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Whitney Hanley  
*University of Central Florida*



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**KEEPING GIRLS' VOICES AT THE CENTER OF OUR WORK: A  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE DISCIPLINE  
EXPERIENCES OF BLACK FEMALES WITH DISABILITIES**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the School of Teaching and Learning  
in the College of Community Innovation and Education  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term 2020

Major Professor: Rebecca A. Hines

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## **ABSTRACT**

Disciplinary exclusion is disproportionately enforced with Black students with disabilities. Researchers in this area typically examine the overuse of disciplinary exclusion using homogeneous samples narrowed by race, gender, or disability category; however, implications of the overuse and misuse of discipline have rarely been explored at the intersection of race, gender, and disability. Furthermore, Black girls with disabilities and their experiences with discipline are often muted, or overlooked. Due to perceived defiance, which current researchers support, the actions and choices of Black girls are under heightened surveillance.

Responses to their behavior often results in inequitable use of discipline. A master narrative of Black women and girls in our society, driven by social perceptions of race, gender and defiance, is magnified when disability is considered. Sociohistorical theory asserts these stereotypes are socially constructed and perpetuated from a history of the dominant, white, male culture controlling the standards of normalcy. Subjective evaluation of acceptable behavior often is filtered through biases and causes disparities in the treatment of individuals with multiple, marginalized identities. This phenomenological study interviewed eight, Black girls with disabilities to explore their needs, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of school discipline. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Colaizzi's methods of phenomenological data analysis (Colaizzi, 1978; Sanders, 2003). The themes of power, voice, and awareness emerged from each girls' story, resulting in suggestions and implications for practice and policy.

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my Mammaw, Mattie Edna Lewis-Hanley. Mammaw, I love and miss you dearly. I am because you are. Every day I strive to honor the legacy you left with us, always being kind to others and working hard. As I finish my studies (as you would call them), I smile at the thought of you giving me a hug and big kiss on the cheek and saying, "I'm proud of you."

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank God for guiding me to this moment. I know it is God's grace and mercy that have helped me through. It was my faith, and the reminder that I am part of something greater than myself that gave me the confidence and determination to succeed.

To my Mom, I love you with all my heart and appreciate your encouraging messages along the way. Unfortunately, for every year I was in this program, we lost a family member. You remained strong and kept going through the grief. Seeing and observing your tenacity all my life is what got me to this accomplishment. Thank you Mamma. I love you.

To my Dad, I love you and appreciate you always being in my corner. You never cease to reminding me of how proud of me you are.

To my family, Thank you for always reminding me that I am part of and connected to a constant source of love and support. We have been through a lot over the past three years. Love and loss, but one thing that has remained is our coming together to fellowship, with food, love, and laughter. Although I missed out on some special occasions and celebrations, I appreciate you all always being understanding and supportive of me pursuing my degree. Rest in Peace to my family members who passed away during my time in this program: my uncle, Sherman Cowherd Sr., my grandmother, Mattie Lewis-Hanley, my uncle Ardell Hanley Jr., and my uncle Perry Washington.

To my dissertation committee, Dr. Rebecca Hines- “It’s only crazy until it’s not!” Your motto I will continue to live by. You are a true example of disruptive thinking in action. Thank you for your leadership and mentorship. You’ve given me so many different opportunities in this program. One of my most cherished being part of the growth and development of the Exceptional Education Undergraduate Program. I am so proud. Thank you for that and every other experience in between under your mentorship, stretching my thinking and reminding me the importance of thinking differently. I appreciate your unyielding support of my research interests and constantly reminding me not to forget the “why” of it all.

Dr. Lisa Dieker- Thank you for being supportive from the beginning as I figured out my “three words.” You always reminded me to come back to those words. Assisting with the doctoral program expanded my knowledge of the important work of managing grants and other behind-the-scenes work. Your attention to precision and leading by example has helped me become better at articulating my why and the importance of clarity as I develop my position as an expert in my research. As I move forward I will always remember your advice to be confident and humble.

Dr. Martha Lue Stewart- Thank you for always helping me to keep my work central to my passion for contributing to the community. I appreciate your style of mentorship, challenging me to think and perform beyond expectations. I will always remember your reminding me, “You’re the real deal!”

Dr. Constance Goodman- Thank you for helping me shape my research towards the larger social justice agenda and reminding me to look beyond my positionality to pursue

and maintain the voices of the girls throughout this study.

To my cohort, You ladies became my home away from home. We all had our individual and collective trials and tribulations throughout this program, but through it all, we were there for one another and became a family. Missy and Annette- We did it! So proud of you ladies and looking forward of what's next for us. Missy, we've had our share of productive struggles, and grown from them together! I've loved working alongside you with Dr. Hines and our undergraduates. Beyond that, your genuine team/family spirit. Annette, thank you for always keeping us practical, especially early on when there was a tendency to overthink. You were that constant reminder that "We got this." Morgan, my doc suite mate and desk neighbor! I'll miss our lunch breaks and chats in 315K! Thank you for being that critical colleague I needed, always pushing me to and helping me articulate my research clearly. Amanda, I have learned so much working alongside you. Your determination through these three years inspired me to keep pushing through the challenges and also expanded my self-awareness. Can't wait to sign up for our next run together! Jen, it still amazes me this will be your second one! I will always cherish our first project together at the Farm Workers Association; it was my first experience intersecting the health and special education field. I appreciate your confidence in me from the start!

To Faith and Matt- You were my first doc student contacts when I started the program. Matt, thank you for helping me get settled from the big move and mentoring me through my first year with words of advice and other tips regarding coursework and dissertation that proved to be helpful! Faith, I shadowed you my first two years in our assistantship working with the LEAD project and was amazed by your diligence. Thank you



for patiently answering all of my many questions in 315K and being willing to always listen and give feedback.

To Donna, Angelica, Jillian, and Timara- I love you! Thank you for always reminding me to take care of myself first and being my lunch bunch on campus. Catching up and supporting one another with life in and outside of the program and somedays, just meeting up to check in. Donna, thanks for being my other mother on campus. Reminding me it's ok, to say no sometimes and always take a moment to stop and take a break. Angelica, you've always been a great friend and colleague. From day one, you offered mentorship and being a sounding board as I navigated each year. Thank you. Timara, you pushed me to be the best version of myself. As one of your student mentors, I'll have to say I'm so proud of you. You hit the ground running when you started and continue to do great things. I look forward to seeing you here next year! Jillian, as soon as I started the program you took me under your wing, and even after graduating and moving on to your faculty position, still manage to check in. Thank you for all the words of advice and keeping me centered on my focus while also reminding me to keep a balance between schoolwork and life. Means more to me than you'll ever know.

Nick- My LEAD mentee and friend! I have enjoyed working with you and appreciate your willingness to approach all tasks as a team. You definitely helped me enhance my technology savviness when it comes to helping organize conference travel for our group, recruitment, and doc student interviews. Good luck in your last year, and I look forward to seeing what's in store for you in the future!

To my friends from back home in Atlanta and KY (Kelley, Posey, Tasia, KDP, and Kentra), Thank you for keeping me rooted in my reason and being that comfort and solace I needed in moods and times of stress and struggle. Also, thank you for providing laughs and not letting me take myself too seriously!

To my Holmes Scholar Family, thank you for providing me the support I needed and the opportunity to see a reflection of myself while fellowshipping amongst other underrepresented scholars, faculty and mentors in Higher Education. Representation matters and it was essential to my success. Whitney, Shelly and Michelle, thank you ladies for taking me under your wings as my student mentors, colleagues and friends. Your words of wisdom along the ways that helped me get through the productive struggles. Seeing you in your success motivated me to keep going. Amber and Claudine, We did it! Came in together and finished strong! Love you ladies.

To the HIVE, My fellow interns in D.C. (Rebecca, April, Michelle, Marcus, Eric, and Justin), Thank you for making the D.C. experience a memorable one. From the sightseeing, briefings we attended together at the capitol and projects we collaborated on at OSEP, were all experiences I know were made better because of our bond. I now have nationwide colleagues and friends for life.

To Cass, Aly and my Waterside Family, Thank you for all of the great workouts and social events these past three years! CrossFit Waterside was both my release and a source of motivation through this program. I love my Waterside family.



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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

CC Critical Consciousness

EBD Emotional or Behavioral

Disorders ED Emotional Disturbance

IDEA Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

NLTS-2 National Longitudinal Transitional Study-2

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*“No matter how old....or what position somebody is in, no matter if I am a child and somebody else is an adult, I think respect is definitely a two-way street.” -Katrina, 13, twice exceptional, gifted and OHI.*

Research has demonstrated Black students, both boys and girls, receive disparate disciplinary measures while in school compared to their same age, White peers (Anyon et al., 2016; Cardichon & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Carter et al., 2017; Gregory et al., 2011). Current research regarding discipline disparities attributes the racial gap in achievement and disengagement to the instructional time lost when students are suspended or expelled (Losen, 2018). Disparities increase for students who receive special education services for emotional or behavioral disorders (E/BD) (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013). Evaluation for and placement in special education services is disproportionate for Black students with disabilities, given the inconsistency of educators to consider the child’s holistic experience (Artiles et al., 2010; Blad, 2015; Blanchett, 2009). This lack of consideration, ultimately, highlights how vital it is for educators to be culturally responsive in their approaches to instruction and assessment (Blanchett et al., 2005; O’Keefe & Medina, 2016).

Black students with disabilities perform at lower rates than their White peers with disabilities and have an average overall grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. Conversely, White students with disabilities have an average overall GPA of 2.4 (Newman et al., 2011). Researchers suggest implementing culturally responsive pedagogy can reduce

disproportionality and contribute to the academic success of Black students with disabilities (Gardner & Mayes, 2013; Jones, 2011; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Patterson, 2005).

However, implementing culturally responsive pedagogies, thus far, have not produced outcomes which are significant when race, gender, class, *and* disability categories are considered (Carter et al., 2017; Fine, 2014).

Current researchers suggest a key component to produce better outcomes is the development of relationships with and establishing high expectations for Black students with disabilities (Bergman, 2017; Blanchett et al., 2005; Gatlin & Wilson, 2016; McMahon et al., 2011; Murray & Naranjo, 2008). Initiatives such as "My Brother's Keeper," developed during President Obama's White House Initiatives, were designed to advocate mentorship, create support networks, and teach skills to youth of color who are at risk of poor outcomes (<https://www.obama.org/mbka/>). However, these mentorship initiatives focus primarily on boys (Annamma, 2014; Skiba et al., 2002; Srsic & Rice, 2012). Currently, strategies such as positive behavior supports, interventions, differentiated education, and supportive services neglect to acknowledge how students' needs vary based on race, disability, class, and gender.

Black girls with disabilities encounter a struggle often ignored at the intersection of their identities, due to the mismatch of perception, reality, and experience. The issues Black women and girls face are often perceived through a lens focused on Black men and boys. According to Collins (2000), such oppositional thinking is rooted in hierarchies of oppression, including the categories white over black, or male over female. Black girls with disabilities are sometimes then subjects of narrowed and oftentimes neglectful approaches to

interventions and supports, omitting the perspective of the Black woman and girl (Annamma et al., 2013; Petersen, 2009; Srsic & Rice, 2012). In the area of discipline disproportionality, the primary focus has been on that of poor Black boys with disabilities (Grant, 1984; Evans-Winters, 2007). Seldom exploration of how, if, and when experiences differ for Black women and girls has been asserted by researchers as symbolic *silencing* of the Black woman's voice and removes the power and control they have in their lives (Annamma et al., 2013; Collins, 2000; Ferri & Connor, 2010; hooks, 1992; Petersen, 2006; Petersen, 2012). Further, issues of gender often are reported relative to White women and girls. "Shifting the center" to include the lived experiences Black girls with disabilities will affect both perspective and analysis, challenging researchers and educators to remove the filters that dominant groups bring to their observations (Andersen & Collins, 2006, p.73).

The outcomes for Black girls, including those with disabilities who have had multiple experiences with discipline, extend beyond the classroom and often result in interactions with multiple systems, including child welfare and juvenile justice (Annamma et al., 2019; National Women's Law Center and NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 2014). Over one-fourth of Black girls are referred to law enforcement, and 43% are arrested on school grounds. These are alarming rates, considering they only make up 17% of the population (Annamma et al., 2019; National Women's Law Center and NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 2014). These percentages are not disaggregated based on disability status; therefore, exploration of the status of Black females with disabilities and the extent these punitive disciplinary measures affect this population is sparse.

Researchers and education advocates note the use of suspension is linked to an

increased likelihood of incarceration and other forms of criminal surveillance (Annamma, 2014; Crenshaw & Nanda, 2015; Pusch & Holtfreter, 2018). Factors such as school climate and implicit biases have been cited for influencing the degree and prevalence of adverse experiences for Black girls. Adultification also has been cited as disproportionately affecting this population. Adultification demonstrates the perception of Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than other girls their same age (Epstein et al., 2017). Although current literature has not more narrowly focused on Black girls with E/BD and their beliefs, attitudes, and needs related to the educational system, interest is growing in this area (Annamma, 2014; Gage et al., 2012; Srsic & Rice, 2012).

As the literature expands, researchers need to consider the context in which these girls develop their identities and senses of self, framing their experiences within the complexities of existence as a Black girl with a disability in both the past and present. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe and explore the lived experiences of Black girls with disabilities at the intersection of race, gender, and disability.

### **Statement of Problem**

As a result of the dominant class normalizing behavior expectations in school, quality of life is different for individuals who identify with multiple, marginalized identities (Danforth & Smith, 2005; Dumais, 2002) with an increased risk of inequalities, including a higher likelihood for exposure to violence and harm (Hernández-Saca et al., 2018; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2007; Zahn et al., 2010). Students diagnosed with

E/BD are more likely to be excluded from the general education classroom than any other disability category (Achilles et al., 2007; Pevidor & Lightle, 2009; Srsic & Rice, 2012). These exclusionary experiences typically align with disciplinary issues early in the student's educational career and predict later arrests and court involvement. Students with E/BD are three times more likely than other students to be arrested before leaving school; twice as likely as students with other disabilities to be living in a correctional facility, halfway house, or on the street after leaving school; and twice as likely as students with other disabilities to be teenage mothers (The Southern Poverty Law Center, 2007).

Teachers and school officials operate within the micro-politics of schools based on national, local, and school policies. Individual assumptions of student behavior, often create a culture where differences equate with deviance (Danford & Smith, 2005). Losen et al. (2014), in their study on discipline inequities, found Black students categorized as E/BD were predicted to have an increase in suspension rates for all Black students, primarily due to the assumptions and expectations of student behavior and the connection to marginalized identities. This prediction has been confirmed by the assertion of discipline as a relational construct (Greene -Esq & Allen, 2017; Hipwell & Loeber, 2006; Vavrus & Cole, 2002; Walker et al., 1995). Monroe (2006) confirmed similar findings, concluding administrators' and teachers' expectations of behavior are shaped by perception, culture, and context. Chakrabarti-Ghosh (2008) conducted a cross- cultural study to explore the perceptions, identification, and treatment of students with behavior problems or disorders in India and the United States. Study participants included teachers, parents, and students within residential settings in India and high school students in New Mexico. Students' ages ranged

from 12 to 18 years old. The factors that influenced teacher perceptions and understanding of behavioral problems were familial backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, environments, peer influence, cultural practices, societal expectations, and cultural gaps between home and school.

The direct academic impact of exclusionary discipline practices is the loss of instructional time. Researchers have shown a direct association between out-of-school suspension and long-term adverse effects on students and their school performance (Achilles et al., 2007; Losen, 2018; Losen et al., 2015). Currently, few qualitative studies with a primary focus on Black girls with disabilities exist. Therefore, the extent to which exclusionary discipline affects Black girls with disabilities remains unclear. Gaps in the field fail to examine the confounding relationship between gender, race, and disability as it pertains to Black girls. Furthermore, minimal research has been conducted beyond the acknowledgment of differential treatments across the characteristics of disability categories regarding race.

### **Theoretical Framework**

“Oppressed people resist imposed definitions and images of themselves by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, and telling their story” (hooks, 1989, as quoted in Benjamin, 1997 p. 39). Similar to previous examinations and methods of qualitative analysis, the researcher used a social framework to explore and describe the lived experiences of Black girls with disabilities. The social model of identities explains difference as a product of human and social interactions (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In the



continued struggle for equity, Black girls with disabilities are met with balancing of multiple consciousnesses, race, gender, class, and disability oppressions (Annamma, 2014; Annamma, 2019; Morris, 2007; Petersen, 2006; Pusch & Holtfreter, 2018; Srsic & Rice, 2012). Considerable differences exist both within each gender and between the two genders (Collins, 2000; Wehmeyer & Rousso, 2001). The marginalized experiences associated with being Black, female and or disabled are rooted in societies' pervasive biases, stereotypes, and discrimination (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1992; Wehmeyer & Rousso, 2001). Therefore, the critical conscience theory serves as the framework for this qualitative study, along with both socio-historical and intersectionality theories. These theories provide the framework to critically explore and describe the lived experiences of Black girls with disabilities, particularly how the intersection of their multiple identities inform their social conditions and position.

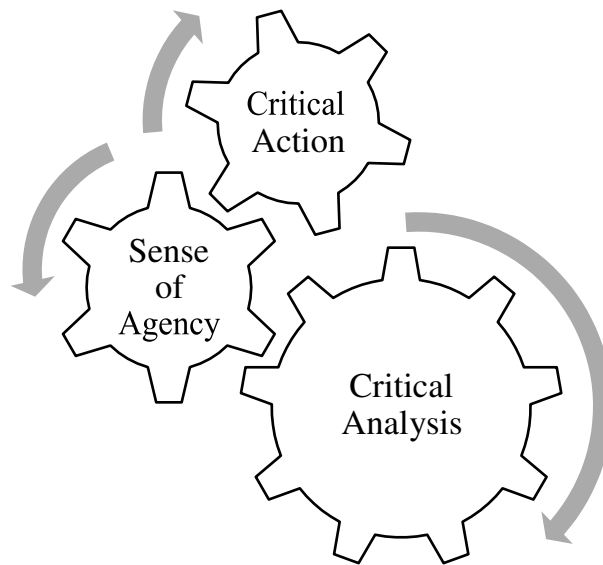
### ***Critical Conscious Theory***

While researchers and practitioners agree school is a place for gaining academic knowledge, establishing a sense of self and community, engaging in social and emotional development, (Cohen et al., 2009; Thapa et al., 2013; Wehmeyer & Rousso, 2001); these experiences are not equitable for all students (Bal et al., 2019; Conroy & Brown, 2004; Greene- Esq & Allen, 2017; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2007; Walker et al., 1996). Black students, as well as those with disabilities, are part of a generational struggle for access, equality, and equity within the school system (Annamma, Ferri, & Connor, 2013). The struggle is evident through a history of emancipation from bondage (U.S. Const,

amend. XIII); desegregation of schools, *Brown v. Board of Education*; equal access to public resources and facilities; and inclusive education (Civil Rights Act, 1964; Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975; Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004).

However, researchers in the 1970's acknowledge a "false universalism" in perception, asserting almost no attention given to the gender differences in social experiences (Eisenstein, 1983). Therefore, the researcher used a critically conscious framework to explore the disciplinary experiences of Black girls with disabilities.

Critical Consciousness (CC) is a broadly defined term introduced by Brazilian educator, Paulo Friere (1973). It is the ability to perceive and take action against the oppressive elements of society; socially, politically, and economically. Critically conscious educators learn to analyze social conditions and act to change them (Freire, 1973). To support the development of CC, the researchers proposed the cycle shown in Figure 1 (El-Amin et al., 2017; Friere, 1970). The development of CC begins with acquiring knowledge about the systems and structures which sustain and create oppression (critical analysis), developing a sense of capability (agency), followed by a commitment to take action (critical action). Using this theory as a framework for data analysis and description allowed the researcher in this study to provide an in-depth understanding of current conditions. The CC framework supports culturally relevant pedagogy; considering culture, perspectives, and experiences of oppressed or marginalized groups (Carter, 2008; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Sanders, 1997).



