oppressive controlling logic of

slavery and the presupposed inferiority of black people" (Morris, 2016, p. 5). Literacy opened

the possibility of encountering ideas opposed to human bondage and carried the potential of written communication between black conspirators. Ideologically, maintaining illiteracy among African Americans contributed to the myth of racial inferiority. Slave owners used this lack of knowledge to their advantage and were able to keep the slaves under their submission. Slaves were fearful of the consequences if they were found reading and writing, and most chose to adhere to the warning. However, there were some that defied their owners and chose to teach themselves and others educational skills.

Despite prohibitions, African American teachers were educating their communities in the shadow of slavery. Butchart (2010) found in Washington and Baltimore, places where free black children and a few favored enslaved children quietly attended private black schools before the war, black teachers opened their schools to all black children. Around Norfolk and Alexandria, VA, and on the Sea Islands of South Carolina, other black teachers opened the first "free" schools (Butchart, 2010). By the end of 1861, shortly after the Civil War began, 40 southern black teachers had expanded their schools or established new schools to accommodate students. Approximately 6 months later, the 40 southern black teachers constituted nearly half of all teachers working in freed people's schools. Before the war ended, chaplains and soldiers assisted in teaching blacks how to read. Educational societies in Chicago and Cincinnati sent teachers to the camps of black troops in the Mississippi Valley, and any places the union troops had gone (Bentley, 1955). At the end of the Civil War, over 280 African Americans, mostly literate southern blacks, were educating their own (Butchart, 2010).

When the Civil War ended in 1865, southern blacks forged their own destiny toward educational literacy. They reconstituted families, built their own churches, negotiated contracts, and demanded access to literacy (Butchart, 2010). They raised teachers from the literate among

them, and even urged some former slave owners to teach them. During Reconstruction, some southern whites thought blacks should be educated for their new citizenship responsibilities. Although impoverished, blacks raised funds to buy land for their schools, supplied the labor to build the schools, supported teachers as best they could, and maintained an effective network of schools across the South. Butchart (2010) concluded that "slavery's great failure lay in its inability to crush the lack longing to read and write (p. 2)." According to Butchart (2010), there was an intense desire to be educated among African Americans during that time. Many of them were eager to learn how to read so that they could read the bible for themselves and declare emancipation from white churches and centuries of being told by white preachers what to believe. Literacy had political meaning for freed people. They believed it to be necessary to their children for promoting equality, protecting autonomy, and providing access to information (Butchart, 2010). Freed people also believed literacy protected them from fraud and would allow them to advance economically. One freedman stated, "we must learn to keep books and do our own business, for already the white man is marking and thinking how cheap he can hire us, and how easily he can cheat us out of our pay" (Butchart, 2010, p. 12). In learning to read, freedmen were eating of the fruit so long forbidden to them and entering a mystery which seemed almost holy (Bentley, 1955). Overall, blacks understood that literacy extended their emancipation beyond the minimal legal termination of bondage.

During Reconstruction, the Freedmen's Bureau and benevolent associations worked together to help African Americans attain schooling. A classic work by Bentley (1955) describes the history and the work of the bureau in great detail. Oliver Howard, founder of Howard University in Washington, D.C., became head of the bureau and was one who believed education could be most beneficial for blacks. Howard believed that through proper schooling, blacks

would be able to command and secure for themselves "both privileges and rights difficult to guarantee" (Bentley, 1955). The bureau had little money to contribute but allowed government buildings to be used for schoolhouses, rent free. It also provided free transportation for teachers, and books. Bentley (1955) suggests that the bureau's greatest contribution to education however was psychological, providing a centralized organization with a staff responsible for locating needs, publicizing them, and seeking aid from charitable organizations. The Freedmen's Bureau sparked enthusiasm among aid societies and increased the work being done for the education of blacks. In 1866, the American Freedmen's Union commission supported 458 teachers in the south, while the American Missionary Association and other church-sponsored societies provided many more (Bentley, 1955).

Eventually, Congress provided $500,000 for rent and repair of schools and asylum buildings and the bureau could seize, hold, lease, or sell any property of the ex-confederate states for school purposes (Bentley, 1955). There was a major demand to build schoolhouses secured to African Americans forever. Assistant commissioners of the bureau would pay for completing the buildings. General Howard also urged the erection of school buildings. At the end of 1868, he began giving buildings to benevolent associations, corporations, and board of trustees who owned the land where the school buildings were located (Bentley, 1955). The school had to sign a guarantee that the buildings would always be used for education and no child could be excluded because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. By March 1869, the bureau had built or helped to build 630 schoolhouses and spent $1,771,132.25 for rent and repairs. In the next three years, its appropriation for school buildings amounted to another $2 million.

The Freedmen's Bureau had legal authority for paying rent of buildings, but not for paying teacher salaries. Some schools stopped operating because of the lack of money for

teachers. As told by Bentley (1955), the bureau eventually began transferring the title of many of its school buildings to benevolent societies, which enabled the bureau to rent buildings from the societies. Howard decided to use the rent to supplement income and the societies would send a bill for rent each month to the bureau. As a result, schools began to operate again and teachers were able to be paid by the societies and the money received for rent.

Bentley (1955) also explains the bureau's role in higher education for African Americans. In 1867, Howard also proposed that societies build normal schools and colleges for blacks in the south. About 50,000 people assisted in this effort. He allotted $407,752.21 to 20 institutions of higher learning for blacks and $3,000 for white refugees. By 1871, 11 colleges and universities in the country were intended for blacks, along with 61 normal schools (Bentley, 1955).

Scholars, like Bentley (1955), believed that the bureau could have accomplished more had its schools not aroused the hostility of some southern whites. Bentley (1955) reported that the most violent reaction to educating black youth was in Maryland in 1865. An antebellum law of the state permitted orphans' courts to bind out the children of any free black if it should appear better for the habits and comfort of the child. White farmers took advantage of the law and young freedmen were bound out as apprentices to their former masters. The law did not require children to be educated and white men feared their apprentices would be taken out of the field because of education. Additionally, by December 1865, at least three schools in Maryland had been burned by mobs. Other efforts to deprive education from African Americans were attempts to recover the property of white owners, taken after the war, some of which was now being used for schools.

Bently (1955) reports that through 1866 and early 1867, southern whites changed their attitudes toward black schools, only in degree. They were willing to educate black children, but

were suspicious of northern teachers (Bentley, 1955). They simply wanted northern teachers to teach reading and writing, avoid politics and sociology, and eschew ideas of social equality with whites (Bentley, 1955). Southern whites wanted black youth to be educated by southern teachers to maintain the "southern way of life." Since northern teachers remained the primary educators of black pupils, southerners attempted to discourage or frighten them. However, the violence did not intimidate them, nor did it limit the growth of freedmen schools. Bentley (1955) reports that the teachers did influence their students to become members of the Republican Party, which led to white southerners burning more school buildings. The freedmen's schools remained firm in educating blacks despite the hostility they endured because of political activity. The Freedmen's Bureau contributed to the beginnings of black education but ultimately ended in 1870.

Before the changes in the social and political climate of the south led to the nullification of black political power, public-funding for black and white education became nearly equal. According to Klarman (2004), in 1880 African Americans actually received more funding for education than whites in North Carolina and Alabama. Most southern whites however opposed black education altogether or favored only industrial training. Even fewer endorsed black secondary education. In addition, prominent black leaders, such as Booker T. Washington, stressed industrial education rather than liberal arts. These attitudes led to funding preferences. For example, attitudes also meant limitations were placed on how much education was thought as suitable. Peabody and Rosenwald funds subsidized southern black education by supporting industrial training to prepare blacks for the same "negro jobs" held by their parents – manual labor and service positions. In 1890, only 0.39 percent of blacks attended high school and there were only four highs schools in the south available to black students (Klarman 2004). By 1900, most southern whites rejected black voting and saw less need for equal black education.

Ultimately, antebellum southern states almost universally excluded blacks from public education or limited them to industrial training.

The Contributions of Black Women

The contributions of African American women in education deserve special attention so some of their story is highlighted here – in particular, the black club women's movement and the black child savers movement.

Following the Emancipation Proclamation signed in 1863 and throughout the period of Reconstruction (1865-1877), many women decided to continue educating the formerly enslaved. Sarah Mapps Douglas led the girls' preparatory department for the Philadelphia Institute for Colored Youth in 1853 (Yee, 1992; Sterling, 1984). In 1893, Catherine Ferguson, a formerly enslaved woman, chose to educate "poor and neglected" black and white children for Sunday school instruction. She would be known as the founder of New York's first Sunday school. Although she could not read or write herself, she wanted to instill the importance of education and faith because of its utility toward bringing about a promising future. Years later, Mary McLeod Bethune would open the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School, an institution of higher learning, which is now known as Bethune-Cookman College (BCU, 2019). These are just a few of the many black women that pioneered the way for education within their communities, most of whom have not been included in textbooks or literary works. In all, African Americans, both men and women, have sacrificed their lives to assure their descendants were able to gain an education because of the hope for upward mobility, reclamation of dignity, and reward in society.

Of central importance to the story of how African Americans attained access to education is the black club women's movement. Black women created a club movement to improve their

communities 30 years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed and the Civil War ended (Ward, 2012; Young & Reviere; 2006, 2015). During this time, Jim Crow laws were enacted and incited horrific acts of violence towards the black community. Clubs were formed during this tumultuous time (late1800s- early 1900s) in response to the urbanization, industrialization, violence of lynching, and poverty that impacted the lives of their communities and to fill the void in social services available to black families (Ward, 2012). Many clubs were organized into committees such as women's suffrage, education, Mother's meetings, child welfare, etc. based on the interests of the women involved and the needs of their communities. The organizations provided funds to establish schools, hospitals and neighborhood clinics, orphanages, institutions for black juveniles, and employment services (Scott, 1990; White, 1993; Peebles-Wilkins, 1995; Ward, 2012; Young & Reviere, 2015). They also placed emphasis on the welfare of black children, delinquent or not, based on the idea that children's well-being resulted from both family and social environments, and that were integral to the future of their race (Roberts, 2005). As a result, they stressed the importance of education as a path of self-reliance and began preparing youth, specifically young girls, for "honest occupations" through training programs, literacy, and skill development (Young & Reviere, 2015). Their goal was to rescue girls from prison and the normative image of sexual wantonness. Such wayward girls represented the stereotype that many were forced into moral offenses and vagrancy because of lack of opportunity (Young & Reviere, 2006). However, club women believed they could save these girls so that they could move forward in society in a positive light.

Additionally, the early clubs focused on undermining the stereotype of immorality placed on black women (Giddings, 1984). President of the Women's Era Club of Boston, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, decided to speak out against James Jack, president of the Missouri Press

Association, who stated that "the Negroes in this country are wholly devoid of morality" and "the women were prostitutes and all were natural thieves and liars" (Hine, 1988, p. 235). Frustrated with such statements, Ruffin mobilized black women and called for a national conference in Boston. This meeting marked the beginning of the National Federation of Colored Women (Bruce, 1915). In 1896, this organization held its first convention in Washington, D.C. Eventually, the National Federation of Colored Women from Philadelphia, PA and the National League of Colored Women from Washington, D.C., merged in 1896 under the name of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW; was renamed National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, Inc. in 1954) with the motto, "Lifting as We Clime" (NACWC, 2011). Other founding members include Mary Church Terrell, Ida Wells Barnett, Mary B. Talbert, Janie Porter Barrett, Mary Murray Washington, and Fannie Barrier Williams (Hine, 1990).

The NACW was led and directed by black women from different facets of life. The stated purposes of the organization were: (1) to promote the education of colored women and hold an Educational Institute biennially at the convention; (2) to secure and enforce civil and political rights of women; (3) to raise the standard of the home; (4) to work for social, moral, economic, and religious welfare of women and children; (5) to protect the rights of women and children who work; (6) to obtain for colored women the opportunity of reaching the highest standards in all fields of human endeavor; (7) to promote interracial understanding so that justice and good will may prevail among all races (Young & Reviere, 2015). By 1895, the NACW expanded to 28 clubs, then 67 a year later.

Specifically, in North Carolina, Charlotte Hawkins Brown helped organize the North Carolina State Federation of Negro Women's Clubs and launched a drive to establish an industrial home for delinquent black girls in 1909 (Hines, 1990; Young & Reviere, 2015).

Initially, she began with a single room school which she transformed into a private institution for high achieving middle-class children, where she emphasized manners and correct behavior (McCluskey, 1997). The federation went on to purchase 140 acres of land and maintained the Efland Home for Wayward Girls in Orange County. This project was carried out by both white and black clubwomen, one of the only successful joint efforts in the state. Eventually, the federation also opened the Industrial School for Negro Girls in 1921. This school accepted 16 girls between ages 14 and 16 (Young & Reviere, 2015; North Carolina, 1934). The program included sewing, gardening, home economics, woodcutting, and an upgraded school plan (Sanders, 1968). Sanders (1968) believed that the state planned on taking over the school, but when the Efland Home closed, the federation lobbied for additional funding from the legislature. Eventually, the state assembly provided a $50,000 appropriation and authorized the state training school for Negro Girls for nearly two decades later in 1943 (MacCormick, 1943; Holmes, n.d.). The school opened officially at a temporary location in Rocky Mount, NC on September 12, 1944 before moving to Kinston, NC in 1947 to a larger building.

Black clubwomen also initiated the black child-saving movement. A recent work that documents the story of the black child-saving movement is by Ward (2012). This work is considered important because it provides a complete analysis of the movement and its relevance to education and the black community as a whole. The harsh realities of Jim Crow juvenile justice were highlighted by representatives of the Women's Clubs of Atlanta at the first annual convention of the NACW in 1897 (Ward, 2012). They protested racial inequality in criminal justice and its harmful impact on black youth. The movement began in 1890 and provided food, clothing, and other resources to black youths and adults in prisons or experiencing other forms of injustice. Members of the movement appealed to the state to remove black children from adult

institutions, petitioned to establish reformatories for black youth, and operated their own reformatories. Their goal was to not only establish juvenile courts and institutions for black youth, but to create spaces that benefited all youth, regardless of race.

The black child-savers movement began in the Progressive Era south, where most blacks lived until the middle third of the 20th century (Ward, 2012). At this time, African Americans endured the harsh realities of juvenile social control during Jim Crow segregation. Although the movement started in the south, it grew into a national movement against Jim Crow juvenile justice at the height of the civil rights movement. Initiatives of the movement focused on securing equal protection, opportunity, and influence within the idea of the 'parental state' (Ward, 2012). Leaders of the movement believed that denial of education and other opportunities for self-development was unjust and a threat to their group's interest. Although many of the members were college educated individuals of considerable status – teachers, attorneys, and business owners – Ward (2012) argues that the leaders remained marginalized socially, economically, and politically, within this larger racialized social system. This social movement of early black child-savers was "born of an interactional political consciousness unique to their social position which prioritized but lacked the power to privilege black interests, growing in reaction to the denial of opportunity and influence in Jim Crow juvenile justice" (Ward, 2012, p. 151). Scholars like Ward (2012) suggest that early black child-saving struggled to survive due to lack of an articulated vision for racial group progress and societal transformation.

A later wave of black child-saving pushed more aggressively and effectively for civil rights racial uplift. Ward (2012) stated that the focus on the racial uplift agenda was considered a negotiated, practical expression of black progressivism. However, the uplift ideology had differing views in regard to black mobility within society. Booker T. Washington and W.E.B.

DuBois's debate on the best path toward black social, economic, and political progress strongly influenced early black child-saving initiatives. Washington's agenda (i.e. Hampton-Tuskegee model) focused on uplift ideology, while DuBois believed in cultivating the race's "Talented Tenth' of black professionals and elites to fight for social justice and civil rights. Most African Americans in the south who attended black industrial schools, believed that Washington's Hampton-Tuskegee model could better assist in black progress (Ward, 2012; Butchart, 2010). This was considered a safe and familiar approach. Uplift ideology proposed that blacks should be educated to achieve industriousness (Ward, 2012). This would provide opportunities to work independently and productively as farmers and in various trades, building educational, economic, and other foundations of power. Industriousness was perceived to be more attainable and practical, compared to seeking full social and political equality. Washington's basic view was that "it is by means of practical education that the Negro is to be developed and made a useful citizen" (Ward, 2012, p. 152), and most black child-savers agreed. Reformers and additional efforts viewed industrial education as a protective and rehabilitative strategy that had the potential to save black youth affected by Jim Crow systems, and ultimately contribute to their ability to make a decent living. Radical leaders such as DuBois, considered Washington's strategy to be "foolhardy and unacceptable" (Ward, 2012). He believed that without political power, economic power was useless. He also believed that the idea of industriousness was manipulated by white authorities and a means of permanently assigning blacks to menial labor and marginal societal roles.

The critique of uplift ideology during the black child-saving movement is that it was ineffective at altering social, economic, and political relations of inequality and complicit in exploiting marginalized populations (Ward, 2012). When considering black involvement in early

juvenile justice reform, Alexander Pisciotta, professor of Criminal Justice, explained that the "founding of reformatories for black children under the direction of black administrators before the turn of the century further legitimized the state's racist distortion of parens patriae" (Ward, 2012). Black child-savers taught hard work and submission to the white man's authority were the key to advancement. Whites were willing to allow blacks to run reformatories as long as they continued to train blacks for menial positions and perpetuated existing power relations. The intervention intended to increase access for black youth to developmental opportunities and resources and achieve participatory parity in the administration of juvenile justice. Although not considered to be revolutionary, Ward (2012) suggests that the black child-saving movement was a progressive expression of liberal idealism intended to counter Jim Crow juvenile justice through strategies of democratic inclusion.

Fight toward Desegregation: Brown vs. Board of Education

Enduring the most heinous injustices as a race, African Americans remained resilient through slavery, Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow. The work of African Americans to provide education for themselves is an essential part of the story and the movement toward education equality. Also key is the role of the law – in particular the United States Supreme Court case *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Beginning with *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, this Supreme Court decision set the groundwork for the standard that separate facilities for blacks and whites were constitutional as long as they were equal – "separate but equal." This principle allowed races to be separated in various public places such as theaters, restrooms, restaurants, and public schools. Although the facilities were expected to be equal by the Supreme Court ruling, it became evident there existed a clear racial divide, especially in public schooling. Often black schools lacked the resources that White schools offered their students.

Due to inequality and the belief that schools could not effectively operate under the "separate but equal" mandate, *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas* became a focal point of the civil rights movement in 1954. In fact, *Brown* was deemed the most important court decision of the early 20th century. Michael Klarman's work, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights*, highlights the struggle for racial and educational equality. His analysis regarding *Brown v. Board of Education* is part of a much larger work and can be found throughout this section.

Before this case, some northern states began to desegregate schools in response to social and political forces emanating from World War II. New Jersey and Illinois began desegregating by 1950 and four western states – Arizona, New Mexico, Kansas, and Wyoming – permitted local communities to impose segregation at their own discretion (Klarman, 2004). Even Topeka, Kansas, the defendant in *Brown* adopted a desegregation plan eight months prior to the decision. After *Brown,* desegregation in border-states, such as Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, and Missouri moved swiftly, because most whites, even though opposed, were not intensely resistant to it. The social and political conditions within these areas enabled blacks to take advantage of *Brown*. They gained substantial political power in these places, which ultimately influenced the desegregation stance of politicians. It is important to note that counties within these border-states with relatively small percentages of blacks were easier to desegregate than areas like southern Maryland and the Eastern Shore, which did not begin desegregation until the early 1960s (Klarman, 2004).

The pace of desegregation increased in the early 1960s due to direct action protests where blacks were aggressive in demanding school desegregation, lawsuits proliferated, and federal judges grew intolerant of delay. In North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee, the number of blacks attending desegregated schools doubled, or tripled every year in the early 1960s

(Klarman, 2004). However, southern states resisted desegregation for as long as possible. The south was able to delay integration for a while partly because school boards retained primary responsibility for placing students and *Brown II* supplied no clear mandate for action. As a result, school board members resisted prompt and effective action toward desegregation. Those school board members who decided to desegregate, such as the board in Greensboro, NC, received harassing letters, phone calls, and threats.

Most school boards would not desegregate without a court order, the implementation of *Brown* depended on the ability of black parents to bring lawsuits and on the willingness of federal judges to order desegregation. Neither approach was easily satisfied. Klarman (2004) stated that most school boards halted integration by "studying the problem," and judges were generally satisfied for at least a couple years after *Brown*. In addition, Klarman's (2004) analysis demonstrates that several desegregation policies were used to circumvent *Brown* –pupil placement, freedom-of-choice plans, transfer options, and grade-a-year plans. Pupil placement and freedom-of-choice became the preferred methods of limiting desegregation. In North Carolina, considered the place to pioneer pupil placement, 12 black students attended desegregated schools in 3 cities in 1957, enough "race-mixing" to withstand an initial judicial challenge, if an issue arose (Klarman, 2004). Lower courts refused to presume discriminatory administration and declined to invalidate pupil placement plans on their face, as long as they disassociated from other legislation that mandated segregation or school closures. The Supreme Court concurred.

How did *Brown* begin? It was the persistence of brave African American students, parents, community members, and the ultimate involvement of the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), *Brown v. Board of Education* ensued. The next section explores the beginning work of this landmark case.

The Beginning of Brown

The issue of educational inequality in the United States gained attention in the spring of 1951. Led by Barbara Johns, African American students at segregated Moton High School in Prince Edward County, VA commenced a strike against overcrowding and other unequal conditions at their school (Klarman, 2004). Both black teachers and parents implicitly supported the protest by not attempting to stifle it. NAACP leaders in Virginia initially tried to discourage the students' activism because Prince Edward County did not seem like an environment in which the students should challenge Jim Crow education. Due to the students' persistence however, the association's lawyers agreed to sponsor a lawsuit on the condition that the students and their parents directly attack segregation, which was not their initial intention. This lawsuit became 1 of 5 consolidated cases that became known as *Brown v. Board of Education.*

Klarman (2004) argues that the social and political climate was different in 1951-52, compared to 1927 when the Supreme Court last considered the question of racial segregation in schools. First, many blacks had migrated to northern states and frequently held the balance of power between the two major political parties. Demographic shifts and industrialization resulting from World War II produced an urban black middle-class with the education, disposable income, and major expectations conducive to involvement in social protest (Klarman, 2004). African Americans ultimately found it easier to coordinate social protest during this time period. Second, ideological forces helped transform American racial attitudes and practices. The war against fascism impelled many Americans to reconsider their racial preconceptions to clarify the differences between Nazi Germany and Jim Crow south (Klarman, 2004). The Cold War

pressured Americans to reform their racial practices to convince non-white third world nations that they should not equate democratic capitalism with white supremacy. Finally, developments in transportation and communication – television, interstate highways, expansion of air travel – bound the nation into a more cohesive unit. The apparent cohesion of the U.S. hindered the white south from maintaining deviant social practices, such as Jim Crow. Unfortunately, background forces for racial change in 1950s did not produce dramatic changes in southern racial practices. It is thought that 'segregation of public grade schools lay near the top of the white supremacist hierarchy of racial preferences' (Klarman, 2004, p. 291). For the court to invalidate school segregation then was certain to generate great controversy and resistance than striking down segregation in interstate transportation.

Five cases challenged the constitutionality of segregation in public schools and reached the Supreme Court in 1951-1952. Klarman (2004) argues that justices were unenthusiastic about confronting an issue they deliberately evaded in the 1950s university segregation cases, and the NAACP had not planned to force the issue this soon. Of the five cases, only 2 were representative of the southern school segregation issue – Clarendon County, SC and Prince Edward County, VA – where blacks were 70 percent and 45 percent of the populations, respectively (Klarman, 2004). Broad forces for racial change had not influenced whites in these areas, and there was concern among NAACP leadership that judicial invalidation of school segregation could jeopardize public education. The remaining three cases however were from Kansas, Delaware, and Washington D.C., where whites were not deeply committed to segregation.

As explained by Klarman (2004), the NAACP had been hesitant to take on school segregation directly, causing African Americans to convert their grievances against inferior

schools and lack of bus transportation into broader desegregation challenges. However, the association was not willing to abandon courageous blacks who were willing to challenge Jim Crow, pressuring them to attack school segregation directly, something Klarman (2004) argues they probably would have not done. Still some civil rights leaders questioned the wisdom of pushing a desegregation suit on the court at this time, worrying that the strategy would backfire.

Along with wanting to support blacks protesting segregation, the decision of the NAACP to attack school desegregation directly was made by or supported most strongly by Thurgood Marshall. Shortly after winning a lawsuit that forced the University of Maryland to integrate its law school, Thurgood Marshall was brought into the NAACP legal defense fund by his Howard Law School dean and mentor, Charles Hamilton Houston (Oyez, 2019). Marshall was then tasked with arguing the *Brown v. Board* case at the U.S. Supreme Court level.

Marshall argued that school segregation was a violation of individual rights under the 14th amendment (Oyez, 2019). He asserted that the only justification for continuing to have separate schools was to keep people who were slaves "as near that stage as possible" (NPR, 2003). Fortunately, On May 17, 1954, the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* unanimously invalidated racial segregation in public schools. Segregated public schools were "inherently unequal" and violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Although the Supreme Court's decision was unanimous, Klarman (2004) argues that the unanimity can be misleading. The justices were deeply conflicted by their own personal views and the law. Klarman (2004) reported that some of the differing thoughts on the issue of desegregation were that prior precedents upheld segregation as constitutional, the belief of the justices that states should work out their own problems, fear of district courts being in the line of fire for enforcement through injunctions and contempt, possible violence in the south, and that

blacks had not thoroughly assimilated into society. By 1954, however, two factors pushed

unanimity. The justices acknowledged that white southerners would respond violently and

exploit any internal court dissension. Justices who disagreed with the outcome thus felt pressure

to suppress their convictions for the good of the institution. Moreover, two justices experienced

Brown as a conflict between law and politics. They loathed segregation but doubted whether it

was unconstitutional. If a majority was committed to invalidating segregation they would

acquiesce and suppress their legal doubts.