**Figure 1** Freire's Cycle of Critical Consciousness

### **Socio-historical Theory**

Education scholar, King (1988), asserts, "the relative significance of race, sex, or class in determining the conditions of black women's lives is neither fixed nor absolute but rather, is dependent on the sociohistorical context and the social phenomenon under consideration" (p. 49). Use of the socio-historical theory to explore the phenomenon considers how histories of social categories of differences, such as race, gender, and disability, shape everyday experiences. The socio-historical framework also considers theories of intersectionality and disability studies in education (Connor et al., 2008; Ferri & Connor, 2010). Disability as a label can lead to unfavorable outcomes regarding access to education, housing, healthcare, transportation, and other levels of independent functioning (Banks et al., 2014; Cannon, 2016; Hernández-Saca, 2017). Understanding disability from a social model, such as the socio-historical framework, distinguishes impairment (biological

and functional, limitation) and the disability (social oppression which results from the category) (Bourdieu, 1986). Gender-focused frameworks mostly disregard race as a factor, which affects girls (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Gill & Erevelles, 2017; Hernández-Saca, 2017). Historically, girls and women with disabilities often were kept from the world, while society encouraged boys to be in society daily (Asch & Fine, 1988; Wehmeyer & Rousso, 2001). The socio-historical model considers the consequences of social exclusion, whereas many medical and psychological models emphasize interventions, to normalize individuals. Some researchers argue that difference and disability often are interpreted as deviance, which contributes to disproportionality of discipline and identification within special education (Artiles et al., 2016; Artiles, 2017; Bornstein, 2017; Hernández-Saca, 2017; Munyi, 2012; Valencia, 2012). Bornstein (2017) argued such ableism and bias set a narrow expectation of *normalcy*, often defined by dominant, white cultural norms. Resistance to dominant cultural norms often has resulted in punishment, isolation, labeling and other oppressive consequences for individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1986; Carter, 2008; King, 1988).

According to education scholar Phillip Jackson (1968), a hidden curriculum exists, which describes the three Rs of school: rules, regulations, and routines. Jackson (1968) asserted success in school depends on a student's mastery of the hidden curriculum. Critically conscience researchers and supporters of culturally relevant pedagogy, such as Delpit (1995), assert students from diverse backgrounds have a challenging time navigating school because of misalignment with and resistance to conforming to such hidden expectations. Historically, these expectations were maintained and enforced in favor of

white, middle class citizens (Petersen, 2006).

Exploring the experiences of Black girls with disabilities through a socio-historical lens, the researcher acknowledges their experiences are intertwined in a history of managing multiple, marginalized identities (Banks et al., 2014; Gold & Richards, 2012; King, 1988; McLinden et al., 2018). The socio-historical framework not only considers the historical formation of intersecting identities, but also determines how identity groups and others make sense of who they are at their current intersections (Boskovich et al., 2019). According to Ferri and Connor (2010), “A scarce number of studies focus on the experiences of girls of color with dis/abilities or critically examine how being a girl shapes their experiences as students across time and space” (p. 108).

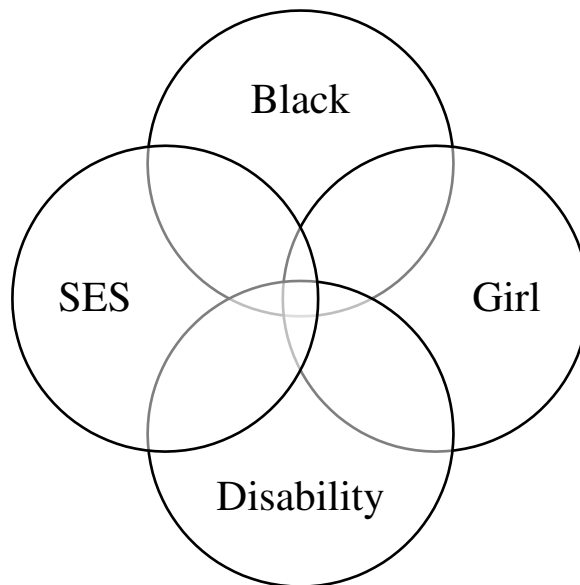
### ***Intersectionality Theory***

Intersectionality is rooted in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory. This theory is a method, a disposition, a heuristic, and analytic tool (Carbado et al., 2013). Crenshaw (1991) created the term intersectionality by asserting, “women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas” (p. 1246).

Intersectionality emphasizes the location of complicated and contested configurations of power (Choo & Feree, 2004). Utilizing intersectionality as a lens to analyze and describe the lived experiences of Black girls with disabilities highlights their own perspectives in the educational system while they manage multiple, marginalized social identities.

“Girls, children of color, children from low income families and children with

disabilities have often found schools as places they cannot be themselves if they want to succeed” (Danforth & Smith, 2005, p.45). Artiles (2011) also suggests the civil rights efforts of free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities became a tool of inclusion for White students, but a tool of exclusion for historically marginalized students with the same disabilities. An understanding of disability through an intersectional lens acknowledges the qualitatively diverse ways racial minority groups experience school (Artiles, 2011).



**Figure 2** Intersection of Identities

### **Purpose Statement**

The field has conducted extensive examination of academic and behavioral outcomes through longitudinal studies and analyses for students with disabilities, often generalized to disability or race category (Achilles et al., 2007; Gage et al., 2012; Mazzotti et al., 2016;

Newman et al., 2011). Numerous researchers have identified disparities based on race, gender, and disability and the connection to the increased rates of youth involvement in the judicial system (Annamma, 2014; Blad, 2015; Green, & Allen, 2017). Results of these studies similarly show students with E/BD, in particular, have a higher probability of being referred to juvenile justice facilities and have prolonged involvement in the court-system (Annamma, 2014; Caseau & Others, 1994; Kann & Hanna, 2000; Young et al., 2010). Yet, little analytic attention is given to Black girls with disabilities and their lived experiences considering the intersections of race, gender, disability, and socio-economic status (Ferri & Connor, 2010; Petersen, 2006; Petersen, 2009; Petersen, 2012). Researchers do assert Black girls with disabilities often struggle to understand their disability label, its purpose, and mutability (Annamma, 2014; Ferri & Connor, 2010; Petersen, 2006; Petersen, 2009; Petersen, 2012). The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of Black girls with disabilities at the intersection of race, gender, class, and disability. Using a qualitative analysis and description of how girls navigate their educational experience through the intersection of multiple identities, results will inform practices, policies, and systems of support for Black girls with disabilities (Vernon, 1999).

### **Research Questions**

The research question is central to this study; being used by the researcher to explore, explain, or describe the subject or phenomena being investigated (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological research questions are to answer a question of interest to the researcher, to understand an experience and the meaning behind it (Creswell, 2007). The

following research questions were created to fulfill the mission of a phenomenological study. This study investigated the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black girls with disabilities as it relates to discipline?
2. What meanings do the participants make of their experiences in school in relation to gender, race, disability, and socio-economic status?

## **Literature Review**

Labels both afford and constrain. Qualitative researchers note most Black girls with disabilities struggle to balance their multiple identities (Annamma, 2014; Annamma, 2019; Morris, 2007; Petersen, 2006; Pusch & Holtfreter, 2018; Srsic & Rice, 2012). Many girls in this demographic have mixed emotions of strength, often demonstrated in opportunities to stand up for themselves. They also demonstrate emotions of sadness due to negative teacher-student relationships, policed bodies, and sexual objectification (Nunn, 2018; Yang et al., 2018).

Disciplinary exclusion often occurs more frequently, not only based on students' race and gender but also on their disability (Achilles et al., 2007; Losen et al., 2015; Losen, 2018). The population of students who experience exclusion at rates much higher than all other disability categories are those diagnosed with an emotional or behavioral disorder (E/BD) (Achilles et al., 2007; Pevidor & Lightle, 2009; Srsic & Rice, 2012). Girls with E/BD are twice as likely as other students with disabilities to be teen mothers (The Southern



Poverty Law Center, 2007). In their study on the socio-cultural correlates of disciplinary exclusion among students with emotional, behavioral, and learning disabilities, Achilles et al. (2007) found disciplinary exclusion often occurs more frequently based both on a student's race and disability.

Exploring the disciplinary experiences of Black girls with disabilities helps to address discipline issues affecting them. In this study, the researcher considered how race, class, gender, and disability caused an individual to occupy a social position. The cause of disproportionate discipline for Black girls with disabilities is unclear, but believed to be one component of failure in the system or a problem with the quality of the interventions; most often developed with boys in mind (Davis et al., 2011; Rice et al., 2008). Creating a research genre focused specifically on Black girls with disabilities provides an opportunity to explore how each aspect of social identity combines with school life, particularly the influence of this label on adverse experiences in school (Morris, 2007).

## **Research Design**

Qualitative research answers questions about “what is happening” and “why or how it is happening?” (Brantlinger et al., 2005, p. 196; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher chose the phenomenological design to explore the beliefs, needs, and attitudes of Black girls with disabilities. A wealth of research exists focused on girls and discusses their experiences on their behalf. However, a dearth of research exists involving girls telling their own stories. The chosen qualitative methodology for this study is designed to keep the girls' voices central to the work of improving outcomes. The researcher used transcendental

phenomenology to understand the girls' experiences from their own perspectives. This inclusive thinking helped the researcher, and potentially the field, to better understand the way school is viewed by these females, potentially shifting the perspective from the White male, centered forms of thinking, which have characterized much of our Western thought (Andersen & Collins, 2006). Doing so could offer clarity regarding why certain situations or interventions might continue to escalate the problem of misuse, and overuse of discipline for Black females with disabilities.

The researcher was responsible for developing this research study, the interview questions and protocols, the data collection, and data analyses procedures. Therefore, trustworthiness and credibility were obtained through careful consideration of the research study instrumentation, description, and interpretation. After clarifying biases, values, and my own experiences in relation to the phenomenon, the researcher then analyzed the data reducing it to significant statements and quotes; then combined those into themes. Next, the researcher developed a textural description of the experiences (the what), a structural description (the how), and a combination to describe the essences of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Results will inform current practices and pathways of addressing the needs of Black girls with disabilities. While the general concern is to provide the appropriate levels of support within the school system for all students with disabilities, studying the experiences of girls within the intersection of marginalized identities of race, gender, disability, and class could help the field to consider targeted interventions for this population not yet discussed in the literature.

## **Assumptions of the Study**

The researcher in this study assumed the eight participants who agreed to participate would be comfortable expressing their thoughts, feelings, and opinions in a face-to-face interview. This assumption was due to the nature of the interviews being semi-structured and in a comfortable and quiet space within the school. This researcher also assumed participants identify as female, Black, or African American with a disability when agreeing to participate in the study. Since no test or assessment exists to verify one's racial or ethnic identity, the researcher assumed participants are of Black or African American decent based upon their self-identification to participate in the study. With permission from parents and school officials as well as with approval of University and district level IRB, each participant verified disability status. School data were reviewed for office discipline reports for each participant.

## **Definition of Terms**

### **Emotional or Behavioral Disability**

Emotional and behavioral disabilities are defined as a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics, displayed over a long period of time, and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

- A. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors
- B. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers or teachers
- C. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances

D. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression

E. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

As defined in IDEA, emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia but does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (CFR § 300.8(c)(4)).

#### Adultification

1. A process of socialization, in which children function at a more mature developmental stage because of situational context and necessity, especially in low-resource community environments
2. A social or cultural stereotype that is based on how adults perceive children “in the absence of knowledge of children’s behavior and verbalizations. *This latter form of adultification, which is based in part on race, the subject of this report*” (Epstein et al., 2017).

#### Internalizing Behaviors

Covert, overcontrolled behaviors that are directed internally (Walker & Severson, 1990).

For Example: depression, sadness, worry, fear, or social withdraw.

#### Externalizing Behaviors

Overt, under controlled behaviors that are directed outward toward the environment (Cook et al., 2011). For example: verbal and physical aggression, and

tantrums.

### Exclusionary Discipline

Any disciplinary action resulting in the removal from the learning environment (the most common are in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension or expulsion) (Green et al., 2019; Bal et al., 2019)

### Black

The self or social identification as a racial marker for groups of people, typically associated with African ancestry, across ethnicity, language, national origin, and religion (Hunter & Robinson, 2016).

### Socioeconomic Status

A condition of material wealth. Often seen as a form of culture, when members of a certain class-based group share patterns of being, living, speaking, valuing, and acting (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

### Gender

The socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes a given society considers appropriate for men and women (World Health Organization, 2009). Gender, rather than sex, is utilized to acknowledge a biological difference between boys and girls.

### Race

Social construction of groups of people according to physical attributes, rooted in historical, political, and economic conditions (McChesney, 2015).

## Black Community

Those who share a common culture, concerns, and modes of survival (Paul, 2003). Also defined as diversified set of interrelated structures and aggregates of people who are held together by the forces of racism (Blackwell, 1985).

## Culture

One's beliefs, attitudes, and practices; not a proxy for race. Individuals are cultural beings who belong to groups with similar values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns. All learned behaviors normalized and regularize within the group (Ladson-Billings, 2004; Gay, 2002).

## Warm Demander

The term first appeared first appeared in Kleinfeld's (1975) study of effective teachers of Eskimo and Alaskan Indian children to describe the ways in which the teachers interacted with their students. Warm demanding appeals to social justice agenda toward improving students in and out of school by approaching students with positive regard, knowing their cultures well, and insisting they perform to a high standard (Bondy & Ross, 2008; King, 1994; Perry et.al, 2003) Particularly, when described as a practice with African American students, warm demanders use a no-nonsense, authoritative teaching style because of their mission to give them a future and the belief that they must learn (Irvine & Fraser, 1998).

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Normalized expectations for behavior in school are reflective of dominant, socioeconomic class and ethnic group values reinforced using power (Dumais, 2002). Less than a decade after the transformational legislation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, disparities in behavioral outcomes and educational equities gained national attention. In the 1970s, the Children's Defense Fund (1974) published a report on the disparities regarding discipline for students of color. Since then, several decades of research have concentrated on the overrepresentation of Black youth and students from low socio-economic statuses in the use of exclusionary discipline. Exclusionary discipline is defined as any disciplinary action resulting in the removal from the learning environment (Bal et al., 2019). Some scholars believe the results of the Children's Defense Fund's report on school discipline yielded an image of disproportionate discipline portrayed as a poor, Black, boy (Evans-Winter 2007; Grant, 1984). Thus, over 20 years of research on the disproportionality of discipline practices has not focused on the experience of Black girls, until recently (Evans-Winter, 2007; Evans-Winter, 2011; Jones, 2009; Morris, 2016). Further, there is an even narrower focus on Black girls with disabilities (Annamma et al., 2013; Ferri & Connor, 2010; Petersen, 2006; Petersen, 2012). The National Center for Education Statistics' Digest from the 2015-2016 school year reported the percentage of Black students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was 16%, which was second highest to those who were American Indian/Alaska Native (17%). The differences at the intersection of race, gender and disability of these students are rarely included in discussions that document discipline disparities (nces.ed.gov).

Historically, race and disability have been a way to distinguish and exclude students (Bal et al., 2019). Many studies support the claim that biased educator perceptions contribute to disparities in discipline practices, on the basis of both a student's race and disability (Bornstein, 2017; Brent, 2019; Losen, 2018; Nind et al., 2012). Stereotyping and implicit bias can lead to harsher punishment for students of color with disabilities rather than their same-aged, White peers with disabilities (Hernández-Saca et al., 2018; Skiba et al., 2002). A "Dear Colleague" letter released to guide public school administrators, with the obligation to discipline students, discussed how to discipline students without discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. The letter addressed Title IV of the Civil Rights Act. The guidance from the "Dear Colleague" letter was further supported by the National Center for Disabilities' suggestions to evaluate assessments, behavior plans, IEPs and placements (Landrum & Tankersley, 2003; Oswald et al., 2003).

Despite guidance from both regulation and empirically based supports and interventions, a gap exists at the intersection of identities - race, gender, and disability, especially for Black females (Borstein, 2017; Skiba et al., 2002; Srsic & Rice, 2012). Outcome-based studies demonstrate a mismatch between assistance and assimilation, with interventions neglecting to craft school culture to meet the needs of students, especially Black girls with E/BD (Gage et al., 2012). Throughout the existing literature regarding discipline disparities, limited studies and reports capture the schooling experiences of urban, K-12, Black girls, considering their identifications of race, class, and gender. Even less of a literary contribution emerges when considering this student population and adding the intersection of their disability identity to the school experience (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Evans-Winters, 2011; Morris, 2016; Petersen, 2006).

### **School Characteristics**

Recent researchers suggest school-level characteristics may be better predictors of



disproportionate discipline for particular groups of students, than behavior or individual characteristics (Skiba et al., 2014). School-level characteristics often include percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch, students' mobility rate, overall level of school academic achievement, and staff experience (Sullivan et al., 2014). It has been well established amongst researchers that school-level factors have a relationship with risk for the behavioral suspension of specific student populations (Chen & Greg, 2008; Conroy & Brown, 2004; Cullinan & Epstein, 1979; Greene-Esq & Allen, 2017; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2007; Walker et al., 1996). Discipline-related disparities are particularly more prevalent in urban schools where the majority of the demographics are students of color (Bal et al., 2019). School districts in the South have been found to account for 50% or more of Black students who get expelled or suspended in K-12 public schools (Blad, 2015; Losen, 2018). Skiba et al. (2002) conducted a study regarding the source of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment, within a middle school in the Midwest. The researchers used disciplinary data and found, in this particular district, disproportionality originates at the level of office referral, rather than at the administrative level. The referrals Black students received required more subjective judgment. Infractions such as threat depend on the perception of the staff writing the referral before it gets to the administrator. Consequently, Skiba et al. (2002) reported, school suspension then functions to seemingly, "pass along" the racial discrepancies. Researchers examining risk factors using office disciplinary data found similar patterns at the classroom level in which African American students were referred to the office for more subjective infractions (Achilles et al., 2007; Losen et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2002).

### **School Climate**

School climate is multifaceted, involving norms, goals, values, relationships, practices, and organizational structures (Cohen et al., 2009; Thapa et al., 2013). School climate includes

varying components, such as school composition and school practice. School composition encompasses the social and economic characteristics of a school, whereas school practice includes administrative leadership and the utilization of resources (Anyon et al., 2016; Opdenakker & Van Damme, 2006; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). While most studies of school climate focus on elementary-aged students, there is an important delineation asserted by researchers on school climates' effect on middle school students. Researchers on school climate and middle school student behavior agree. There are aspects of school climate that affect middle schoolers; the nature of relationships between teachers and students; the nature of relationships between students; the extent to which student autonomy is allowed in the decision-making process; and the extent to which the school provides clear, consistent, and fair rules and regulations (Cohen et al., 2009; Connell & Wellborn 1991; Epstein & Karweit 1983; Libbey, 2004). Further, if adolescents do not feel their needs are supported by their school environment, their behavioral and psychological health is at risk (Cohen et al., 2009; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Libbey, 2004). Way et al. (2007) used a crossed domain latent growth model to examine the change in student perception based on the dimensions of school climate. Results, among the 1,451 middle school participants, showed across gender and SES, perceptions of all four dimensions of school climate declined over the 3 years of middle school. The researcher predicated the decline to be due to the mismatch between student need and what the school provided (Way et al., 2007). Similarly, other researchers have conducted analyses of student perception of school climate as a predictor of behavior (Batanova & Loukas, 2016; Elsaesser et al., 2013; Loukas et al., 2006; Wilson, 2004). Results from varying methods including regression analysis, multi-site randomized trials, and path analysis asserted the importance of student autonomy and perception of adult empathy for middle school adolescent concerns and needs, both academically and interpersonally, in middle school (Batanova & Loukas, 2016;

Elsaesser, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2013; Wilson, 2004).

Research on discipline and school climate regarding school composition has primarily examined racial composition and its' influence on disproportionate discipline. Particularly, studies focused on delinquency prevention have posited the similarity between the responses to Black students' behaviors in schools and Black offenders' subjection to harsher punishments in the criminal justice system than White offenders (Anyon et al., 2014; Payne & Welch, 2010). Research on school climate also involves examining the disciplinary procedures that lead to inequalities in suspension (Greene-Esq & Allen, 2017; Hipwell & Loeber, 2006; Walker et al., 1995).

The theoretical construct of discipline is relational (Greene-Esq & Allen, 2017; Hipwell & Loeber, 2006; Vavrus & Cole, 2002; Walker et al., 1995). This finding was similarly confirmed with Monroe's (2006) study, which concluded administrators' and teachers' expectations of behavior are shaped by perception, culture, and context. Chakraborti-Ghosh (2008) conducted a cross-cultural study to explore the perceptions, identification, and treatment of students with behavioral concerns or disorders in India and the United States. Study participants included teachers, parents, and students within residential settings in India and high school students in New Mexico. Students' ages ranged from 12 to 18 years old. The factors which influenced teachers' perceptions and understandings of behavioral problems were family backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, environments, peer influence, cultural practices, societal expectations, and cultural gaps between home and school. There is also a multitude of evidence supporting the claim that a positive school climate increases students' feelings of safety in school, lessens aggression amongst students, lowers levels of substance abuse, and lowers rates of mental health concerns (Cornell & Huang, 2016; Gregory et al., 2010; Karcher, 2002).

In a review of the literature, Welsh and Little (2018) found school policies and practices,

teachers' classroom management, and principals' perspectives played critical roles in explaining discipline disparities (Welsch & Little, 2018). In a review of 25 studies in which school climate surveys were administered, Johnson (2009) found schools with students who are aware of school rules, believe the rules are fair, and have positive relationships with teachers reported less violence. Some researchers investigated discipline disparities through the lens of the authoritative school climate (ASC) theory (Heilbrun et al., 2018). The ASC theory focuses on disciplinary structures and student support systems within schools. characterized by strict but fair discipline, and supportive teacher-student relationships (Skiba et al., 2014). Heilbrun et al. (2018) sampled 369 schools and used both student (7th and 8th grade) and teacher reported measures of ASC. In an examination of ASC's association with school suspension rates, Heilbrun et al. (2018), found student-reported ASC measures of disciplinary structure predictive of lower school-level suspension rates. These researchers also found higher disciplinary structures associated with lower suspension rates for Black but not White students. However, the student level characteristics were school-based and not disaggregated in Heilburn et al.'s (2018) study. Moreover, in a similar study conducted by Gregory et al. (2011), the results were similar. Skiba et al. (2014) conducted a multi-level study, statewide in a Midwestern state, regarding authoritative school climate. The researchers used logistic regression models to analyze cross-sectional, student-report survey data from a sample of 75,000 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students from 310 middle schools. After controlling for student and school characteristics, higher ASC characteristics in a school was associated with a lower likelihood of receiving disciplinary suspension. Some studies have examined the physical structure and size of the school population as contributing factors to increased rates of exclusionary discipline. Further, through an analysis of demographics and school discipline data; larger schools are associated with increased rates of suspension (Heilbrun et al., 2018; Rocha & Hawes, 2009). Conversely, other regression studies

have shown school size is not a significant predictor of suspensions (Christie et al., 2004; Gregory et al., 2011). Yet, few researchers have experimentally examined the causal impact of race on disciplinary exclusion practices (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015), and even fewer have examined how this climate particularly affects the experiences of Black girls with disabilities (Annamma et al., 2013; Petersen, 2006).

### **Black Girlhood**

Historically, responses to Black student's behavior involves punitive measures compared to White students (Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2017). During slavery, Black boys and girls were often put to work at ages as young as two and three years old, dehumanized and treated as possessions. Engaging in playtime and any other normal childlike behaviors resulted in severe punishment (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1992; King, 2005). Centuries after the emancipation of slaves in the United States and the illegalization of racial segregation, Black girls have been subjected to stereotypes about Black femininity, which have shaped their experiences in the classroom (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Evans-Winters, 2011; Morris, 2017). Recent studies and reports regarding Black girls' racial and gender identity development within social and political contexts confirmed, Black girls often are identified as being a girl but are not Black. Thus, they receive societal messages which they interpret as meaning that femininity and Black racial identity do not intersect (Evans-Winters, 2011; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Morris, 2016).

In efforts to explore why Black girls are subjected to punitive treatment for behavior, the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality developed a national survey to determine "whether adults assign Black girls' qualities that render them more like adults-less innocent-than their White peers" (Epstein et al., 2017, p. 7). Adulthood is dehumanizing and removes the innocence of childhood from Black children (Epstein et al., 2017). Results from 325 adults with different ethnic backgrounds and education levels indicated aspects of adulthood, including

participants perceived Black girls, compared to White girls of the same age, as needing less nurturing, less protection, to be supported less, to be comforted less, are more independent, know more about adult topics, and know more about sex (Epstein et al., 2017). Results indicated dominant White perceptions, of the child-like behaviors of Black children, may influence disproportionate use of discipline. The impacts of adultification are substantial and prevent some Black children from experiencing childhood in the same way as their White peers (Collins, 2000; Evans-Winters, 2011; King, 2005).

### **Black Girls and Their Peers**

Scholars have identified harsh school disciplinary consequences, such as suspension and expulsion, as key markers of poor academic achievement for Black girls (Nunn, 2018). Nationally, Black girls experience discipline rates four times higher than White girls (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014). Black girls are punished largely for their perceptions of threat, non-compliance, and harm. Primarily, they are penalized for behaviors consistent with “breaching” implicit norms of school staff (Annanma, 2014), such as being loud, over-bearing, sassy, and combative. These behaviors challenge society's idea of femininity (Morris, 2016). Black girls are more likely than girls of any other race to receive an office referral and three times more likely to receive a referral than their White peers of the same age (Yang et al., 2018). According to a School Climate and Safety report by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2014), Black girls comprise 8% of total student enrollment, but they represent 14% of students who receive one or more out-of-school suspensions. Girls of other races do not disproportionately receive one or more out-of-school suspensions.

Negative teacher-student relationships, policed bodies, and sexual objectification cause Black girls to feel mixed emotions of strength, often demonstrated by standing up for themselves, and of sadness (Nunn, 2018; Yang et al., 2018). In a systematic search for school officials’

perceptions of Black girls in school, researchers revealed Black girls are unequivocally misaligned with school norms, undisciplined in their academic habits, viewed as unapproachable, unteachable, and responsible for any limitations they experience (Annamma, 2014; Annamma, 2019; Pusch, & Holtfreter, 2018). When interviewed during a qualitative study inquiring about Black girlhood, 18 participants between the ages of eight and thirteen discussed the struggle of balancing their identities (Nunn, 2018).

Neal-Jackson (2018) published a meta-ethnographic review regarding the experiences of Black girls and young women in K-12 Education. Neal-Jackson's (2018) search of the literature yielded 37 key articles. In her conclusion, Neal-Jackson asserted that narratives positioning Black girls in negative ways contribute to their inequitable treatment by school officials. However, the Black girls who participated in the studies often possessed views of themselves not aligning with the perspectives of school personnel. In addition, teachers' narratives and perspectives were essential to the opportunities, or lack thereof, each girl experienced (Neal-Jackson, 2018). Using a multi-level analysis of a longitudinal dataset of school disciplinary records, Morris and Perry (2017) found, when controlling for specific confounds related to background (SES, school location, special education status and academic proficiency), Black girls were three times more likely than White girls to receive an office referral. Results also indicated the discipline gap between Black and White girls was wider than that between Black and White boys. Yang et al. (2018) conducted a study and used logistical regression with a sample of 3,495 kindergarten and first grade elementary school students who were referred to a truancy program. They found Black girls are more likely than girls of any other race to receive an office referral, and more than twice as likely to receive an office referral than White girls.

### **Black Girls with Disabilities**

Only in recent literature have individuals with disabilities become comfortable talking

about themselves (Annamma, 2014; Ferri & Connor, 2010; Petersen, 2006). Even so, qualitative research regarding outcomes and perceptions of Black girls with disabilities have focused on experiences from the perspectives of adult participants (Ferri & Connor, 2010; Petersen, 2006; Petersen, 2009). In an interview with Black women with disabilities, many expressed living in the ghetto equated to not being smart. Participants also expressed having to work harder than White women. They also expressed having low wage jobs where people expect less of them, and lastly, they expressed the belief that race, class and gender affected their opportunities for success (Ferri & Connor, 2010).

Black girls with disabilities identify with three minority groups, which often subjects them to stigmatization (Annamma, 2014; Hernández-Saca, et al., 2018; Liasidou, 2013). An underrepresentation of the needs, beliefs, and attitudes of Black girls with disabilities is evident, given the neglect of current literature to explore and examine the perceptions and experiences of this population (Annamma, 2014; Borstein, 2017; Ferri & Connor, 2010; Petersen, 2012; Skiba et al., 2002; Srsic & Rice, 2012). The most relevant research by Madigan (2005) explored the intersections of gender, ethnicity, disability, and a co-ed special education classroom, rather than a single-gender special education classroom. Although, specifically focusing on the experiences of Latina students, Madigan (2005) found that girls of color experienced disability as qualitatively different than boys of color. However, there were some overlaps across gender regarding shame and frustration with the label of “disabled.”

### **Black Girls with Disabilities and Socio-Economic Status**

As early as the 1900s, delinquency and deviance were equated to being characteristic of poor or working-class families (Danforth & Smith, 2005). American society became industrialized. Living conditions shifted from rural to urban, and neighborhoods quickly filled



with overworked and unpaid residents. Living conditions for families of factory workers and their children were less than sufficient. Running water, garbage collection, and healthcare were all luxuries the poor, primarily immigrant, families could not afford. As society shifted, so did the public school. A “youth problem” emerged from the urban communities, students who behaved in troubling ways. These students worried government officials, and in the industrialized urban ghetto, juvenile delinquency became more popular (Danforth & Smith 2005).

While none of the participants in Evans-Winters’ (2007) ethnographic study on race, class and gender identified as having a disability, the girls reported that stressors regarding racism and classism affected their interactions with teachers and school staff. One Black female participant commented on her experience in high school, and said, “It’s like every year, they get a new rule, and it gets stricter and stricter” (Evans-Winters, 2007, p. 169). As a result of the three-year ethnographic study, Evans-Winters (2007) found, “Black girls’ educational experience is impacted by race, class, and gender, but more importantly is based on where and how they live” (2007, p. 177). Although the purpose of the study was to explore how the interaction of racism, classism, and sexism impact the school experiences of urban African American female adolescents, the theme of resiliency was magnified. Evans-Winters (2007) learned support from family and community combated adversity. In addition, the females did not experience stressors based on race, class, and gender dichotomously. Instead, most stressors occurred at the intersection of race, class, and gender, impacting the overall educational experience.

In most quantitative studies regarding poverty’s relationship with disparities in discipline and educational equity, poverty often is classified by the percentage of students at the school who are eligible for free or reduced meals. Poverty also is used as a proxy for socio-economic status

(SES). A study of middle schools in the east central region of the U.S. resulted in a correlation between school poverty and higher rates of out-of-school suspensions for both Black and White students (Heilbrun et al., 2018). In an exploration of predictors of disciplinary disproportionality, Bal and colleagues (2019) conducted multi-level logistic regressions and found a student's race, gender, income, language, attendance, and academic proficiency are related to discipline disparities.

In efforts to examine how demographic, individual, and family factors contribute to disparities in office referrals and suspension or expulsion, Mizel et al. (2016) analyzed a survey administered to a sample of 2,539 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students on the west coast of the U.S. Black boys and students whose parents had less education, measured by how far they went in high school, were more likely to be suspended or expelled. Factors associated with less school discipline included: higher levels of student academic preparation for class, hours spent on homework, and academic aspiration (Mizel et al., 2016). On the other hand, Skiba et al. (2014) and Gregory et al. (2011) conducted multi-level and multiple regression analysis concluding school level SES and suspensions were not statistically significant.

### **Disproportionate Discipline**

Comparisons of disparities for students with disabilities and their peers have typically been conducted by using national data sets (Achilles et al., 2007; Losen, 2018; Pevidor & Lightle, 2009; Srsic & Rice, 2012; Sullivan et al., 2014). The U.S. Department of Education (2014) highlighted the importance of considering the variation amongst predictors of disproportionality and its extent from state to state. In an examination of patterns and predictors of disciplinary exclusion over time, Bowman-Perrott et al. (2013) collected three waves of data over a six-year period of parent interviews, teacher and school administrator questionnaires, and direct student

assessments. Results for each disability group indicated early exclusion as a statistically significant and strong predictor of late exclusion (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013). In addition to this finding, students in special education classes as well as students identified as seriously emotionally disturbed had a significantly higher odd for out-of-school suspension (1.17,  $p < .05$ ), (2.48,  $p < .0001$ ). Similarly, Achilles et al. (2007) used existing data from the SEELS national dataset and confirmed early exclusion to be a predictor of late exclusion using logistic regression analysis.

The suspension of students with disabilities has increased in frequency since 2000. Researchers have hypothesized a correlation between this increase and the shift to include students with disabilities in the general education setting (Caseau et al., 1994; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Zigmond, 2003). Qualitative studies have shown general education teachers are concerned, indifferent, or reject students with disabilities in their classroom (Blad, 2015; Greene-Esq & Allen, 2017; Srsic & Rice, 2012). To address limitations identified in methodology, comparison groups, sample size, and analysis procedures, Bal et al. (2019) examined the extent and predictors of disproportionality across five racial groups. In addition to expanding the racial groups included in the analysis, the researchers used state-wide, public-school data to examine student and school level variables. Using multi-level logistic regression, of Wisconsin's statewide discipline data, they found Latino, Native American, and African American students were significantly overrepresented in exclusionary discipline. Native and African Americans also were overrepresented in special Education placement for E/BD. In their multi-level analysis of predicting disciplinary actions, students who received free or reduced lunch had greater odds of being disciplined than those who did not (odds ratio 2.79), and students categorized as ELL had lower odds of being disciplined than those who were not (.63). African American, Latino, and Native American boys had greater odds of disciplinary action, with African American boys

having the highest (odds ratio: 4.05) compared to Latino (1.40) and Native American (2.48). The population of students most excluded were those with an emotional behavior disorder (EBD) label (Achilles et al., 2007; Pevidor & Lightle, 2009; Srsic & Rice, 2012). Within their systematic review of literature on exclusionary discipline studies, Welsch and Little (2018) found several factors contributed to the frequency of exclusionary discipline, including student behavior, student characteristics, and school level variables. While students with overt externalizing behaviors are most often recognized in the classroom for behavior problems, Montague et al. (2011) concluded students with internalizing behavioral problems are at higher risk for poor academic outcomes.

## **Outcomes**

Many researchers assert the use of exclusionary discipline affects students in the following ways: loss of instructional days, less academic supervision and support, less student engagement, broken relationships in schools, labels and stigma attached to students which then creates difficulties for reintegrating into the classroom, and detrimental effects on school climate (Losen et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2014; Welsch & Little, 2018). In a longitudinal study to investigate the academic, behavioral, and emotional outcomes for adolescents from middle to high school, Montague et al. (2011) used teacher ratings and student self-reports. They found at-risk students in special education had significantly higher self-ratings of emotional problems and viewed school more negatively.

Student development also is affected by the enforcement of strict policies (APA zero tolerance task force, 2008). Although the original goal traced back to the Gun-Free School Act of 1994 was to remove weapons from schools. Policies have since expanded to include non-weapon related and non-violent behaviors as threats. These policies often do not consider

developmentally appropriate responses to behavior. In contrast, they implement consequences, often not aligned with the said misbehavior. In their study regarding discipline inequities, Losen et al. (2014) found Black students categorized as E/BD had an increase in suspension rates compared to all Black students. Researchers' cross sectional studies also show academic failure, disengagement, increased drop-out rates, and involvement in the criminal justice system are all potential outcomes for students involved in exclusionary discipline, a cycle beginning with loss of instructional time (Anyon et al., 2014; Losen et al., 2015). Other cross sectional and longitudinal studies, regarding the outcomes for students, found frequent experiences with discipline can cause substance abuse and violent behavior, which often results in students being referred to court (Greene-Esq & Allen, 2017; Mazzotti et al., 2016; Novak, 2018).

### **Summary of Literature**

The researchers in education show negation of identity that Black girls experience, which Black feminists describe as occurring in order to “pass” with normalized expectations of behavior (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1992). Resistance to the social norms of school has both historically and presently caused students to be perceived as bad, disorderly, disturbed, disrespectful, and deviant (Danforth & Smith, 2005). Danforth and Smith (2005) asserted behaving badly is a form of resistance to the practices and values of schooling. Researchers have typically measured rates of disciplinary exclusion using office referrals (Bal et al., 2019; Gregory et al., 2011; Losen, 2018; Mizel et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2014). Upon further analyzation, the factors impacting the disproportionate use of discipline were explored by examining reports of misconduct and surveying teachers and administrators in relation to school climate and response to students' behaviors (Cohen et al., 2009; Cornell & Huang, 2016; Gregory et al., 2011). Several researchers have collected data regarding the reasons for student referrals, pinpointing the behaviors and

school practices leading to disciplinary disparities (Cornell & Huang, 2016; Gregory et al., 2011; Skiba, 2014). Some researchers link disciplinary outcomes to students' race and gender, while others focus on students' race and disability categorization (Blanchett, 2009; Gold & Richard, 2012; Losen, 2018; O'Keefe & Medina, 2016).

Researchers also have tested and rejected the hypothesis that Black students somehow engage in increased levels of deviant or disobedient behavior compared to their peers (Huang, 2018). In addition, the standard procedure for assessing discipline disparities has been the use of longitudinal data sets that are often from national or state-level databases. Instrumentation often involves multi-variate analysis, multi-level logistic regression, or correlational methods of school climate, size, and personnel perceptions; as well as, student level characteristics, such as race, gender, SES, or disability.

To predict negative outcomes for marginalized groups, researchers conducted odds and relative risk ratios (Brantlinger, 1991; Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Jordan & Anil, 2009; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Skiba et al., 2002). Empirical evidence indicates no single factor explains discipline disparities. Despite the established importance of considering both school and student level characteristics, the review of literature shows limited evidence about how these factors specifically affect Black girls with disabilities. Few research methods have disaggregated data based on race, class, gender, and disability or reported qualitative results encompassing the extent to which current school practices and policies affect Black girls with disabilities. Based on the review of the literature, Black girls' multiple identities may present challenges throughout their education. Moreover, with minimal research regarding Black girls' thoughts related to race, class, and disability, a need exists to frame their experiences using their own narratives as a vehicle to explore their perceptions (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Purpose of the Study**

Longitudinal studies and analyses regarding educational issues for students with disabilities have extensively examined their academic and behavioral outcomes, often generalized to disability or race categories (Achilles et al., 2007; Gage et al., 2012; Mazzotti et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2011). Numerous researchers, regarding the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline, show disparities based on race, gender, and disability and the connection to the increased rates of youth involvement in the judicial system (Annamma, 2014; Blad, 2015; Greene-Esq & Allen, 2017). Results from interviews, observations, and national survey comparisons similarly indicated students with disabilities have a higher probability of being referred to juvenile justice facilities (Annamma, 2014; Quinn et al., 2005). However, little analytic attention is given to Black girls with disabilities and their lived experiences, considering the intersections of race, gender, disability, and socio-economic status (Ferri & Connor, 2010; Petersen, 2006; Petersen, 2009; Petersen, 2012). Further, research asserts Black girls with disabilities may struggle to understand their disability label, its purpose, and mutability (Annamma, 2014; Ferri & Connor, 2010; Petersen, 2006; Petersen, 2009; Petersen, 2012). The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of Black girls with disabilities at the intersection of race, gender, socio-economic status, and disability. Using a qualitative analysis approach and description of how girls navigate their educational experience through the intersection of multiple identities, the results inform practices, policies, and systems of support for Black girls with disabilities (Vernon, 1999).

### **Research Questions**

The research question central to this research study will guide the researcher's focus to

explore, explain, and describe the phenomena of Black girls' with disabilities (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological research questions are developed to answer a question that is of interest to the researcher, to understand an experience and its significance (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following research questions were created, considering the mission of a phenomenological study. This study investigated the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black girls with disabilities as it relates to discipline?
2. What meanings do the participants make of their experiences in school in relation to gender, race, disability, and socio-economic status?

## **Setting**

The site for data collection is an east central school district, which encompasses 191 schools and over 160,000 students in grades PK, K-12, with a student-teacher ratio of 16 to 1. The format of the current school system is the result of a 1970's integration between the historically largely white schools in one east central district and the former, historically largely minority schools in a neighboring district within the state (Williams & Houck, 2013). The school system aims for schools to be integrated with a maximum of 40% low-income students at any one school, using the percent of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch programs as a tool of measurement. Students from suburban areas are transported by bus to magnet schools in areas in which the primary population is students whose household income is low (Smrekar & Honey, 2015).