Klarman (2004) reports that the Supreme Court invalidated school segregation on May

17, 1954 but ordered no immediate remedy and deferred re-argument on the issue until the

following term. Death of a justice and delays over confirmation of his replacement postponed the

re-argument until April 1955 – *Brown II*. Here, justices wrestled with whether they should order

immediate desegregation or allow a gradual transition, if they should impose a deadline for

beginning and/or completing desegregation, the details of the remedial decree, and if the court

could treat the lawsuits as class actions or limit relief to the named plaintiff (Klarman, 2004).

The NAACP pushed for immediate desegregation with a completion deadline of the fall 1956.

Members of the association believed gradualism would encourage resistance and that the best

way to integrate was to simply do it. The justices chose vagueness and gradualism however,

requiring a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance with additional time allowed if

"consistent with good faith compliance at the earliest practicable date" (Klarman, 2004, p. 313).

Scholars such as Klarman (2004) and Douglas (1995), note two important reasons

justices chose gradualism. First, the justices feared immediate desegregation would cause

violence and school closures. White southerners campaigned to convince justices that such

actions would occur. Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors refused to appropriate funds

for public education. Many states chose not to file an amicus brief in response to *Brown II*, but North Carolina's brief reported a poll of local police chiefs that found 193 out of 199 predicted violence in response to immediate integration (Klarman, 2004; Douglas, 1995). Violence did occur in many places. In September 1954, hundreds of angry white parents in Milford, DE forced the closing of a desegregated school and the abandonment of integration. Similar acts took place in the Deep South.

The adoption of vague terminology used in *Brown II* allowed states to find alternative measures to circumvent the *Brown* decision to cease white anger and possible violence. Phrases such as "good faith," and an order to begin "as soon as practicable," and desegregation with "all deliberate speed," left an open door for states to resist the integration of schools (Klarman, 2004). As reported by Klarman (2004), school districts adopted a variety of policies such as:

1. Freedom-of-choice plans – allows parents to choose among several schools pupil placement.

2. Pupil Placement – assigns students to schools based on a long list of ostensibly race-neutral criteria.

3. Transfer options – permitted parents to move out of desegregated areas

4. Grade-a-Year Plans – started desegregation in 1st or 12th grade and then expanded it to one additional grade every year.

Justices were aware of these issues but chose to allow the district courts to handle them. They thought that district courts should consider local resistance in determining the timing of desegregation, but worried that saying so would put a "premium upon lawlessness" (Klarman, 2004, p. 318).

Second, the Supreme Court justices conceived of gradualism partly as a peace offering to southerners and it was generally received in that way. For example, the Norfolk-Virginian Pilot called the ruling "a superb appeal to the wisdom, intelligence, and leadership of the southern states" (Klarman, 2004). The United States Supreme Court avoided further confrontation over school desegregation by denying full review in every case that was appealed until 1963, with sole exception of the Little Rock case, *Cooper v. Aaron* in 1958. Klarman (2004) writes that the justices decided not to discuss the subject until they received some signal of support from the political branches. At the time, President Eisenhower repeatedly refused to say whether he endorsed *Brown*. He himself preached moderation and observed that *Brown II* had endorsed gradualism. Civil rights leaders wanted Eisenhower to publicly condemn the violence and terror in certain communities. Instead, he criticized extremists on both sides, morally equating NAACP leaders, "who want to have the whole matter settled today," with the Klan (Klarman, 2004). Congress did not support the court either, showing no interest in equality for African American rights. Throughout the 1950s, liberal congressmen failed in their efforts to pass even symbolic statements affirming that *Brown* was the law of the land (Klarman, 2004). Congress did pass tepid civil rights legislation in 1957, but it covered only voting rights. A proposal to empower the attorney general to bring desegregation suits was eliminated from the final bill with the president's assent (Klarman, 2004). The Supreme Court concluded that the right against school segregation was not to be forced by the executive power of the federal government. Lastly, congress declined to offer financial support to desegregating school districts. Without support from other political branches, the Supreme Court was unwilling to continue discussing the *Brown* and the issue of desegregation.

Klarman (2004) describes how the Supreme Court decided to step back in after the Little Rock crisis in a case called *Cooper v. Aaron* (1958), where they ruled that the governor and legislature of Arkansas are bound by federal court orders mandating desegregation. In September 1957, Governor Orval Faubus used the state militia to block enforcement of a court order desegregating Central High School (Klarman, 2004). To avoid a contempt citation, Governor Faubus withdrew the troops, but an angry, white mob then stepped in to force black students out. After receiving much backlash for inaction, President Eisenhower, nationalized the state militia and sent in the army's 101st Airborne Division, an action he once stated he would never do (Klarman, 2004). The Little Rock school board petitioned District Court Jude Harry J. Lemley for a reprieve for two and a half years to allow community resistance to subside, and he agreed. Judge Lemley concluded that the right of black students to non-discriminatory admission to public schools had to be balanced against the public interest in a smoothly functioning educational system (Klarman, 2004). U.S. Supreme Court Justices convened in special session in summer 1958 to determine whether a district court judge could delay desegregation, once it had begun, because of community resistance. Klarman (2004) reports that judges were aware that a ruling in *Cooper v. Aaron* could initiate massive resistance and that the postponing of desegregation would encourage similar behavior elsewhere. Since President Eisenhower finally showed a sign of support for the *Brown* decision by dispatching troops to Little Rock, the justices felt they had no choice but to back him. The *Cooper* decision was forceful and justices blamed Governor Faubus and the Arkansas legislature for the violence at Central High School. They criticized the efforts to not only nullify *Brown,* but to evade it by allowing public-school funds and buildings to be used by segregated private schools. After *Cooper*, however, justices continued to abstain as white southerners defied or evaded *Brown*.

Even after *Cooper*, a number of strategies were used to delay desegregation. Klarman (2004) reports two strategies. First, by 1958, pupil placement had become a preferred method of avoiding desegregation, and most southern states had adopted this scheme (Klarman, 2004). Justices declined to invalidate this practice in *Shuttlesworth v. Board of Education Birmingham*. Klarman (2004) suggests that the motive of such a practice was to frustrate desegregation by allowing race to be considered, but then confounded blacks who were dissatisfied with their placements in a maze of administrative appeals. They also presumptively allocated students to their current segregated schools and placed the burden on them to request transfers. Federal courts in Louisiana and Virginia invalidated pupil placement schemes for such reasons, but the fourth circuit sustained North Carolina's versions (Klarman, 2004).

Second, beyond pupil placement, two methods for avoiding desegregation was grade-a-year and transfer options. Nashville's desegregation plan, for example, utilized grade-a-year desegregation and offered transfer options to ensure whites were not compelled to attend a majority black high school. It also encouraged blacks, through formal and informal pressures, to transfer out of racially mixed schools (Klarman, 2004). By 1959, minority to majority transfer options were becoming a favored method of limiting desegregation.

Between 1957-1959, southern battle lines were drawn around outright defiance of *Brown* and token compliance (Klarman, 2004). The extremism of post-*Brown* southern politics eliminated meaningful integration as an option. Massive resisters threatened to close schools as their final resort. Governor Faubus closed four high schools in Little Rock and Governor Almond in Virginia closed nine (Klarman, 2004). There were others who fought to keep schools open. Malcolm Seawell, attorney general of North Carolina, endorsed similar policies in 1958 and acknowledged *Brown* as the law of the land. He criticized school closures and lauded pupil

placement as a mechanism for gradual change. Klarman (2004) reports that Seawell was attacked for abject surrender and compared to Judas Iscariot, even though only 13 blacks attended desegregated schools in all of North Carolina. Massive resistance is believed to have ended in North Carolina in 1959 – 21 students were attending 7 integrated schools in 2 cities.

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy declared *Brown* both legally and morally right and criticized the pace of desegregation as too slow (Klarman, 2004). Due to the change in social and political climate, justices hinted at a new desegregation policy. The court declared that the time for mere deliberate speed has run out, with entirely too much deliberation and not enough speed (Klarman, 2004). Previously, the justices had voiced no objections to gradual desegregation, but the civil rights movement apparently impelled a change of heart, causing them to intervene much more aggressively. *In Griffin v. County School Board* (1964) the justices strongly hinted toward the district judge ordering public schools to reopen. In the case of *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971), justices sustained busing to achieve desegregation and approved a sweeping plan that effectively undid the effects of housing segregation.

This landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* assisted in sparking the Civil Rights movement when the change in the law was resisted and many states, particularly in the South, refused to desegregate schools. The move to desegregation was a long, hard fought process. In the next section, a discussion of this process in one southern state, the site of the current study, highlights that fight.

Desegregation in North Carolina

An important work on desegregation in North Carolina is *Reading, Writing, and Race: The Desegregation of the Charlotte Schools* by Douglas (1995). Here key features of Douglas'

work are discussed. Importantly this work shows that public education in North Carolina was long segregated and often poorly funded for both whites and blacks.

The North Carolina General Assembly established a system of public education in 1839 only for white children (Douglas, 1995). Following the Civil War, North Carolina's constitutional convention of 1868 drafted a constitution which provided for the creation of a free public-school system for all children, segregated by race. The convention did not require racially segregated schools, but few favored educating white and black children together. Requested by an African American delegate, the convention adopted a non-binding resolution – "the interests and happiness of the two races would be best promoted by the establishment of separates schools (Douglas, 1995, p. 7). Douglas (1995) argued that black leaders at the time understood that promoting integrated schools could undermine support for any system of public education. In 1869, the North Carolina General Assembly, along with its' African American members, codified the segregationist sentiment of the constitutional convention of 1868 by enacting a statute mandating separate schools for white and black youth (Douglas, 1995). A few years later, in 1875, another convention amended the constitution to the state which explicitly stated that children of white and black descent are to be taught in separate schools. North Carolina became one of the first southern states to require, by constitutional provision, segregated public schools.

Throughout the 19th century, many schools in North Carolina were underfinanced, and tax revenues were unable to support the four-month school term mandated by the state constitution (Douglas, 1995). State legislatures would not adequately finance schools until the first decade of the 20th century. As a result, only 40 percent of eligible children received a public education. Wealthy white parents were able to send their children to private schools or employ private tutors. Others either did not attend school or only went for a few weeks a year. Illiteracy

actually increased throughout the 1870s (Douglas, 1995). Many districts had no schools for black children or had no schools beyond the elementary level. By 1890, only about half of the black school-age children attended school in North Carolina, and in 1900 almost half of the black population remained illiterate.

An example of ideas regarding funding was illustrated in a Charlotte, North Carolina story. The city eventually gained legislative permission to levy supplemental local taxes for school support. Most of the community supported this proposal because they understood the relationship between strong public schools and economic prosperity. The tax levy caused Charlotte and Mecklenburg County to be among the best financed in the state in the 19th century. Unfortunately, this did not bolster or better finance black schools. White schools were consistently better financed than black schools during this time (Douglas, 1995). There was little white support for black schools, in fact there was overt hostility to black education, partly due to the idea that educated blacks would be more likely to challenge whites socially and economically. The General Assembly ultimately allowed increased expenditures on white schools without comparable expenditures for black schools. In another case, in 1880, Goldsboro, North Carolina approved a plan for separate taxation to allow whites to tax themselves solely for the support of white schools. As a result of these funding strategies, white schools were significantly better financed than black schools, mostly in the eastern part of North Carolina, which had a substantial African American population.

Eventually, *Puitt v. Commissioners of Gaston County* struck down separate taxation. Although the *Puitt* decision rid separate taxation among the races, the court case solidified the segregation of white and black children. In that case, the North Carolina Supreme Court concluded that as long as North Carolina provided children of both races with substantially equal

school advantages, segregated education did not deny black children the equal protection of the law (Douglas, 1995). Some parts of the state continued separate taxation for a number of years. Despite this, the discrepancies between black and white schools in North Carolina at the end of the 1800s were smaller than those in nearly every other southern state.

Douglas (1995) found however that the discrepancies between white and black school expenditures would widen again in the Jim Crow era with a rise of white supremacy movements throughout the south. He argues that at this time, the black political voice fell silent, leading to detrimental consequences for black education. During the 1898 election, the Democratic general assembly passed a number of segregation laws and a suffrage amendment to the state constitution that established a poll tax and literacy test for voters (Douglas, 1995). The laws were put into place to disfranchise most African Americans. The suffrage amendment was ratified in the 1900 election, stripping voting rights from many African Americans. Aycock was elected Governor on a platform that emphasized white supremacy and educational reform. His education reform sought to gain the illiterate whites' support for the disfranchisement amendments and to take the issue of educational reform from Populists. According to Douglas (1995), Aycock's educational campaign total increased from $1 million in 1900 to $4.7 million in 1915, one of the largest increases of all southern states. However, African American schools continued to receive an unequal share of the revenue. By 1915, African American schools received only 13 percent of total school monies (Douglas, 1995).

There are two key features of the North Carolina story as reported by Douglas (1995). First, he notes the Northern philanthropic efforts that took place within the state, and second, the NAACP fight for educational equality. In 1914, Nathan Newbold moved to Raleigh, North Carolina and became North Carolina's first state agent for black schools, often discussing the

injustice and inhumane conditions within black schools. Fortunately, northern philanthropists such as the Southern Education Board, the Rosenwald Fund, and the John F. Slater Fund provided tremendous assistance to black education, particularly in rural areas, throughout the south. In some cases, money supplied by the Rosenwald Fund for African American schools in North Carolina exceeded the amount spent by the state (Douglas, 1995).

The NAACP eventually assisted with educational inequality in North Carolina. They were financed by a foundation grant and were able to challenge the exclusion of black students from southern graduate and professional schools, as well as salary inequities for black teachers (Douglas, 1995). They offered legal expertise and financial backing, two missing factors in the southern black community. According to scholars such as Douglas (1995), the NAACP's litigation efforts were hampered however by the lack of support among African American educational leadership in North Carolina. These leaders had a vested interest in the maintenance of segregated education. This is illustrated in the case of Thomas Hocutt. Dr. James E. Shepard, president of then North Carolina College for Negroes in Durham, North Carolina, intervened in the case of Thomas Hocutt and his effort to be admitted into the University of North Carolina's pharmacy school. Shepard discouraged political and legal activism as a means of improving the status of blacks in the state, and worried Hocutt's attempt to integrate the white university would subvert his efforts to secure segregated graduate programs for African American students at his institution. As told by Douglas (1995), Shepard refused to release Hocutt's undergraduate transcript or supply a recommendation in support of his recommendation. Hocutt was not admitted into the program. Thurgood Marshall, legal director of the NAACP, claimed that the lack of support from the black community, particularly educational leaders, was a primary barrier to more extensive litigation challenging educational inequalities in the South. It was

believed that accommodationist attitudes shared by many educational leaders in North Carolina made litigation difficult in the fight for educational inequality (Douglas, 1995). Lawsuits were continually filed in North Carolina challenging racial discrimination in education, and the threat of litigation caused the general assembly to approve graduate education for African Americans, equalize teachers' salaries, and equalize support for elementary and secondary schools. The NAACP then learned that litigation or threat of litigation could be highly effective in the attaining educational equality.

North Carolina would wait for the courts to decide if they would require pupil mixing in public schools – *Brown v. Board of Education*. Challenging southern culture was much different than equalizing school expenditures and mixing graduate students. When the *Brown* decision deemed segregated schools unconstitutional, North Carolina was not as stirred as other areas of the south, but they had to learn to adjust to a new way of life.

Response to Brown in North Carolina

According to Douglas (1995), North Carolina considered itself progressive and responded to the *Brown* decision with appeals to moderation. The state avoided the negative rhetoric that most southern states spewed as a result of *Brown* and gained a reputation as a state willing to adapt to the new order. North Carolina leaders were not eager to allow integration but understood that defiance could harm the state's reputation for racial moderation, hinder possible economic development, and invite judicial intervention (Douglas, 1995). Douglas (1995) argues that the state did not openly welcome black students into white schools but decided to utilize token integration. Usage of token integration allowed North Carolina to maintain an almost completely segregated school system for the first decade after *Brown*. On the 10th anniversary of

Brown, only 1 in 100 southern black children attended a desegregated school, and in North Carolina that figure was 1 in 200.

Most of North Carolina's state political leaders opposed school integration. However, Douglas (1995) argues that most were also unprepared to engage in hopeless defiance of the Supreme Court, an action that could hurt the state's broader interests. Political leaders believed such actions could harm the state's economic environment. Moreover, Governor William Umstead opposed the *Brown* decision, but refused to defy the Supreme Court. He stated, "the Supreme Court of the United States has Spoken. This is no time for rash statements or the proposal of impossible schemes" (Douglas, 1995, p. 27). Two days later, Irving Carlyle, a prominent NC attorney and Democratic leader, addressed the NC Democratic Convention and urged the state to obey the decision.

Douglas (1995) describes how Governor Umstead would then direct the North Carolina Institute of Government, a branch of the University of North Carolina, to prepare a report analyzing *Brown* and outlining possible responses to the decision. Under the leadership of Director Albert Coates and his assistant, James Paul, the report concluded that the constitutionality of proposals such as private school tuition grants and a state supported private school system were doubtful, and for the state to avert judicial challenge to its pupil assignment scheme (Douglas, 1995). The report did not make explicit recommendations but suggested that the state not openly defy the Supreme Court, due to possible litigation and court supervision. It instead encouraged gradual desegregation, which would allow a minimum of court interference and sudden change.

After receiving the report, Governor Umstead appointed a 19-person committee, including three African Americans, under the leadership of former speaker of the house Thomas

J. Pearsall to study desegregation. Pearsall opposed pupil mixing, but also wanted to preserve the state's public schools and strong economic climate. The committee completed its report December 30, 1954, Governor Umstead had died a month before. The report was then submitted to his successor, Governor Luther Hodges, who concluded that immediate desegregation should not be attempted because it would alienate public support of the schools in such a way that they could not be operated successfully (Douglas, 1995). The only legislative action that the committee recommended was the transfer of authority over pupil assignments to local school boards, which assisted in delaying desegregation. The Pearsall Plan was supported by the three African American committee members. Each of them was employed by the state and disinclined to oppose the majority. Two of them were heads of all-black colleges that had benefited from the legacy of segregated education.

The Pearsall Plan was endorsed as an appropriate and moderate response to *Brown*. Douglas (1995) reported that on March 30, 1955, the General Assembly enacted legislation that vested local school boards with exclusive authority over pupil assignments. It allowed school boards to operate mixed-race schools, disallowed considering race as an assignment criterion, but also contained certain features that inhibited desegregation. For example, the legislation made it difficult to challenge pupil assignments without bringing suit against each individual school board and established a complicated system of administrative appeals, where challenges to school board assignments had to be made and transfer requests filed. No black student could challenge an assignment to a segregated school unless the student had faithfully adhered to all specified administrative procedures. Douglas (1995) found that most school boards denied every request filed by a black student to transfer to a white school.

In 1956, North Carolina General Assembly enacted a more ambitious legislative program to reduce the threat of desegregation. They created the second Pearsall Committee to conduct further research on desegregation. All white men were assigned to the committee. Douglas (1995) reports the belief that African Americans would have been under pressure from groups, such as the NAACP, to push for desegregation. This plan expressed the desire to maintain segregated schools, and also included constitutional amendments allowing for private school tuition grants for parents who had children assigned to a desegregated school. It went on to include a local referendum where community members could decide whether to close certain schools instead of desegregating. This plan was approved by North Carolina voters in September 1956 (Douglas, 1995).

North Carolina enacted fewer statutes in response to *Brown* than any other southern state legislature according to Douglas' (1995) research. They did not mandate school closings and no student ever received a private school tuition grant. When a tuition grant was requested, it was deemed unconstitutional in a court challenge. The Pearsall Plan basically "bought time." It gave people something to hold on to while proceeding with integration. The plan appeased segregationists without undermining education.

Douglas (1995) noted that much of the state's business and political leadership recognized that defiance to school desegregation could potentially damage the state's economic future. For example, he found that the Southern Regional Council called on chambers of commerce throughout the south to urge sensible solutions to the desegregation problem as a matter of long-range economic benefit. In another example, North Carolina used the state's reputation for moderation to recruit new industry, which produced tangible benefits. With legal compliance to *Brown* and little social unrest, North Carolina had a new plant investment in 1958

totaling $253 million, while Arkansas, with massive resistance, had only $25.4 million in 1958, compared with $44.9 million in 1957, and $131 million in 1956 (Douglas, 1995).

Douglas (1995) also noted the importance of wanting to avoid entanglements in the courts. He found that political leaders also understood that defiance could lead to judicial intervention in the school system, resulting in even more pupil mixing. Douglas (1995) argued that they recognized that although they were consenting to school closing and tuition grants in the Pearsall Plan, the plan could not operate as a mechanism to maintain segregation. North Carolina needed to engage in token desegregation to avoid judicial meddling in pupil assignments.

This state was able to maintain their reputation as moderate because of political leaders of the business and financial elite that was committed to economic advancement and avoidance of racial division (Douglas, 1995). Additionally, there was a lack of political influence from majority-black rural counties of rural eastern North Carolina. Unlike most southern states, North Carolina had a relatively small slave population, with no rural planter elite that dominated the state's politics during the antebellum or Reconstruction eras (Douglas, 1995). Instead, a financial and business elite emerged in the late 19th century that was committed to industrial growth. These individuals understood the relationship between economic prosperity and positive race relations. Therefore, they supported black education because of potential economic benefits. Moreover, many lawyers were a part of North Carolina politics, and they understood that anti-black measures could lead to judicial intervention – something they did not want to occur. For most of the 20th century, political power had been linked to business and financial interests of the state's Piedmont area, opposed to the rural farming areas of the eastern counties (Douglas, 1995). Douglas' analysis led him to conclude that this vastly contrasts with other southern states, where

political power was far more likely to be attached to counties with large black populations. North Carolina had a smaller black population and fewer majority black counties.

Douglas (1995) notes that North Carolina's response to *Brown* did not mean African American children were welcome in the state's white schools. Ten years after the *Brown* decision, less than 1 percent of children in the state attended school with a child of another race. Other southern states with massive resistance actually had more integrated schools in 1964 than North Carolina (Douglas, 1995). North Carolina was able to retain segregated schools because it understood that voluntary token desegregation and avoidance of statements of defiance would allow them to continue with segregated schools without judicial interference. Pupil assignment on a non-racial basis was abandoned and most continued to assign children to schools based on their race until mid-1960s. At that time, black children were also allowed to request for transfer to white schools, but his analysis found that none were granted. Eventually, political leaders realized that continual refusal to admit black students to white schools could leave the school system exposed to judicial challenge. As a result, they began urging school boards to admit a few African Americans to show pupil assignment was not preserving segregation. Charlotte, Greensboro, and Winston Salem became the first to desegregate in 1957, granting transfer requests for 12 black students to attend white schools. By fall 1957, North Carolina was one of only four southern states (Tennessee, Arkansas, Texas) to operate integrated schools.

No court ever found North Carolina school system unconstitutionally segregated, even with suits filed by NAACP. Token integration and little resistance enabled the state to escape judicial intervention. It has been almost 64 years since *Brown v. Board of Education* and activists continue today to advocate for equality in schooling in the state.

Continual Fight for Educational Equality

The plight of youth of color within the public educational system today has been well documented (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Rothstein, 2004; Barton, 2006; Lomotey, 2010). Forcing them into a predominantly white institutions not intentionally created for them has worsened their condition and not allowed them to flourish in the educational environment. Although the Supreme Court ruled favorably in *Brown v. Board*, educational inequality remains an issue for black students. Disagreeing with the idea that black and white students should be educated together, "White flight" occurred where many White families moved from the city into suburbs and from public to private schools (Shedd, 2015). As a result, inner-city schools became predominately black and lacked necessary resources to educate the students. Jonathan Kozol, in an important book published in 2005 documented problems he observed within poor, predominately black school districts. He found that the buildings were in no shape for an educational environment, many having issues with green fungus molds growing in offices, airlessness, and flooding (Kozol, 2005). These schools also had to deal with issues of overcrowding and were forced to shorten schooldays and cut back hours of instruction to accommodate all students. Courses such as Music and Art were removed from many inner-city public-schools because of lack of funding. One student quoted in the book stated "we have chemistry labs with no chemicals at all, literature classes without books, computer classes where we sit there and talk about what we would be doing if we had computers, classes in which students were forced to stand or to sit on bookshelves, cabinets or windowsills, because there were more kids than chairs" (Kozol, 2005). Forced into this environment the students recognize that their conditions are unfair and not conducive to learning. Parents would even ask "why are our children not important?" (Kozol, 2005). It was no secret that the private schools were

thriving with an abundance of resources at their fingertips. Unfortunately, black students were not afforded the same luxuries.