Based on the 2018-2019 progress report, the gifted magnet middle school, where interviews were conducted, include the following statistics: Number of students: 606; Classroom Teachers: 47; Students who receive free or reduced lunch: 30.4%; Students with limited English



proficiency: 2.3%; Student race: 55.9% White, 26.1% African American, 13.1% Hispanic, 3.6% two or more races, and 1.3% other; Students in Special Education: 16.0%. The student to teacher ratio is 1 to 13. There are four administrators: three females, one male, with two White and two Black. There are 86 teachers, 50 White, 24 Black, 2 Asian, and five Hispanic. District-level disciplinary data reports for the 2018-2019 school year indicate a disproportionate number of minority referrals. While the school is a designated gifted magnet within the district, not all student patrons of the school participate in the magnet program. Students apply and are admitted to the school based on a lottery system. Exceptional circumstances for admission without entering the lottery include students with Autism, as the school has a program specifically geared towards students with Autism.

## **Participants**

The sampling method used for this study aligned with the four-point approach to qualitative sampling (Robinson, 2014). The four points are: defining the sample universe (target population), deciding on a sample size, devising a sample strategy, and sourcing the sample. The sample population was homogeneous. Qualitative and quantitative data from questionnaires and records to which the researcher was granted access were used as sampling tools (Coleman et al., 1996). The questionnaire contained both demographic information as well as confirmatory responses concerning office referrals, school-based arrests, or other disciplinary experiences at school. Demographic and psychological homogeneity was achieved by including middle school age Black girls with disabilities, who have had multiple experiences with exclusionary discipline or office disciplinary referrals. Although not an exclusive inclusionary requirement, girls may have been court involved.

**Table 1**  
Participant Demographic Data

Participant	Age	Grade	Disability Category	Number of Referrals 2019-2020 School Year	Reason for Referral "incident"
Bethune	13	7 <sup>th</sup>	OHI	8	Harassment/bullying; appropriate language; substantially disruptive or dangerous behavior; electronic devices; disrespect (written up three different times); disruptive behaviors
Ida	12	6 <sup>th</sup>	OHI	2	Compliance with directives; school/class attendance
Shirley	12	6 <sup>th</sup>	SLD	3	Noncompliance; compliance with directives; electronic devices
Cicely	13	7 <sup>th</sup>	SLD	2	School/Class attendance; compliance with directives
Zora	12	6 <sup>th</sup>	ASD, bipolar	3	Threat/False Threat; school/class attendance;

Participant	Age	Grade	Disability Category	Number of Referrals 2019-2020 School Year	Reason for Referral "incident"
					substantially disruptive or dangerous behavior
Dorothy	12	6 <sup>th</sup>	ASD	3	School/class attendance; compliance with directives; harassment/bullying
Katrina	13	7 <sup>th</sup>	Gifted, OHI	5	Physical aggression/fighting; substantially disruptive or dangerous behavior; compliance with directives; noncompliance; harassment/bullying
Thelma	13	7 <sup>th</sup>	SLD	2	Compliance with directives; appropriate language

All participants were on-site at a school location. The setting for the research study was a school located in the south-Atlantic region of the United States. The school site was selected based on the researcher's relationship with a colleague who works at a school in the south- Atlantic region of the U.S. The researcher inquired about the school's interest in the study based on their meeting the following demographic criteria: enrollment of Black middle school girls with disabilities who have had multiple experiences with exclusionary discipline or office disciplinary referrals. Sample size in qualitative research is determined by both theory and practicality. The researcher's chosen sampling method was influenced

by the focus on in-depth, information-rich data (Patton, 1990).

The researcher determined the aim of the study was idiographic. Thus, to preserve individuality and locatable voices among participants, (Robinson, 2014) the sample size was eight girls. A purposive sampling strategy was used for this study to ensure girls who met the inclusionary criteria comprised the final sample. Sourcing the sample population aligned with guidelines of human subject research of vulnerable populations. The researcher began the data collection process after obtaining University and district IRB approval. Sample size in qualitative research is determined by both theory and practicality. A letter and consent form were sent home with each of the perspective participants for parent agreement. The letter and consent form included the researcher's purpose and questions, and it also described the method of data collection as it pertained to the participant and site involvement. The consent form also provided a written explanation conveying that participants could withdraw at any point in the research process. When the researcher arrived at the school site, letters of consent were collected. The assent process from participants included an introduction of the researcher, an explanation of the research, what they would be asked to do, and how long it would take. Following the explanation of the study, the researcher obtained verbal assent from each participant regarding their participation in the study.

### **Instrumentation**

Before the recruitment process began, the researcher waited for approval from the University IRB. Once approved, the researcher collaborated with a Black female colleague

who works at a middle school in the South Atlantic region of the United States. After a discussion of the study and participants needed, the colleague helped organize a virtual meeting via Zoom with the researcher and the school administration. In the meetings, the study was discussed and the potential for participants who meet the criteria. Once the administrator agreed the study could be completed at their school site, the researcher wrote and submitted a district-level IRB. Once the district IRB was approved, the researcher worked with her colleague to organize another meeting to help with drafting the letter for parental consent. Prior to the researcher sending the letters home, the colleague helped to further recruit participants by meeting with the girls and calling their parents to talk about the study in anticipation of the letters being sent home. In the following weeks, the researcher met with the school principal to discuss the school schedule and the timeline for sending letters home and conducting the interviews. One of the primary concerns was to minimize instructional time lost for each girl. After the schedule was finalized, the letters were sent home to parents with a return deadline. Eight girls returned their forms and agreed to participate in the study. The researcher made plans to travel to the school site.

Once arriving at the school, the researcher met with the special education team leader and her colleague to outline the plan for the week. The researcher and her colleague met with the girls, reviewed the purpose of the study, and also discussed possible incentives for participating. The next day, the researcher began the interviews. The interviewer used a semi-structured interview approach. Participants were asked the preliminary interview questions to assure they met the inclusionary criteria set for the study. Questions for the preliminary interview were selected for the purpose of assuring participants met

inclusionary criteria for the study as well as to collect demographic information relevant to the analysis of the results. The protocol for the interview was developed using existing literature on the potential school. The protocol was also developed using student-level factors that influence Black girls with disabilities' experiences in school, particularly as they relate to discipline. The questions within the protocol addressed school experience overall, and it elicited responses related to the participant's intersecting identities, including race, gender, disability, and socio-economic status. To align with the theoretical framework used within this study, the protocol also prompted the participant to discuss their experiences at school in relation to their identity. It also addressed the perception of self and others within the educational system. To preserve the semi-structured format of the interview, question order varied for each participant. The researcher often elicited additional clarification or explanation based on responses. Girls were also asked to affirm some of their statements to make sure their story was being told accurately. Each interview was given in an office space at the front of the school. Participants were reminded the interview would be recorded and given a lapel mic they clipped to their shirts to support sound quality.

### **Child and Youth Resilience Survey (CYRM)**

The CYRM-28 measure, designed for adolescents, has acceptable psychometric properties (reliability and validity) and is the only measure which considers resilience across cultures (Liebenberg et al., 2012; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011). Although the purpose of Evans- Winters' (2011) study was to explore how the interaction of racism, classism, and

sexism impact on the school experiences of urban African American female adolescents, the theme of resiliency was magnified. Evans-Winters (2011) learned support from family and community combated adversity. In addition, the females did not experience stressors based on race, class, and gender dichotomously. Instead, most stressors occurred at the intersection of race, class, and gender impacting the overall educational experience. This instrument was chosen because it contains items consistent across cultures. The organization of the CYRM-28 contributes to the understanding of the presence of personal skills (peer support and social skills), caregiving (physical and psychological), and sense of belonging (spirituality, culture, and education) that exist in the lives of adolescents. Additionally, the CYRM-28 provides a full understanding of the various dimensions of resilience regarding an adolescent's development (Liebenberg et al., 2012). This tool was used to increase the trustworthiness of the findings of this study to support or negate the females' interview responses around resiliency.

## **Procedure**

The current phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Black girls with disabilities. The study was conducted during the 2019-2020 academic year (August 2019-May 2020). The primary analysis of the data was completed by February 2020. The qualitative research included interviews with selected participants. The interviews occurred during the time frame selected by school personnel. The procedures for interviews were as follows: participants were interviewed twice in a quiet office space on site. The researcher used a preliminary interview to begin the interview process for the selected participants,

from the target population, who provided the necessary consent to participate in the research study. The duration of the preliminary interview was between 15 and 20 minutes. The questions were asked using a structured format to elicit self-report information, which confirmed the participant met the inclusionary criteria for the target population. Following the preliminary questionnaire, participants were asked to complete a survey, which was the children and youth resilience measure. This survey was administered using QualtricsXM, an online survey system that automatically analyzes and provides the tools to manage data (<https://www.qualtrics.com/platform/>). To provide an additional level of confidentiality for participants, each survey was completed online and responses populated in a password-protected Qualtrics account. Survey questions were relative to resilience as it pertained to the personal skills (peer support and social skills), caregiving (physical and psychological), and sense of belonging (spirituality, culture, and education) which existed in the lives of adolescents.

The next phase included a semi-structured, 45-minute interview. This interview provided the researcher with a detailed description of the participants' experiences and supported a detailed thematic analysis of the shared experiences of the participants. The use of descriptive transcription reduced the costs related to time and resources as well as reduced the human or program error which is often made. This transcription included the misinterpretation of content, class, and cultural differences in addition to language errors (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006; MacLean et al., 2004; McCormack, 2000). During the interviews, the researcher audio recorded the content and took notes, being sure to structure the interview questions in an exploratory format of the participants' experiences rather than



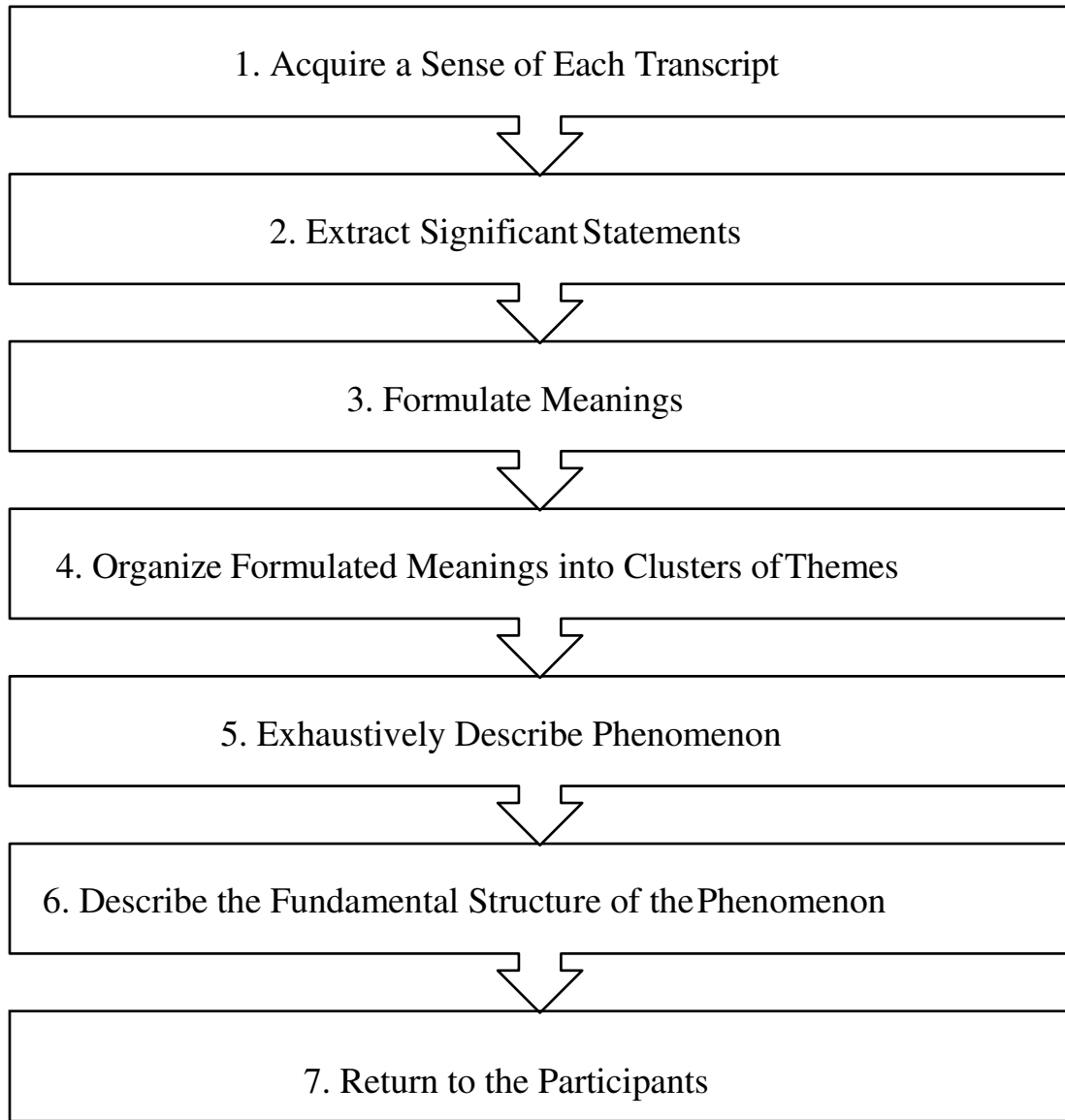
probing them. Audio recording prevented the interviewer and participant from distractions, which could have been caused by verbatim notetaking on the computer. Recording also provided review for the researcher during the data management and analysis stages, but it also served as a source for the second, independent reviewer. Any ambiguity can be clarified by listening to the playback of the interview.

Immediately after each interview, the researcher read the notes, which were collected, and made additional reflective comments particular to the participants' responses, using a reflective journal. There was a journal entry following each interview. The research design encompassed continual participant feedback and consultation, which included sharing research results with them. School personnel, parents, or guardians could ask any questions regarding participants' accomplishments and or behavior during her interview. The researcher shared a copy of their analyzed transcription to each participant, developed from the NVivo software. Further, the researcher asked for their validation as well as any comments they wished to add (Sanders, 2003).

### **Method of Analysis**

The semi-structured interview protocol was the primary tool the researcher used to conduct the interviews. The development of the interview transcriptions consisted of first uploading the audio recordings into the electronic transcription program, Rev.com, to be transcribed. The researcher then used NVivo software for preliminary content analysis. To ensure the analysis of qualitative data was trustworthy, the researcher followed methods outlined in Colaizzi's methods of phenomenological data analysis, seen in Figure 3

(Sanders, 2003).



**Figure 3** Colaizzi’s Method of Phenomenological Data Analysis

*Step 1:* Acquire A Sense of Each Transcript. Become familiar with each transcript and the interviews themselves. Participants’ facial expressions, body language, and tones helped to identify the depth of positive or negative experiences. During each interview, the researcher

did not take many notes and focused on the participant. The field notes taken provided further context and a record of the participants' facial expressions and body language during the interview (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). The researcher read the transcripts and listened to the audio-recordings (Colaizzi, 1978). The researcher did so at least two times and made notes during each listen. While listening, the researcher verified the notes aligned with the interaction. Notes may have changed based on multiple listens in efforts to develop themes when the collected data was analyzed. Once transcripts were developed, the researcher read them three times.

*Step 2: Extract Significant Statements.* After producing the transcripts, the researcher read the first time through entirely with no notes or significant statements identified. The second time, the researcher reads transcripts, and she identified and recorded significant statements, taken verbatim from the transcript. The researcher identified significant statements on printed versions of the transcripts and then read the electronic versions and made notes there, without looking at the printed versions. Statements and or phrases identified told a story specific to each participant's experiences with school discipline. This included quotes from the participants. The transcription and inclusion of quotes helped the researcher understand and describe the experiences Black girls with disabilities have regarding discipline more authentically, as quotes were direct, and in participants' own words. The researcher read the transcripts one final time and referenced both the original printed version with notes and the first electronic version with notes. From this third reading, the researcher had a list of significant statements. Each significant statement included traceability to the participant and research question.

*Step 3: Formulate Meanings.* The development of formulated meanings from the significant statements included identifying the interpretation of each significant statement. The goal of this step included developing a set of general statements to acknowledge any preconceived expectations and or potential bias. To develop the formulated meanings, the researcher reflected on the following question: "What does this significant statement tell me about the participant's experiences?" The researcher did not only use the significant statement to develop the formulated meanings but also read the preceding and succeeding sections of the transcript associated with the significant statement to ensure contextual meaning was not lost.

*Step 4: Organize Formulated Meanings into Clusters of Themes.* After developing the formulated meanings, the researcher arranged them, based on similarities, into cluster themes and then into emergent themes. When developing the cluster themes, the researcher read each formulated meaning and traced it back to the original significant statements or transcript, to identify those that covered similar experiences. The researcher then arranged the cluster themes again, based on commonalities, into emergent themes.

*Step 5: Exhaustively Describe Phenomenon.* The researcher used the cluster and emergent themes to answer the research questions. The researcher supported each answer using the participants' own words, including actual quotes from the interviews into the narrative. When using participant data to support the answers, the researcher identified participants that supported the answer and, if applicable, mentioned those that may have had different experiences. The next part of this stage was thematic analysis. This involved reviewing the secondary content analysis, making any necessary change to established themes, and re-

listening to the audio recordings to identify illustrative examples with which to demonstrate the meaning of the themes from the participants' perspectives.

*Step 6: Describing the Fundamental Structure of the Phenomenon.* The researcher drafted an overarching narrative of the Black girls with disabilities who participated and described their experiences with discipline.

*Step 7: Returning to the Participants.* The last step in Colaizzi's 7-Step method allowed for the participants to review the data analysis results.

## **CRYM-28**

Each participant's overall score on the CYRM-28 depicted each participant's level of resilience. For each of the following subscales, descriptive statistics were used to further analyze participants' characteristics associated with resilience. Subscales included the following scales (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2009): individual practices and resources, relationships with primary caregivers, and contextual factors which facilitated a sense of belonging. The CYRM-28 measure is meant to be directly summed, and the score, which indicates high or low levels of resilience, is compared to the youth in the sample (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2009). Further, the higher the score is, the more the resilience components are present in the lives of the participants.

Ungar (2015) described resiliency as survival or thriving in contexts under stress. Results from this survey imply that although each girl has faced adversity within their experiences with discipline, there are factors that have mitigated the experiences. Research on resiliency refer to these factors and processes as risks or vulnerability, and protective

factors (Gallagher et al., 2019; Murray, 2003; Werner & Smith, 1989). Protective factors and processes work to counteract the risks, and, thus, influence or alter a person's response to an environmental hazard which predisposes them to a maladaptive outcome (Rutter, 1985). Protective factors that have been identified among researchers are individual characteristics, family factor, school factors, and community factors (Gallagher et al., 2019; Hawkins et al., 1992; Ungar, 2008; Werner & Smith, 1989). Risk factors identified using longitudinal studies on the post school outcomes for students with high incidence disabilities include gender, race, level of academic skill, emotional problems, stressful life events, socioeconomic status, family composition, quality of instruction, involvement in school activities, and poor peer relationships (Gallagher et al., 2019; Murray, 2003; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2005).

### **Researcher as an Instrument**

“Teaching is an activity that requires artistry, schooling itself is a cultural artifact, and education is a process whose features may differ from individual to individual, context to context” (Eisner, 1976, p. 140). In the analysis and exploration of this phenomena, the aim was to use the narratives of the participants, not as a tool of evaluation of the current conditions of education and teaching profession, but instead as a lens to create an awareness and understanding of the educational life of each girl. The researcher's recognition of her own position and identities were both privileging and limiting and informed the inquiry process. While as the researcher, I cannot dismiss my biases, I will make them known. As Becker (1996) has argued, researchers are not value free, and, therefore, the researcher

recognized her personal and political views and predispositions were inseparable from the research process. Therefore, trustworthiness and credibility were obtained using careful consideration of the research study instrumentation, description, and interpretation, thus incorporating what Eisner described as educational criticism (Eisner, 1976; Eisner, 2002). The researcher acknowledged and appreciated both the complex and subtle qualities of each girl and her experience (Eisner, 1991). During the process of coding the transcriptions from the interviews and isolating themes, the goal was to inform current perceptions so that each girl's story and the themes which emerged from them articulated suggestions and implications for practice and policy (Eisner, 1976; Eisner, 2002).

### **Positionality**

My assumptions, values, biography, social interactions, and interactions with the study are embedded in the procedures and analysis of results (Arzubiaga et al., 2008). I am a 33-year-old Black, female, doctoral candidate in an Exceptional Education program at a large southeastern university. I grew up in a single-parent household, raised by my mother and extended family, including my grandmother. My early experiences in school were shaped by the connections I made between school, family, and community. I was a quiet and often reserved student, and although most of my direct educational experiences were positive, I did recognize inequalities and the struggle for opportunities for Black girls, including myself. My success throughout school and beyond was due to the investment, encouragement, and personalized interest my teachers and other school personnel had in my success. My interest in education grew from my desire to make an impact in the lives of

those who may not, otherwise, have an opportunity to excel.

I completed all of my formal education in the Southern region of the United States. I completed my bachelor's and master's degrees in special education and taught for seven years prior to starting my doctoral program. I primarily taught students with learning and behavioral disorders in Title I schools, in which more than 60% of the student demographics included students from minority populations. While teaching, I often found myself advocating for students, especially the girls who often expressed they felt teachers did not like them or want them in their class. I believe the school experiences of Black females with disabilities are unique because of their membership in multiple culture sharing groups, many of which are marginalized. I was responsible for developing this research study, the interview questions and protocols, the data collection, and data analysis. I wanted to conduct a study which gave the girls an opportunity to share their stories. I organized this study because I think it is important for the perspective of the girls to not only be considered, but to influence decisions made about and in reaction to behavior. I hope that by highlighting the social history of the girls' identities and learning more about the experiences of Black girls with disabilities as it relates to discipline, I will inspire more research focused on equitable practices that meet the unique needs of these girls.

### **Trustworthiness**

Angen (2000) asserted that considering the interpretive approach to qualitative research, clarifying bias or reflexivity is essential to obtaining trustworthiness. I am aware of the biases, values, and experiences I brought to this qualitative study, based on my



membership in the following identity groups: Black, female, growing up in a working-class household, and raised by my mother. Interview questions were carefully crafted not to elicit biased responses. Further, they were used in a semi-structured format to support the exploratory nature of their experiences rather than to probe. The researcher approached the research process with insight from Richardson (2000), instead of viewing “three sides” to approach analysis and obtaining trustworthiness of the phenomena, understanding “there is always more to know” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). Multiple data sources, methods, and investigators were included in the research process. The preliminary content analysis was reviewed by two research team members who were not previously involved in the data collection, using a thorough review of both audiotapes and field notes. This task facilitated testing of the audit trail and a peer review of the data and research processes using inter-coders (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Peer reviewers also verified that the development of themes from the data corresponded with the field notes and transcriptions (Robinson, 2014). After administering the survey, the researcher performed a descriptive analysis on the collected survey data using the results from QualtricsXM. Descriptive statistics helped summarize the general trends in the data and offered an understanding of the scores, and provided an understanding of how one score compared with others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Document analysis of office referrals allowed for the verification of some aspects of the girls’ accounts of discipline experiences (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

### **Credibility**

When developing the research instrumentation, it is important for the researcher to

consider the following in relation to credibility: *Were the appropriate participants selected for the topic? Was the appropriate data collection methodology used? Were the participant responses open, complete, and truthful?* To establish cohesiveness between the girls' expressions and the researcher's interpretations of the expressions, a semi-structured interview format was used. This format removed some of the inherent biases and supported the exploratory format of the study (Brantlinger et al., 2005). In addition to the interviewing processes, the researcher established prolonged engagement in the field to acquire necessary information. Inclusionary criteria were used to assure appropriate participants were selected for the topic. A review of current literature regarding Black females with disabilities and their experiences with discipline assured the appropriate data collection method was selected. Knowledgeable faculty and committee members assisted the researcher by reviewing and critiquing the research and data analysis findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Black girls with disabilities and to understand the meaning they make of their experiences, especially as it pertains to discipline. The researcher used a phenomenological research design to explore the phenomenon. A thematic analysis of eight interviews was completed, and the emergent experiences and meanings were used to answer the research questions.

### **Participant Bios**

The essence of a phenomenological study is in the lived experiences of the participants who share their stories and depth of the phenomenon under exploration. In this study, eight girls participated and discussed their experiences regarding school, contextualized in the areas of discipline. The following short biographical sketches describe the girls who participated in the study (pseudonyms were used for the girls and schools to protect confidentiality).

#### ***Bethune***

Bethune is a Black, female, 13-year-old, seventh grade student at Walker Middle School, identified as OHI (other health impaired) and is involved with several extra-curricular activities. She is on a local dance team, plays basketball, and plays instruments

including the trumpet. She appreciates the wealth of electives aligned with her interests. During her interview, Bethune said, *“For the most part I try my best in school. I don’t want to be held back and taught things over and over.”* She described herself as crazy because she likes to *“laugh a lot and crack jokes and have fun.”* Bethune talked a lot about classes being fun when the teachers discuss topics she enjoys. She said she gets angry when teachers or administrators do not understand her. When talking about her experiences with discipline, Bethune asserted that administrators should listen to both sides of a story. She also discussed what she described as a negative and a positive experience with discipline. The positive experience she described involved her cell phone that fell out of her pocket. Although it was taken away, her teacher returned the phone to her at the end of the day. In what Bethune describes as a negative experience, she said she was tired one day and wasn’t doing her work in class and was sent to ISS. Bethune said if she could change one thing she would say, *“if we are walking together in a big group that they wouldn’t stop and question us…”*

### ***Ida***

Ida is a Black female, 12-year-old, sixth grade student at Walker Middle School, identified with a specific learning disability (SLD). Ida likes to draw and play with her little sister. She said her middle school experience so far has been *“pretty good.”* When asked what teachers would say about her behavior in school, Ida replied, *“I don’t know if they would say I was hard-working, but I do. I do try and finish my work as fast as I can.”* She also said she likes school and thinks it is a *“nice place to be.”* Ida likes the interactive classes that allow her to talk to her friends. She described herself as hard-working, and she also admitted, *“sometimes it’s hard to focus.”* Ida’s experience with discipline, which she discussed in the interview, involved

an incomplete assignment, and she said she was in trouble for the whole day. Ida likes her school and described it as big and open. She mentioned how it would be nice to participate in afterschool activities, and if she was to participate in an afterschool activity, she'd like "gardening club, or a school play or something like that." Ida said if she could change one thing, she would change "The way other people treat us."

### ***Shirley***

Shirley is a Black, female, 12-year-old, sixth grade student at Walker Middle School, identified with other health impairment (OHI). Shirley is involved with track and field, cheerleading, and she plays instruments. Shirley said her teachers would say she is "...loud and get off task a lot" because she has ADHD. She said her friends would describe her as "goofy, crazy and caring." When Shirley discussed her relationship with teachers and administrators, she said they hover a lot, and it makes her uncomfortable. She was mostly concerned with having classes that interest her, and when asked about one thing she would change, she said, "Making the world a better place with less pollution. And I would try to make most of the Black girls have a good education." Although Shirley was not as talkative as the other participants, what she focused on was her individuality within the classroom and engagement. During the interview, Shirley said teachers often tell her to, "keep it down," or make her move a seat. She said they may say, "I'm loud and get off task a lot because I have ADHD. Sometimes I get off task fast or start talking to someone."

### ***Cicely***

Cicely is a Black female, 13-year-old, seventh grade student at Walker Middle School, identified with a specific learning disability (SLD). She enjoys art, playing the violin, and volleyball. She described herself as goofy, crazy, caring, and nice. She said she enjoys school overall, especially when she participates in interactive opportunities. She said she gets anxious, and habits such as chewing gum helps reduce her anxiety. When asked what her teachers would say about her Cicely said, *“They’ll say I’m mostly a good kid, but sometimes I don’t listen.”* When asked what her friends would say about her she said, *“They’d say I’m mostly good, but sometimes I do things that I shouldn’t be doing...either talking or playing around too much.”* She discussed her friends and family and what they mean to her. She also talked about how large the school is and how crowded the buses are. She further asserted how she wishes her own school had sports activities rather than participants having to be bused to another school. Cicely’s stories of her experiences with discipline involved her feeling she was kicked out of class for laughing and feeling like the teacher had something against her because there were other students laughing who didn’t get sent out of class. She also talked about how she thinks ISS is used to persuade students to stop doing what they are doing, but *“...that does absolutely nothing.”* Cicely said if she could change one thing she said, *“I don’t know. Probably learning either more Black history...that would be nice.”*

### ***Zora***

Zora is a Black, female, 12-year-old, sixth grade student at Walker Middle School, identified with autism and bi-polar disorder. Zora began the interview self-disclosing she was bi-

polar and referred to her diagnosis throughout the interview, especially when she discussed interactions with teachers and other school personnel who upset her. Zora said she has enjoyed being on a dance team for the past three years, and she is a gymnast. In her perception of experiences with discipline, Zora heavily discussed her experiences in ISS (in school suspension), her use of electronics (especially cell phones), feelings of isolation and how she, ultimately, feels targeted. When asked what her teachers would say about her, Zora said, *“She’s a terrible kid. Because some days I have my moments and some days I don’t.”* In the interview, Zora also talked a lot about what she enjoys doing when she feels upset, such as laying her head down or using a stress ball. Zora described herself as tough, competitive, and says that her friends would say, *“I’m like back-up for them, I think they would say I keep my word for some reason.”* Zora said if she could use a magic wand to change one thing she wishes *“...the world would change and we all be kind, people and anybody that’s going through something...I would change...and also that I don’t think that people should be talking about other kids.”*

### ***Katrina***

Katrina is a Black, female, 13-year-old, seventh grade student at Walker Middle School, and she is twice exceptional. She is gifted as well as other health impaired (OHI). Katrina discussed how she plays competitive softball and how fitness is important to her. Katrina often answered questions, thinking beyond herself, and in relation to the peers, with whom she shares time in ISS. She often used, *“If that makes sense”* when telling her stories, and she was incredibly forthcoming regarding her perception of discipline being a systematic problem at her school. She primarily focused on administrators regarding her

perceptions of authority and how she feels teachers and administrators sometimes misuse their authority. Katrina said her friends would say she has an attitude, and she asserted, “*my attitude get in the way definitely a lot.*” She also said that, although her teachers may not think so, she thinks she perceives herself as “*pretty well behaved.*” When asked what she would do with the magic wand, Katrina said, “*...I wish that everybody was given the same opportunities to learn their best way without [with] taking into consideration their behavioral problems, or things that they do wrong, or the way that they are treated at home, or their problems at home*”

### ***Dorothy***

Dorothy is a Black, female, 12-year-old, sixth grade student at Walker Middle School, and her older sister also attends the school. Dorothy has been identified with autism. Dorothy is involved in the dance ministry at her church and also sings in the church choir. When asked what she would say to someone who is new to her school, Dorothy said, “*This is not a game, this is middle school. School is going to be hard, and there will be ups and downs.*” Dorothy enjoys mathematics. She said it is easy and fun. She also described one of her classes as one that “*teach[es] you how to take care of babies.*” One class in particular, she expressed, she does not enjoy because “*they make you sit down way too long.*” Dorothy’s perception of discipline was primarily that, in her experiences, it has been unfair. She described interactions with teachers and administrators where she felt her side of the story wasn’t considered or heard. She also talked about how drama between herself and other girls at school caused her to feel like she was always being watched by administrators.



When asked what her friends would say about her, Dorothy said, “*my friends are fake...I do have one true friend, but she doesn't go to this school.*” Dorothy said her teachers would say, “*...sometimes she doesn't do right, sometimes she thinks that everybody don't like her...*” When asked what is one thing she would change with a magic wand, Dorothy said, “*I would change how people treat me at school and how people treat me at my house. They'll listen to me and actually let me talk and believe me and stuff.*”

### ***Thelma***

Thelma is a Black, female, 13-year-old, seventh grade student at Walker Middle School, identified with a specific learning disability (SLD). Thelma is involved with gymnastics, art, and band. She also plays both the flute and keyboard. When asked about her school, Thelma spoke about how some kids get bullied and how the boys, specifically, bully people because of how they look. Her description of her experiences with discipline included altercations with students where she felt she had to stand up for herself, because she thinks girls at her school get bullied a lot. Thelma also said, “*Sometimes I get in trouble, I actually do things wrong. It's not my fault...people be messing with me and I don't like it...*” Thelma said she enjoys both science and mathematics subjects because they can use their devices in those classes. She said if there is one thing she would change about her school, it would be “*the way people talk to each other.*” Although she did not verbally disclose having a disability, she said she felt bad for a boy with a disability at her school. People made fun of him because he cried during the fire alarm. Thelma said her teachers would say, “*I'm wild.*” Thelma said her friends would say she's “*weird, wild, and crazy.*”

## **Findings**

Each interview began with the girls completing the Qualtrics survey, which included demographic questions as well as questions from the CYRM-28. After the Qualtrics survey was completed, the participants were then interviewed using the semi-structured interview protocol and reminded the interview would be recorded. While every interview began with the same question prompting the participant to tell me a bit about herself, the sequence of the questions that followed varied based on the participant's response, but remained relevant to the research questions and purpose. While interviewing, the researcher took note of the participants' facial expressions, body language, and tones which helped to identify the depth of positive or negative experiences. The number of notes taken during the interview were limited to reduce distracting the participant. At the end of each participant's interview, the recording was immediately uploaded to Rev.com and a transcript was returned within 20-30 mins.

The researcher then uploaded and saved the transcripts in NVivo. She then printed and read the transcripts, listened to the audio-recordings two times, and made notes in the margins of the transcripts during each listen. While listening, the researcher verified the notes, both from the field and in the margins aligned with the interaction.

*Step 2: Extract Significant Statements.* After verifying the field notes aligned with the transcriptions and audio-recording, the researcher read the through the transcript entirely with no significant statements identified. The second time, the researcher read each printed transcript, she identified and recorded significant statements by highlighting them verbatim.

The researcher then read the electronic versions and made notes in NVivo, without looking at the printed versions. Statements and or phrases were identified, specific to each participant's experiences with school discipline. This included direct quotes from the participants.

The transcription and inclusion of quotes helped the researcher understand and describe the experiences Black girls with disabilities have regarding discipline more authentically, as quotes were direct, and in participants' own words. The researcher read the transcripts one final time and referenced both the original printed version with notes and the first electronic version with notes. From this third reading, the researcher had a list of significant statements. Each significant statement included traceability to the participant and research question.

*Step 3: Formulate Meanings.* To develop the formulated meanings, the researcher reflected on the following question, "What does this significant statement tell me about the participant's experiences?" The researcher did not only use the significant statement to develop the formulated meanings but also read the preceding and succeeding sections of the transcript, associated with the significant statement, to ensure contextual meaning was not lost.

*Step 4: Organize Formulated Meanings into Clusters of Themes.* After developing the formulated meanings, the researcher arranged them, based on similarities, into cluster themes and then into emergent themes. When developing the cluster themes, the researcher read each formulated meaning and traced it back to the original significant statements or transcript, to identify those that covered similar experiences. The researcher then arranged the cluster themes

again, based on commonalities, into emergent themes using the NVivo software.

*Step 5: Exhaustively Describe Phenomenon.* The researcher used the cluster and emergent themes to answer the research questions. The researcher supported each answer using actual quotes from the interviews into the narrative. When using participant data to support the answers, the researcher identified participants that supported the answer and, if applicable, mentioned those that may have had different experiences. The next part of this stage was thematic analysis. This involved reviewing the secondary content analysis. The researcher sent the coded transcripts and audio to two IRB approved reviewers for secondary content analysis. Following their reviews, the researcher made any necessary change to established themes.

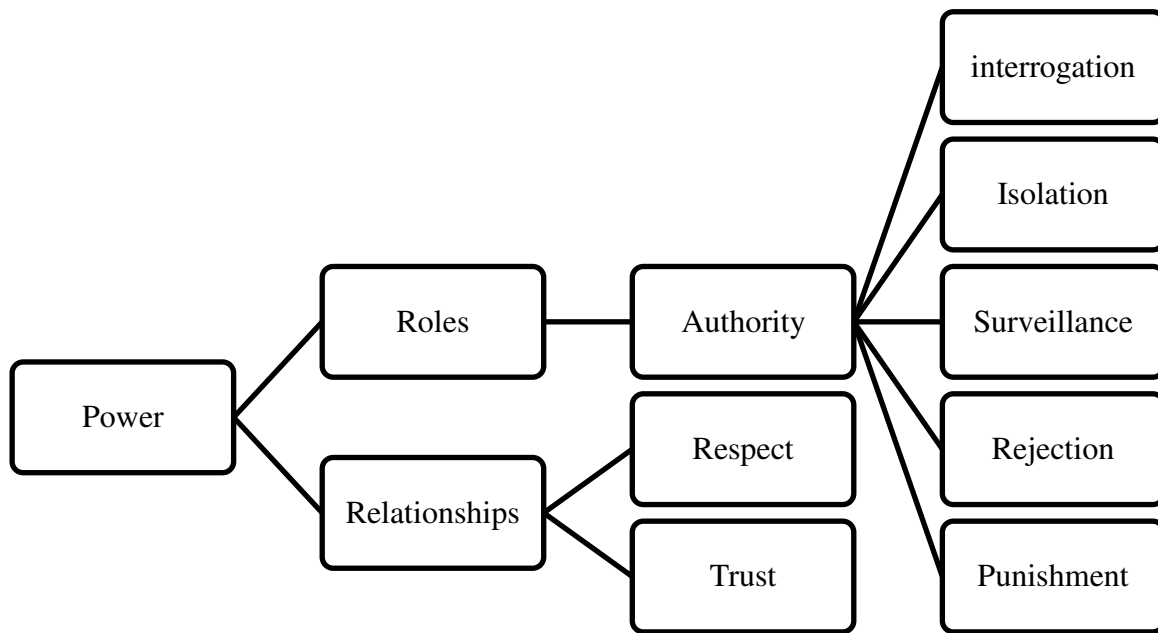
*Step 6: Describing the Fundamental Structure of the Phenomenon.* The researcher drafted an overarching narrative of the Black girls with disabilities who participated and described their experiences with discipline.

*Step 7: Returning to the Participants.* The last step allowed for the participants to review the data analysis results. The researcher sent the results of the analysis to the participants to verify themes that emerged, aligned with their description of experiences with discipline.

### ***Research Question One***

The first research question asked: What are the lived experiences of Black girls with disabilities as it relates to discipline? The girls' lived experiences are found in their stories about school and interactions with teachers, administrators, and peers as it relates to discipline. Interview durations ranged from 20 to 55 minutes in length. Many of the stories

the girls shared were interwoven with incidents they perceived as inequitable because of the lack of opportunity to be heard and understood. In reaction to, and from the girls' perceptions of the experiences, teachers and administrators asserted their power using interrogation, isolation, surveillance, and rejection.



**Figure 4** Themes from Research Question One

**Power**

Katrina, Zora, Dorothy, Thelma and Cicely, in several situations, reported being doubly punished, receiving both out of and in school suspension days. When reviewing the referrals of each girl, incidents reported varied in their degree of severity, from physical aggression to non-compliance. Table 1 contains the referral data for each girl. Some of the descriptive language the

girls used, related to discipline was: unnecessary [Katrina], unreasonable [Katrina], not working [Cicely and Bethune], and administrators really do not know what happened and they always believe what the teachers say [Dorothy, Katrina, Zora, and Bethune]. Katrina expanded on this theme of power and stated that some teachers, given their closeness with another teacher, find it difficult to decide whether to advocate for a student because of being treated unfairly by another teacher. She said teachers and administrators use student fear of consequences as a tactic. When asked about reasons for their discipline, all of them, Zora, Katrina, Dorothy, Thelma and Cicely, shared it is because of their attitude. Ida and Shirley said they're usually disciplined for not being focused or being loud. Dorothy, Zora and Katrina added, in their responses, that they're often disciplined for being rude, disrespectful, or a distraction to others. All the girls except Ida and Shirley discussed why they feel they are removed from classrooms -- for what they described as little things. Four of the girls admitted an awareness of their behaviors, stating sometimes they do things they should not be doing, such as talking or playing around too much. Katrina, Zora, Cicely, Thelma, and Bethune were not only aware of their own experiences, but they also showed empathy for other students. They discussed feeling upset when they feel their peers are removed from the classroom without cause and are labeled as a distraction to others.

### **Roles**

Discipline experiences from Katrina, Bethune, Dorothy, and Zora's perspective often involved a situation where they shared they felt they were being watched and interrogated by administrators. The four girls explicitly discussed not feeling respected. Bethune's story involved non-classroom spaces and how, when her and her friends are in the hallway

transitioning from class, they feel like administrators always question them. She went on to talk about being questioned frequently when she is in the hallway completing work. Zora and Bethune both expressed they feel this type of surveillance happens to the Black students more than anyone.