Along with these issues within public-school systems in the United States, can be seen a number of others, especially in the inner-city. Differences in academic achievement, scoring on standardized tests, and disciplinary punishment are all disparities found among youth of color, particularly African American or black youth, when compared to other racial/ethnic groups. Of particular importance today is disparity in disciplinary practices. The disproportionate issuance of school discipline is contributing to the school push-out that we see forcing black youth out of the educational environment, the institution that should be assisting in preparing them for their futures. Exclusionary disciplinary practices are now being used to continue to place black youth at a disadvantage regarding educational attainment, leading some into the juvenile and adult criminal justice system. They are constantly reprimanded for actions that are misunderstood (Morris & Perry, 2017; Morris, 2007). Black students are removed from the classroom for being too loud, or overly anxious to answer a question, they speak "out of turn" (Morris, 2007). These are actions deemed unacceptable by white, middle-class values and norms. Since their actions are often misinterpreted, they are disciplined for them. This does not refer to serious offenses such as bringing a gun to school, but rather menial, subjective offenses that could be addressed without exclusion.

The disparity in school punishment has been highlighted in the literature, but most of the research focuses on black boys. There is a paucity of literature discussing the mistreatment of African American girls and the disparities they face in the public-school system. Before turning to a discussion of the research on disciplinary practices, the next section examines the factors in the 1970's and beyond that shaped disciplinary practices we see today – punitive polices arising

from the war on crime, and the rise of concern for the super-predator.   This discussion will be followed by an examination of the impact of zero tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline. Following this, it is known that race and socioeconomic status are important factors to consider when examining school discipline; therefore, an exploration of class and its importance in punishment is included. Lastly, though there is limited literature on African American girls' experiences within the public school, research that has been conducted on this group will be included wherever possible.

Punitive Educational Practices and Policies

Punitive education practices and policies in existence today can be linked to two factors discussed below. The first is the war on crime and the punitive policies it generated. The second focused attention on youth, the idea of the super-predator.

The War on Crime and Punitive Policies

During the 1970s, amidst the unpopular Vietnam War, President Nixon convinced Americans of the need to launch the War on Drugs. It was his belief that domestic drug usage was the root cause of violent crime, sparking panic among citizens. Eventually, the War on Drugs was renamed the War on Crime, contributing to the American obsession with crime and crime control. This war contributed to the enactment of zero-tolerance policies, three-strikes laws, and mandatory sentencing policies that were honed by the fight against drugs as primary mechanisms for getting tough on crime even as crime rates were diminishing (Zimring, 2007). The criminal justice system became extremely punitive during this time. Between 1973 and 1997, the inmate population in the United States rose by more than 500 percent (Loury, 2008). By 2008, there were 2.3 million people behind bars and another 5 million in jail, on probation, or parole, giving the United States the highest incarceration rate in the world (Loury, 2008).

Incarceration for nonviolent offenses multiplied by a factor of eleven and the incarceration rates for drug crimes increased more than tenfold between 1980 and 2001 (Loury, 2008; Western, 2006). Specifically, crack cocaine within the black community was heavily targeted during this time (Provine, 2011). Prison terms grew longer because of harsh sentencing and truth-in-sentencing measures that led to abolishment of parole in many states. Ultimately, more and more people were incarcerated and stayed longer, trapping them within the prison system (Malik-Kane et al., 2012; Pew Center on the States, 2008; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015).

As a result of punitive crime control, African Americans were confined at higher rates than other racial groups. African Americans represent about 12 percent of the national population but nearly 40 percent of the U.S. prison population. In contrast, in 2000, whites made up three-quarters of the national population and only 35 percent of prison inmates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; Glaze & Parks, 2012). Young black men were incarcerated so disproportionately that David Garland, as mentioned in *The Prison School*, referred to the trend as mass imprisonment – prison became the "prime site for amassing black males and disconnecting them from their communities and futures" (Simmons, 2017, p. 32; Garland, 2001)

Eventually, public schools across the country turned to the criminal justice system as a model for discipline and began adopting the strategies it used to fight drugs and crime (Simon, 2007). Fear of school violence continued to be a major concern, especially following school shootings such as Columbine. Schools partnered with criminal justice agencies, utilized homeland security funds, instituted zero-tolerance policies, implemented surveillance and metal detectors, expanded security staff, and infused schools with punitive measures similar to that of the War on Crime (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2015; Kupchik, 2010; Monahan & Torres, 2010). Suspension rates rose across the nation. In 1974, 1.7 million students were

suspended from school (Schiraldi & Ziedenberg, 2001; Losen & Edley, 2001). By the 2011-12

school year almost 3.5 million students were suspended (Losen et al., 2015). About half of the

3.5 million students were suspended more than one time and given an average suspension of

about 3.5 days long. That means there were 18 million days of classroom instruction lost that

year because of exclusionary punishment (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018; Losen et al., 2015).

Although this tough-on-crime approach disadvantaged students in the learning

environment, political officials used it to their advantage and continued to speak to this notion of

public fear about school violence. This conversation remained at the forefront regardless of the

fact that public schools were relatively safe. Between 1992 and 2010, less than 2 percent of all

youth homicides have been school related (James & MacCallion, 2013). Schools are also

statistically safer than non-school spaces when considering serious violent victimizations (Yanez

& Lessne, 2018). Regardless of the lack of literature and statistical data to support a school

violence problem and the impracticality of absolute safety, school administrators continue to

engage in the get-tough approach, responding harshly to nonviolent disciplinary offenses. Black

students especially have been heavily affected by punitive school discipline and are punished

regularly and more severely than youth in other racial groups (Skiba, 2001; Skiba et al., 2002;

Johnson et al., 2001).

Rise of the Super-predator

Institutional and individual biases within the school social context were also contributors

in school discipline practices that disproportionately punish black youth (Gregory & Weinstein,

2008; Skiba et al., 2011; Wald, 2014). Specifically, sociopolitical influences that deem black

youth as "super-predators" have assisted in bolstering these practices by spreading a fear of black

youth across mainstream media. In the early 1990s, Americans were faced with predictions of an approaching rise of juvenile violence. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the United States experienced a sharp increase of juvenile crime, causing many to believe a national crisis was on the horizon (Butts & Travis, 2002; Cook & Laub, 2002). The number of juvenile arrests for violent index offenses (i.e. murder, forcible rape, aggravated assault) grew 64 percent between 1980 and 1994. The juvenile arrest rate for murder increased from 5 arrests per 100,000 to 14 per 100,000 between 1984 and 1993. By the early 1990s, this increase in juvenile crime had captured national attention. The term super-predator was coined during this time to characterize ruthless youth with no moral conscience, who see crime as a rite of passage (Haberman, 2014).

Due to its' validation by academics John DiLulio, James Fox, and Willliam Bennett, the phrase juvenile super-predator spread into public consciousness. The term referred to the idea that youth engaging in crime were sociopaths who were unafraid of consequences. As a result, it was argued that violent juvenile crime would increase because these so-called super-predators would commit more vicious crimes more rapidly than past delinquent youth. Policymakers argued they had to act quickly to address violent crime among these youth. Their response was to launch reform initiatives, or a get-tough-on-crime approach within an ineffectual, rehabilitative juvenile justice system (Fagan & Zimring, 2000). The age of criminal responsibility was lowered, there was legislative exclusion of various age-charge combinations from juvenile court jurisdiction, and increased prosecutorial discretion was given to "direct file" cases in adult court (Fagan & Zimring, 2000). Some even debated whether a separate juvenile court system was necessary (Ainsworth, 1995; Butts & Mitchell, 2000). Unfortunately, black and brown youth would become the face of the super-predator, leading to continued discrimination and mistreatment in society.

Zero Tolerance Policies at School

The support for punitive policies that arose from the War on Crime and idea of super-predators contributed to the disproportionate incarceration of black and brown men and women. In addition to changing criminal justice policy and practice, a rise in juvenile crime and deadly school shootings meant that similar policies developed for schools. In extension of the Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994, primary and secondary school districts in the United States adopted zero-tolerance weapons policies (Cerrone, 1999). Five years after the shooting at Columbine, this law mandated that all primary and secondary schools in the United States were to adopt zero-tolerance weapons policies if they wished to continue receiving federal funding for education. Any student punished for a violation of zero-tolerance rules would be expelled, unless it violated the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or in the event of extreme extenuating circumstances. These policies intended to remove weapons from the school environment, and protect students from possible threats, attacks, and death. Zero-tolerance rules and practices emerged from the broken windows policing theory, first developed by criminologists George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson. This theory suggests that small criminal acts are indicative of more severe, negative behavior that may manifest in later years (Jefferson, 2016). This "get tough" approach dramatically increased the amount of social control within U.S. school districts (Casella, 2003).

Over time, zero-tolerance policies have lost some public support because of the negative effects they have had on school discipline. Students and parents have often complained about the extreme punishments for seemingly minor infractions (i.e. disruption), moving beyond the concept of having a weapon and drug free school environment (Martinez, 2009). In addition, such policies have not been empirically supported and are theoretically unsound (Casella, 2003;

Martinez, 2009). Although it seems there were good intentions behind this policy, several

unintended consequences emerged. One in particular is the development of the school-to-prison

pipeline which disproportionately effects brown and black youth. Within this research, the

primary unintended consequence is the disproportionality in discipline among African American

girls. Because zero tolerance policies include minor infractions such as dress code and

disrespectful behavior, black girls are punished at much higher rates than their white

counterparts. Therefore, school administrators must combat this issue that contributes to the

funneling of African American girls into the school-to-prison pipeline.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

The school-to-prison pipeline remains a growing concern within communities of color.

School exclusionary policies that force students out of the classroom are believed to result in the

increased likelihood of their entering into the prison system (Kaba, 2017). Alternatively, a more

in-depth definition which describes impact comes from Wald & Losen (2003), they refer to

> "a journey through school that is increasingly punitive and isolating for its travelers—
> many of whom will be placed in restrictive special education programs, repeatedly
> suspended, held back in grade, and banished to alternative "outplacements" before finally
> dropping or getting "pushed out" of school altogether" (p.3).

Although there are varying definitions regarding the phenomenon, it can be agreed upon

and recognized as an issue, particularly for students of color who face severe consequences for

misconduct in school. The school-to-prison pipeline and zero tolerance polices continue to

disproportionately impact youth of color, low-income students, and students with special needs

(Heitzeg, 2009, Mallett, 2016). Inequitable educational opportunities and punitive disciplinary

policies have disproportionately affected this population, causing public schools to inevitably

contribute in structuring a black prison diaspora, and forcing the involuntary migration of youth

away from formal schooling (Simmons, 2017). Instead of equipping youth with the necessary

tools to become productive citizens, school disciplinary policies undermine that aim by reacting to student misconduct with harsh punishment. Zero tolerance policies have contributed to the construction of the school-to-prison pipeline by mandating specific consequences for outlined misconduct. Initially responding to the deadly shootings occurring across the country, zero tolerance widened its scope beyond preventing deadly incidents to subjective behaviors such as 'disrespectful attitude' (Gerstein & Gerstein, 2001; Mongan & Walker, 2012).

When utilizing punitive measures for misconduct, one has to acknowledge the negative effects it has on the child. Removing a child from the classroom as a form of punishment inevitably leads to him or her missing valuable instruction, ultimately leading to lower achievement (Raffaele, Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Rausch & Skiba, 2004), increased feelings of alienation from school (Brown, 2007), greater risk for acts of violence (Ellickson & McGuigan, 2000), and a weakened sense of trust in adults (Finn & Servoss, 2013). When she returns to the classroom, there is a possibility that she will feel lost because of her time away. This absence could lead to additional misconduct and increased likelihood of educational disengagement. If a negative perception of education forms, it will become difficult to appreciate education and this may ultimately result in lower academic achievement and continual misconduct. Research also shows that exclusionary practices undercut teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships, which damages the child's overall school performance (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

Additionally, removal from the classroom because of suspension or expulsion is likely to lead to the student dropping out of school (U.S. Dept. of Education Office for Civil Rights, School Climate, and Discipline, 2017). High school dropouts then face a host of other issues because of their lack of education. There is difficulty obtaining employment, their overall

earnings will be much lower than those with a high school diploma, poorer levels of health, and other social consequences.

Dropouts are also three and a half times more susceptible to being arrested, and 82 percent of prison inmates are high school dropouts (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2001; Martin & Halperin, 2006, Amos, 2008). Exclusionary discipline also increases the likelihood that the child will become part of the juvenile justice or adult system. When suspended from school, many youths are left home alone because parents are unable to provide full-time supervision. This lack of supervision creates an opportunity for the child to be victimized or engage in crime (Beihl, 2014). As a result, they are funneled into the justice system because of their misbehaviors due to idle time.

In 2015, the "Health Disparities, Trauma, Disruptive and Criminal Behaviors and the Adolescent Brain" conference highlighted the incarceration of black males and the public health and economic crises that follow from the school-to-prison pipeline. However, the conference failed to note that black girls receive more severe sentences in the juvenile justice system than any other groups of girls and are the fastest growing population in the system (Crenshaw et al., 2015). African American males continue to be the primary focus, research continues to exclude their female counterparts. This is true despite the fact that zero tolerance policies have contributed to black girls facing punitive discipline and they are disproportionately affected by these mandates (Blake et al., 2011; Crenshaw et al., 2015).

Racial Disparities in School Discipline

The historic Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 set in motion educational equality for all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, or national origin. Eventually this civil right was extended to students with disabilities in the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Improvement Act of 2004 and to educational outcomes for all children in the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act. However, there continues to be racial and ethnic

disparities within the educational system in areas of special education, dropout and graduation

rates, and the achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Wald & Losen,

2007). Such disparities question the influence that the Supreme Court ruling has had over the

years.

One of the areas in which disparity is seen within education is school discipline and

exclusionary practices. School disciplinary practices exclude thousands of young people in the

United States each year. According to the School Survey on Crime and Safety:

> "48 percent of public schools (approx. 39, 600 schools) took a serious disciplinary action
> against a student for specific offenses during the 2006-06 school year. Of those
> disciplinary actions, 74 percent were suspensions lasting five days or more, 5 percent
> were removals with no services, and 20 percent were transfers to specialized schools"
> (Dinkes, Cataldi, Lin-Kelly, & Snyder, 2007, p. 56).

Furthermore, the Office of Civil Rights' Elementary and Secondary Survey found that out of 97

percent of the nation's school districts and 99 percent of its schools, there were a total of

3,053,449 student suspensions and 97,177 expulsions in 2000 (U.S. Department of Education,

2014). More recently, in 2013-14 the U.S. Department of Education reported a total of 1,074,984

in the category of "more than one suspension" and approximately 111,144 expulsions with or

without educational services.

School systems across the country utilize exclusionary disciplinary practices that remove

students from the classroom and school daily; however, their usage is not equally distributed

among the students. Instead, African American youth are subject to exclusionary discipline due

to subjective offenses such as defiance, insubordination, or disobedience (Skiba et al., 2002,

2011; Wallace, 2008; Lewis et al., 2010). Subjective offenses refer to those actions that may be

perceived differently by school administration. For example, one teacher may believe talking out of turn in the classroom is disrespectful, while another teacher may not. Moreover, teachers may view the behavior differently depending on the race of the child. Research suggests that students of color, particularly African American youth, are suspended at rates two to three times that of other students, while also being overrepresented in office referrals, classroom reprimands, and school expulsion (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Ferguson, 2001; KewalRamani et al. 2007; Rocque, 2010). Additionally, it has been found that educators punish African American and Latino students more severely than whites for the same or similar behavior, suggesting that educators interpret transgressions more critically when they are exhibited by youth of color (Skiba et al., 2011). In 2003, Mendez and colleagues analyzed suspension rates in 142 schools within a large Florida school district and found that suspensions were most likely to be assigned to black males, followed by black females. Lewis et al. (2010) reported established defiance and disobedience as the two most frequent offenses leading to exclusionary discipline for African American students.

Racial disparities continue to disproportionately impact youth of color. Concerned about the disparities by race, the U.S. Department of Education (2014) issued a set of guiding principles regarding school punishment, reviewing literature on racial disparity in discipline, and reminding educators of the requirement to distribute discipline fairly. They reported that between 1972 and 2012, the national rate of out-of-school suspension for black youth had increased by nearly 200 percent, from 12 percent to 23 percent for black students, whereas the rate for white students only grew by 12 percent during the same time period (Losen et al., 2015). Some attribute the increase in school discipline rates among black youth to an increase in the frequency or severity of their misconduct. However, research has found that there are higher rates of

sanctioning for black youth, even when levels of misbehavior were similar to their white counterparts (Finn & Servoss, 2013; Skiba et al., 2002; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). Additionally, higher rates of disciplining black youth also persisted when evaluating teacher ratings for behavior and other potential confounders such as poverty level and socioeconomic status (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan & Leaf, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008).

Although the scholarship on school discipline and subjective evaluation tends to focus on race, recently scholars have recognized that there are also complex biases when focusing on the intersection of race and gender. When taking intersectionality into account, it is found that black boys are punished at vastly disproportionate rates compared to other race-gender groups (Wallace et al., 2008; Ferguson, 2001; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). For instance, perceptions of masculinity vary when also considering race. Young men of color are often viewed as "hypermasculine," which is also linked to a perception of dangerousness (Collins, 2005; Oeur, 2016; Rios, 2011). As a result, they are often hyper criminalized by police and school personnel.

Unfortunately, there is far less literature pertaining to the surveillance and punishment of young women of color. Quantitative studies that do exist have shown significantly disparate patterns of discipline for black girls. The U.S. Department of Education data for the 2011-2012 school year showed that only 2 percent of white girls were suspended compared to 12 percent of black girls. In addition, it has been found that black girls are over five times more likely than white girls to report being suspended or expelled (Wallace & Colleagues, 2008; Crenshaw et al., 2015). Using data from two nationally representative data sets, Hannon, DeFina, and Bruch (2013) show that African American girls are more likely to report receiving a suspension than white girls. When examining school records to examine reasons for the punishment of black girls, Blake and colleagues (2011) find significant differences from white girls in disciplinary

infractions such as defiance, inappropriate dress, and physical fighting. Even though the punishments that African American girls receive are often less severe than African American boys, they still suffer from similar lasting, negative effects. Due to the lack of current literature, researchers are attempting to highlight the adverse treatment that black girls receive in the educational system.

There are additional studies that provide insight into the intersection of race and perceptions of femininity. For example, it is possible for race to allow space for alternative femininity, which allows black girls an opportunity to challenge white, European gender norms, but they are continually evaluated according to those standards within white dominant institutions (Ispa-Landa, 2013). Girls who are able to mirror normative expectations of femininity – passive demeanor and appearance that does not deviate from mainstream standards – are viewed as "good girls" (Jones, 2010). Good girls stay at home, meet gendered expectations at school, and focus on academic success. On the contrary, girls that violate such feminine boundaries are characterized as "unnaturally strong" (Collins, 2004) or "ghetto" (Jones, 2010). Ghetto girls exude behaviors and attitudes that are considered unacceptable in society – fighting, loud and obnoxious, angry and disrespectful. In classroom observations, Morris (2007) found that educators disciplined black girls for assertive behavior that is interpreted as loud and overbearing, terms that are associated with the "angry, black woman or girl." White and Latina girls did not receive similar treatment, nor were they told to behave like "ladies" when they exhibited similar behaviors. African American girls, it seems, were mainly disciplined for black Femininity (Morris, 2007).

When considering the intersection of gender, race, and class, these girls continue to feel pressure to measure up to gender expectations within their own communities. They are not only

evaluated by white, middle-class gender expectations, but by the standards considered to be a set forth by black middle-class families as black respectability. These expectations closely mirror white, middle-class expectations of femininity (Collins, 2004). African American women who are considered attitudinal, "shapely," or even of a darker skinned complexion do not fit into the mold of white femininity. Therefore, black women are to distance themselves from physical aggression or overt sexuality that is commonly associated with poor working-class women. Any black woman or girl whose attitude, body size, or complexion differed from these expectations of black female respectability is vulnerable to formal and informal sanctions that accompany these gender violations (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003: Collins, 2004; Richie, 1996, Keith & Herring, 1991). Within schools, teachers and administrators are likely to treat girls who conform to gender expectations more fairly, in ways that reaffirm their personas as good, young ladies. A girl deemed unladylike on the other hand, is likely to receive harsher treatment when a violation occurs because it is easier to punish a girl who does not act like a 'girl' (Jones, 2010).

Referencing the attack on black femininity, society has labeled black women and girls angry and obnoxious when they exude behaviors other than what is deemed acceptable in white America. Many members of society accept this identification as true, creating a stigma about black women. However, most choose not to acknowledge the trauma that these women and girls have to endure within a white, patriarchal society. They are not inherently angry, but due to stressful life events, their attitudes reflect the pain they deal with daily – hence an explanation as to why they are perceived as the angry, black woman. Kenneth Clark (1965) states that by the age of 7, most black children have accepted the reality that they are dark-skinned and are forced to recognize themselves as inferior in America. This dark reality can take an emotional toll on a child when attempting to understand an unjust racial hierarchical system created to keep them

marginalized and disposed. Due to this idea, one can understand and empathize with black youth, particularly black girls, regarding their "attitude." Moreover, school is a central activity at this age and the feeling of inferiority manifests itself through the lack of confidence in him or herself as a student (Clark, 1965). They may lack the motivation to learn and display behavioral problems. African American girls are punished for similar behaviors as their white counterparts, but they may also exude behaviors perceived as disrespectful because of their daily life experiences. Therefore, schools should be proactive in understanding and empathizing with their students of color before labeling them as a behavioral problem.

In the next section, research and theory is drawn from to examine what we already know of the experiences of African American girls with school discipline. This section explores the facets negatively affecting African American girls within the public-school system.

African American Girl School Disciplinary Experiences

Stereotypes, lack of understanding, the implementation of school resource officers, and maintaining cultural identity has impacted the school experiences of African American girls. Over the years, the nation has witnessed the mistreatment of young, black girls within public schools. Recent examples have come to national attention. In 2007, a six year old named Desre'e Watson was placed in handcuffs for having a bad tantrum; in 2012, six year old Salecia Johnson was arrested for throwing books and toys; in 2013, Jmiyha Rickman , an autistic child, was restrained by her hands, feet, and waist when she was arrested for throwing a tantrum and allegedly trying to hit a school resource officer; and lastly, 16 year old Shakara, was thrown across a classroom by a school resource officer (SRO) while still sitting in her desk (Morris, 2016). Although these examples are considered to be the most egregious representations of school discipline, they represent only a few of the stories of black girls being pushed out of the

school system for varying reasons. Girls such as these have expressed their frustrations with being disciplined in school for asking questions, wearing natural hair, falling asleep, being too loud and unruly, and committing dress code violations (Morris, 2016). While such actions do not constitute a threat to school safety, girls are constantly being reprimanded for them.

The first facet impacting school experiences of African American girls is stereotypes. These are illustrated in how African American girls are often perceived as having a "bad attitude" or being "ghetto" when they act outside of normative feminine standards (Morris, 2016; Jones, 2010). Eye-rolling, finger snapping, and placing their hands on their hips are all characteristics that are considered to describe a black girl's attitude. bell hooks (1992) explored this "bad attitude" and explained it as a complicated component of black femininity, characterized in the public domain as Sapphire, a character on the Amos' n' Andy Show. Sapphire appeared to be nagging and combative with her husband on the show, reinforcing the stereotype of black femininity being dominant and overbearing. This misrepresenting of the "angry, black woman" stereotype of attitude and neck-rolling has caused much misunderstanding regarding what it means to be black and female. Within the public school, if teachers and administration have a misinterpretation of what it means to be a black girl, the girls are at risk of being punished when they speak their opinion or stand up for themselves. Teachers may discipline them under the belief that they are being disrespectful.

Being perceived as having an attitude can also place a strain on student-teacher relationships. Often, these girls are viewed as problematic within the classroom (Morris, 2016). Students are key in constructing the classroom environment. Ways in which they are reflected in course material and how they experience inclusion in this environment, influences whether the students will be respectful to the teacher. Students decide to either abide by rules or work in

ways to circumvent them based on the teacher's interaction and classroom climate. When there is

conflict between black girls and their teachers, some instances reflect the expressive nature of

this group. "Us black girls, like, if we don't get it, we're going to tell you" (Morris, 2016, p. 62).

This quote suggests that black girls are going to be honest within the classroom if they do not

understand a particular subject. This expression can be misinterpreted as a complete disregard for

the teacher's authority and ability to educate, leading to a push-out of the classroom.

Signs of disrespect within the classroom include assertive behavior interpreted as loud

and overbearing and overlapping speech or speaking over a teacher when he or she is talking

(Morris, 2007; Irvine, 1990). There is limited research discussing particular behaviors perceived

as disrespectful within the classroom, but what exists suggests that often the perception is

misguided. Blatant signs of disrespect such as cursing at a teacher or using inappropriate

language is very different compared to a student speaking out of turn in the classroom. If school

teachers are unaware of cultural interaction styles, they may perceive actions as misbehaviors

when they were not intended as such (Irvine, 1990). If uninformed, school personnel must do a

better job at gaining cultural competency in order to differentiate between disrespect and cultural

norms.

Moreover, black students are often subjected to less support and more criticism by their

teachers because they do not adhere to the conforming behaviors expected in the classroom. This

is particularly important and impactful as studies have shown that black student performance and

motivation are often a function of the students' social relatedness with teachers, particularly in

early grades (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). There has always been an emphasis on parent-teacher

relationships, but black students fair better when they have established a positive interaction with

their teachers. Research has shown that racial climates in schools, including the relationships between adults and students, affect suspension rates (Meiners & Winn, 2010; Nasir et al., 2013).

The second facet, lack of understanding, explains that oftentimes experiences outside of school impact girls' experiences in school. The disrespectful attitude perceived by teachers may derive from situational forces that they deal with at home and/or within their communities (Wun, 2016). Research has found two situations in particular - trauma and abuse and poverty. In terms of abuse, the majority of youth who are either detained by the juvenile justice system or a part of the child welfare system have experienced various forms of abuse (physical, sexual, verbal), neglect, poverty, dysfunctional home environments, and have mental health conditions (Leone & Weinberg 2010; King et al. 2011; Wasserman & Seracini 2001). Girls have a greater likelihood of having a history of being physically and sexually abused, with sexual victimization being a common form of trauma experienced by girls in the justice system (King et al., 2011). The perceived disrespectful behaviors exuded by black girls towards school administrators then may be misplaced. Their frustrations may be directed towards teachers and school principals, though really about the abuse. School personnel should challenge themselves to understand where the perceived disrespect derives before opting for punishment.

Additionally, Wun (2016) explored the impact that poverty has on a child's school experiences. In the study, a young girl named Charmaine stated "sometimes my mom doesn't eat so that the rest of us can eat. Sometimes I don't eat so the little ones can eat. He [a teacher] doesn't know that sometimes I have to walk one or two hours to school because my mom's car broke down. He doesn't know these things. They don't see these things" (Wun, 2016, p. 429). Charmaine felt that if teachers understood her reality, they would be more forgiving. This could also assist in ensuring the child stays in the classroom and become engaged in the curriculum.

Unfortunately, school disciplinary policies, teachers, and administration fail to address the contexts and experiences that contribute to the anger and attitude that is portrayed. Instead of identifying and contextualizing key structural issues that affect the girls, schools identify them as problem children. Due to the failure to make structural changes to social inequalities or even acknowledge them, educational reform and school disciplinary policies remain ineffective in managing behavior (Wun, 2016).

Another facet negatively affecting the experiences of young black girls within the school system is the inclusion of school resource officers (SROs) in school discipline. SROs are full-time law enforcement officers who are trained by and report to local police departments and sheriff's offices (Kupchik & Bracy, 2010; James & McCallion, 2013). Having a police force within schools has grown from fewer than 100 in the late 1970s to nearly 20,000 in 2007, becoming known as the fastest-growing segment of law enforcement (Kupchik & Monahan, 2006). Kupchik & Bracy (2010) suggest that the introduction of officers into schools represent an area of convergence between schools and the criminal justice system. Officers within the schools not only add to an increased likelihood of a student being suspended or expelled, but they also are at risk for arrest and court referral for minor, subjective behaviors (Rimer, 2004; Hirschfield & Celinska, 2011). With officers added into the schools for additional security measures, they bring in those same patriarchal, racial, and sexist ideals that they have patrolling on the street.

Contributing to the problem of having the police in school is the fact that SROs are not properly trained in education and youth development. Lack of training for officers in schools contributes to many youth of color being victimized by these state actors. Previous research has examined how boys of color have been surveilled, brutalized, and criminalized by police officers

(Rios, 2011). However, girls are also victims of police violence. Videos have circulated regarding African American youth being thrown by SROs into lockers or onto floors because of a failure to comply with school dress code or student code of conduct (Austria, 2015; Castillo, 2016; Fausset & Southall, 2015). The young girl in Columbia, South Carolina was flipped over backward in her desk chair and thrown across the room, prior to being arrested, because she violated the disciplinary code by having a cell phone in class and refusing to obey the commands of the officer. In a recording of the incident, you can hear the male officer saying, "I'll put you in jail next" (Fausset & Southall, 2015).

This type of negative environment stunts the educational growth of the students, possibly contributing to the disconnect from school, period. Students are not trusting of the officers and young women should not be fearful that a male officer will brutalize them in some way. Such experiences can cause girls to lash out and become even more disruptive. As a result, youth of color suffer in an environment where they should feel protected. If officers feel they have been disrespected or insulted, they use their power to punish to the students (Wun, 2016). Insulting or ridiculing school personnel and SROs is typically not formally recognized a disciplinary violation but having authority and position of power makes one vulnerable to punishment.

In addition to how stereotypes, lack of understanding, and the movement of the police into schools has shaped or defined girls' experiences of school discipline, another facet is staying true to their cultural identities. African American girls are often tasked with handling how to stay true to their cultural identities, while obeying school rules. This proves to be difficult for some who do not want to be punished for misbehavior, but who also desire respect from their peers. Within the community it may be acceptable to argue with another girl by raising her voice and using derogatory language. However, that same behavior will lead to disciplinary action in

school. "I'm not in no fights. I'm a good girl," says Takeya, in Jones' (2010) *Between Good and Ghetto*. This refers to Takeya making it known that she does not participate in fighting because she is focused on academic success and has conformed to mainstream feminism regarding how young women should behave in the educational environment and throughout their lives. Takeya continues, "I don't want you to think I don't know how to fight. I mean everybody always come get me [for fights]." These contradictory statements indicate the importance of having not only a "good girl" image, but to have respect among her friends. She felt it necessary to make the statement that she possessed street skills and was respected by her peers, even though she did not identify herself as a fighter. However, she knows that she has to walk a fine line at school because fighting would tarnish her image among faculty/staff, possibly leading to additional disciplinary punishment. African American girls have to deal with determining what identity is most important to them while at school. Should they stay true to who they are in their community or obey the rules of this formal institution? Most often, it is much easier to maintain separate identities, behaving one way at school and another within their communities. This is a task that most white girls do not have to face because they are born and raised in households and communities that teach them how to navigate life and formal institutions. They do not have to code-switch like girls of color to prove they are worthy of equal treatment and educational access and opportunity. Ultimately, they have to choose which is most important – respect/relationship among peers or respect/relationship with faculty/staff.

Not only are girls tasked with gaining respect among peers, while obeying the student code of conduct, but they also have to deal with being disrespected. This disrespect can come from other girls or boys. Jody Miller (2008) discussed the issue of sexual violence within schools in her groundbreaking book, *Getting Played: African American Girls, Urban Inequality, and*

Gendered Violence. In this work, the boys were disrespectful by engaging in unwanted touch or verbal sexual abuse, and the other girls in the school victim-blamed girls for their experiences. Cherise stated young women do not "got respect" for themselves, which she measured in terms of their choice in clothing (shorts that left their "butt hanging out") and their behavior. She went on to say "they treat women that act that way like they need to be treated – stupid. I mean if you carry yourself like you ain't got no respect for yourself, that's how they gonna treat you." This statement falls into traditional beliefs regarding how women should look and act. Miller (2008) points out that the lack of solidarity among female students following victimization continues to feed toxic masculinity, by blaming the victim for her attack and not condemning the young man for his invasion of her body and space. Such an experience makes it difficult for girls to navigate the school setting. They are forced to abide by school rules, maintain a fearless reputation among their peers, and deal with possible harassment at the hands of boys and girls at school. Enduring all of this can be taxing on one's emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being. School administrators should become more aware of the unique experiences of African American girls under their supervision to better understand how to deal with any misbehavior that may arise.

Parental Involvement, SES, and Educational Success

In addition to the inequality and disparity by race and gender, one must also consider other factors that could also intersect to contribute to school experiences. The effects of race and gender are often shaped by factors, such as parental involvement and socioeconomic status. Within this section, both will be discussed in regard to their impact on educational success.

Educational stratification by socioeconomic status (SES) continues to remain an issue within the United States. Socioeconomic disparities are found in both K-12 school quality and in

postsecondary enrollment and persistence (Rothstein, 2004; Kena et al., 2014). SES is defined as

a social position determined by a person's salary, employment position, and educational

attainment (Hook, Lawson, & Farah, 2013). The educational and economic mobility of American

youth is strongly associated with the educational success of their parents (Reynolds & Johnson,

2011). The promotion of educational attainment has grown as a priority within society because

of the recognition of the widening of earning gaps between those who attain a bachelor's degree

or higher versus those with a high school diploma (Fry, 2013). Lower levels of education are also

linked to poorer health and wealth over the life course, increased drug usage, incarceration, and

unemployment (Institute of Medicine, 2014). In an effort to promote the educational success of

all youth, many advocate for parental educational involvement or active participation in the

educational lives of their children (Jeynes, 2007; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Zhan & Sherraden, 2011).

Parental involvement is imperative to a student's educational success. Prior research has

suggested that there is a direct correlation between involvement and the child's academic success

(Epstein 2001; Hawkins & Mulkey, 2005; Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryallas & Nero, 2010).

Communicating, volunteering, disciplining, collaboration with the community, and teaching at

home are all examples of various types of parental involvement that have an important impact on

academic success (Epstein, 2001).

Parental involvement in education is necessary with in the home and at school. Home-

based involvement refers to any activities parents have applied in the home to reinforce school-

based learning (Tekin, 2011). Activities can include checking homework, monitoring homework

completion, and educational enrichment activities. Involvement at school includes activities such

as volunteering, communicating with teachers at parent-teacher conferences, and participating in

school organizations. Moreover, academic socialization is considered to be an important

contributor to educational success (Tekin, 2011). This form of socialization refers to indirect messages about school that communicate parents' educational expectations for their child, along with their views around the importance of education. Parents begin to promote the development of their children's future educational and occupational plans, which aids in independence and educational success (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Parental involvement in both the home and school, as well as academic socialization are positively linked to students' academic success, including higher grades in school, grade promotion, and better scores on achievement tests (Lee & Croninger, 1994; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011).

Socioeconomic Status and Educational Outcomes

Socioeconomic status is a challenge to parental involvement and found to impact student learning outcomes (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Turney & Kao, 2009, Ryan et al., 2010). Typically, parents who display limited parental involvement also have limited access to resources and opportunities (Davis-Kean & Sexton, 2009). Parents from higher SES and those more educated have been found to be more actively engaged in their child's schooling than parents from lower SES (Turney & Kao, 2009). Those parents with less formal education who had low SES displayed less visible and active levels of parental involvement in schools, but were highly involved at home (Ryan et al., 2010; Herrold & O'Donnell, 2008). Involvement at home included the parents' expectations of the child to graduate from high school and even pursue higher education. Unfortunately, limited knowledge places these parents in a disadvantaged position because of an unfamiliarity with procedures related to obtaining public resources to provide for their child's academic success (Griffiths-Prince, 2009).

The practice of parental involvement at their child's school also occurs at a lower rate than what is considered acceptable by educators (Bower & Griffen, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele,

2011; Robles, 2011). Research finds that some parents find it difficult to participate in their child's schooling because of socioeconomic status (Catsambis, 2001; Davis-Kean & Sexton, 2009; Green Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). Recognizing that parental involvement is important, legislators enacted several laws and programs to assist with opportunities for participation – for example, Head Start, No Child Left Behind Law, and Even Start (Tekin 2011; Chang, 2012). Prior to the enactment of these laws and programs, those individuals whose SES allowed them to stay home during the day were able to engage in the school environment by volunteering. After the laws were in place, all parents, regardless of SES, were believed to have more of an opportunity to participate in their child's schooling (Tekin, 2011).

Intersection of SES, Parental Involvement in Educational Outcomes and School Discipline

There are well-documented differences between parental involvement and youth academic outcomes. Such differences typically reflect the challenges and stressors that accompany inadequate family income and economic stress. Parents with minimal education and low income are more likely to express lower academic expectations for their children compared to parents with higher SES (Davis-Kean, 2005; Carolan & Wasserman, 2015). Parents in this class are less likely to be involved in their children's education at home and at school (Cheadle & Amato, 2011; Roksa & Potter, 2011). In addition, family social background is linked to youth school performance and achievement – youth reared in more affluent families generally outperform their less-affluent peers on every standard measure of academic achievement and engagement (Huston & Bentley, 2010; Reardon, 2011). Previous research has also shown that relations between parental educational involvement and youth academic outcomes may be conditioned by various aspects of family SES (Park, 2017; Yamamoto, 2010; Hemmerechts,

2016). It has been found that links between both parental home-based involvement and academic socialization and student engagement appear stronger for low-SES youth as compared to their more affluent peers (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Children from lower SES backgrounds appear to benefit more academically from parents' engagement in home-based activities (e.g. visiting a museum) (Roksa & Potter, 2011). This finding is similar to the idea of "concerted cultivation," that suggests children from less affluent homes likely benefit from parents' "deliberate and sustained effort to stimulate children's development and to cultivate their cognitive and social skills" (Lareau, 2003, p. 238).

As it relates to school discipline, a number of studies using a variety of measures of SES have linked SES to the risk of being suspended or expelled (Petras, Masyn, Buckley, Ialongo, & Kellam, 2011; Skiba et al., 2002; Sullivan, Klinbeil, & Van Norman, 2013; Wu et al., 1982). Using free lunch as a measure of SES, some studies reported that students who receive free school lunch are at an increased risk for school suspension (Skiba et al., 1997; Wu et al., 1982). Two others, using level of parents' education as a measure of SES, found an association with suspension rates, with less education predicting greater punishment (Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou, & Catalano, 2014; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987). Finally, using father's employment as their measure of SES, Wu et al. (1982) concluded that students whose fathers did not have a full-time job were significantly more likely to be suspended than students whose fathers were employed full time.

In a qualitative analysis examining student reactions to school discipline, Bratlinger (1991) interviewed students from both high and low-income residential areas. Students from both groups agreed that low-income students were unfairly targeted by school disciplinary sanctions. They also mentioned that high-income students often reported receiving mild

punishments (e.g. teacher reprimand), while low-income students received more severe consequences (e.g. yelled at in front of class, made to stand in hallway).

Finally, research has examined school discipline rates by SES of the school. School discipline rates have been found to be higher for economically disadvantaged students, particularly for students in schools located in large cities, and for those who attend school in the South (The Civil Rights Project/Advancement Project, 2000). Many students that attend public school in large cities and the South are usually African American. Comparatively, Wu et al. (1982) reported that non-white students still reported significantly higher rates of suspension than white students in all locales except rural senior high schools. In addition, a multi-level analysis of disciplinary outcomes conducted by Theriot et al. (2010) found that student race and gender did not predict exclusion after controlling for other student-level and school-level factors, but SES, previous suspension, and infraction type were significant. Although SES is not always associated with student misbehavior, it has been found that increased SES reduces the likelihood of suspension and/or expulsion (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011).

Within the following section, the theoretical framework used to explore the school experiences of African American girls will be discussed. Three theoretical approaches are key - Critical Race, intersectionality, and labeling theory can be found.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged as a response to the limitations within the critical legal scholars (CLS) approach. CLS engaged a Marxist critique of U.S. jurisprudence, focusing on class (Crenshaw et al., 1996). Critical race scholars agreed that class was an explanatory factor, but also believed that the law played a specific role in reifying (and was responsible for)

racial subordination and inequity. Co-founding member of CRT, Mari Matsuda, defines the theory as:

> "The work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination" (Martinez, 2014, p. 17).

CRT's foundation is linked to the development of African American thought from the post- civil rights era to present day (Bell, 1980; Matsuda et al., 1993). The civil rights movement in the 60s had slowed down and the opportunities that were available during that time were diminishing. Activists and scholars during the time noted the limitations of achieving justice using dominant conceptions of race, racism, and social equality. Many scholars in sociology, political science, and education moved beyond the traditional paradigm of their fields to provide a more convincing analysis of the black experience (Allen, 1974; Banks, 1971; Ladner, 1973). The boundary crossing was representative of a significant contribution of the black studies movement to the academic community. This intellectual movement pervaded legal education as scholars committed to racial justice started corresponding and engaging in political action to resist institutional structures that facilitated racism, but claimed equality (Matsuda et al., 1993). The foundation of CRT was then connected to the development of a new approach examining race, racism, and law in the post-civil rights era (Barnes, 1990; Crenshaw, 1988).

Martinez (2014) identifies two events contributing to the development of CRT. The first are the 1981 student protest and boycott which resulted in the organization of an alternative course on race and the law at Harvard Law School (Martinez, 2014). The course was created in reaction to Harvard's refusal to hire a teacher of color to replace Derek Bell. Bell was one of only two African American law professors at Harvard Law following the Civil Rights movement, he developed and taught legal doctrine from a race-conscious viewpoint. His

textbook, *Race and Racism and American Law*, along with his own opposition to the traditional

liberal approach to racism, are cited by CRT scholars as central to the development of the

movement. Student activists fighting for a professor of color to replace Bell were told by

Harvard administration that there were no qualified black scholars who merited Harvard's

interest (Martinez, 2014). This protest was the first institutionalized expression of CRT and one

of the earliest attempts to bring scholars of color together to address the law's treatment of race

from a self-consciously critical perspective.

Second, the 1987 Critical Legal Studies National Conference on Silence and Race also

contributed to the creation of CRT. The focus of CRT became the effort to uncover how law

constructed race. The separation of CRT and CLS took place because of the dissatisfaction with

CLS' failure to come to terms with the particularity of race and the movement of CLS to deploy

a racialist critique close to that of liberalism (Martinez, 2014). However, instead of arguing that

race was irrelevant to public policy, CLS stated that race simply did not exist. According to

Martinez (2014), this assertion was based in the ideas that biological race was a myth but failed

to note the lived material realities of the social construction that is race. CRT focused on race and

addressed various concerns utilizing distinct methodologies and traditions.

Dixson and Rosseau (2006) identified six major unifying themes within CRT. They are as

follows: (1) the recognition that race is endemic to American life, including its institutions; (2)

skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and

meritocracy; (3) challenges to ahistoricism and insists on contextual and historical analyses of

the law; (4) recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and communities of

origin in analyzing law and society; (5) the need for interdisciplinary scholarship; and (6) activist

work toward the elimination of racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms

of oppression. It is hoped that combined themes will provide tools necessary to illuminate institutional racism in the colorblind era and validate the experiential knowledge of communities of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Solorzana & Yosso, 2001).

One important scholar, Gilborn (2010), argues that the usage of CRT in education assists in locating experiences of racial inequality within the intersection of race and property rights to reveal power dynamics and dominant interests that are at work. Such power dynamics and interests are considered outgrowths of the lengthy history of legal, political, social, and economic white supremacy in the U.S. The concepts within this theory work to de-naturalize and expose the workings of white supremacy and racism in relation to other axes of oppression (Gillborn, 2010). Although mainstream white supremacy typically refers to crude forms of racial hatred by far-right extremists, CRT scholars suggest that it is a regime of assumptions and practices that constantly privilege the interests of white people, but are so deeply rooted that they appear normal to most people in the culture (Gillborn, 2010; p.2). Therefore, one must examine and expose the ways in which racialized inequity manifests and persists in order to inform social actions that can lead to social change.

One way of exposing how race insinuates itself in education is in regard to the intersection of race and property rights. This argues that whiteness is a form of property that is rooted in the idea that race and property rights have been connected since the creation of the U.S. (DeCuir-Gunby, 2006). The social construction of whiteness served to naturalize stratification through the explanatory power of race ideology (Smedley & Smedley, 2012). The first theorized relationship between whiteness and property argued that, historically, whiteness had been afforded legal protection in ways similar to property and was ultimately protected under law (Harris, 1993). In education, race and racism in U.S. society and its institutions and the ways in

which race intersects with property rights to produce racially inequitable outcomes for students and families of color can be highlighted (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). School segregation, school funding, having supportive and qualified teachers of the same racial/cultural background, and being substantively represented in curriculum and worldview are examples of educational whiteness as property. Whiteness has been used as an important form of ideological and epistemological property in schools and it continues to signify ways the ways social construction of race is connected to dominant worldviews, values, teaching, and learning that maintains the superiority of whiteness within a patriarchal society (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011; Slater, 2017). Whiteness that is embedded within Eurocentric majoritarian curriculum and school culture negatively affects the racial and cultural identity development of students of color by encouraging internalized racism (DePouw, 2016; Kohli, 2014; Poon, 2013). White students do not have to suffer from identity development because they are positively reflected within the curriculum and treated fairly within the institutional setting (Sleeter, 2017).

Critical Race Theory helps us to understand how whiteness is embedded in schools as an institution and used to maintain control and create a hierarchy among all within this environment. The following section will further discuss the second theory, intersectionality, used to examine school experiences of African American girls. Intersectionality theory will help us understand how social identities (i.e. race, gender) intersect in such a way that each identity can only be defined through the intersection with other identities (Harrison, 2017).

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory has been considered as one of the greatest theoretical contributions of women's studies (McCall, 2005). Black women, particularly, have been referencing their multiple identities in the fight for women's rights and civil rights for African

Americans. Women such as Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, and Mary Church Terrell were pioneers in the early conceptualizations of intersectionality (Romero, 2017). Stewart would lecture on the unique position of black women facing racism and sexism, while also calling for black women to develop their highest intellectual capacities. Sojourner Truth's famous speech "Ain't I a Woman?" discussed the invisibility of black women in the discussion of women's oppression (Truth, 1851; Romero, 2017). These women were forced to speak out because their experiences were silenced by racism, sexism, and elitism. The feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s gained momentum and support, but only because it primarily focused on the needs of white women. The black woman experience was erased, causing Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper to speak out about their unique position in society.

It has been suggested that the term 'intersectionality' drew heavily from the concept of 'interlocking systems of oppression' (race, class, gender, and sexuality), defined in a social movement context by the Combahee River Collective during the late 1970s. Their name stemmed from the location Harriet Tubman planned an action to free more than 750 slaves. This concept was defined in a black Feminist Statement "as the structural anchor of the experience of simultaneous oppressions and the target of integrated political struggle" (13, 16). During the 1980s, many antiracist feminist theory texts were published using the language of 'intersections' (Moraga & Anzaldua, 1981; Davis, 1981; Smith, 1983; Lorde, 1984; Hooks, 1981; Mohanty, 1988). This political movement for women of color also included sexual orientation in black feminism. The movements members were active in social justice campaigns including the desegregation of Boston schools, protests against police brutality in the black community, and violence against women. Ultimately, Kimberle Crenshaw, a legal scholar, introduced the metaphor of intersectionality in a legal academic context.

Kimberle Crenshaw is credited with coining the term 'intersectionality' in her 1989 article "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics." Her legal writings on intersectionality stemmed from the inability to capture the experiences of black women in anti-discrimination law. In court cases, black women were unable to prove both gender and race discrimination because not all women and black people were discriminated against. The courts failed to recognize how black women experienced race and sex discrimination simultaneously. They were forced to claim either gender or race discrimination, neglecting how they both operate at the same time. Crenshaw used an example of a traffic accident to illustrate race and gender as having their own lane in the street:

> Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination (1989: 149).

This analogy shows how the "black woman" identity is not recognized by anti-discrimination law. Intersectionality clearly highlights the inadequacy of anti-discrimination law as a tool for addressing injuries to women of color.

Historically, feminist and antiracist works have not considered intersectional identities. Black feminist scholars argued that traditional feminist research was conducted by white women and only reflected their experiences, but it was expected to speak for all women, representing an "essentialized womanhood" (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1984; Spelman, 1988). The failure to consider the narratives of black women left their voices and experiences silenced. Moreover, Crenshaw states that antiracist scholarship has been conducted from the perspective of black men, continuing to dismiss black women voices. Crenshaw (1991) suggests that women of color

whose intersectional identities center them both as women and of color are marginalized in both perspectives because of the dominant focus on race or gender exclusively. The marginalization of women of color goes beyond rendering one group powerless because of their intersection of identity, but it suggests how identity politics contribute in producing inequalities within groups. Feminists failed to question race, resulting in the oppression of people of color, and antiracists neglected to question patriarchy, reproducing the oppression of women (Crenshaw, 1991).

This theory also has a political undertone that highlights how the intersection of identities can leave particular groups oppressed. When examining intersectionality and its relation to public policy, Hancock (2007) mentions that intersectionality theory is necessary to examine policies designed to help oppressed groups who should theoretically benefit from racially targeted or gender targeted policy but benefit from neither. In addition, intersectionality theory can explain the inequality found within racial or gendered groups, forming a sort of stratified system within each group. Hancock (2007) suggested that policies should ensure all members of marginalized groups are enabled to empower themselves, and not selectively choose a select few who are fortunate enough to benefit from the few opportunities offered.

When examining the experiences of African American girls in the public-school system, intersectionality has been rarely used. This theory has not been utilized much to make meaning of the experiences of youth period (Harrison, 2017). However, Crenshaw's idea of cultural intersectionality can be helpful in highlighting how the intersection of various cultural constructions can reproduce racial and gender hierarchies and disparities among youth. Such constructions could contribute to the marginalization of black feminism within the public-school environment, allowing white traditional feminism to serve as the standard for woman or girlhood. If assimilation has not occurred and black girls defy the standards they are expected to

meet in schools, intersectionality suggests that they will be disciplined, placing them at the bottom of the racial and gender hierarchies.

Labeling Theory

Drawing heavily from the work of Mead (1964), WI Thomas (1923), Cooley (1902), and Blumer (1968), labeling theory can be used to help understand how stigma attached to a label can change the trajectory of someone's life. Focusing particularly on groups often shunned and mistreated within society, Howard Becker published *Outsiders* in 1963, which theorized that those labeled as an outsider are individuals who have not conformed to what society deems as acceptable behavior. Society creates its own rules and expects all people to abide by them. When one deviates from these expectations, they are placed in an "outsider" position.

Labeling theory focuses on both the formal and informal application of deviant labels by society on individuals and groups. Formal labeling in the context of criminology refers to a criminal or delinquent tag attached to a person due to their interaction with the juvenile justice system and/or adult criminal justice system. Informal labeling is generated by parents, teachers, and peers. Within public-schools, students may not have a formal label from the juvenile justice system, but informal labeling among faculty/staff and students can have an impact on how the targeted student views him or herself.