Katrina described a situation that escalated and caused her to be sent out of class where she asked a question in her Math class, and felt her teacher disrespected her by saying, *“I taught that already, you should know it...”* instead of helping her. Katrina, Cicely and Dorothy also discussed feeling as if teachers and administrators always have the final say. The theme of awareness emerged from Cicely, Zora, Thelma, Dorothy and Bethune’s descriptions of incidents where they were disciplined. In their retelling of their story, the five girls showed an awareness of themselves and their emotions and talked about different coping mechanisms (both positive and negative). Specifically, Thelma said she uses a stress ball. Zora said she picks at their fingers or chews on pencils. Cicely said she chews gum to make herself less anxious, and Bethune said laying their head down for a moment helps her to calm down. Many of the coping experiences the girls engaged in resulted in punishment. Thelma and Cicely shared specific conflicts with their peers, which got them in trouble. These incidents involved bullying, gossip, and “playing around.”

## **Relationships**

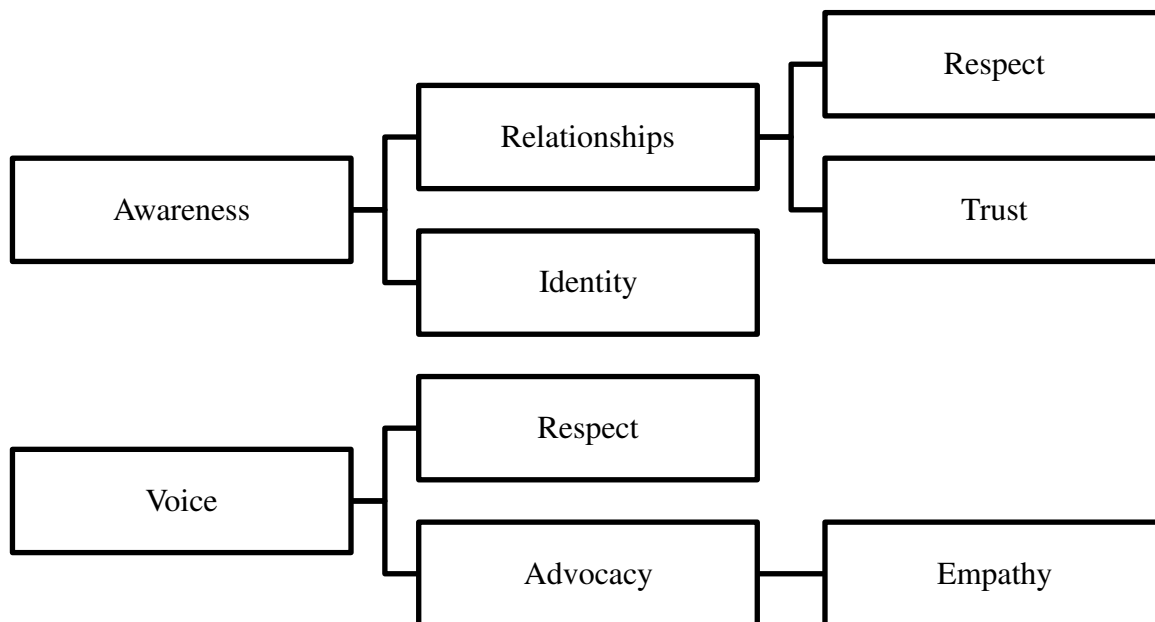
Dorothy, Zora, and Katrina mentioned experiences they felt teachers targeted them or isolated and rejected them, based on information gathered from another teacher or administrator. When asked how this made them feel, they used words such as angry, upset,

and sad. In these same conversations, Katrina, Dorothy and Zora talked about their relationships and trust between themselves and their teachers. In Katrina's stories, she described a particular teacher who advocated for students, responding to her and other students in constructive and restorative ways. On the other hand, Dorothy and Zora described a disconnect between some teachers and most administrators, saying they do not empathize with the students. In each of their stories, Katrina, Zora, Dorothy, and Cicely shared their perspectives regarding behavior-related situations as either not being heard, rejected, or misunderstood. They described teacher and administrators' responses to behavioral and disciplinary experiences as reactive. All four of the girls shared administrator's responses to behaviors as problems that needed to be addressed. Among the eight girls' stories, Bethune, Katrina, Cicely, Shirley and Ida, had one adult at school they described as nice and fun and with whom they built relationships. Bethune and Cicely discussed one female teacher who connected to them by sharing her story of being challenged at school and how she worked hard to be successful.

### ***Research Question Two***

The second question asked: What meanings do the participants make of their experiences in school in relation to gender, race, disability, and socio-economic status? The meaning drawn from their experiences is found within their descriptions of what stood out for them, daily, in middle school.





**Figure 5** Themes from Research Question Two

### **Awareness**

While I was given the demographic background of each girl prior to the interviews, only two of the eight girls discussed and confirmed their disability status during our conversations. However, when sharing their stories, Dorothy and Zora made meaning of their disability identities. They referred to the support they received from another teacher in each of their classrooms to ensure they understood the material. Dorothy explicitly stated she feels abnormal, given she has a hard time learning and has to receive special help.

During the interviews, Katrina and Shirley addressed experiences related to socio-economic status. Shirley discussed her desire to participate in afterschool activities, but she also mentioned there are requirements to be involved, such as parental permission and self-

transportation, which may prevent some students from participating. Katrina expressed empathy for the peers she knows whose parents work long hours and who, thus, do not have the option to be as involved with activities as they prefer. She further discussed this in relation to discipline-related experiences, saying that some students do not have the advocates she has, given her mom is heavily involved with her schooling.

Katrina and Dorothy discussed that students deal with taxing situations at home, as they often help take care of siblings and other responsibilities, and they face pressure at home and school, which often leads to them being sent to ISS. Katrina said she has an aunt who is a teacher who remains informed and supports her and her mother when incidents at school arise, requiring communication with teachers and administrators. Thelma and Katrina mentioned finances, and their awareness of that struggle emerged during a discussion regarding isolation, which encompassed two examples. First, Thelma discussed a situation where a student did not feel a sense of belonging because she could not afford certain clothes.

Secondly, Katrina discussed how students acted out as a way for them to cope with the financial struggles of their family. The themes which emerged relative to race arose during Zora, Katrina, and Cicely's discussions of how they feel their race is the reason disciplinary incidents start, and result in consequences. The girls' stories focused on the assertion of power through surveillance, isolation, rejection, and interrogation by teachers and administrators. Zora discussed situations where she felt she did not belong because of her school day, often beginning with an interaction with an administrator or school personnel. Katrina explained that she thinks African American students are not performing

like the rest of the student population because they are being removed from class for little things. Fitting in and being different were characteristics discussed by Zora, Ida, Shirley, Thelma, Cicely, and Katrina, as sometimes being difficult for Black girls to maintain in middle school. Cicely stated she often feels she has most in common with other Black girls in her school. She described an experience she had with other students where she felt offended because they were “acting ghetto.” Given the behavior of the other students, she felt it was important to emphasize to them in their conversation that Black people do not act that way.

Conversely, one participant who described herself as biracial, with a Black father and White mother, said she feels more excluded by other Black girls than she does with White girls at her school. She especially notices this issue during casual lunch conversations. Four of the girls used the words crazy, and nice or caring to describe themselves. Five of the girls discussed how African Americans are treated differently at their school. One girl said minorities are always the ones in ISS. No themes emerged regarding the girls’ gender identities. When they shared their stories, they referred to gender when discussing how the boys at their school are treated and, in some cases, mistreated by teachers and administrators. Three participants did emphasize bullying and gossip as issues with girls that often gets them into trouble.

### **Supporting Data**

Answering the research questions in this study required an in-depth review and understanding of the interviews with the participants regarding their experiences with

discipline. When reviewing the written transcripts to answer the research questions, three main themes emerged: power, voice, and awareness. Figure 3 illustrates the themes found across each girl's story, and Figure 4 illustrates the themes which emerged from the meanings the girls' made of their experiences.

### ***Power***

Zora, Cicely, Bethune, Katrina, Thelma and Dorothy discussed power when describing their experiences with discipline: power as it related to roles of authority in their lives [*Thelma and Dorothy*], or the relationships that were built or broken on respect and trust [*Zora, Bethune, Cicely, Katrina and Dorothy*]. Zora, Cicely, Katrina, Bethune and Dorothy's stories illustrated how authority figures in the school, including teachers and administrators, exercise their power using discipline. The following subthemes were developed to describe the girls' experiences: punishment, interrogation, isolation, surveillance, and rejection.

### **Roles.**

Dorothy, Thelma, and Katrina expressed how their parents have a different level of power and authority over their behavior and the consequences than their teachers and administrators at school. Dorothy, Katrina, and Thelma referred to their parents or caregivers when discussing the authority roles in their lives, often attributing a higher level of authority to family than school personnel. The girls were more concerned with the consequences of their behaviors at home rather than at school. This realization created conflicts for Dorothy and Katrina, particularly.

Dorothy discussed an incident and conversation with a teacher and administrator at her school regarding her behavior:

They said, well, you can't do that. I said, well, you can talk to my mom about it. Because I'm not about to sit here and argue with you because I'm doing what my momma told me I could do. You mad because of the rules my momma made. You're not my mom, you're not my dad, you're not my aunt, you're not my cousins. I know you're a teacher, but like...Come on now.

Thelma mentioned the following when she gets in trouble at school:

It made me feel fine, because I don't care if I get in trouble in school. It's just another way to learn to not do it. It's a home experience that I get in trouble with my dad a lot when I don't even do anything wrong, but oh well.

Katrina mentioned the following regarding her use of profanity:

If you're being really, really disrespectful to a teacher while you're using profanity, then that's different, but I think that it's a part of the English language. My mom doesn't care, but that doesn't really matter. I think it depends on the respect, I guess, that you're giving to the teacher while you're using it, if that makes sense. It shouldn't be used in middle school, obviously, but I'm just saying that it's really not that big of a deal.

### **Authority.**

Katrina, Dorothy, Shirley, Zora, Cicely, Bethune and Thelma discussed how teachers and administrators use their authority to assert their power. The subthemes,

including interrogation, isolation, surveillance, rejection, and punishment were developed from the statements girls made regarding their experiences with discipline. The level of respect and trust between teachers, administrators, and the girls also affect their discipline experiences and how they feel about their relationship with administrators and teachers. One of the frequent mentions of power occurred when Katrina, Zora, Dorothy, and Bethune discussed their interactions with administrators in their school. The roles of teacher and administrator, and their levels of authority, often were questioned and resisted, as told by Dorothy, Katrina and Zora. Katrina admitted to having an attitude, but she also emphasized how personnel with powerful roles in the school, who she described as “authority figures,” use discipline unfairly and sometimes, “unreasonably.”

### **Punishment.**

Dorothy, Zora, Katrina, Shirley, Bethune, Cicely, and Thelma described an experience with punishment as discipline. Each of the seven girls expressed her belief that punishment was unfairly used. Further, Zora, Dorothy, and Katrina were involved with situations where they felt doubly punished. The consensus from the girls was that responding to their behavior with punishment was ineffective. Katrina, for example, stated, “I understand if I got a day of in-school suspension but getting put in out-of-school suspension and then also two days of ISS on top of that, that is so unnecessary.” Katrina discussed the following regarding her consequence for the use of profanity: “But I feel like it was so unreasonable. They just went to suspension and ISS so fast. That doesn't make sense to me.”

Katrina also connected the use of exclusionary discipline to performance by saying:

...but I don't think that the administrators are seeing the connection between the test score and taking them out of the room. I don't know how they don't see it, because it's so obvious that these children are not learning, because you're taking them out of their classrooms for little things.

Katrina shared the following thoughts on the use of ISS:

They're just so quick to just throw you in ISS. Like my mom said, they're removing the problem basically, instead of working on the child that's causing the problem to be better in a classroom setting... It does not make any sense to me. I don't understand it.

They just went to suspension and ISS so fast.

They're letting me know that they are able to put you in ISS, or they are able to suspend you. They use fear, I guess, as a tactic, which I don't really agree with, because that's abusing your position, I guess. And I think that's unfair.

Katrina further discussed when ISS is a fair consequence:

I guess it depends on the situation. Like I said, if I'm screaming, violently cursing at a teacher, that's definitely different.

Me and my math teacher don't really get along very well, because she's very quick to send you out. She's one of the people that will just get rid of the problem. Then if you mess up once, you get put in ISS. Then you're being taken out of your classroom.

Dorothy also discussed punishment by saying:

Then he said that I was... He called an administrator and said that I was being disruptive,

which I wasn't, because everybody else was in their own business, and I was in the corner running circles. I wasn't doing nothing else.

Cicely discussed the following, regarding why ISS is used for discipline:

They just use it to try to persuade them to stop doing what they're trying to do. No, I think that does absolutely nothing.... I have gotten kicked out the class and sent to another class because, I don't know. I was just chilling with my friend. We were laughing out loud and she just kicked me out. I just know that I just got kicked out of the classroom because of laughing.

Bethune shared an account about when she was sent to ISS:

I was really tired one day. I wasn't doing my work and then I got an ISS because I wasn't doing my work, but then I just did my work in ISS. I was just really tired though. Yeah. I was laying down. She told me to put my head up, but I put my head up like this. But first I was laying down and then I put my head up and then she was like, that's it. Go to the off... I'm going to call Miss M, the administrators...

Zora discussed the following regarding her experience in ISS:

It's painful because we don't get to be with our friends, we have to be quiet, they tell us what to do, they play music, even music that we don't like sometimes. We have to stay focused. If we don't stay focused, it's another day added, basically. If you've only got two sheets of work done, you get an extra day. You got three, extra day, four, extra day, five, you get off that one day.

Cicely and Zora recounted several situations of punishment related to the use of their phones. Zora explained what happens when her phone is taken:



I get my phone taken away like every time when I come inside the room. They yell at me saying, 'Give me your phone now,' and really, I just walked in, so that leaves like five seconds to give them it or they say, 'You have another day of ISS.'

Cicely discussed how her phone is sometimes taken, even when she is not using it by saying, "...but I ain't do nothing wrong to get it taken away. If I was on it and told her no, you can't have my phone, then I'll understand, but I didn't do that."

Although their incidents did not result in them receiving ISS, Bethune and Ida also discussed experiences where punishment was a consequence. Ida discussed the following, regarding being sent to another class for the day: "But I was in trouble just to finish my work for science. It was for the whole day."

Additionally, Bethune discussed the restriction of gum in one teacher's class by saying, "Oh, she hates gum. She does not like gum. If you come in class with gum, she makes you spit it out. And she might give you lunch detention."

### **Surveillance.**

Zora and Dorothy shared experiences where they felt teachers and administrators were always "coming for them," watching and following them to an extent they felt was unnecessary. Administrators also often made them feel and identify with being bad or disrespectful.

Zora discussed how teachers always assume she is not where she is supposed to be in school. She shared the following:

Other days I would do very well, but teachers used to come at me because they

thought, 'You're being bad,' or other things... I know this morning they thought, one of my teachers, my first period, because they thought I was skipping class, but I wasn't. I was in ISS today. I asked her for my work. She says, 'Where was you at? You know what, you have lunch detention.' I told her I was in ISS. Then, she looked over there and saw the teacher. She like, 'Oh, okay.'

During her interview, Zora made a connection between surveillance and race by saying:

It's just not fair. The way I see all my friends get sad, it's only about us, us American kids, African American. Around in school and they get in trouble. You know those phrases of you have a target on your back? Well, I don't think it's a phrase. I think they really have a target on my back because people, sometimes they want to be nice to me (and sometimes they don't).

Bethune spoke of surveillance both from the first- and third-person perspective when transitioning in the hallways. She said:

They say a lot of stuff like pull your pants up. Well, that's for boys. Pull your pants up or go to first period. If we're going the long way, they'll ask us why are you going the long way? But if it was a group of White kids, they wouldn't ask them why they're going the long way. They don't know why we're going the long way or why we're going the short way.

Dorothy discussed the following regarding the use of surveillance:

Are y'all stalkers or what? Because I'm like... I'm like come on now. Because that makes no sense, to be over something that's not even going to happen because she told the principal and now she's scared of me right now? No. That's not going to

happen. Because you don't got to watch me, that's being a stalker. You know what I mean? So yeah.

Bethune and Dorothy had experiences with power being used as an interrogation tool. Bethune felt her experience was because of her race. Dorothy explained her frustrations with the way administrators make her feel she is always a problem. Bethune discussed transitioning to and from class. She said:

If it's a group of Black people, specifically, they will say something to us. But if there was a group of White kids, anything, they wouldn't say nothing to them if they walked by with something like headphones or something. I would say, if we're walking together in a big group, that they wouldn't stop and question us why we're going the other way, or this way, this way or that way. Or outside in the hallway, they wouldn't question us. If we're sitting outside beside the door, maybe we're finishing work and they would question us like, why are you outside? I just would ask if they would stop questioning us.

Dorothy also discussed her interactions regarding administrators who always suspect she's misbehaving:

So, say that somebody was walking, and they got... The teacher was lying, and they had to go to an administrator. The administrator will talk about, you do this, you do that. Why are you doing this all the time? I've got to keep coming to get you. They'll say that I'm doing the most.

### **Isolation.**

The theme of isolation emerged from Cicely, Katrina and Zora's experiences getting removed from class due to their behaviors. Cicely described her punishment as a permanent removal for the quarter, and Zora and Katrina both shared stories of how and why they received either in-school or out-of-school suspension as a consequence for their behavior. Both girls felt the punishment was not fair.

Cicely discussed a time when she was removed from class as a form of punishment. She

said: My friend got sent away for one day, but I got sent for the rest of the quarter for it. To a different class. I still have to do the work, but they'll just send me to another class so I can do my work.

Katrina explained why she thinks ISS and OSS are not helpful consequences. She said:

Right now, obviously, I'm in ISS, and I was suspended on Wednesday, because a teacher... (gathering her thoughts) I was late to her class. I went to go get breakfast, and then I came back. Then I was late, and I didn't have a pass, which I should have had a pass, but I didn't. She immediately called one of the administrators, and he came in. He was like, 'You're going to ISS for the rest of the day,' and then suspended me for Wednesday.

It makes me upset, because all these children are getting their opportunities taken away from them because they're removing the problem because they don't want to distract or make the other children that are in the classrooms learning with them uncomfortable, or they want to make sure that they're focusing. But what about the child that you're removing from the situation? They don't even think about that, and

that makes me upset.

Zora shared the following thoughts regarding suspension: “Usually, every time when somebody do something, they try to suspend them for some reason. What I thought was, at first I was like, they planned this or something. They planned this to put on me.”

### **Rejection.**

Rejection emerged as a subtheme from Zora’s experiences. As she described interactions with teachers, administrators, and other school personnel she emphasized feeling like she was not accepted. She discussed how she often questions when things are happening, feeling like it is because she has a target on her back.

Zora expressed her feelings about her relationship with some teachers by saying:

The music was just blasting because I'm on Bluetooth, and she just snatched it, and she was like, ‘I'm not in the mood for you today. I'm not ready for this. The day just started. Of course, I'm mumbling under my breath saying, What did I do wrong? What did I do? I really just walked inside the classroom.

It don't feel like I'm wanted here... I want to stay at this school so I can actually learn.

### **Relationships.**

The positive relationships Bethune, Katrina, Cicely, Ida and Shirley described were with teachers who challenged them academically and had high expectations of them, but also invested in getting to know them, personally. They discussed how the teachers and administrators with whom they had connections made them feel. These connections contributed to their motivation and engagement in the classroom.

Ida discussed what she would tell someone who was new to the school. She said, “There's a lot of nice people, nice teachers and a lot of nice stuff at the school.”

Zora spoke about the administrators who treat her well by saying, “They make me feel like I'm actually supposed to be here. Every time after I meet with them, like the next day, I pick to just stay at this school.”

Bethune said the following regarding her relationship with some of her teachers:

Okay, so first period, my math teacher, I feel good about her. She pushes you so you could make sure, and she makes sure you have it in class so you can know what you're doing and so you won't fail.

She teaches, she walks around the classroom while she's teaching. She'll come over and help you, and while she's teaching, she has examples. She'll ask you to come up and make an example of what she's saying. She lets you read the example on the board, and she's just laid back and chill. I like her. I don't know why, but she's just... I mean she doesn't wake you up (if you go to sleep in her class). She just, maybe, she knows you maybe had a rough night, that you couldn't get sleep. I like that teacher, fifth period.