It has been found that processing juveniles through the criminal justice system is likely to produce a negative effect on the adolescent's self-concept. Jenson (1978) reported that formally labeled adolescents have a more delinquent self-concept than those who have never been labeled. They begin to see themselves as delinquent. However, formal processing is not the only avenue by which an adolescent's self-identity can be affected. The school disciplinary process, which applies informal labels, is a form of processing where students become labeled as a "problem

child." Once this label is applied, it changes the way others (peers, teachers, administrators) interact with the student and how he or she is perceived. As a result of the stigmatization attached to particular students, they are then denied conventional opportunities, such as educational advancement (Restivo & Lanier, 2015). Continuing to socially marginalize labeled students, including exclusionary discipline, is found to increase the likelihood of engaging in more crime and delinquency in the future (Bernburg & Krohn, 2003).

Black youth are deemed criminal from birth simply because of their race. Historically, society has placed African Americans in second-class status, and they are often negatively stereotyped. When American culture suggests that a population is more prone to criminality and misbehavior, this rhetoric becomes engrained into institutions. Unfortunately, some faculty/staff in public-schools hold similar beliefs and they continue to oppress these youth inside of a building where they should feel safe. Black youth are automatically given the label of deviant and are mistreated in schools because of racist ideals, and because their behavior deviates from what society states as acceptable. Although they may not engage in deviant activity, if they are sent to the office for a minor infraction by a teacher and given a form of punishment, this could jumpstart their school disciplinary trajectory. They are given an automatic deviant label because of their race and punished by the school. They then internalize their disciplinary experience, and now their self-concept is altered based on how they are perceived by faculty members. This promotes secondary deviance in some cases. The initial disciplinary infraction (i.e. primary deviance) could lead to additional misbehavior in the classroom because now they self-identify with how teachers and administration view them. It is important to identify this issue because not all black students are deviant, but they are constantly punished at higher rates than their white counterparts. Recognizing and acknowledging the impact that labeling has on African American

students could initiate a change in how they are treated in public-schools. The goal of the school system should be to deter them from delinquency, not add to the likelihood that they will engage in it. Faculty and staff have to change how they view and treat black students, so that the internalization of deviant labels does not occur.

African American girls who have been characterized and labeled as loud, obnoxious, and less feminine may internalize this status and seemingly agree with the "angry, black girl" stereotype. They fall victim to the self-fulfilling prophecy, where one's self-perceptions are reflections of others' conceptions of us, and even apply the term to other girls. Black girls not only have the automatic label of deviant because of their blackness, but they also have to deal with identifying as a woman. Black women are often criticized for their behaviors because it deviates from traditional, white feminism. Not conforming to conventional values places black girls at a disadvantage within the public-school system. Being labeled "angry" and "black" almost guarantees that she will be punished at some point in the educational system. The black label signals deviancy, while being angry and loud suggests that she is in need of "correcting" so that she can display appropriate behavior

Additionally, informal labeling can occur from peers within the school. Not only do black girls have to navigate their school experiences by obeying the rules and not gaining the "angry, black girl" label, but they also have to decide which label they are willing to accept from their peers. For example, a girl may not want to be viewed negatively by teachers, thus not misbehaving in class; however, they also have to gain respect and notoriety from their peers, which could mean that they have to participate in some form of deviancy to avoid being teased. Nikki Jones (2010) refers to having labels of being pretty or a fighter. Pretty girls typically conform to conventional standards regarding femininity and are focused on academic success,

whereas fighters are focused on gaining respect and instilling fear in others. Many girls have to walk a fine line regarding the label that they want attached to their identities. Pretty girls do not want to fight but will to prove that they will not be bullied by others. They recognize that the "angry, black girl" stereotype leads to differential treatment in school, so they do not want to be identified as such. Girls recognize that a positive image is important in evading discipline, therefore, they want to be labeled as such. In an effort to understand how African American girls navigate schools, the following section will discuss the methodology used in the research study to explore the experiences of the sample population.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The current research seeks to understand how girls perceive and understand their treatment in and fairness of school disciplinary policies, document their direct or indirect experiences with school discipline, and manage their relationships with faculty/staff and other girls in the school. Additionally, this work asks and documents how they navigate being a black young woman within an institution that criminalizes them for their blackness. For the purposes of this study, a qualitative approach was utilized in the form of one-on-one, in-depth interviews with 20 African American girls' ages 14 to 18 in a rural public-school district. The girls provide guidance on how both the school personnel and black girls could assist in fostering healthy relationships in the school setting.

A qualitative approach was utilized because it helps gain a better understanding of the girls' individual perceptions regarding their experiences in school. The girls live in a rural town, located in the coastal plain region of northeastern North Carolina. The site of the study is an understudied area, considering most research focuses on urban areas. Additionally, the interviewees are from middle-class families, another understudied population. The ages of the participants range from 14 to 18. Prior to conducting the interviews, approval was granted by Old Dominion's University's institutional review board (Case #972328-3).

This rural area is made up of 340.45 square miles and encompasses part of the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge and Merchants Millpond State Park. Since the town's inception, the economy has been built around farming and timber. Agriculture and lumbering remain the leading commercial enterprises in this area and employment is heavily male dominated. As of 2016, the U.S. Census Bureau reports a total population of 11, 478 residents in

the area. Racial/ethnic composition consists of 64.4 percent white, 32.5 percent black, 2.1 percent Hispanic/Latino, 2.2 percent identify with 2 or more races, 0.6 percent American Indian, and 0.1 percent Pacific Islander. The median household income is $52, 481 and the per capita income in 2018 was $24, 335. Approximately 15.7% of the residents accounted for within the census are persons in poverty.

The high school from which the sample derives had an overall high school population of 492 students in 2018, represent about 26 percent of the total African American female population, and 4 percent of the entire school. This school is also identified as Title I, indicating a high percentage of the student population comes from impoverished backgrounds. Title I is designed to assist students in achieving proficiency on challenging state academic standards. Schools with percentages of low-income students of at least 40 percent may use Title I funds, along with other federal, state, and local funds to operate a school-wide program to upgrade the instructional program for the whole school (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2018). This North Carolina high school's percentage of low-income students is 45.42 percent.

The girls within this sample are representative of middle-class households and are able to discuss ways in which they navigate the school environment as African American girls who reside within this rural town and choose to adhere to the standards of white, middle-class, traditional feminism. The girls are unaware of their adoption of middle-class feminism, but their narratives will closely mirror those expectations. As a result of class privilege and choosing to adhere to middle-class expectations, their school experiences may differ from those of African American girls and boys typically studied because they might not encounter some of the most blatant acts of racism. Instead their experiences with mistreatment and discrimination may be more subtle and insidious. Particularly, studying this group will reveal how subjectivity plays

out, along with how pressure to conform to middle-class standards – largely defined by whites –

is problematic. Their class privilege however will not supersede one important factor – their race.

Therefore, while their experiences with racism and mistreatment may not be as overt as those

who do not identify as middle-class, nonetheless, they are recipients of disguised forms of

discrimination. Their perceptions are important because we not only understand their process in

navigating the school environment through the guise of whiteness but could also reveal that no

matter one's background (i.e. class), youth of color are constantly at-risk of unfair treatment and

discipline due to the history of race relations within the United States and current institutional

practices.

This particular town was selected because it is the area in which I grew up and attended

school. My entire immediate and most of my extended family attended the schools in this

district. My grandmother and great uncles attended school in the area during segregation, and I

often remember the horrid stories told about the difficulty of integration in the area. Two stories

in particular stand out regarding the history of education for African Americans in the area. First,

on October 28, 1968, a letter was received from Dr. Eloise Severison by the county's school

board. Dr. Severison was the Regional Civil Rights Director and wrote that the school district did

not have an approved desegregation plan, and if a plan was not approved by July 1, 1969, the

allotment of federal funds to the schools could be terminated. The school board decided they

would begin desegregation during the 1969-1970 school year, with a proposed plan for complete

desegregation during 1970-1971.

> "A motion was made and seconded, that if the Federal courts continued to require
> complete desegregation of the public-schools, if the Department of Health, Education,
> and Welfare continued their policy of forcing desegregation of the public schools and if
> Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 continued to require the desegregation of the
> public schools, that beginning with the 1969-1970 school term the schools would begin
> desegregation."

The usage of the word "if" the courts required and "if" they were forced by policy, then they would desegregate, suggesting opposition to integration of schools.

Second, the school board and North Carolina Department of Public Instruction approved the construction of a school for African American students on August 6, 1956, close to two years following the *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, KS* decision. The school was set to accommodate 300 or all black students in the county. Construction began summer of 1957 and opened for the 1958-1959 school year.

Prior to the construction of this school, black students attended Rosenwald schools in the area. Rosenwald schools were constructed by Booker T. Washington of the Tuskegee Institute and Julius Rosenwald, philanthropist and president of Sears Roebuck, to educate African American children across the south. In 1927, the land for Reid's Grove School, a Rosenwald school in the sampled area, was purchased from my great-great grandfather. By 1928, one in five rural schools in the South was a Rosenwald school and they housed one third of the region's rural black youth and teachers (Hoffschwelle, 2012). At the conclusion of this program, it had produced 4,977 schools, 217 teachers' homes, and 163 shop buildings that served 663,625 students in 15 states. Julius Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Fund contributed more than $4.3 million, and African American communities raised more than $4.7 million. Many of the schools were constructed between 1913 and 1932 remained in operation until the 1960s and the 1970s when the 1954 *Brown* Supreme Court ruling against racial segregation was implemented. Some were no longer in use and others changed function as rural populations declined. The Grove School building remains standing as a national historic site and preserved by usage as an elections site in the county.

On the surface, it appears that there are positive race relations in the town. However, because of my close connections to the school system and former sheriff's department, I am aware of the unseen. As assistant superintendent of the public-school system, my mother has experienced both overt and covert racism, simply because of her identity – being black and female. Since I know of her experience with community members and higher authorities in education, I realized that these racist and sexist ideals are also affecting young, black girls who have absolutely no ability to challenge their treatment. Additionally, because of church and familial ties, I often hear of the girls' mistreatment. Their parents usually call my mother to see if she can intervene in some way. As a result, this town was used for research not only because of the accessibility to participants, but because of the past and present narratives that I have come to know of regarding the treatment of African Americans within a town heavily run by politics and white male authority. Although my familiarity and closeness with the community allows me to tell the story of bias and discrimination, I also recognize that my prior knowledge may also aid in my own implicit biases. However, the narratives are strictly from the young girls and I am removed from their individual stories. Therefore, I believe that transparency regarding my connections to the community and school should be acknowledged so that one can understand why this research resonates so deeply with me, but also know that my personal feelings are not affecting the research.

Interviews

In an effort to gain participants for the study, a combination of purposive and snowball sampling approach was used. The study specifically calls for African American girls that are currently in public-school or recently graduated. The first two participants were contacted via Facebook messenger, asking if they would be interested in discussing their school experiences,

school discipline, and interactions with faculty/staff and other girls. At the conclusion of their interviews, they were asked if they knew of anyone else that would be interested in sharing their experiences. The girls were then given a business card with my contact information and asked to share with potential participants. Additionally, other girls were recruited after school hours at the middle-school cheerleading practice. I am the strength and conditioning coach for the team, so I was able to speak directly with parents about the possibility of their daughters participating in the interview. The girls who were 18 were given consent forms to sign and parents of girls younger than 18 signed informed consent forms before the interviews took place. The participants were informed that their names would names would remain anonymous and they would be provided pseudonyms within the project, their participation was completely voluntary, and they could withdraw at any point.

The in-depth interviews were conducted between May 2017 and October 2018 in various locations, including their homes and a study room inside the public library in the town of reference. These locations allowed a sense of comfort for the participants so they were able to speak freely about their experiences with school discipline, their perceived unfair treatment from particular teachers, verbal/physical fights that they were directly involved in or observed, and ways in which both the girls and school personnel could improve their relationship. The interview guide consisted of about 28 questions that highlight important domains (relationships w/faculty, other girls, perceived fairness, etc.) in the study. The interviews ranged from 28 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes and were recorded using a digital recording device. The interviews were downloaded onto a computer and transcribed by the author.

For this research project, the primary research question seeks to understand how African American girls navigate maintaining their cultural identity, respect, and reputation within a social

institution that disparately punishes them based on unfair expectations of traditional white feminism embedded within schools. Additionally, this work will examine the girls' perceptions of fairness regarding how disciplinary actions are administered by school administration. The study hopes to understand the participants' relationships with their peers, as well as with school faculty/staff. The voices of these girls have been silenced because of the power differential between them and school personnel.

Very few attempts have been made to talk to girls themselves about their perceptions regarding their experiences with school discipline and mistreatment (Jones, 2010; Morris, 2016; Morris, 2007). Also, no one has attempted to understand the difficulty involved in trying to remain true to their identities within a system that forces them to assimilate to white, middle-class values. Maintaining the respect that is demanded among the black community within the school system, while maintaining a "decent" reputation is a difficult line to walk because school personnel expect certain behaviors without understanding that you can never show signs of weakness. If school administrators are unfamiliar with the difficulty of being an African American female student and peer, they cannot effectively proceed with issuing an appropriate school disciplinary sanction. Therefore, it is important to gain insight into the lives of young women who have either experienced school discipline or observed the treatment experienced by other African American girls, as well as have an understanding about their formal and informal relationships within the schools, as these relationships could also be a contributing factor in their likelihood of experiencing punishment.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach was used once the interviews were transcribed. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data. The data collected from the interviews underwent several re-readings of the

transcripts to identify initial themes. Once the initial themes were identified, additional coding

occurred to highlight broader concepts found in the transcriptions. These themes stood out due to

recurrent responses given by the girls and they were reviewed to ensure it accurately represented

the data collected during the interview.

Critical Race Methodology

The theoretical grounded approach used for this study, critical race methodology, seeks

to:

> "challenge traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories that have been used to
> explain the experiences of students of color; provide liberatory or transformative
> response to oppression and subordination (racism, genderism, classism); focus on
> students of color's racialized, gendered, and classed experiences; and apply an
> interdisciplinary knowledge base, drawing from ethnic studies, women's studies,
> sociology, history, humanities, and law to develop an enhanced understanding of students
> of color's experiences in higher education" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24).

Five key elements considered to be foundational to critical race as a methodology are:

intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of oppression/subordination; challenge to

dominant ideology; commitment to social justice; centrality of experiential knowledge; and

transdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Critical race methodology rests on the premise that race and racism are normal (Ladson-

Billings, 1998; Brayboy, 2005; Solorzano & Yoss, 2001). Scholars utilizing this approach

recognize the intercentricty of race and racism with other forms of oppression/subordination

(classism, sexism, etc.) that affect lived experiences of people of color. This methodology also

challenges the dominant ideology, white privilege, and the concept of neutrality and objectivity

in research. Critical race scholars are committed to historically marginalized populations to

pursue social justice and educational equity (Pasque, Carducci, Kuntz, & Gildersleeve, 2012).

The pursuit of social justice is pertinent to critical race methodology because it challenges

traditional research methodologies previously used to explain the experiences of people of color. Critical race scholars employ methods often not considered traditional or scientific to learn about and raise awareness of lived experiences of marginalized groups. For instance, scholars recognize the centrality of experiential knowledge as a strength and means for informing research, using various methods including storytelling, family histories, biographies, chronicles, narratives, and testimonies (Bartlett & Brayboy, 2005; Brayboy, 2005; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Sue et al., 2007). Including experiential knowledge acknowledges people of color's lived experiences and provides legitimate and valued data used to analyze racism and forms of oppression (Museus & Iftikar, 2013).

Acknowledging people of color's experiential knowledge and counterstories validates them as knowers and situates learning in their racialized experiences (Quaye & Chang, 2012). Personal narratives and experiential knowledge provide an opportunity for marginalized groups to speak on their reality, thus allowing their voices to emerge (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Quaye & Chang, 2012; Love, 2004). Using storytelling and counterstories in research potentially ensures that their experiences are "normally shared, culturally valued, and viewed as an asset" (Quaye & Chang, 2012, p. 94.). This approach disrupts the majoritarian story that attempts to "universalize and cast dialogues in binary, contrasting categories that support the maintenance of dominant groups" (p. 14) by relying on participants and their own lived experiences (Stanley, 2007).

Master narratives are events told by members of dominant/majority groups that are accompanied by the values and beliefs that justify the actions they take to ensure their dominant position (Love, 2004, p. 228-229). They are grounded in white superiority, specifically the ideals of white males, the upper and middle class, and heterosexuals. The construction of majoritarian

stories include fostering invisibility, making assumptions about what is normative and universal, and promoting the notion that schools are neutral and apolitical. This masks white privilege and seek to make it appear normal (Love, 2004). Therefore, highlighting the multiple ways the master narrative is constructed and perpetuated is important to dismantling it. Storytelling or counter-storytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002: Stanley, 2007).

With critical race methodology, scholars draw on their race and other identities to inform the research process. Critical race scholars often include their lived experiences in the research process. As a result, the scholars position themselves and acknowledge the influences of their social identities on the research process and assist the audience in understanding how the scholars' position influences the research process. H. Richard Milner, IV (2007) created the "Framework of Researcher Racial and Cultural Positionality" to guide researchers in a process of racial and cultural consciousness in their practice. His framework rejects practices that remove researchers from the research process, particularly when they reject their "racialized and cultural positionality" (p. 388). Milner (2007) warns of dangers associated with not engaging in "processes that can circumvent misinterpretations, misinformation, and misrepresentation of individuals, communities, institutions, and systems" (p. 388). His intention is to guide scholars working through the "seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers" (p. 394). Therefore, as the researcher I went through this process and do not have to reject my identity as an African American woman because it is similar to the sample population. Milner suggests that my identity should be embraced because of the racialized and cultural positionality that I hold.

As the researcher, my position directly aligns with the girls within the sample. I identify as an African American woman who grew up in a middle-class household. I was born and raised in this small rural community and attended the same public-school system as the girls. My

mother was a school teacher during my time in the public-school system within this particular

district. Due to my mother's employment in the district, I also benefited from having a parent

employed by the school to advocate on my behalf. As a result, I never received any formal

punishment, even for misbehavior clearly listed in the disciplinary handbook (i.e. dress code,

verbal arguments). It was only after conducting this research that I realized the interplay of race,

class, and gender, and how I was privileged to never receive punishment for offenses other black

girls would. I recognized the power of advocacy and the impact that my mother's presence and

position had on disciplinary decision making. However, I did not consider the effect discipline

may have had on other girls who looked like me but were from different backgrounds. This

research assisted in my own reflection regarding the school experience and caused me to believe

that during that time I was naïve to the lived realities of other African American girls. I am

grateful for the opportunity to reflect and ultimately shine light on an issue that negatively affects

our girls within schools. After considering my position as a researcher, one can now move

forward with the analysis of the study. The following section will explore the analyses of data

collected from the girls regarding their school experiences.

CHAPTER IV

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

This chapter will cover the analysis of the data, discussing the major themes that emerged from the interviews conducted. Relationships among girls, reasons for punishment and the perceptions of discipline and fairness, the network of support and ways in which they evade punishment, and discussions of internalized racism will be discussed.

Within this study, 20 middle-class African American girls ages 14-18 were interviewed to discuss both their experiences with school discipline and mistreatment within their rural public-school. Eighteen of the girls are being raised in two-parent homes. Two of the participants are raised in single-parent homes because their fathers passed away. Their parents are employed as registered nurses, school teachers, social workers, etc. Out of the 20 interviewees, only 5 had ever been sent to the office for formal discipline in these cases for dress code violations and for a physical and verbal fight. Thus, a majority of the sample had never directly experienced school discipline. They, however, were able to discuss their observations of other young, African American girls that had experienced punishment. As will be shown below, according to the girls, those who had been disciplined or mistreated were characterized as trouble-makers, loud and disrespectful, who did not value academic achievement, and were not involved in extra-curricular activities. Those within the sample credited their positive school experiences to connections, positive behavior, academic achievement, involvement in sports, and passive demeanor. They believed that those girls who had experienced school discipline could change their overall encounters with school personnel if they simply changed their behavior. Ultimately, if the "trouble-makers" began subscribing to white, middle-class standards their school

experience would drastically change. The findings will mostly reflect the experiences of African American girls that they have observed, but not directly experienced.

Relationships among Girls

Exploring the relationships among the girls is important because friendship groups could contribute to the likelihood of the girls engaging in misbehavior, leading to possible punishment. In the school setting, girls often bicker over trivial events, but sometimes those situations grow into verbal or physical altercations. Girls often argue over boyfriends, rumors, and jealousy. A simple argument or misunderstanding among girls, could become a trip to the office for discipline. Therefore, this section will reflect the perceptions of the girls regarding the relationships among girls at their school and reasons why they fight and argue with each other. Additionally, the concept of maintaining respect among their peer groups is explored. Girls may not want to engage in fights, but because they want to maintain an image of respect among their peers, they choose to participate. Therefore, the exploration of relationships among girls could assist in understanding the school experiences of African American girls.

A first key finding is that in general, for the girls in the sample, relationships formed between girls that were on their sports teams, members of the same clubs or other extracurricular activities, had neighborhood or familial ties, and/or simply befriended each other within the classroom. As reported, when there are issues or conflict, they usually stems from girls that were not within their particular group. Chelle's primary friendship group was her cheer squad and she discussed her conflict with a group of girls that spanned over the course of five years. She referred to the "main leader" as much bigger than her and said she would spread rumors about her. She stated "she's telling, she's feeding everybody all this stuff and they just all didn't deal with me. It was like 10 of them. It was like, it was a lot of them. So I walked around school every

day with knowing that 10 plus females didn't deal with me." Chelle never mentioned any friction

between her cheer squad and the 10 girls, but because of her issue with the main leader, she was

unable to form relationships with the other girls in that group.

Additionally, the girls who are members of multiple groups typically have to choose a

loyalty to one clique over the other. Audrey recalled an argument between girls within the

classroom where a mutual friend attempted to mediate the situation. Unfortunately, during the

attempted mediation process, the girls suggested that she had to choose a side to support. She

stated, "so it (the argument) kept going on and on and on until a friend got into it because it was

both of their friend and it was either decided that you had to stop being friends with that person

or that person in order to be friends with the other one." When asked, "so they can't all be

friends?" Audrey quickly responded "No." This statement is just representative of the idea that

when conflict arises, the girls are expected to choose the group that they are most connected to,

often leading to strained or failed friendships in their other groups.

Zara explains that she has observed girls fight because they began isolating a particular

girl from their group. She reports:

> "There has been physical fights over girls just being friends with a group, but leaves one
> out at certain times. And it doesn't work well, and then they like physical fight over crazy
> stuff because they bring other girls into that situation."

When asked to clarify her statement, Zara went on to say that once the group has decided to

isolate that one girl, they then befriend and welcome another girl into the group. By doing so,

that often contributes to additional fighting between the group and the ex-friend that they have

secluded. Addy also mentioned the isolation of girls from their friendship group via group chat.

"There has been some times where basically over group chats, by not adding one person, but you

talk about them in that group chat and it gets to that person. Then they just fight over it." Her

statement suggests that arguments or physical fights derive from not including all friends of the group in the chat, but instead using this time to target and "talk about" the girl who has been secluded. Such behavior causes tension within the friendship group.

A second key finding from the interviews is about the source of conflict among girls. Most of the girls in the sample had not directly experienced conflict with other girls at their school. However, they believe that the conflict they have observed between African American girls at their school derives from "he said, she said," and jealousy.

The phrase "he said, she said" refers to the idea of others saying things about the girls that may or may not be true. For example, there may be a rumor formulated about one girl that is believed to be said by another. There is no concrete evidence to support the accusation that the girl started the rumor, but once it begins to spread throughout the school, it becomes the center of a potential conflict. The girls expressed that this is how most verbal and physical altercations start. For example, when asked why girls would argue with one another, Jade stated "Because the other girl was talking about the other one." Karen made a similar statement: "I mean one reason I can say like playing sports maybe you get mad at each other and they'll fight over things like that or it be over a boy or 'he said, she said' argument where somebody was talking about the next person and you know they just start going at it."

Allowing gossip and rumors, such as expressed in "he said, she said", to infiltrate the relationships between girls at school was reported to lead to school punishment. Chelle, who had been involved in a verbal argument, received in-school suspension (ISS) after having two prior arguments with one particular girl. She and the other young lady had been to the office twice to discuss their arguments but had not received a formal punishment. Chelle responded, "it was always something. Always being in the office. But it was times when it was worse than that and

we didn't get in trouble. So, maybe it was just the buildup that got the 2 days." In this situation, she realizes the leniency she had been given before, which ultimately led to the disciplinary action – ISS.

Another reason mentioned by the girls for conflict with other girls at school is jealousy. They believe that other girls are jealous of them because of how they look, their popularity among peers at school, their grades, and even their relationships with teachers. For example, Grace felt that girls were envious of her because she was popular, pretty, could dress well, and had really good grades. "Maybe if they would do something [be active in clubs, sports, got good grades], they too would be popular at school and they wouldn't be concerned about me." Grace, and others in the sample, make the assumption that if girls are not active at school, they are jealous of those who are and tend to want to stir up "unnecessary drama." Additionally, Tia explained her experience with girls at school:

> "I've had a certain number of friends all through high school. I didn't really deal with nobody else. Like they were the people I dealt with. But that was because we cheered together. So I dealt with them and we were seen around school as 'those girls.' Like everybody was cool with us, but it was certain girls, it was some girls that were a grade behind us that did not deal with us. But they didn't do any sports, their grades weren't good, and they weren't doing anything, so if it wasn't jealousy, that's what it looked like."

The girls in the sample then believed that their popularity, involvement in sports, and academic excellence contributed to the perceived jealousy of those who do not identify as such.

As with "he said, she said," some of the girls stated that the jealousy led to teasing and calling each other names, such as "ugly," that would begin verbal altercations in the hallways. The girls implied that they have witnessed others walk past each other and make insulting statements to "get under their skin." For example, Addy stated that some girls would walk past one another and say, "bruh she so ugly or something like that and you know she can hear you."

Within this sample, none stated that they have ever taunted other girls at school, but they did not report having been called names by other girls – the girls who are not involved or make good grades.

A final important finding about the role that of relationships among the girls is about the need to maintain their respect and dignity among their peers being more important than punishment. Issues such as "he said, she said" and jealousy created altercations between the girls at school that most believed could have been avoided. The girls in the sample indicated that both physical and verbal arguments could have been avoided if it were not for pressure by their peers to engage in those acts. The girls responses indicated that girls have to walk a fine line within the school environment because they have to demand and maintain respect among their peers, while also sustaining a positive image in the eyes of school personnel. They have to choose which is more important, a decision that is often difficult to make. If they choose to engage in a verbal or physical altercation, they are viewed to be "cool" and unafraid of punishment and thus are respected. On the other hand, if they consider their image through the eyes of school personnel important, they will be perceived positively by their teachers, but a "punk" by their peers.

According to the sample, most girls who have an established record of "trouble" or discipline choose to follow through with the altercation. Not engaging in the altercation could insinuate that "she's not about that life," as Chelle put it, meaning that she is afraid of the other girl or afraid of formal discipline. Grace felt that peer pressure and having groups of people heightening the situation forced the girls to believe they had no choice but to fight. She reported:

> "You got friends standing around that's boosting your head up or you got your boyfriend right there who you want to seem hard for. Or its just people around period. You're never gonna see somebody fight, except that girl that I got in the altercation with when there's nobody around. That's when you know somebody really wants to fight. Any other time

you wait until the hallways are full and you just trying to get loud so you can have like an audience."

Crowds contributed to the likelihood that one would actually follow through with a fight. Grace suggested that girls who actually wanted to fight would do so without large crowds pressuring them to. The crowds however force those less assured about their desire to fight to believe they have no choice.

Audrey believed that fighting made the girls feel empowered within their social groups. When asked about peer pressure and the decision to fight, Audrey explained that others would hype the altercation by saying "you're not gonna fight this person or that person." Under these circumstances, even if the girl is not planning to fight initially, she follows through so she will be viewed as brave and courageous. Jade states, "you don't wanna be viewed as a punk." Addy reports, "they're not planning to (fight) but they go ahead and do it so it will make them look better somehow." This statement suggests that there is a belief that proceeding with a fight will shed a light on the young lady and make her appear empowered by this decision. At this point, her peers view her as courageous and one who is respected.

Audrey's statement shows the ambivalence of the young ladies in their decision to either engage in the argument or walk away. This is a decision that school personnel may not understand. School administrators may believe that the decision is as easy as not misbehaving or arguing with a peer. However, the concept of respect and maintaining a particular identity among their peers is as equally as important as managing positive relationships with school personnel. Both Jody Miller (2008) and Nikki Jones (2010) have referenced how African American girls are forced to manage dual identities within their communities and at school. Ultimately, they have to decide to risk being a recipient of discipline to gain or maintain respect or sustain a positive persona among school administration.

Most of the interviewees, however, had not directly been impacted by school discipline or engaged in verbal or physical fights. Among these girls, there was a sense of pride that emerged from the interviews when discussing their isolation from "trouble-makers." Patricia stated:

> "I don't have any females that I know usually get in trouble because all my friends be good because you know, I don't wanna hang around no bad girls. Me, I'm mature so I don't want anybody that like fuss at teachers, always wanna get in trouble, wanna skip. All that stuff. For me, I wanna go off, well I am about to go off to college to try to become a nurse in the next four years, so I feel like that's gonna be a big step for me. So I don't need any negativity in my life."

Patricia felt that interacting with girls who appeared to not value academic excellence and got into trouble could possibly hinder her from her future goals. Relationships with these girls could possibly taint her "good girl" image and cause school personnel to view her differently. Addy also explained: "I think that they should, like if your friends are the reason you're getting into trouble then you might have to drop them and make and try to find friends that will encourage you to try to do the right thing, instead of the wrong thing." Nya also believed she was able to navigate the school environment because "I didn't pay stuff like that any mind in school. I didn't care about that mess. That's why I had good grades." Isolating herself from negativity is how she believed she was able to maintain success. Based on their observations, the girls understood that in order to navigate this institution, they had to conform and separate themselves from the "others."

Just like the typology listed in *Between Good and Ghetto,* the girls in the sample defined themselves as "good" girls who valued academic success, adhered to mainstream normative feminist standards, and did not engage in behaviors that could lead to discipline. The girls recognized that they cannot form relationships with girls who have negative labels attached to them. Due to their disciplinary record, the girls in this sample isolated themselves from other

girls who had previously gotten into trouble. Addy mentioned that she would try to maintain distance from those girls because she knew school personnel constantly monitored their behavior. She stated "they watch them more than they watch the ones that don't get into trouble, so you have to keep your distance." This statement suggests that because of the "trouble-maker" label, the girls in the sample have to maintain separation from those girls. Patricia and Nya's aforementioned comments also show their separation from girls who have established a disciplinary record.

It is also important to note that when referring to peer pressure, the girls in the sample were referring to the experiences of other girls at their schools, and not their own. None of them mentioned that they felt pressured by peer expectations, but rather focused more on maintaining a positive image in the eyes of school personnel. They ensured that they were distinguished as girls who followed the rules and did not disrespect school administration.

This section is important to highlight because it details how relationships and interactions among the girls impact their experiences with school discipline. They discuss the challenges of those whom they have observed with maintaining their own individual and cultural identity, fostering healthy relationships, and handling potential conflict with others within the school setting. Discussing their relationships with each other helps the reader to understand how the girls are at risk of school discipline based off of how they interact with other girls within the school.

Reasons for Punishment/Perception of Fairness

Previous research has found that school discipline outcomes, especially for African American youth, are much harsher when compared to other racial/ethnic groups (Rocuqe, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011). African American youth are often disciplined, suspended, and expelled at

higher rates than their white counterparts. In addition, Blake & colleagues (2011) reported that African American girls are often disciplined for defiance, inappropriate dress, and physical fighting. One might argue that infractions such as fighting and public display of affection are easy to assess objectively and thus punish equitably. The students are given a standard punishment as listed in the school code of conduct, and no other aggravating factors weigh in on the disciplinary outcome. However, behaviors deemed disrespectful or disobedient are open to interpretation, and are often considered subjective offenses. This means that if school personnel "perceive" disobedience or disrespect, they may choose to discipline the student as a result. Studies have shown that when comparing cultural interaction styles, African American behaviors are often perceived as misbehaviors when they were not intended as such (Irvine, 1990). Black girls often have to combat stereotypes that have been falsely attached to their identities. Unfortunately, some school administrators and teachers also harbor the same beliefs and allow their implicit biases to influence how they treat their students. This results in the disproportional punishment seen among African American girls within the school system.

The girls within this study were asked how they perceived disciplinary outcomes and fairness at their school. Their perceptions are important in the attempt to understand their view of the school environment and how they are treated within this institution. If their perception is that they are treated unfairly, this could disrupt their engagement with the school and inside the classroom. This section will explore reasons the girls believe they are punished, along with their perceptions of fairness in the classroom and during the disciplinary process. During the interviews, many of the same behavioral issues were mentioned by the girls across interviews – fighting (verbal or physical), public displays of affection (i.e. kissing), disobedience/disrespect,

and dress code. Two of these may well be easily assessed objectively (i.e. fighting, public displays of affection), but the others are subject to individual perception.

Two of the main reasons reported by the girls for punishment deal with behaviors that are open to interpretation – subjective. These are worthy of more detailed discussion because it is those behaviors that are often misunderstood and disproportionately affect girls of color. When asked about what teachers perceive as disrespect, the girls noted three behaviors – manner of speaking, body language, and speaking too loudly or out of turn. In terms of manner of speaking, Audrey said: "Teachers think the way students say stuff. They might not be coming off as disrespectful but some teachers do find it disrespectful because of the way they say certain things." The perception of black girls having a bad attitude is a barrier that they have had to face not only in the school system, but within society as a whole.

Jade also experienced a negative interaction with a teacher in the hallway due to the belief that she was being disrespectful and talking back. During her lunch break, she was in the hallway talking on her cell phone with her mother and the teacher told her to go back into the cafeteria. School policy states that they are allowed to use their cell phones at this time and can either walk outside to the patio or immediate area outside of the café. Jade explained that she attempted to tell the teacher that she was on the phone with her mom and was going back inside shortly, but believed the teacher misinterpreted her response. She states:

> "I do remember one time I was in the hallway on the phone with my mama and the teacher was like go back into the cafeteria, but I was trying to tell her that I was talking to my mom. And I guess she thought I was talking back to her or whatever, so she followed me to my class to ask the teacher my name when she could have just asked me. And she kept talking about she was gonna write me up and stuff and said that in the hallway. And she see me right there like, I wasn't roaming around the school, I was on the phone with my mama and I guess she thought I was talking back to her."

Jade suggests that her intention was not to be disrespectful, but she was simply trying to inform the teacher why she was in the hallway. However, her behavior was perceived as disrespectful. There are circumstances when students are blatantly disrespectful, but African American girls are automatically stigmatized by the "angry, black girl" label. This is important to document and understand because the label forces them to prove that they do not subscribe to the stereotype. Thus, the girls' behaviors and identity are shaped by their attempt to defy the angry label in an effort to be viewed positively by school personnel.

One participant feels that teachers should gain more understanding regarding when girls are being disrespectful, instead of immediately opting for discipline. Audrey stated "I feel like if everybody just had better understanding in these situations that they could've been avoided because…umm…you know, not everybody knows how things are. Coming off as disrespectful isn't something that you should, it shouldn't automatically happen. You should just ask well are you being serious or you know." Her statement suggests that there are often misunderstandings between teachers and African American girls due to misinterpretations of disrespectful behavior. Audrey also suggests that teachers should form positive relationships with their black female students and even ask the girls if they are being disrespectful in that moment. Her statement indicates the need for building rapport with students and becoming informed on the varying behaviors displayed by African American girls in an effort to accurately identify disrespect when it appears.

Similarly, some forms of body language are also identified by the sample as a sign of disrespect within schools. Both Nya and Chelle reported that using hand gestures when speaking was viewed as aggressive behavior within the classroom. Chelle stated,

> "They feel like aggressive is...they see aggressive as me being like this (punching fist in hand). Like I use my hands when I talk all the time. Certain people see that as aggressive

and I'm like no that's just how I am. But some people see that as aggressive. Some people see me umm…like when I do facials when I talk, they see it as aggression. It's just all…it depends on who you're talking to."

She felt misunderstood by teachers who viewed her actions as aggressive or even threatening. Chelle perceived her hand gestures though as a way of expression. She expressed difficulty with trying to stop using hand gestures because she often uses them during her interactions with her peers. Her friends understand it as an expression, school personnel do not.

Nya also discussed the misconception of body language: "Ok, yes. Being viewed as aggressive. Umm…very strong emphasis on body language. If that makes sense. Oh like balling up your fist, balling up your fist." Teachers perceived this form of body language as threatening and would typically send the girls to the front office for discipline. Although Nya was not convinced that the girls she had seen "ball up their fists" were attempting to intimidate school personnel, she did understand why it might be perceived as threatening. She reiterated the importance of gaining an understanding of each other and their cultural differences.

When asked about restoring the relationship between black girls and school personnel, Nya quoted, "Just being more open and positive, being more accepting of people's differences. People's backgrounds." Her statement acknowledges that there are misunderstandings between the girls and school personnel and that it should be rectified by both sides being willing to accept their differences and learn about cultural backgrounds. Knowledge of the students' background particularly might assist in lessening exclusionary discipline and unfair treatment because school personnel would be aware of when the girls were showing signs of disrespect and when they were not.

Speaking too loudly or talking out of turn was also reported by the girls in the sample as being viewed as disrespectful within the classroom. Traditional gender norms suggest that

women should be soft-spoken, seen and not heard, or only allowed to speak if spoken to. These white, middle-class standards are also taught within public-school systems. If any girl defies these standards, they are at-risk of punishment. Several girls in the sample acknowledged that being too loud in the classroom or hallways could warrant punishment, such as in-school suspension. Jade recalled a young lady in her class that was constantly threatened with punishment because the teacher felt her voice was too loud. She stated, "Well I know one girl that's in my home base. She's like very loud but it's how she is. She's really nice or whatever but she just like really loud. And our home base teacher always threatening to kick her out or something because she's always loud, but that's how she is." Jade believed that the young lady's volume of voice was not indicative of disrespect, but how she spoke to everyone. She did not believe it was fair to threaten to punish her for something that she seemingly "did not have control over." This indicates that when navigating the public-school environment, black girls are forced to adjust who they are in order to avoid punishment or mistreatment.

Karen has witnessed her friends receive punishment because they were "too loud" as well. She expressed that she has never been disciplined for such an action, but " I mean I've had friends who've had to go there for just acting out too many times or for the same reasons, such as like being aggressively loud or disrupting the class and things like that. They've had to go to the principal's office." The girls reported that within the classroom talking too loudly is also equated with disruption. Karen stated that some teachers would warn the girls that they were disrupting class time, while others would immediately send them to the principal's office. Speaking loudly is viewed as an aggressive behavior that must be tamed within schools. School personnel may not be aware that speaking loudly is acceptable within the black community. Therefore, the

reinforcement of cultural competency among school personnel is vital in establishing positive relationships with African American girls.

The school dress code emerged as a primary reason why African American girls were punished at this school. Out of the 20 interviewees, 19 stated dress code as a reason for discipline. Girls who came to school with holes in their jeans, off-the-shoulder tops, or shorts that do not meet the dress code criteria were reported to be at-risk of punishment. The interviewees explained that those punished could call their parents to bring another article of clothing, or if they refused to change their clothes, would receive in-school suspension, or out-of-school suspension.

Jade, Karen, Chelle, and Patricia have each been "dress-coded" and instead of going to in-school suspension, they opted to leave school for the remainder of the day. Each of them stated they believed being punished for dress code was biased and unfair. According to the girls, their punishments were subjective because of their physique which some of the girls equated to race. For example, Patricia stated "white people are skinny and African Americans have more meat on their bones." Many of the girls stated that skinny girls were able to wear clothing that those considered bigger were unable to. Alexis believed "it's all in how your body is made. Skinnier ones they don't get much attention drawn to them like the other ones." She was mainly referring to girls wearing dresses, skirts, or shorts. Girls in the sample believed that skinnier girls did not receive as much attention when they wore shorts. Patricia explained her contention with the mistreatment as "I just feel like if the big girl gets into trouble for it then the skinny girl shouldn't be able to wear it anymore either. I mean if it's the same dress then that's unfair to the big girl that the skinny girl still gets to wear it." Some however did explicitly relate their concern with the fairness of their treatment to race. Chelle felt her treatment was unfair because "some

white girls come in there with their little athletic shorts and keep it moving and nobody is gonna say anything to them."

Perceptions among the girls about the importance of dress code policy in understanding school discipline may well be related to confusion among the girls and within the dress code policy, regarding the specified length of such clothing. Some girls thought that the dresses had to be three inches above the knee, while others thought that they could not surpass their fingertips. Unfortunately, they were unclear about the policy. Further, they perceived that the administration either did not reference the policy or differed on what was deemed the appropriate length. Chelle claimed that the assistant principal never referenced the policy when she was sent to the office, but simply took a look at her skirt and sent her to in-school suspension. Jade received similar treatment when she was sent to the office. She was dress-coded because the principal believed her shorts violated the policy, but Jade believed that the handbook said mid-thigh. For punishment, she stated "I still ended up having to go home because they act like they didn't know what it was." This reflects the subjectivity in punishment that the girls suggest should change.

The subjectivity embedded within punishment for dress code violations appears to result from the girls being unaware of the actual policy, school administrators not referencing the policy during the discipline process, and body type. Each of those areas leave certain girls vulnerable to discipline, while others are given a pass. The girls are unclear of the rules within the dress code policy and administration seem to be inconsistent in punishment, instead of equally "dress-coding" all students according to what is written in the policy. It is possible that staff are also unclear of the dress code policy, resulting in inconsistent punishment. Moreover, the issue of body type and how clothing fits individuals differently led to references to race. The

girls believe that because African American girls' body frame differs from white girls, they are not allowed to wear the same or similar clothing because of how it fits. Such subjective treatment is believed to disproportionately affect African American girls, and the interviewees have acknowledged it as an issue within their school.

Differential Treatment based on Racial Bias

According to many of the girls in the sample, discipline is not equally distributed or objective. Chelle suggested, "they did what they wanted to do to who they wanted to do it to," indicating that school personnel had the authority to abuse their power when issuing school discipline. The girls reported differential treatment came in two ways by race, and within race by perceptions of the student – in particular indications of their commitment to education. The girls suggested that the differential treatment experienced by African American girls derive from assessments teachers and administrators have made regarding the African American race as a whole, and then they categorize black girls based on those who are committed to academic excellence and those they believe are not. Perceptions of bias by race are problematic because it suggests that school personnel have adopted the false images of African Americans advertised by the media and those ideas perpetuated by America. When viewed as disinterested in education, this places African American girls in a unique space of disposability or "othering." Since black girls have to constantly combat the stereotypes placed on them by society, lacking interest in academic success and involvement in activities further categorizes them as disposable and at-risk of mistreatment. Typically, those viewed as disinterested in excelling academically and/or uninvolved in sports are the girls who experience more discipline and mistreatment.

Stereotypical images of African American women negatively affect the school experiences of the girls in the sample. First the girls note differential treatment by race which the

girls related to stereotypes teachers held about African Americans. One important example of this differential treatment came in a story the girls referenced about instances in which their white counterparts were given second chances in some situations that they should have been disciplined for. Both Chelle and Jade recalled instances where they felt their white counterparts were given leniency when they should have been disciplined. For example, a group of white band students were caught cheating on an exam. According to the handbook, they were supposed to be given in-school suspension and removed from the National Beta Club, an honor's society. However, they were simply given zeros for the exam and a stern warning. Another incident occurred with black students cheating on an exam, but instead of only receiving zeros, they were given in-school suspension and removed from their health club. The girls showed sincere frustration when mentioning such events because they do not understand why treatment cannot be "equal across the board." They want everyone to receive equitable treatment regardless of who you know and how you look. However, they recognize the unfortunate reality that race plays a major role in their school experience. Falsified images of black women and girls appear to impact how school personnel issue punishment towards this group.

The girls felt that these differences in treatment by race were related to stereotypes teachers held. Nya stated, "black girls are not treated as equal to Caucasians. Especially being that young black girls are stereotyped. And because of that they are treated differently." During the interview, she recalled seeing many African American girls "in and out" of the office due to what she believed was misconception. She believed that the girls were stereotyped and due to the angry, black girl stereotype, they were sent to the office often. Nya also thought they were silenced during the disciplinary process. School administrators would "cease conversation and their input on whatever they had to say really didn't matter." She credited this silence and refusal

of principals to listen to the girls' "side of the story" to the stereotypes about attitude and drama attached to black women.

In addition, there were comments from three other girls. Jade made a similar comment by referring to black girls as "drama-makers." She explained "I guess they think black girls are trouble makers or getting in trouble at school. When the other ones are doing it too." The other ones she is referencing are her white counterparts; however, because of the stigma attached to black girls, they are the population receiving unfair treatment. Moreover, Danny stated that "people expect black girls to get into trouble more than white girls." According to the responses from the girls, the negative and biased label placed on African American girls has indeed affected their treatment within school, an issue that white girls are less likely to deal with. In fact, during the disciplinary process, white girls are believed to receive favoritism. For instance, Patricia states "I see a lot of white people get more favoritism than black kids do because black kids are viewed as the bad kids." Her perception is that black youth, particularly black girls, are unlikely to benefit from the same privilege as white youth because of the implicit biases and racist ideas that school personnel hold against African American students.

Beyond race, the girls recognized differences in treatment among black girls based on teachers' perceptions of who the students are as indicated by academic achievement, participation in extracurricular activities and disciplinary record. Some expressed the mistreatment received by girls who have not excelled academically or not been involved in extracurricular activities. The girls identified the importance of being involved in sports and academic excellence in navigating their school environment in an effort to avoid unfair treatment. They felt that having the label of smart and/or an athlete appeared to serve as a buffer against mistreatment. However, those that lacked this label were likely to experience some form

of ill-treatment. Chelle reported "like the bad black girls that be all, like groups that's just bad black girls. They don't play any sports, their academics aren't like that. They don't care about them. It's just like you're here to take classes, but that's it." She did not believe that school personnel were invested in truly educating this particular group because it also seemed as if the girls were not dedicated to academic success. Nya stated, "some are viewed as they have a lack of interest or not as enthusiastic as other Caucasians." As a result, Chelle, Nya, and also Audrey suggest that black girls place emphasis on "bettering their academics" and joining a sports team and/or organization.

Additionally, African American girls with an established disciplinary record are perceived by the girls to receive harsher punishment. Interviewees suggested that girls who have been disciplined at least one time are more quickly punished again, maybe even for an act that they were not engaged in. Danny said: "I feel like when you're in trouble so many times, they start making the punishment harsher on you." Similarly, Zara stated that "the main people getting into trouble, everything gets blamed on them." Danny went further reporting that those who have been in trouble before are supervised more closely. "Every little thing they do, they're being watched for." Audrey also suggested that "principals watch them closer than they watch others that don't really get into trouble." It appears that placement of the delinquent or "trouble-maker" label contributes to future discipline. Their statements indicate that there may be a mishandling of punishment and that a particular population is possibly receiving disparate punishment because of their prior misbehaviors.

Patricia believes that favoritism also weighs on the decision to punish a student along with whether or not the girl has been in trouble before. "Sometimes with favoritism, one student may do more than the other student does and that first offense they don't get sent to the office,

but the other student who gets in trouble all the time might get sent to the office a whole lot." Her statement indicates the importance of second chances. In the attempt to be objective, teachers and principals should ensure that all students, no matter the prior disciplinary record, receive equal punishment. Stigmatizing a particular group because of prior offenses further marginalizes them within the school setting.

Understanding the perceptions youths have of discipline and treatment is important because it helps one to understand how the girls understand and internalize how discipline is distributed within their school. All of the girls reported having personally experienced or knowing someone who has experienced inequitable treatment with school discipline. They perceive that teachers and administration are issuing sanctions that are different from their white counterparts, as well as mistreating those girls who have established a disciplinary record. The girls have decided to separate themselves from girls who have been labeled as trouble-makers in order to foster a positive school experience. It is necessary to highlight the differential treatment of girls and all students within school systems because this institution is a reflection of a larger system of class and racialized oppression in society. The same racism, classism, sexism, etc. found within society, are the same factors that penetrate school systems, creating an atmosphere of mistreatment and preferential treatment.

"The Network of Support" (Evasion of Punishment)

"It's not what you know, but who you know" is a familiar quote referring to the power of networking for both professional and personal support. Building such networks is considered to be fundamental to survival in various areas of our lives. Formulating this connection within the confines of the public-school setting could be beneficial for students and the faculty/staff that they form the relationships with. On the other hand, the lack of network could contribute to

inequitable school disciplinary outcomes and have a negative impact on those students without an alliance.

Building this network served as a safety net for the girls that reported personal ties to the school system, have formed healthy teacher-student relationships, and for those with parents that are heavily involved in extra-curricular activities within the school. Out of the 20 girls, only 5 benefited from having a familiar or personal tie to the school system. They perceived that this "network of support" helped decrease their chances of accruing a lengthy disciplinary record and ultimately remain in the educational setting. They feel they are often not given the same objective treatment as those students whose parents are unable to be as active in the education process. Previous research supports the idea that lack of parental involvement can be detrimental for the child, often leading to mistreatment and suspensions or expulsions (McElderry & Cheng, 2014). According to the interviews, parents who request disciplinary hearings increase the chances of their child's disciplinary decision being overturned or dismissed completely. Decisions are not always changed but showing that the family is invested in the child's well-being appears to influence disciplinary outcomes. Analysis of "network of support" also reveals how class differentials are embedded in the discipline of youth within the school system. For these reasons, it is important to highlight how this "network of support" ultimately impacts school disciplinary outcomes.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Prior work has shown that teachers who are proactive in building healthy relationships with their students can prevent misunderstandings and misconduct and diffuse any issues when they arise (Cornelius-White, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011). In this study, teacher-student relationships were an essential component in the evasion of school punishment. This is because,

in part, other than the hallways, the girls stated that most of the misbehavior occurred within the classroom. Being disrespectful, talking "out of turn," and being loud were mentioned as common classroom behaviors which led to girls being sent to the office for discipline.

One example comes from Ava. Ava reported, "teachers think the way that students say stuff. They might not be coming off as disrespectful, but some teachers do find it disrespectful because of the way they say certain things." She continues:

> "Like if a teacher is talking to you and they ask you a question. You may not mean to give a smart response, but if you say like a teacher could ask you umm... well what, why were you late? And you might say umm... because I was in another class and I was talking to the teacher. And you might not try to be coming off as smart but you, the teacher might take it that way because you projected that with your attitude."

Ava's statement suggest that some behaviors displayed within the classroom are misinterpreted but the teacher moves forward with disciplinary action based on his or her perception. Additionally, Jade recalls the experience of a young lady in her homeroom who was threatened with punishment because the teacher felt she spoke too loudly. She recalls, "well I know one girl that's in my home base. She's like very loud but it's how she is. She's really nice or whatever but she just like really loud. And our home base teacher always threatening to kick her out or something because she's always loud, but that's how she is." In this situation, the young lady does not intend to be disrespectful, but because the teacher feels the volume of her voice is too loud and disruptive, she became subject to possible discipline.