Shirley recounted a personal story her mathematics teacher shared with her class about working hard and excelling in school:

She taught us a story... that she became a teacher because she had one teacher that pushed her hard and tried to get her to get a better answer... So she went to a college and became a teacher to push us harder and tell kids that you can do it, and if you push harder, you can get a better answer and explain it better. The teachers,

they're nice and some of the teachers push you harder to get a better answer and try to make you understand it more. Some of the teachers just make you just sit down and do notes all day.

Dorothy discussed her daily routine, saying, “Okay. For my math class, basically we have fun. On Wednesdays, we have Prodigy day. Prodigy's also a math game, but we have so much fun.”

Thelma, in response to what she likes and dislikes about her classes said, “I get bored very easily. Sometimes just sitting on a device, it'll just make me bored. Math can be fun sometimes, because the two teachers in the room, they kind of make sure we understand it.”

Cicely discussed what a typical day is like for her:

...absolutely be bored in there and probably even yelled at for chewing gum. She literally has a poster outside of her classroom that says, ‘don't chew gum, dispose of it.’

Okay, for example science, we actually get to do really cool things. I remember one time we had to make our cars, but we can't push it or anything. You have to use something to make it push itself. It would just be like some fun things to do instead of just reading.

Katrina's thoughts about her mathematics teacher's recent recognition and her interactions with students were recounted as follows:

It's unfair to say that all the teachers are bad.... On the outside, it looks like she's an amazing teacher, because she's won all these awards for growth, but then when

you're sitting in her class and you ask her a question, and then she ignores you or says, 'Well, I already taught you this, so you should know it.' It does not make any sense. It feels like she doesn't want to give you the time of day to answer the question...

Dorothy shared the following regarding her relationships: "Like, I don't really care particularly about people these days, because they get mad at me and I don't like them anymore."

### **Respect and Trust.**

One of the subthemes, which developed from relationships, was respect and trust. Dorothy, Cicely and Shirley discussed experiences in the classroom regarding teachers who made them feel uncomfortable, which made them struggle in those classes. The girls also discussed the level of trust and respect they have for different teachers and administrators. Dorothy explained why she does not trust teachers. She said:

Like I told this teacher, I said, 'can you please'... They doin' the most. So she said, I'll handle it, but then the next thing later you never handle it. It's five days later, you never handled it yet. I know she care about me, but like there's stuff she says... Like you need to listen to what you're saying to a student.

Cicely discussed why she does not like one of her classes. She said:

She has these popsicle sticks she'll call, and I just sit there and not say nothing because I don't know the answer to it, and she'll make us read and answer questions on the side of the paragraph we read, and that will really be it.

Shirley shared thoughts regarding feeling confused in class. She said:



Sometimes it feels like I must be dumb because I don't know it and they might just think they just don't like you or something. It feels like they try to make you feel dumb... It's the questions because they ask you the question, you answer it, then they try to ask you another question about it and push you harder to get a better answer.

Further, Dorothy explained her relationship with teachers at school. She said:

See, I don't like some of the teachers in school. I just don't get it. I was in gym yesterday, and I didn't know how to do my work. It was too hard.

So, then I had to go upstairs to the third floor. The she was like, well, for some reason, I had to go get you because you wasn't doing what you were supposed to do. I said that I was. I said, I couldn't do my work. My work was too hard. I said, I couldn't ask him for help, because he was doing stuff.

Shirley discussed the respect of boundaries with teachers and administrators. She said:

...sometimes they touch your shoulder or rub your back a lot of times, and hover over you sometimes. It's uncomfortable because they keep touching your back or just touch your shoulder and just breathe all over you. And it's kind of uncomfortable.

Zora, Katrina, and Dorothy shared experiences in which they felt they were disciplined for disrespect. Zora discussed how what they say to teachers gets them into trouble. She said, "Whenever we talk back to a teacher or we try to correct a teacher, we get in trouble for it." Katrina discussed respect being reciprocated by adults. She said:

I feel like no matter how old or what profession or what position somebody is in, no matter if I'm a child and somebody else is an adult, I think that respect is definitely a two- way street. So, I don't think that just because I'm 13 and somebody else is a principal or a teacher, that that means that I deserve less respect than they do, because I don't think it's fair to assume that just because I'm younger that you don't have to respect me. I think that's unfair.

Zora and Katrina had experiences where they felt the relationships among teachers and administrators had an aversive effect on them and the use of discipline:

Zora mentioned:

One time I was very mad because the teacher lied on me. I'm not going to say she lied on me, but she fibbed on me and then she simply switched up her story. Twice. Then they never caught it, so I got in trouble. Then when I went back inside the classroom, she simply said, 'Well this is not between me. I don't know nothing about this,' because it was the principal that told me to give her my phone.

### *Awareness*

By exploring the girls' stories, patterns emerged in their responses to questions relevant to their multiple identities within their experiences. While also considering their voices, the theme of awareness emerged. All of the girls discussed feelings, both personally and generally, which involved their identities and the roles and relationships intertwined within those identities. Further, the sub themes of respect and trust emerged, specifically in Katrina, Dorothy, Zora, Thelma, Ida and Cicely's stories of impacting how

they feel about themselves and others, both members and non-members of their self-identified groups.

### **Roles.**

The roles of school climate and the classroom appeared again within the theme of awareness. Cicely, Zora, Thelma, and Ida discussed the importance of relationships in school and having fun.

Cicely discussed the importance of understanding who to trust. In response to the interview question, “If I were a new student, what would you want me to know about your school?” Cicely said, “People that have too much drama or be able to just like not safe to hang around or something... Show you the people that you should not trust or be around.”

When sharing their daily routine, Zora, Cicely, Thelma, and Ida highlighted the relationships they have with their peers and how socializing is part of each of their identities. Regarding what she does between classes, Cicely shared, “Talk to my friend Kayla where I'll hear all the tea [gossip].” Further, Cicely discussed the importance of having time to talk to her friends between classes because they do not live near her. She said, “So when I do see them, I try to take more time. Like, I don't know, just take the time I have with them.”

Ida discussed what she thinks makes class fun by saying, “There's a lot of diversity and a lot of nice people.” Also, she said, “Interacting with each other and engaging in work.” Zora explained her morning routine with her friends. She said, “Then we all go to [get] breakfast and then we drop each other off, drop a lot of people off. I have girls as

friends. I have boys as friends.” Thelma discussed the things she likes to do by saying, “Sometimes in school I like to joke around with my friends. Then outside of school, I will just probably try gymnastics or just draw.”

Dorothy discussed the role of school and how an individual’s feelings will change from day to day, but she also offered advice about the seriousness of middle school compared to elementary school. She said:

There is another, like I say ups and downs. Another ups and downs is you might, when you come to school, you might feel happy. When you come to school, you might feel sad. You might feel mad because of how you woke up this morning. Also the ups and downs, one more thing, is that I have to wake up early. You need to know that this is not a game. It's actually middle school now. You're not in no elementary; you're in middle school.

School's going to be hard. It's going to be ups and downs. Just have fun and try to work your way through it until you go to your next grade.

### **Identity.**

The meaning the girls made of their identities is discussed in various ways, including how the girls view themselves, how they feel they are viewed by their teachers and administrators, and how they feel their peers view them. Some of the girls discussed the role their race identity plays in their lives, while others discussed their disabilities. Each identity discussed during the interview is provided in Table 2. Race was most frequently discussed. The researcher used the four intersecting identities from

research question two, which include race (Black), girl, disability, and money as a proxy for socio-economic status. Katrina, who discussed bills, was not included in the frequency count. Her statement was made in the context of explaining why she feels some parents do not come to school and advocate for their kids. She said:

...they're more focused on paying the bills and giving their kids things they need, then they might not have time to come, or they might not even be able to come, because they're focused on the financially kind of part.

**Table 2** Frequency of Identity Groups

Identity Group	Frequency
Black	30
Girl	23
Disability	3
*Money	7

*\*Money was used as a proxy for frequency of SES discussed in the conversation.*

The stories told by Thelma, Cicely, Zora, Shirley and Katrina illustrated their beliefs, needs and attitudes relative to their identities and experiences in school.

Zora discussed the leadership role she has amongst her peers. She said, “They always listen to me, so they'll think I am a person that keeps their word, and I make sure that they choose the right decision all the time even if I don't sometimes.” Zora also discussed what she feels her friends would say about her. She mentioned:

They would say I'm tough. I'm like back-up for them. I think they would say I keep my word to them for some reason. I think they would say that I back them up

because everything that I do, it depends on them, but sometimes it depends on myself, too.

Zora further shared how she views herself. She said:

I dance actually. I'm a dancer. I've been dancing for three years by now. And then I do gymnastics, too. About me is that I have issues because I know I found those out by myself. Because one day I remember I was at elementary school, and I found out because I went to the doctor that day, they said I had ADHD. I need to work on my attitude because I know my attitude, it really sucks, because when I see the way I'd be yelling at people on certain days and the next day I be all nice to them.

Thelma also discussed how she views herself by saying, "I'm wild. Sometimes I'm wild. Not all the time. It's certain periods that I'm wild because I eat too much candy. Because I'm not doing what I'm supposed to do in school, and I'm not focused."

Katrina shared some details about her identity. She said:

I'm 13-years-old. I play competitive softball. It's a big part of my life. Staying in shape is very important to me. I like to exercise and all that kind of stuff. I feel like sometimes my attitude can get me in trouble a lot... and people just see that instead of who I actually am as a person, because sometimes I put a wall up. I'm going to admit that I have an attitude, I don't really know what else to say. I don't particularly enjoy school, but, I mean, what middle schooler really does? I'm not really a very open person, I guess, if that makes sense, especially when it comes to authority figures, I guess it's because I haven't really had a good experience with authority figures, I guess. I don't know. Not the police or anything, just people that have

control over me, I guess, in school and stuff like that.

Cicely noticed a shift in in herself from elementary to middle school about her identity.

She reflected by saying:

Like I don't know, I got more aggressive... like in elementary I used to get bullied and I guess I don't want to get bullied no more. You know, I have, but it just stopped after a while 'cause like it wasn't affecting me no more.

The following excerpts discuss Zora, Cicely, Shirley, and Katrina's responses to what teachers or administrators would say about them. Regarding teachers' responses to her behavior, Shirley said:

They might say I'm loud and get off task a lot because I have ADHD. Sometimes I get off task fast or start talking to someone. Sometimes when I'm talking to someone, they will say, 'You're being too loud,' or if we're having a conversation they'll say, 'You're being too loud.'

Cicely described her experience by saying, "They'll say I'm mostly a good kid, but sometimes I don't listen." Zora mentioned what administrators would say about her. She said "She's a terrible kid. Katrina discussed how she feels and what teachers would say about her behavior. She said, "I have my moments, but I think I'm pretty well behaved in general. My teachers may not think so, but I think I'm pretty well behaved." Dorothy described what administrators would say about her behavior. She said, "They would be like, well, sometimes she doesn't do right, sometimes she thinks that everybody don't like her." Ida, unsure of what exactly teachers would say, discussed what she thinks about her own behavior. She said:

I don't know if they would say I was hard-working, but I do. I do try and finish my work as fast as I can. I do work hard, but it's like hard for me to focus because other stuff is going on. So like I'm focusing on my work and I'm paying attention to other things also, but that's why it's hard.

The following excerpts highlight how Cicely and Shirley responded to an inquiry regarding what their friends would say about them. Shirley thought her friends would say the following about her: “They say I'm goofy and crazy and I'm caring.”

Thelma explained her friends call her wild and crazy. She further said:

They'll probably say that I'll be wild, because I was a lot wild today too. They were calling me crazy. They always call me crazy, and I don't know why. I know it's crazy in a good way, but I don't know why they always call me that.

Cicely figured her friends would have mixed feelings about her behavior. She said, “That I'm mostly good, but sometimes I do things that I shouldn't be doing. Either talking or just playing around too much.” Ida was unsure of how to describe herself and what her friends would say, so she said, “I don't know. I really don't. I don't know what to say about to me either.”

During the interview, the last question every girl was asked was if they had a magic wand, what is one thing they would change. Seven of the girls talked about acceptance of diverse identities, particularly race and disability.

Regarding the magic wand inquiry, Shirley said:

I'd try to make people stop hating on people for the color of their skin, and try to love them or try to care for them because their personality or something else of



them, not how they look or what their race is... I'd try to make most of the Black girls have a good education.

Zora shared the following regarding how she would use her magic wand: “I wish that the world would change, and we all be kind people and anybody that's going through something very bad, it would change, even the school though. I will make that my wish.”

Ida wished for equality, and said:

I would change the way that we, that they, the other people treat us and how they think that we to deserve, to be here. Probably.

Like some people, like they probably never seen us before because they probably don't know who you are, what they like. They're like, probably we're new here or something

### **Race.**

The researcher combined all of the participants' interview transcriptions and created a text search query for race (Black) using NVivo software. Figure 6 illustrates the context and frequency in which the girls discussed their racial identities.



**Figure 6** Text Search Query, Race

Ida discussed racial identity and relationships from third person perspectives. She said, “But sometimes, like, people don't like say like mean stuff about other people and stuff like that. So, and they don't treat each other equally. So other people don't think other

people deserve the opportunity to be here.”

Cicely shared how she feels about her racial identity by saying:

I feel like Black girls have a very strong power. We can achieve anything we want if we actually tried and put our minds to it. All the history we have, Black history and things. That's really nice to have Black History Month and things.

Shirley shared her feelings about her racial identity. She said, “It's nice to be a Black girl because Black girls need to speak up and speak up for their rights.” Katrina’s awareness of racial identity and its impact on students was clear, given her explanation of the academic performance of African American students was discussed. Katrina discussed the following, regarding her struggles with her racial identity, and how her awareness makes it hard to fit in:

I think that sometimes it can be difficult. For me, I've kind of figured out who I am, I guess, but I'm still kind of struggling with that, because I'm biracial. To be honest with you, I felt more excluded from the Black community than from the White community.

...when I really sit and talk to the White kids, I guess, it's like they say stuff that's kind of off, and I'm like, ‘Do you not hear yourself?’ But I'm aware of it because I'm Black, if that makes sense, but they're not aware of it. They don't understand that there's some stuff you just cannot say. I feel like I sit there, and I'm like, ‘What?’ If I sit with the Black kids, it's like, ‘Okay, you're still saying some kind of off stuff about White people, but okay. It was always difficult for me to figure out who to sit with at lunch, because I always felt like I was too White for the Black people and too

Black for the White people. They could never just see me for Katrina. It was always the White girl, I guess, if that makes sense. They would always call me White girl and I wanted desperately to fit in with them, I guess. So, it was kind of like, what is even the point of me trying to fit in with you?

When discussing identity, Katrina shared her perception of race and academic performance. In her sharing, she discussed racial and economic status as markers for poor performance in school. She said:

...but I think that it's proven that minorities can sometimes perform less... I'm not saying for every single person of color, but I'm saying that generally, it's more of the children that don't have the support at home, if that makes sense, and those children are usually minorities. There's usually more poor Hispanic and Black children than White children.

Katrina also discussed why she feels low-income minorities perform poorly. She further said: So, I think that that can affect the test scores, because they don't have the support at home, because their parents don't have time to sit and care about the grades or the test scores and stuff. I'm not saying that it's all the time that there's colored people in ISS and being suspended, but then they turn around and say, 'Well, look at all these test scores. African American people aren't performing like the rest of the student population.' But when you take kids out of their classrooms for little things, and then expect them to perform the way that everybody else is, is very unfair.

Cicely and Zora spoke of the inequities of Black people. Cicely connected being a

Black female to having to work harder and less opportunities. She also discussed her motivation, given her identification as a Black girl. When she was sent to the office, and while waiting to be seen by an administrator, Zora often noticed a number of other students in the office with, what she described as, “my skin tone.”

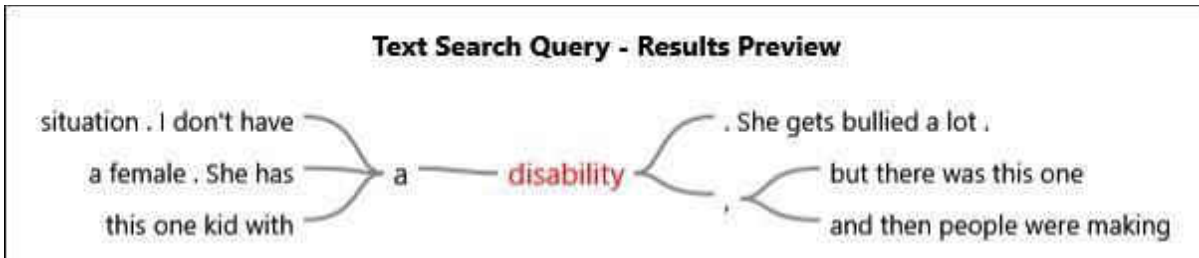
Cicely discussed her view of racial equality by saying, “And other people, well specifically, Whites, they have opportunities. They don't really need to put much work and effort to things. But that's what makes Black women stronger, if we try hard enough we can do it.”

Cicely responded with the following when asked what she would wish for if she was given a magic wand:

Probably learning about either more Black history. Like Rosa Parks was not the first lady to refuse to give up her seat on the bus. There was actually this other girl, I forgot her name, she was 15 but didn't want to show her or something like that, so they just changed it to Rosa Parks. So there's like way more Black history, that would be nice.

### **Disability.**

During the interviews, Dorothy and Zora were the only two girls who discussed their beliefs, needs, and attitudes related to their disability identities. Thelma rejected her disability as an identity but empathized with other students. Dorothy and Zora talked about their struggles, and how they make meaning of their disabilities. Figure 7 was created from a text search query for disability using NVivo software, and shows the context and frequency in which the girls discussed disability.



**Figure 7** Text Search Query, Disability

When I first asked her about how it feels to be a Black girl with a disability, Thelma’s initial response was, “I don't know how to answer that question.” When the topic was re-introduced into our conversation, in the context of relationships, acceptance and interactions with peers, she said the following:

I don't have a disability, but there was this one girl... She's Black, and she's a female. She has a disability. She gets bullied a lot... No, she just gets bullied because of the words that come out of her mouth. People curse at the people with disabilities. There was this one kid with a disability, and then people were making fun of him, because he was crying because of the fire alarm.

Zora told me a little about herself. She said:

Sometimes I have my own moments, like always, because when I first meet them all the time. I tell them straight up I'm bipolar so I might change a little bit sometimes.

But I was bipolar. Then all I thought was that would curse me forever. But then I found I need to work on that a lot.

Dorothy discussed what it means to be a Black girl with a disability. She

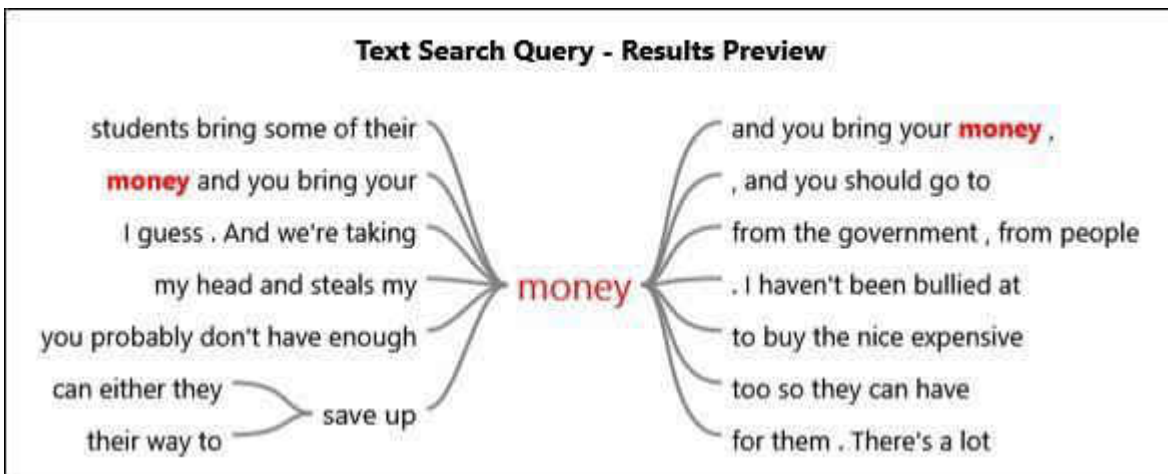
said: I want to be normal. I'm not normal. I have to have special help. I have to have help with my reading and stuff. I know. My uncle always says get better at it, get better at it. I know, I know, and I know. But, I'm not a normal person.

I know I have to get better, I try to. Come on now. I go to school.

Why can't I go to regular classes and be fun and go to regular science instead of sitting in there watching some videos... All we do is watch videos and write about science.