The girls realized the importance of having a teacher as an ally within the school for being given a chance before being sent to the office. However, this only seemed to benefit those girls whose parents were actively involved in the school and those who worked within the school system. For example, Addy, Tanya, and Dina seemed to have positive relationships with the

teachers but it appeared to be because of the involvement of their parents. Their stories will be further explored shortly.

Important as relationships to teachers are, unfortunately, the girls also discovered that they were not initially given the opportunity to form those relationships. They perceive this lack of opportunity to teachers believing they were the "drama makers" and always staying in trouble. Jade reported "I guess they think black girls are the drama-makers or always getting into trouble at school." Therefore, many of the girls felt they had to prove that they were not a part of this stereotype through academic success in the classroom, participation in extracurricular activities, and passive demeanor. It was expressed that teachers are likely to form such a bond with girls who "act like they want to be there." Monica, who was an A/B honor roll student and athlete, was fortunate in establishing rapport with her teachers. She was asked how important it was to form a positive relationship with her teacher and she responded with "it's very important because if you start lacking in class, you know they are there to have your back and try to help you get better and improve your grade" She believes her academic achievement and involvement assisted in helping her to form those relationships. Teachers recognized her willingness to learn and she was not "disrespectful in class," so the teachers would assist her, when needed. However, she felt she had to prove to the teachers that she valued her education before they were willing to "have her back." She believed that her academic success assisted in their willingness to help her navigate the school environment. Although Monica found this support beneficial, she believed that other girls who were deemed "loud, disrespectful, and disinterested in learning" were unlikely to receive this same treatment.

"Favoritism" was a common thread in the interviews when discussing teacher-student relationships. Tia mentioned how favoritism affects the likelihood of discipline. She was asked if

the teacher-student relationship played a role in girls being sent to the office. Her response was "sometimes yeah because like I said with the favoritism, one student may do more than the other student does and that first offense they don't get sent to the office… but the other student who gets in trouble all the time might get sent to the office a whole lot." This statement suggests that it may be likely that those who lack this relationship are more likely to receive some form of punishment when compared to girls with this support.

Race often came up in discussions about favoritism. When asked if she thought all girls were treated equally within the school disciplinary process, Jade quickly referred to the importance of one's "race and connections." She stated that "teachers has their favorites who they look out for. They always talk to them, make sure they straight, and spend time with them." Jade explained that making sure the girls were "straight" meant that they assured the girls kept their grades up, set up additional tutoring after school, and if they were in any trouble, the teachers would help "them get out of it." The "them" that she references were her white counterparts. She maintained that they were given priority in forming the teacher-student relationship. Her perception was that black girls were not given the same chances with teachers because they were viewed as the "drama-makers," when "the other ones (white girls) were doing it too" (engaging in "drama"). Drama was defined in several ways - talking about other girls, arguing, or being disrespectful in the classroom. Jade's statement suggests that African American girls are stigmatized and treated unfairly among faculty members, even when displaying similar behavior as their white counterparts, which has been supported through literature (Skiba et al., 2011; Finn & Servoss, 2013; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013).

Additionally, girls in the sample perceived that girls who have an established disciplinary record are also at-risk of being sent to the office more than others who are not stigmatized by a

"reputation." Grace mentioned student-teacher relationships were strained at school and maintained she was a direct recipient of it. She goes on to explain that teachers feel:

> "I talk too much, that I'm drama filled, and umm……just that I have a bad aura about me. Like, I can go into a room if my, say my teacher tells me to go to somewhere and get something from that teacher. It's automatically like no eye contact, there's none of that."

Unfortunately, Grace felt she had been labeled as a "bully." She presumed many teachers and students viewed her negatively though she was unable to provide an exact reason why they had such a negative perception of her. She felt that the girls were "jealous," but she believed the teachers were listening to gossip floating around the school and refused to form their own relationship with her. As a result, Grace felt targeted by teachers and sent to the office, mostly for dress code violations. She believed that if she had closer relationships with the teachers, they would not target her so much and would actually speak with her about her clothing before immediately sending her to the office.

Chelle explained that her relationship with teachers at the high school was mixed. "Some teachers love me to death and some teachers just can't stand me." Her experiences with some of the teachers that she felt did not like her was baffling because she had never taken a class with them. She believed they had a negative view of her because of what other people were telling them and not through personal interaction. She believed these teachers would describe her as drama, loud, and talkative, some of the same rhetoric as the stereotypical disrespectful and loud black girl. When asked about her interactions with teachers, she stated, "they don't like me, and I think it's from another teacher telling them that I'm loud and always involved in drama with girls, but it ain't like that." She felt that she was supported by the teachers she formed a positive relationship with but targeted by those that she perceived disliked her. When Chelle got into a physical fight at school, she explained how a teacher who witnessed the fight and attempted to

"break it up" advocated on her behalf. She was trying to avoid fighting, but the other young lady struck her first, placing her in a situation where she felt she "had to fight." This teacher's account initially helped her to receive a lesser punishment. According to the disciplinary handbook, she was supposed to receive 10 days out-of-school suspension, but the teacher's account of the fight and her mother's involvement at the school contributed to her only receiving 2 days in-school suspension.

Research has suggested that teachers tend to report less warmth in their relationships with black students compared with white students (Hughes, 2012). When there is not an opportunity to form relationship with teachers, black girls are at-risk of mistreatment and disparate punishment. Each of the girls mentioned they either evaded harsh punishment because of a healthy relationship with a teacher or were recipients of discipline/unfair treatment due to the lack of teacher-student relationship. Importantly the girls perceived that any positive relationships with a teacher was based on the girls "proving their worth." The girls explained that if they maintained good grades, displayed a positive behavior in the classroom (i.e. asked questions, raised their hands), and were active in clubs and/or sports the teachers would then determine that they were "worth" forming a relationship with. In addition, the girls reported unfair treatment based on stereotypes. The girls expressed that teachers continue to view African American girls as disrespectful, loud, and drama-filled without trying to gain understanding about them individually. Those stereotypes are detrimental to their educational experiences and continues to push them out of the classroom and the school. Based on this idea, one could posit that school push-out is occurring because a particular population (girls with a disciplinary record) is receiving recurring punishments simply because they have gotten into trouble before, ultimately removing them from the classroom, and creating an opportunity for them to disengage

from the learning environment. School disengagement has been related to school dropout, initiation of substance abuse, and delinquency (Henry et al., 2012). Therefore, teachers have to remember to treat all students fairly and discontinue preferential treatment for one group of girls, while pushing out others.

Parental Involvement

Along with relationships with teachers, the girls reported the importance of parental involvement. A majority of the girls stated that parents/guardians who are heavily involved in the school system are more likely to be knowledgeable about school processes including those involving discipline, as outlined in the school discipline handbook, thus able to advocate on behalf of their children during the disciplinary process. In addition, parents form relationships with personnel. This relationship and knowledge of the girls' families tells school personnel how they were raised, creating a perception of who the child truly is.

One participant expressed how an initial disciplinary decision was overturned due to a disciplinary hearing requested by her mother. Chelle recounted her physical fight with another young woman which initially resulted in a 2 days in-school suspension. However, her decision was overturned after the parent of the other young woman requested a hearing to understand why her daughter received out-of school suspension.

> "I wake up the next day and my mom is like there's no need. And I'm like what? And she's like you have 3 days OSS. And I'm like for what? And she's like the, they said they had a hearing with the girl's mom and couldn't get the tape of the girl, umm bumping you, so they're just going off what her friends said, and her friends said you bumped her. So I got 3 days OSS. Like all this is about, like all their parents are up there talking trash to the administration. Saying how she only had 2 days ISS. And he's just trying to find something just to shut them up. Like that's all it is. I got those 3 days of OSS and it was like you didn't hear anything else."

Chelle suspected that the parent's involvement and presence in the disciplinary process assisted with overturning her outcome. Chelle assumed that the parent was aware of her ability to request

a hearing to advocate for her daughter, and although her daughter's decision was not changed, she ensured Chelle had a harsher punishment. Therefore, her involvement possibly impacted the disciplinary outcome.

Additionally, Jade had a decision pertaining to her dismissal from the high school's honor society overturned as a result of her mother's advocacy. Due to sickness, Jade was unable to attend an event and receive the necessary points to remain in good standing with an honors club she was a member of. Although she had appropriate documentation from her physician regarding her illness and absence from school, the teachers who sponsored the honor club elected to revoke her membership.

> "They tried to kick me out of beta club because I didn't get my points but I was out sick that week. I didn't get my points and when I tried to talk to my teacher or the sponsor, they was like it's nothing I can do, it's too late. And I should have reached out to them, but every time I did they wasn't at school or didn't contact me back."

Fortunately, Jade's mom had been actively involved in the school system since Jade was in kindergarten and knew that she had options to challenge this decision. She requested a hearing with the sponsors and principal, and the decision was overturned. Jade was excused from the event and reinstated in the honor club. Without her mother's involvement and advocacy, Jade was convinced her decision would have remained the same.

When parents are actively involved in their child's school, the parents also form relationships with school administration and personnel. They are able to hold conversations that are unlikely to happen when they are not constantly present. Therefore, teachers and administrators believe they learn more about the family and their values, ultimately feeling a sense of connectedness that they are unable to form with parents who cannot participate in activities at the school. When this happens, teachers and administrators may feel obligated to support the children of those parents and possibly assist in evading punishment. Addy believes

that her teachers are lenient with her and provide additional support because of the relationship that her mom has with the school. She states, "They know my mom wouldn't raise me to be bad or a certain way." Addy suggests that teachers believe her mom would not approve of disrespectful behavior in the classroom, or any action that could lead to possible discipline. When she does get a bit "rowdy," teachers threaten to call home. Due to their relationship with the mother and how her family is perceived, Addy feels she is able to evade punishment that other girls are likely to receive if they show signs of disrespect or disruption.

Tanya, who also has siblings at school, has a similar story to Addy's because of her mother's relationship with teachers and involvement at school. She has never received a formal punishment. Her teachers typically offer verbal warnings within the classroom before threatening to call her mother. Tanya believes that her mother's involvement at school and her relationship with the teachers possibly aid in her school experience. She reports "we (her siblings) get away with a little bit because we never really get into trouble because our mom raised us well." Similar to Addy, Tanya believes that school administration and personnel are aware of her mother's expectations (i.e. valuing academic achievement, respecting authority). Tanya recognizes there are limits but she understands that the relationship helps she and her siblings avoid punishment. These two factors, parental involvement and rare discipline, allows them to evade punishment.

Familial or Institutional Connections

Finally, the girls' stories indicated that children of teachers and those that have personal ties with administration at the school may receive alternative treatment regarding disciplinary outcomes. Having such a connection served as a protective barrier for Grace, Teresa, and Margaret. Grace's mother became a staff member at the high school during her sophomore year.

As previously stated, most of her office referrals were due to dress code violations. Grace would tell her mother that she felt targeted by teachers, but her mom really did not understand the allegations until she started working at the school. Once her mother came to work at the school, she noticed how some girls were able to wear certain clothes, while others were disciplined for it. Therefore, Grace's mom had a conversation with administration about fairness and equitable treatment and punishment for all girls who violate the dress code policy.

> "Like when she got there it was better in terms of, you're not gonna do my daughter like this because I seen how you do someone else. Or I seen how you let this person slide, so I'm not gonna let you just do her like that. Which before it was she's home and she doesn't understand what I'm trying to tell her."

Since her mother was now employed by the school system, Grace's mother witnessed disciplinary outcomes for many students. Having this firsthand knowledge allowed her to advocate on behalf of her daughter to assure that she was not mistreated. However, without this unique position, Grace's mother would be like most parents who are not employed by the school system or involved – unaware of subjective discipline and unable to advocate on behalf of their children. Grace recognized that although her mother's presence at her high school limited the amount of fun she had, without her position as a staff member she would continue "not understanding what I was trying to tell her" in regards to her treatment by school administration and teachers.

Dina has also benefited from having her mother both involved in and employed by the school system. She admits that she has never gotten into any "real trouble" that resulted in her being punished. Dina explains though that she does talk a bit too much in class and often jokes around with her friends. Dina believes that, because her mom is an employee of the district, she is held to a high standard but receives verbal warnings from her teachers or they call her mom. She stated, "Even if I do a simple thing they're just gonna go back and tell what I done." She

does not believe her classroom behavior warrants a call home but is grateful that she has not received further punishment. Without this network of support, it is likely that Dina would have received a more serious form of discipline at some point.

Finally, Margaret's mother was also a teacher at one of the local elementary schools and she emphasizes the importance of having that connection. There were times that she was sent to the office for being "disrespectful or defiant," but there were also instances where the principal would call her mother instead of opting for formal discipline. She states, "Yeah they would call my mom sometimes and I wouldn't get in trouble. My mom would just talk to me about it that night." Although Margaret had been formally punished before, she also had informal discipline, a privilege that she felt other students may not have. She believed there were some cases that she should have been sent to the office but having a familial connection to the school-system helped to evade most school discipline.

Internalized Racism

Many have heard the phrase, "you have to work twice as hard, to get half of what they have." Particularly within the African American community, children are taught the importance of hard-work at a young age, understanding that there are institutional barriers they will encounter throughout life. Children are taught they cannot simply be "good," but they must be great in all areas of their lives. Middle-class black families begin teaching their children early on to value academic excellence, to obey the rules and values of society, and to exude a passive demeanor that is not threatening to their white counterparts. African Americans are aware that their presence alone may be intimidating to those that possess unrealistic and racist beliefs about their race but believe that possessing the aforementioned qualities will create opportunities for them to prove that they are different.

The idea that having certain qualities will create opportunities that others of their race might not have creates the idea of tokenism, or the "chosen one" who defies all of the stereotypical beliefs about their culture. Rosabeth Kanter defined tokenism as

> "not merely deviants or people who are different from other group members along any one dimension. They are people identified by ascribed characteristics or other characteristics that carry with them a set of assumptions about culture, status, and behavior highly salient for majority category members. They differ from dominants, not in ability to do a task or in acceptance of work norms, but in terms of secondary and informal assumptions" (Nieman, 2016; Kanter, 1977, p. 73).

African Americans have to show their abilities extend beyond the negative assumptions that others believe about them, and once they do, whites place them within this token category that differentiates them from the overall race.

Even when placed in this unique category because of privilege, status and/or education, blacks continue to face discrimination. Through the racism that they encounter, they internalize their experiences and use what they learn to better their circumstances. Recognizing all of the stereotypes placed upon them as being incompetent, lazy, loud, and violent, they attempt to prove they are the total opposite. One way in which they do so is by excelling at the normative, white middle-class standards of society.

The girls within this sample acknowledged the importance of working within the bounds of normative feminism. As shown above, their belief is that if they follow school rules, remain respectful to school personnel, and value academic success, teachers and administrators will notice and they will be less likely to receive punishment or experience mistreatment. This belief among the girls is most powerfully seen, however, in the girls' belief that a change in behavior will change the outcomes of those who experience discipline and unfair treatment. Delia felt "If the girls would try to work on themselves and stay out of trouble and not get into things that don't deal with them" then they could evade the possibility of punishment. She went on to

explain that girls should "…stop engaging in drama or something really stupid that doesn't have to do with academics." Delia's statements represent what most African American youth believe will better their life chances – stay out of trouble and make good grades. Alexis had a similar response and stated "I think they could start following directions. Students should follow directions and be more nicer and just know that the teachers are trying to help them." Adhering to school rules is vital when trying to avoid punishment or mistreatment. Everyone is expected to obey rules, but students of color have to take extra precautions because of the stereotypes that they have to combat each day. Many of the girls previously stated their belief that stereotypes impact their treatment, so following rules is necessary to evade punishment. Middle-class standards are imposed and the sample recognizes the need to obey rules create a positive school experience.

Along with a change in behavior, and perhaps even more tellingly, the girls suggested that a change in attitude should occur to better their school experiences. African American girls have been tagged with the "angry, black girl" label and have to combat that stereotype daily. Within the classroom, their attitudes are often misinterpreted for disrespect when not intended as such (Irvine, 1990). Alexis put it this way: "Don't say it with an attitude. Just like explain calmly why you were late or something instead of raising your voice or being disrespectful." Moreover, Danny stated, "I guess they could not be as loud and the teachers understand that they aren't trying to be loud." Nya credits her fair treatment in the classroom to her positive attitude and good grades. Her suggestion for girls who are disciplined is: "They could've came into the classroom with a positive attitude. And I mean they could've worked a little better on their attitudes and their common courtesy" (i.e. speaking to teachers when entering the classroom). The passive demeanor embedded within white, middle-class femininity is illuminated in their

statements. Both Alexis and Danny acknowledge that attitude, tone, and volume appear to be factors in the treatment of black girls at their school. Since teachers perceive some attitudes as disrespect, the girls must change those areas in the attempt to better their experiences. Patricia believes that the girls must "show they have goals in life." By doing so, they cannot engage in misbehavior, are forced to change their "attitudes" and volume of their voices, and follow rules.

The most compelling thought that emerged from their statements is the idea that they have to be perfect. It appears that there is no room for error in their behaviors within the school environment. They cannot speak too loudly or misbehave at any time because of the likelihood that they will be disciplined and further stereotyped. What is most unfortunate is their inability to make a mistake and be given a second chance. They carry the burden of trying to prove their worthiness to school personnel and show that they are indeed "tokens." Forcing these girls to feel that they cannot make a mistake or "just have a bad day" further oppresses their position within the school and society. Audrey suggests that instead of punishment for misunderstandings, "the teacher and the student just take time to maybe step to the side outside the classroom or wherever umm and just talk about it, then they would better understand each other. And they wouldn't have to be going through the whole discipline process."

It is acknowledged that some girls may show signs of blatant disrespect and cause some disruption in the classroom, but prior research suggests that black youth are often punished for subjective offenses that are perceived as disrespectful by their teachers, and some of the girls in this study expressed that teachers should attempt to do a better job at differentiating between disrespect and culturally acceptable behavior (Skiba et al., 2002, 2011; Wallace, 2008; Lewis et al., 2010). Based on the statements from the girls, the majority of the responsibility to change their school experience is placed on black girls, even by the girls themselves. However, teachers

should also form positive rapport with their students and familiarize themselves with the various cultures represented within their classrooms. Simply put, the girls expressed that they want to be understood and respected within their school. This can only happen if school personnel prioritize the well-being of all their students above the implicit biases and stereotypes that they hold regarding youth of color.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Introduction

The goal of this research study was to examine the school disciplinary experiences of African American girls. Due to the increase in suspension rates for this particular population (Morris, 2016), it was necessary to gain insight regarding their disciplinary experiences and navigation of the school environment from their perspectives. The perspectives discussed within this work represent those of a middle-class background, and those who have adopted white middle-class standards. Most of the sample interviewed within this study had no direct experience with school discipline. Although they have not experienced much punishment within the school setting, they recognize and acknowledge the experiences of other black girls tagged with negative and stereotypical labels. The girls whom they discuss are labeled as "drama-makers," loud and disrespectful, and devaluing academic success by school personnel. Additionally, they believe that black girls who have an established disciplinary record are also stigmatized and mistreated within this public-school. According to the girls in this sample, school discipline then does not directly impact them but negatively affects girls of a different background. In this case, middle-class privilege benefits the girls in the sample, while girls without this leverage suffer. The interplay of race, class, and gender is found within the results. Ultimately, the results show that the adoption of white, middle-class femininism by African American girls must occur in order for a more positive school experience. The analysis regarding perceptions of fairness, reasons for punishment, and relationships among girls will be further discussed.

Findings

The girls in the sample mentioned that the relationships among girls in the school created objective problems that led to punishment. Often, the conflict among girls caused arguments or physical fight to ensue, usually deriving from what they believed to be "he said, she said" and jealousy. Based on this idea of toughness, the girls stated that they observed others get into altercations to gain respect among their peers. However, the respect that they gain among their peers is not viewed the same with their teachers. Insight into the relationships among girls at school helps one to understand its' impact on possible discipline.

It is important to note that the girls within the study do not fully recognize the benefits of their class privilege and believe that if those girls who are experiencing discipline would simply change their behaviors, their school experience would be positive. Many of them advised the others to quiet down and show that they are invested in learning, so teachers would be willing to assist them in their success. The girls explained that the girls experiencing discipline were subject to punishment more often because of their loud and assertive behavior – the angry, black girl stereotype – and dress code violations. Many of them perceived the punishment of other black girls as unfair, but because they were not directly impacted, they believe that attitude changes could fix their mistreatment. Their advice ultimately suggests that they adhere to white middle-class standards in order to effectively navigate their environment. This suggestion reflects what they believe has helped them stay out of trouble. Such a suggestion is not that simple. Unfortunately, many of them have yet to consider that maybe school personnel should make more of an attempt to understand their diverse student population, rather than resort to punishment that disproportionately affects youth of color.

In spite of some in the sample not having direct experience with school discipline, their narratives were compelling. They observed the mistreatment of their counterparts but felt a disconnect from disciplined black girls because they believe they behaved in a positive manner within the school setting. They were able to benefit from the network of support (i.e. teacher-student relationships, parental involvement, familial ties to school) to evade punishment in most cases of misbehavior, which directly derived from their middle-class privilege. The narratives spoke to an "us" versus "them" concept, where the girls chose not to befriend the girls who were disciplined, those who were ultimately from a different class background. There was a fear that association with "trouble-makers" would somehow taint their image in the eyes of school personnel. Isolating themselves from the other girls helped them to effectively navigate the school without negative experiences. Their advice to girls who "misbehaved" was to transform into a more positive, passive being. They did not take into account that from their birth, they have been equipped with middle-class expectations and values. When reared in that environment, it may be much easier to display that form of behavior because it has been embedded in the brain. If a girl is not raised middle-class it does not mean that she is less than someone else and incapable of good behavior, but her idea of acceptable behavior may be different. This is why it is important for school personnel to truly form relationships with and understand their student body. By doing so, they would not be so swift to punish black girls for punishment they perceive as disrespectful but would be more informed on how to differentiate between disrespect and culturally acceptable behavior.

Within the findings, the issue of white privilege was evident in the discussion of dress code and the perception of fairness. Many of the girls felt that because they were African American and their body shape was different from white girls, they were more likely to be

punished for a dress code violation. They recalled instances where they were wearing similar clothing as their white counterparts, but school personnel would not send them to the office as quickly. Moreover, the girls believed that white girls were not punished for similar behaviors as black girls at their school. One respondent made the statement that African American girls would get into trouble even when "they were doing it too." There is this belief that school personnel are quick to punish black girls for the same or similar behaviors of their white counterparts. Such findings suggest how white privilege has assisted white girls in evading punishment within the school setting. They are less likely to receive formal discipline because of the privilege that they possess and the whiteness that is upheld within schools as an institution. Although women within American society have traditionally been viewed as unequal to men, particularly white, heterosexual men, white women are still viewed as superior to African American women. Therefore, that hierarchy manifests within public schools. African American girls from middle-class backgrounds may find ways to evade punishment but they are still unable to benefit from the ultimate privilege, which is whiteness.

The perceptions of this particular sample was even more riveting due to the idea of perfection that was illuminated within the narratives. Their academic success, involvement in organizations, and passive behavior assisted in what they believed to be successful navigation at their school. As a result of their belief that they had to adhere to middle-class standards, also known as whiteness, they were unknowingly placing pressure on themselves to be perfect teenagers. This does not suggest that they should misbehave, but they should accept that they too can and will make a mistake at some point.

As an African American girl that grew up similarly to those within the sample, I can understand why they have this perception of excellence. Black middle-class families like mine,

instill the thought that mediocrity is unacceptable because of the identities we possess and the barriers we will face. Although excellence is the goal, it is important to note that as flawed beings mistakes are inevitable. The girls within this sample have yet to understand, due to their youth, that even with a perfect scholarly record, some members of society will continue to view them through a stereotypical lens. The girls in this research have "othered" girls who have been disciplined in an effort to gain the respect and support of school personnel, failing to realize that regardless of their middle-class privilege society has already marginalized their existence as African American women. They may not realize that they have conformed to a standard of whiteness that is deeply embedded in all institutions within society. As African Americans, we have been trained to subscribe to forms of acceptable behavior set forth by the white middle-class. Ultimately, our identity and behavior are shaped and molded by those same middle-class values. We view ourselves through the lenses of white America and behave in ways that completely deviate from black stereotypes. The middle-class measuring rod within schools are simply rules put in place by the white middle-class. The girls in this sample identify as "good girls," those who are scholarly and have not established a disciplinary record. They behave in ways that are deemed acceptable to school personnel and the white middle-class, thus assisting them in the possibility of evading punishment. Unfortunately, even when adhering to the rules, black girls are still more likely to receive punishment or experience some form of mistreatment than their white counterparts. This disproportionality stems from a system created to protect whiteness and discipline anything that deviates from it. The girls in the sample may not have direct experience with discipline, but they are subconsciously experiencing trauma through their observations of mistreatment and punishment of other black girls and the pressures they face to sustain whiteness within the school.

Theoretical Lenses

First, critical race theory was utilized to explore how race, endemic to American life and the institutions within in it, shapes the institution of school and experiences within it. In education, critical race theory seeks to expose the ways in which race impacts and is insinuated within educational policy and the lived experiences of students and teachers. Moreover, it locates the experiences of racial inequality within the intersection of race and property rights to reveal power dynamics and dominant interests that are at work. This research explores the lived experiences of black girls within the educational institution in an attempt to understand how their race impacts their overall experiences. Not only did the respondents believe that other black girls were experiencing mistreatment at the hands of a majority white faculty, but class inequality was also revealed. The sample benefited from middle-class privilege, or a standard of whiteness that has historically been afforded legal protection (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011). Whiteness has been used as a form of ideological and epistemological property in schools that signifies ways that the social construction of race is connected to teaching, worldviews, and values to maintain the superiority of whiteness in a patriarchal society (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011; Slater, 2017). By adopting this standard, the girls in this study were able to avoid the disciplinary process. However, girls who do not adhere to whiteness within this institution are more likely to be mistreated and punished. Within this study, white, middle-class dominant interests are at work and heavily impact the behaviors and navigation of middle-class African American girls within the public-school environment. Moreover, the dominant interest continues to marginalize and disproportionately affect black girls who lack middle-class privilege.

Secondly, intersectionality theory explains that the intersections of cultural constructions can reproduce racial and gender hierarchies and disparities among youth (Crenshaw, 1991).

Generally, there has always been a racial hierarchy between whites and African Americans, but this research reveals an additional scale. This study suggests that the racial and gender hierarchy consists of not only white and black girls, but also middle-class black girls and those who have experienced discipline and from working-class families. Majority of the girls in this study had no experience with school discipline but were able to recall the experiences of others who they did not identify with. This hierarchy contributes to the disparities seen within this school system. The girls in this study chose to isolate themselves from others who did not adopt their values. Although the sample consisted of African American girls, their assimilation to middle-class values placed them a notch above those who did not. This ultimately assisted in the division of their racial/gender group, suggesting that those who were academically successful and passive (middle-class) was valued more than those deemed trouble-makers (working-class).

Third, labeling theory can be used to help understand how stigma attached to a label can change the trajectory of someone's life. Becker (1963) suggested that those labeled an outsider are those who have not conformed to what society deems as acceptable behavior. The girls within this study would not be labeled as outsiders because they were raised to conform to middle-class standards of acceptable behavior. They choose not to deviate from society's expectations. On the contrary, those girls viewed as "trouble-maker" or "drama-maker" are outcasted by their peers and school personnel within the school setting. The application of this informal label has negatively impacted their school experience, causing them to be at-risk of punishment, often for minor infractions. Moreover, the label of black and working-class is attached to stigma that also appears to affect their treatment at school. African American girls are often viewed as angry and loud due to stereotypes created by society and the media. The angry, black girl narrative in conjunction with the working-class label situates these girls as outsiders in

society and at school. Without an advocate in this environment that understands the unique circumstances of these girls or parents who are able to readily fight on behalf of their children, they are vulnerable to unfair discipline.

The girls in this study were automatically labeled black but were able to defeat odds and evade punishment because of their middle-class background. Since they identified as girls who valued academic success and had not received formal discipline, their behaviors were often controlled by their desire to maintain a positive image in the eyes of school personnel. Therefore, discipline was rarely necessary for these girls because they policed their own behaviors throughout the school day. As a result, they had to separate themselves from those labeled as "drama-makers" in order to have a positive school experience and maintain their reputations.

Recommendations

The girls within this study were not directly impacted by school discipline but acknowledged the mistreatment their counterparts experienced. It is a necessity to ensure that all students are treated equally within their schools, instead of stigmatized by their skin color. Therefore, recommendations for cultural competency training, administrative knowledge of the handbook, a yearly review of disciplinary data, and a mentorship program are offered to improve the school experiences of African American girls.

In order to effectively change the culture of this school and others across the country, school personnel must become aware of their biases so that it does not affect their treatment of students, and they should embrace the diversity represented in their schools. Each student is a representation of diverse experiences, values, abilities, understandings, approaches, and beliefs (Chiu et al., 2017). School systems should be proactive in attempting to understand their student populations and become aware of any inequitable treatment in their schools. This rural school

district has not offered cultural competency training to their teachers, nor has it focused on equity and inclusion. Next school year (2019-2020) will be their first time offering equity training to their faculty. Based on this finding, the first recommendation is to simply become aware of the issues at the school. They cannot fix the issues at their school if they are unaware. Then they should offer the appropriate training to assist teachers and administrators in understanding the students that they interact with daily. Research supports that teachers need targeted training to impact their perspectives of working with diverse students (Meaney et al., 2008; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2013). Gaining knowledge about the backgrounds of their students and becoming aware of their biases could assist in decreasing suspension rates for students of color, and possibly alleviate the pressure to be perfect that is felt by the middle-class girls in this sample. School personnel may never fully arrive at cultural proficiency in all applicable aspects, but training could provide private opportunities to explore their biases and engage in self-reflective practices, such as journaling, so that they are always aware of areas that need improvement.

After considering the training for school personnel in the areas of cultural competency, diversity, and inclusion, teachers could be more proactive in engaging disconnected students within the classroom. Teachers have to take responsibility for not attempting to reach out and understand why their students are not actively participating in the classroom. There could be multiple reasons for the disconnect but teachers should try to figure out what barriers are in place preventing them from learning and forming relationships. One way to do so is by utilizing the skills learned in their training of cultural competency. If there is a cultural barrier, it is the responsibility of the teacher to tear it down. The teacher may not always be successful in their attempt but he or she must exhaust all options to ensure all students are learning and treated fairly in the classroom.

Additionally, the interviewees felt that disrespectful behavior displayed by some girls in the classroom was simply misplaced aggression stemming from external factors. Oftentimes, traumatic experiences that occur outside of the school environment impact the behaviors of youth once they enter the classroom. Children who have been traumatized may exude over reactive emotions and are likely to engage in coercive and noncompliant behaviors that lead to harsh parental response (Snyder, Schrepferman, & St. Peter, 1997; Lytton 1990). Aggression, anger, sadness, etc. may indirectly affect their encounters with school personnel, causing teachers to believe that they are disrespectful. However, if teachers are unable to identify trauma in their classrooms, they may choose to discipline the student. For girls, high rates of trauma are found among this population with conduct problems and delinquency (Fleming 1997), and additional research shows rates of childhood abuse and co-occurring delinquency in adolescent girls have reached as high as 80 percent (Smith et al., 2006). Considering the impact that trauma has on the lived experiences of African American girls, schools must integrate a plan to ensure they are not revictimizing girls who already experience trauma in their communities and households. Naik (2019) asserts that schools must address the mental health needs of their students. There is a need to hire mental health counselors, utilize universal screening techniques and assessments for mental health, and train school personnel to identify trauma as it arises. Integrating appropriate resources for mental health and trauma could assist in decreasing school punishment for perceived disrespectful behavior for African American girls, behaviors that possibly derive from traumatic experiences.

The girls impacted by school discipline could benefit from support groups or programming within the community to assist in helping them deal with stressors from the school environment. The black club women's movement was instrumental in mentoring young African

American girls in navigating their lives and institutions within society. Similar models to this movement, such as Greek sororities and social groups, have also taken on the responsibility of mentoring and serving as support systems for girls within their communities. Unfortunately, the community where the sample resides does not have such support. Therefore, groups who provide resources and support for black girls to de-stress and communicate with one another about their concerns at school should be established or brought into the community to mentor African American girls. Their concerns would be communicated in a safe environment where they could freely express their issues within the school, without fear of backlash. The girls could also receive comfort in knowing that they are supported by others within the group. This support system could alleviate the stress felt by the girls and assist them in establishing a positive school experience.

Knowledge of the school disciplinary handbook could also assist in consistency with discipline. Many of the girls in the sample mentioned that disciplinary outcomes were not always enforced by what was outlined in the handbook, particularly when considering dress code violations. It is important for parents and students, and especially school administrators to be knowledgeable of the disciplinary handbook and consistently enforce the policy across all groups. Since administrators are in a position of power, it is their primary responsibility to ensure that they are treating all students according to what is listed in the handbook. Parents and students should also read and become knowledgeable of school policies, but because school administrators are issuing the punishment, they must be consistent with their discipline. Consistent enforcement could lessen disproportionate discipline for African American youth.

As previously mentioned, this particular school district has not tackled the issue of disparity at their schools. They will begin this summer with inclusion and equity training,

targeting the areas of school discipline, lack of minority representation in honor courses, etc. Since it appears they are actively trying to become aware of their issues, they should also implement a yearly review to discuss school discipline at all levels (i.e. elementary, middle, and high schools). This report would include disciplinary data, suspensions (ISS/OSS) and expulsions, discussing race, gender, special education, LGBTQ populations, etc. in an attempt to understand the groups disproportionately affected by punishment. As a result, faculty could engage in conversations regarding disciplinary practices and brainstorm ways to make their school a safe and welcoming environment for all students, regardless of race, class, or gender.

Hiring more African American staff could also assist with enhancing the school experiences of African American girls. At this high school there are only five black teachers. For minority populations, representation matters. The girls are not in a position where they can fully educate their white teachers about their culture. It is possible that staffing additional African American teachers could help bridge the gap between the girls and other school personnel. Cultural competency training along with direct relationships with more African American teachers could assist in further educating white school personnel of African American culture. Moreover, the girls would have more teachers that they could speak with about their experiences and understand their point of view. This school system should consider diversifying their staff with more black teachers in an effort to ensure all students feel represented and have someone that they can connect with and understands their culture.

The final recommendation was inspired by a conversation with one of the girls in the study. She suggested that the school implement a mentoring program, where girls were paired with teachers throughout the school. Because of the misconception regarding African American girls, she felt that the mentoring program would allow the teachers to get to know the girls they

are teaching. She stated, "there needs to be more understanding and respect between the two."

During the interviews, some of the girls expressed that at times perceived signs of disrespect in

the classroom was misunderstood. With a mentoring program, the teacher could foster

relationships with girls they normally would not interact with. This idea could also serve as a

form of cultural competency training because of the direct interaction. A mentoring program

could be beneficial in shaping positive outcomes for students. Bruce & Bridgeland (2014) report

that youth with mentors are more likely to report engaging in positive behavior, aspire to enroll

in and graduate from college, and engage in productive and beneficial activities than youth

without a mentor. Implementing such a program could assist in fostering positive relationships

between school personnel and African American girls and contribute to successful life outcomes

for the girls.

Limitations and Future Research

When considering the limitations of this study, one primary concern is that the narratives

represented in the sample does not reflect those directly impacted by school discipline. Most of

the stories within this work are based on their observations of other girls' experiences with

punishment. Few of the sample have been sent to the office for discipline. Due to the snowball

sampling method, the girls who were referred for the interviews were very similar in background

to the initial interviewees. Therefore, the sample reflects who the initial girls referred for the

interview – those from middle-class backgrounds. Their unique experiences are assumed to be

drastically different from girls from working-class backgrounds and have experienced

punishment at school. Despite the lack of experience with discipline, this sample offered their

perspectives of fairness, reasons they believed girls were punished, and ways they were able to

avoid punishment and mistreatment. In the future, research should continue to focus on the inclusion of all classes because it helps to understand the role of class.

Additionally, some would consider race as a limitation within this study. Although the scope of this research was to specifically focus on the African American experience, some may consider the perspectives of girls from other racial/ethnic backgrounds necessary to display differences and/or similarities in their experiences. This study targeted the school disciplinary experiences of African American girls because of the glaring disproportionality in their suspension rates when compared to their white counterparts (Wallace et al., 2008; Morris, 2016; Crenshaw et al., 2015). As the researcher, it was important to attempt to understand how black girls navigate the school environment in the wake of such high disciplinary rates. Ultimately, the sampling method of school-aged African American girls was intentional. Future research could include the experiences of girls from other racial/ethnic groups to further understand the role of race.

While this research focuses on the school experiences of girls, a study gaining the perspectives of African American boys could also be insightful. They too face disproportionate punishment and are three times more likely to be suspended than their white counterparts (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). Offering this group the opportunity to speak out regarding their perceptions of school discipline would assist in further informing school systems and the general public about the treatment of black boys. Oftentimes, black boys are stereotyped as criminal, threatening, and dangerous (Oliver, 2003). If school personnel hold these beliefs, it is possible that they are treating African American boys unfairly due to stereotypes. Therefore, future research should attempt to understand how black boys navigate the school institution as well.

Another suggestion for future research is to understand the perspectives of school personnel regarding their interactions with girls. Researchers could gain insight about what teachers and administrators deem disrespectful behavior, why some groups are punished more than others, and how they think they can better interact and educate their students of color. Examining their perspectives along with the narratives from this study and others could assist in creating a positive school environment for both parties. Programming and policy could be implemented to assist in a fair and equitable space for all students.

Future research could also focus on subjectivity in school discipline in general, and then specifically the dress code policy. Research supports the notion that African American girls are typically disciplined for subjective behaviors, such as disrespect (Rimer, 2004; Hirschfield & Celinska, 2011). Additional understanding regarding the idea of subjectivity, as well as examples to support what it is and how it negatively affects black girls could be useful in changing disciplinary practices. Moreover, according to the girls in the study, dress code were a primary reason girls were punished at their school. They believed that discipline for this violation was inequitable and that African American girls were targeted more than white girls. In addition, they suggested that school administrators rarely consulted the dress code policy, causing confusion regarding acceptable clothing. Research examining the actual policy and how it is administered could unveil both gender and racial disparities.

Contributions of the Study

This research study contributes to the literature regarding school disciplinary experiences. Oftentimes, attention is given to African American boys, neglecting the narratives of their female counterparts. Works such as *Pushed Out* (2012), *Between Good and Ghetto* (2010), and *Getting Played* (2008) shed light on some experiences within the schools and their communities, but

overall this particular area is under-researched. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader literature because we cannot fully understand the issue of school discipline without understanding the unique experiences of African American girls and boys.

The girls within this sample differ from those represented in the aforementioned works because of their middle-class upbringing. Therefore, this study explores school experiences through a different lens – middle-class African American girls. Although they have not directly experienced discipline, their navigation throughout the school is driven by their decision to assimilate into middle-class culture as black women attempting to avoid their "trouble-maker" counterparts and maintain a positive image among school personnel. They perceive the treatment of their peers as unfair, but believe that in order to be successful, they have to separate themselves and prove they are unlike the others. This study adds to the literature on school discipline and offers a privileged perspective from black girls who attempt to evade punishment and mistreatment each day by adhering to white middle-class femininity. It also highlights the subtle racism at play among a more privileged population.

An additional contribution of this study is the focus on a rural population. Urban communities are often represented in literature, while rural communities continue to be overlooked. The sample area is representative of a small school district. Despite the small student population when compared to much larger urban districts, there is a need to research these areas as well. Specifically, rural areas in the south with deep histories of racism and discrimination that continue to permeate institutions and impact current policies and practices. School experiences may vary depending on the culture of the community. Therefore, this research contributes to the literature by illuminating the perspectives of girls from an understudied community.

Lastly, this study shows the girls actively constructing themselves within a gendered, raced, and classed structure. The concept of symbolic interactionism mentions the idea that people interact with things based on the meanings ascribed to those things, and the ascribed meaning of things comes from our interactions with others and society (Blumer, 1969). African Americans are ascribed stereotypes and are often treated unfairly as a result. If African Americans are constantly viewed in a negative light and people continue to spread these beliefs to the general public, they will continue to be placed in a marginalized position in society. Since the girls in the sample perceive that other black girls are often stereotyped and mistreated at their school, they have chosen to adapt to white, middle-class norms and form their identity around what school personnel deem as acceptable behavior. They are actively fighting against the structural constraints that limit who they are and their decision-making. The girls recognize that one wrong decision could negatively affect their school experiences, placing them in the same category as all black girls at the school. Therefore, they have chosen to follow the standards set forth at the school and identify as "token" black girls that differ from the stereotypes imposed by society.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Relationship with School Personnel

1. Do you think girls at your school are treated fairly by teachers, principals and counselors?
   a. Would you say it's mostly positive, mostly negative, or a mix? Can you elaborate?
   b. Have you experienced or observed negative interactions between girls and school personnel?
      - Can you describe to me a situation when a negative interaction escalated?
      - How could this situation have been avoided?

Violence among Girls

2. What are the reasons girls get in trouble at your school?
   Do boys and girls get in trouble for different things?

   a. Have you ever seen girls get into a verbal fight (argument) at school?
      - Why were they fighting? Explain reasons why the argument began.
   b. Have you ever seen girls get into a physical fight (actually hitting each other) at school?
      - Why were they fighting? Explain reason why the fight began.
   c. Has there ever been a time when it appeared that the girls involved in the fight did not really want to fight? Can you recall this event?
      o Did it appear that the girls were pressured into fighting by others? How so?
   c. Have you ever gotten into a fight at school?
      - If so, walk me through the incident.
      - Did you feel pressured to fight?

School Infraction Record

3. Have you, or a close friend, ever gone to the principal's office for violations of the school code of conduct? What was that about?
4. Do you think that all girls are treated the same when it comes to school infractions?
   a. Are there any groups that get singled out?
      i. Why do you think this is so?

5. Can you recall a time when you (or a close friend) was sent to the principal's office because your actions were taken out of context? (for example: talking too loudly, viewed as aggressive, having a "smart mouth," etc.)

   - What was the end result? In-school suspension, out of school suspension, alternative schooling?

Treatment after Disciplinary Sanction

6. After given a sanction, how were you treated at school?

 a. By peers? Teachers? School administration?

 b. How do you think people viewed you?
   - Do you think anyone viewed you more negatively?
   - If so, how did they show this opinion? How did they act towards you?

 c. What do you think could be done to change how they view you [use their language, e.g., restore your image], if anything?

 d. In what ways could the relationship between girls and school personnel improve?
   - How can the girls go about improving this relationship?
   - How can school personnel go about improving this relationship?

APPENDIX B

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

10/5/2016

Dear Parents,

We are conducting a study about girls' experiences in school, including relationships with school personnel and classmates. To conduct this study we need the participation of middle and high school-aged girls (ages 12-19). The attached "Permission for Child's Participation" form describes the study and asks your permission for your child to participate.

Please carefully read the attached "Permission for Child's Participation" form. It provides important information for you and your child. If you have any questions pertaining to the attached form or to the research study, please feel free to contact Vanessa Panfil or Asha Ralph at the numbers below.

After reviewing the attached information, please sign the "Permission for Child's Participation" form if you are willing to allow your child to participate in the study. Even when you give consent, your child will be able to participate only if he/she is willing to do so.

We thank you in advance for taking the time to consider your child's participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Panfil, Ph.D.
757-683-4238
vpanfil@odu.edu

Asha Ralph, M.S.
252-287-9234
aralph@odu.edu

PERMISSION FOR CHILD'S PARTICIPATION DOCUMENT

The purposes of this form are to provide information that may affect decisions regarding your child's participation and to record the consent of those who are willing for their child to participate in this study.

TITLE OF RESEARCH: *Young Women's School Experiences*

RESEARCHERS: *Vanessa Panfil, Ph.D., Old Dominion University*
                                                Asha Ralph, M.S., Old Dominion University

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY:

Recently, there has been much media coverage of girls' behavior in schools that attracts the attention of school administrators, but very little attempt has been made to talk to girls themselves about their experiences within the school setting. This research project will seek a basic understanding of girls' perspectives regarding their own experiences at school.

With this research, the young women will discuss their relationships with school administration, friendships or associations with other young women, perceived negative interactions among girls at school, school discipline, and suggestions on how to improve relationships with school administration and girls at school.

If you decide to allow your child to participate in this study, your child will be interviewed face-to-face about these topics. Your child's participation in the in-depth interview will take approximately 45 – 90 minutes.

At the conclusion of all interviews, the researcher would like to gather participants together for a focus group to further discuss topics relevant to school experiences, such as girls' relationships with school personnel and classmates. Focus groups would foster in-depth conversations where the participants could gain insight on shared experiences from each other and hear different perspectives on the same topic. The focus group will be held at Stoney Branch Baptist Church located in Gates, NC. Your child's participation in the focus group will take approximately one hour. Signing this consent form also means that you agree to your child participating in the focus group at a later date; you will not have to sign another form.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA: In order for your child to participate in this study, your child must be middle or high school-aged (ages 12-19), and must identify as female.

RISKS: Participants may discuss previously documented school disciplinary infractions. Although the disclosure of these during the interview presents no additional risks to participants, they may experience some embarrassment or discomfort when discussing fights or negative interactions in school. However, the researchers hope that talking about the incidents would be no more embarrassing or uncomfortable than the incidents themselves.

BENEFITS: The participants will be given the opportunity to openly discuss their experiences in a space where they will not be judged for their past actions. The girls may actually enjoy being interviewed. Overall, this research can provide benefits to school personnel and middle/high-school-aged girls, since insights regarding how girls are treated by school personnel and how to improve student-administrator relationships are important for girls' success.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS: Participants will be offered a $10 Wal-Mart gift card for completing the interview, or a $5 gift card if they begin the interview and then stop before it is complete. At the focus group, participants will be provided with a meal.

NEW INFORMATION: You will be contacted if new information is discovered that would reasonably change your decision about your child's participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Participants will choose a fake name at the beginning of the interview so that your child's real name will not be attached to her responses. Only researchers involved in the study or in a professional review of the study will have access to these consent forms, audio recordings, and interview/focus group transcripts. All data and participant information will be kept in a locked and secure location. Lastly, investigators will be responsible for notifying you as the parent or guardian and the proper law enforcement authorities if your child discusses wanting to harm themselves or others.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE: Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is alright to refuse your child's participation. Even if you agree now, you may withdraw your child from the study at any time. In addition, your child will be given a chance to withdraw at any time if she so chooses.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY: Agreeing to your child's participation does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation. In the event that your child suffers harm as a result of participation in this research project, you may contact Dr. Vanessa Panfil at 757-683-4238, Asha Ralph at 252-287-9234, or Dr. Tancy Vandecar-Burdin, Chair of the Institutional Review Board, at 757-683 3802.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: By signing this form, you are saying 1) that you have read this form or have had it read to you, and 2) that you are satisfied you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers will be happy to answer any questions you have about the research. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Vanessa Panfil at 757-683-4238 or Asha Ralph at 252-287-9234.

If at any time you feel pressured to allow your child to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, please call Dr. Tancy Vandecar-Burdin, Chair of the Institutional Review Board, at 757-683 3802, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research (757-683-3460).

Note: By signing below, you are telling the researchers YES, that you will allow your child to participate in this study.

Your child's name (please print):   _____

Your child's birth date: _____

Your name (please print):   _____

                                    Relationship to child (please check one):
                                        Parent: _____
                                        Guardian: _____

Your Signature: _____

Date: _____

<u>INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT</u>: I certify that this form includes all information concerning the study relevant to the protection of the rights of the participants, including the nature and purpose of this research, benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human research participants and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice the parent to allowing this child to participate. I am available to answer the parent's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of the study.

Experimenter's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

ASSENT FORM

Young Women's School Experiences

My name is Asha Ralph and I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University.

I am asking you to take part in a research study because I am trying to learn more about girls' experiences within schools. I want to know about your school experiences and relationships with school personnel and your classmates, including both positive and negative interactions. Additionally, I would like to know if you have ever gotten into trouble at school and how that affected your relationships with peers, teachers, and principals. I'm also interested in your ideas for improving the ways that students and school personnel interact with each other.

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in an interview. As previously stated, you will be answering questions about school experiences, relationships with school personnel, negative interactions among girls, whether or not you have ever gotten into trouble, and how you were treated after that experience. This interview is expected to last from 45 minutes to one hour and 30 minutes. Please be aware that the interview will be audio recorded, unless you are uncomfortable with being recorded. In that case, I will take notes of the interview by hand. You will receive a $10 gift card for completing the interview. If you choose to stop before the interview is complete, I'll still give you a $5 gift card.

You do not have to be in this study. No one will be mad at you if you decide not to do this study. Even if you start, you can stop later if you want. You can choose not to answer a question if you don't want to. You may also ask me questions about the study.

If you decide to be in the study, I will not tell anyone else what you say or do in the study. Even if your parents or teachers ask, I will not tell them about what you say or do in the study. However, as the study investigator, I will be responsible for notifying your parents and the proper law enforcement authorities if you discuss wanting to harm yourself or others.

Signing here means that you have read this form or have had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study.

Signature of subject_____

Subject's printed name _____

Signature of investigator_____

Date_____

VITA

Asha M. Ralph
Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice
Old Dominion University

Education

Ph.D.	Criminology and Criminal Justice, Old Dominion University (Expected 2019)
M.S.	Criminal Justice, North Carolina Central University (2015)
B.S.	Criminal Justice, North Carolina Central University (2013)

Peer-Reviewed Publications

Pitman, B., Ralph, A., Camacho, J., & Monk-Turner, E. (2017). "You mind putting out your cigarette please? Social media users' interpretations of the Sandra Bland arrest video. *Race and Justice.* doi: 10.1177/2153368717705420

Manuscripts Under Review

Ralph, A. "It's not what you know, but who you know: Exploring the impact of the 'network of support' in treatment and school disciplinary outcomes for African American girls" (Submitted to *Critical Criminology* April 2019)

Selected Scholarly Presentations

Ralph, A. (2018). "It's not what you know, but who you know": Exploring the importance of the 'network of support' for African American girls, American Society of Criminology, Atlanta, GA.

Ralph, A. (2018). School disciplinary outcomes for African American girls: Exploring school experiences in a rural public-school system, Virginia State University 6th Annual Conference on Social Injustice, Petersburg, VA.

Ralph, A. (2016). #SAYHERNAME: Perceptions of the Mad Black Woman within the Context of Black Lives Matter, The American Society of Criminology, New Orleans, LA.