That is not even fun.

Thelma made meaning of physical identity from the third person perspective as well and why she thinks some people get bullied. Some of her statements along with the other girls related to money as illustrated in Figure 8, created from a text search query of the eight participants' transcripts money using NVivo software. Figure 8 shows the context and frequency in which the girls discussed money.



**Figure 8** Text Search Query, Socio-economic Status (Proxy-money)

Thelma talks about why she thinks some people are bullied:

Cause some people get bullied a lot about how they look or the way they dress or what type of, what their hair looks like and puts up the shoes they wear. It's all based off the looks, not the personality. Like some people just do that for no reason. I really don't care how people look. I mean it's, you probably don't have enough money to buy the nice expensive shoes, clothes and stuff coming out.

Thelma discussed the most important thing a new kid at her school should know. She said:

Some people, they bully kids... Probably because how they look, because it's probably because, if someone were to come to this school dressed up as a farm person, then they'll get bullied. I got bullied on my bus once last year in sixth grade when I had my box braids in, and someone said that I needed to take them out because they look ugly. I was like, 'They look fine, so you need to leave me alone.'

### **Gender.**

The girls did not explicitly discuss their gender identities during the interviews, but they discussed some experiences regarding interactions with other girls and boys.

Sometimes, the girls shared experiences, as they relate to conflict and others, and as they relate to the observations of how teachers and administrators treat them. Figure 9 was created from a text search query of the eight participants' transcripts for girl, using NVivo software. Figure 9 shows the context and frequency in which the girls discussed girl.





**Figure 9** Text Search Query, Gender

Thelma discussed one of the important things a new student should know about her school. She said, "It's mainly the boys who bully people." Shirley further discussed her gender and racial identity. She said:

A Black in middle school, sometimes it's hard because you can hardly fit in with groups or you can hardly find somebody. Because sometimes you might just not

know what they're talking about, or if they're doing something they might not want you to do, get in their conversation or something. Yeah, it's hard finding something in common with them. And sometimes when you find other Black girls or mostly have stuff in common, or maybe not.

Dorothy explained why she does not have many friends at school by saying, “It's a whole bunch of things. Like, they say, oh, this girl says something about you. I'm like, oh my gosh, here it goes again.”

Katrina and Zora also discussed the need for respect and acceptance of all identities. Katrina talked about acceptance beyond her personal experiences at school, connecting respect for individuality to race, sexuality and socio-economic status. Zora's discussion of respect and acceptance of identity was more personal. She shared her feeling that despite her being bipolar, she deserves the same respect as everyone else.

Katrina explained why respect is important. She said:

It's important for everybody to be different and seen differently and appreciated for their differences, but at the same time, it's like people are also getting not appreciated for their differences and being discriminated against because who they like, what their sexuality is, the way that they look, their economic position.

Zora explained an incident which supports why she thinks she has a target on her back. She said:

...and one day she simply said that I was in there second period because that's my bipolar kids or whatever, like a needs class, I go in there. It just goes on and she tells other kids, she yells at people for no reason. I'm just wondering, ‘What's going on in

here? I don't get it.' I know, I really do know, that I'm not, how do I say it?

Basically, I know that I'm the person that, I'm not special or anything because I'm not a person that gets everything that they want. I'm like everybody else. I bleed like everybody else and everything, but I don't deserve being rude or people don't deserve being rude to me either.

### ***Voice***

Voice was developed as a theme, connected to how each girl made meaning of their multiple identities. Within the theme of voice, the subthemes of respect, advocacy, and empathy developed. Dorothy, Bethune, Katrina, Zora, Thelma and Cicely often connected being seen, heard, accepted, and understood with how they made meaning of their identities, relative to their experiences with discipline in school.

### **Respect.**

Respect was coded as a subtheme from the meaning the girls made of their identities. Dorothy and Katrina said they often feel like adults in their school do not listen to or understand them. Dorothy and Katrina requested they be listened to when asked about what wish they would make with the magic wand. Dorothy discussed how she feels teachers and administrators do not listen to her. She shared:

No, they just think ... They don't listen to me. They say I got you, I got you. I said, then what do I mean then? They tell me something wrong, I'm like no, that's not what I mean. Like if you listen to me ... It just ... Because they think I'm always about other stuff. Like come on now... So, when that stuff happens, they're always

talking, like always saying that I'm like a liar and stuff. I was little, I was a liar.

People age up. Didn't y'all say if you change... Isn't y'all world where you get older you change? I changed. I don't lie. They think I'm always lying. No. So I'm just like, forget it.

Dorothy shared having the following wish if she had a magic wand: “They'll listen to me actually and let me talk and believe me and stuff.”

### **Advocacy.**

Bethune, Zora, Cicely, Katrina, Dorothy and Thelma shared situations where they felt consequences for their behavior were not fair. In those situations, they made meaning of their identities by expressing a need for advocates and often teacher or parent allies who had their best interests in mind. Cicely and Katrina discussed how they have to stand up for themselves.

Regarding self-advocacy, Thelma said, “I stand up for myself all the time.”

Cicely discussed the following, regarding dealing with conflict at school:

I do it myself, 'cause actually, if I talked to or told someone in school, they're not just going to help me. They'll just talk to him and then they'll be like, don't do that again or you'll get in-school suspension, and that really don't solve any problems, to be honest.

Katrina advocated for a change in the use of exclusionary discipline, and she said, “I should have just went straight to class. But to take me out, completely out, of my learning environment... I can't do any work while I'm at home suspended.”

Regarding why she feels students underperform because they're often suspended from

school, Katrina said:

Obviously, everybody knows about it, but nobody's doing anything to help them, if that makes sense. So, I think that Miss C is a good advocate for that. I know I'm fortunate enough to be financially stable and have a parent that is able to come here and say, this isn't right, scheduling parent-teacher meetings and stuff.

He's one of the nicest people you'll ever meet. He's just so giving, I guess. If you ask him a question, he's very willing to explain everything.

Zora discussed her request for support by saying, "Basically, just help us sometimes when we're inside our bad moods, like not picking us more and if you have your phone out." Dorothy expressed a strong need for advocacy and support. She said:

I think the school needs to up their game once a student tells you to... When a student asks you to help them with something, help them with what the kids are doing...

That just make me frustrated. Like I just get upset. Like if you want to be a teacher and a student asks you to help about something that's going on and you don't know if it's important or not, you need to help. Well they could stop always believing what other teachers say if you don't know what really happened.

Dorothy shared her experience regarding not feeling heard when she struggled. She said:

She say I can't help you because like... Then you just don't nothing. Because I took all the words I didn't know, she said... It was a whole bunch of words that I didn't understand the words, she said, then you just don't know nothing. I'm like, why would you say that? Come on now. She listens to Miss B, because Miss B tells her

I'm being rude and disrespectful. How am I being rude and disrespectful? The teachers told me to do my assignment, I could not do it, it was hard. How that disrespectful?

There was a misunderstanding of the level of support in the school and the purpose of supports, especially in Dorothy's feelings and experiences with adults who check in on her throughout the day. This seemed to connect to other themes developed, stemming from relationships built on respect and trust. Dorothy said:

They say that my mom signed a contract where I need them to come check up on me and stuff. My momma said, no I did not. And they signed a contract that I have to have this lady come and see me off and on. I don't know her, my mom probably don't even trust her, because she don't even know about it.

### **Empathy.**

Zora, Katrina, Cicely and Dorothy used words such as upset, bad, and angry when describing situations they felt were not fair for all students. Bethune discussed the boys who are often watched in the hallways, Katrina talked at length about peers who may need emotional support but, instead, feel they are punished for not knowing how to cope with emotions.

Zora talked about how she feels when other students have experiences similar to hers. She said, "...but when I see somebody that's actually standing in my own shoes and they're doing with it, it's pretty sad." Thelma discussed the most important thing she feels I should know about her school. She shared, "And some kids, they will stand up for you, and other kids, they'll just bully around with them." Katrina discussed how she feels about her

treatment from teachers, and she shared how one teacher is not bad:

I think she's the advocate for African American children or something here... I don't know if I'm going to say this right, but she works more about equity than equality, if that makes sense. If she sees a child that's struggling or has some stuff going on at home, she'll focus more on that student than the students that are more well-off, if that makes sense.

...but it's not that easy for everybody, if that makes sense. A lot of times children with anxiety or depression or something, a lot of the symptoms of that are being quickly agitated or acting out in school. It makes me upset. You have to sit in that room all day and then go home and help your younger siblings. I think that can also be a reason for the behavioral issues. The children are frustrated, because their parents aren't financially stable, or they have a whole bunch of children. Some eighth graders are taking care of their younger siblings and stuff like that, because their parents aren't there for them.

I think that can cause behavioral issues, because they're already dealing with so much stuff at home, and they come to school and it's like this pressure from everybody to do what you're supposed to do. A lot of kids just don't have the resources, if that makes sense. A lot of kids don't have parents that are willing to come in. And it may not be that the parents don't care. It's just that they don't have time to sit and talk to their kid. If they have a lot of siblings, having eight kids in one house with one parent is really hard.

Katrina also shared a solution to the lack of empathy she feels the school has for the

students she described above:

But I think it's going to take more parents to come in and say, 'This is unfair. My child is not succeeding here for this reason, and it needs to change.' I think it's more parents that need to come in and say something.

Katrina discussed how it's hard for teachers to advocate for students because of their relationships with other teachers. She said:

I guess it's just hard for them, if you're close to somebody, to see their flaws, I guess. So, it's difficult for a teacher to advocate for a student if they're being treated unfairly by another teacher, because they're so close to each other.

The teachers and administrators, you will never, ever, unless they're in ISS gossiping ... The teachers in ISS like to do that. You will never, ever hear a teacher talking disrespectfully about another teacher or an administrator, which is good, I guess, but it can also be bad, because... I don't know.

However, Katrina shared a situation where one teacher did advocate for fairness regarding consequences. She said:

I guess two boys were fighting. Well, they had been fighting like two days before. Then one of the boys that was fighting got out of ISS, but then the other one stayed in ISS... So, Miss B was like, 'That's not fair.' If you do what you're supposed to do, then she will advocate to you, which I appreciate.

### **Self-Regulation.**

Bethune, Zora, Thelma, Cicely, and Dorothy discussed how they coped with their



feelings in school as it related to experiences with discipline. Dorothy, Thelma and Zora made meaning of their identities by justifying behaviors and the need for strategies to manage conflicts. Some strategies for de-escalation were productive, such as the stress ball Thelma described, while others, like Cicely's chewing gum, were not allowed. Zora and Dorothy wanting to hit someone or Bethune's laying her head down caused aversive reactions. Regardless, each girl felt the need for some sort of tool or particular response to help handle situations.

Thelma discussed how she deals with anger when she gets upset. She said, "I'm working on making a stress ball... Because people get on my nerves a lot." Thelma, in response to the girls who she said were rude to her, said, "It made me feel mad. It just made me feel like I was going to punch her in the face."

Zora and Thelma were very aware of what happens when they are upset, and they described how they try to regulate their anger during those situations.

Zora explained what makes her upset by saying the following:

When I'm mad, I just feel like somebody comes up to me, I'd be like, 'Can you please...not inside a mood?' And they don't listen, and I'll just walk away even though they're talking if I'm not inside a mood.

Thelma discussed the following, regarding how she feels about consequences and what happens when she is upset:

I feel fine, because sometimes I get in trouble, I actually did do things wrong. It's not my fault. It's just that people be messing with me, and I don't like it, so I start yelling and I get mad. I have really bad anger issues, so it gets worse. I think it was this

other time... I don't remember what exactly happened. In sixth grade, it was one of the teachers that... I don't remember what she did, but I got in trouble for whatever she did. Then I yelled back at her, and I suddenly said a cuss word, because it slipped out.

Zora discussed how she deals with her emotions. She said:

I would get like a, I have something on me just in case so I can just take it out, and while they're talking to me, I can just squeeze it or something and whatever I have, I can just twiddle with it while they're talking to me so I would not have to just put my head down and ignore anybody. I'm trying to figure out, I'm trying to cool down so I can talk to everybody. Usually if I ask her, 'Can I listen to music while I'm working?' because it gives me focus a lot, she says yes all the time. Then I found out I need to work on this, so usually I bring a stress ball. Sometimes when I'm about to say something, I chew on a pencil for some reason. It's weird, but I just pick on my fingers, and I burn my nose sometimes for some reason. But it really helps me a lot.

Ida discussed what teachers would say about her behavior. She said:

I don't know if they would say I was hard-working, but I do. I do try and finish my work as fast as I can. I do work hard, but it's like hard for me to focus because other stuff is going on. So like I'm focusing on my work and I'm paying attention to other things also, but that's why it's hard.

Further, Cicely discussed how she regulates her anxiety by saying, "Yeah, chew gum. 'Cause like it helps with anxiety if you have anxiety, and will cause it like not to be so bad." Regarding what gives her anxiety, Cicely shared, "Probably just presenting a project,

like normal anxiety things, reading out loud. I always have gum and I'll just put a gum in my mouth and just start chewing it, and I won't feel that scared for some reason.”

Dorothy and Thelma described their feelings of being physically aggressive. Thelma and Dorothy explained situations of conflict with and between peers.

Dorothy discussed an incident with her peers. She said:

That's when my best friend got mad, because she thought I was talking about her, but I was talking about my cousin... So, now, ever since that happened, on the phone she said that we can fight and stuff at lunch. She said we could go fight in the bathroom after lunch. So, I went in the bathroom, I was waiting for her. So, do something to me first, because I'm not a person that hits first. Somebody else will hit me first, then I will pop off.

Dorothy further discussed how she feels about her relationship with her friends. She said, “They don't really trust me. Well, I don't trust them, because they just fake, so... And they talking behind my back. It's so obvious, but it's fine.”

Dorothy also explained a situation in fifth grade when another student spit in her face and how when she's infuriated, she has thoughts of physically retaliating and warns people to stay away from her. She said:

I don't know, I just want to bite people in their face, tell them to leave. I will tell them straight up if I'm really mad, I'll tell you straight up get out of here, get out of my face, back up...

Dorothy further shared that her reactions to anger occur because of her difficulties controlling her emotions, specifically anger. She shared, “But I'm not that mean. Maybe. I

don't know, because sometimes I just can't handle my anger.”

Dorothy explained how she reacts when she feels she cannot get help. She said:

Coach was testing other people with their exercises one by one. So, I'm the one. I'm sitting there like, I don't know how to do this. I couldn't ask for no help, so I put my paper down. I was walking around. I was just walking around, just looking around, just walking around.

Dorothy followed that anecdote with an expression of how those types of situations make her feel. She said, “I'm sad, I'm mad. And I want to leave. I don't want to go to that school no more. Want to go somewhere else. Like I want to go back with my grandma.”

Thelma, in response to how she feels in situations where she is bullied, said, “I will punch someone.”

Zora discussed her awareness that her decision to be physically aggressive was wrong in an interaction with her teachers, who were supervising ISS. She said: “They was like, ‘Oh, you're crying for what?’ I got mad and then, I know what I did was wrong by hitting stuff because I was very mad, but I was not supposed to do that, and I know that for a fact.”

## **CRYM-28**

The participants completed the CYRM-28 online through QualtricsXM. Each survey was completed prior to the semi-structured interview. The purpose of the survey was to measure the girls' level of resiliency. This survey was chosen to increase the trustworthiness of the findings of this study to support or negate the females' interview

responses around resiliency. Each participant’s overall score on the CYRM-28 was split into subscales of the following categories: personal resilience involving individual resources and practices, caregiver resilience, involving relationship with primary caregivers, context, and involving sense of belonging (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2009). The mean of each subscale is reported in the table below. The CYRM-28 measure is meant to be directly summed, and the score, which indicates high or low levels of resilience, is compared to the youth in the sample (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2009). Further, the higher the score is, the more the resilience components are present in the lives of the participants. Interestingly, the mean score for all eight participants was in the low risk compared to the normative data of the CRYM-28.

**Table 3**  
Normative Data for CYRM-28 Total Individual (Complex Needs Youth)

	All *(n=1070)	Female **(n=471)
Mean	34.90	35.38
SD	6.37	6.42

*\*Total Youth Surveyed, n=2197. \*\*Remaining youth not included in each table were males whose scores indicated they were complex needs youth or males whose scores indicated they were low risk youth.*

**Table 4**  
Normative Data for CYRM-28 Total Individual (Low-Risk Youth)

	All (n=1127)	Female **(n=590)
Mean	36.96	37.64

	All (n=1127)	Female **(n=590)
SD	5.30	4.79

**Table 5**

Normative Data for CYRM-28 Total Caregiver (Complex Needs Youth)

	All (n=1041)	Female **(n=456)
Mean	22.68	23.62
SD	6.19	6.06

**Table 6**

Normative Data for CYRM-28 Total Caregiver (Low-Risk Youth)

	All (n=1120)	Female **(n=587)
Mean	25.26	25.77
SD	4.58	4.13

**Table 7**

Normative Data for CYRM-28 Total Context (Complex Needs Youth)

	All (n=1071)	Female **(n=471)
Mean	29.65	30.72

	All (n=1071)	Female **(n=471)
SD	6.62	6.58

**Table 8**  
Normative Data for CYRM-28 Total Context (Low-Risk Youth)

	All (n=1127)	Female **(n=590)
Mean	32.01	32.96
SD	5.19	4.54

**Table 9**  
Participants Mean Scores on CYRM-28

	Personal Resilience	Caregiver Resilience	Context
Mean	42.9	28.53	33.28
Bethune	43	27	33
Ida	38	34	40
Shirley	44	26	41
Cicely	42	26	36
Zora	45	33	38
Katrina	48	28	24
Dorothy	38	29	37

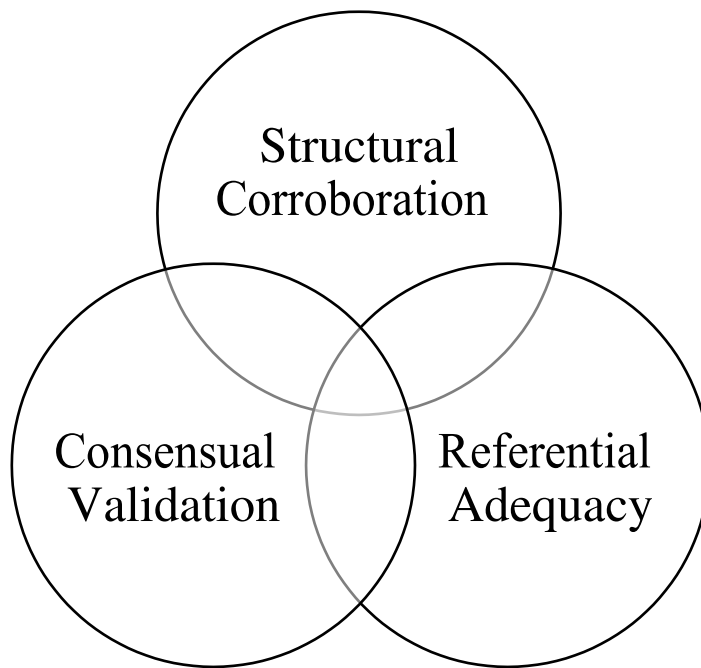
	Personal Resilience	Caregiver Resilience	Context
Thelma	44	18	46

The average mean score in all three subtests indicate the girls are in the low-risk youth category. These results compare to the normative data collected. Individual results demonstrate moderate variation among participants, as shown in Table 8. Thelma’s score was lower in caregiver resilience, which included both physical and psychological supports. Katrina’s score was lower in the subsection of context, which included cultural, educational, and spiritual.

### **Triangulation**

The researcher used Eisner’s standards for asserting credibility of qualitative research as a guide for establishing credibility. The researcher triangulated the data sources, methods and inter-coders’ analysis to establish credibility. Eisner (1991) standards include structural corroboration, consensual validation and referential adequacy (Creswell & Poth 2018). Corroboration involves using multiple types of data to support or contradict the interpretation.





**Figure 10** Eisner’s Standards for Triangulation

During the interviews, the researcher observed each girls’ behaviors and actions and took field notes. Once the interview was completed and the analysis phase began, the researcher listened to the recording alongside the field notes and transcripts, looking for behaviors or actions noted that disconfirm or confirmed interpretations. In addition to the transcripts, the researcher used the girls’ discipline records as well as their results on the CYRM-28. After administering the survey, the researcher performed a descriptive analysis on the collected survey data, using the results from QualtricsXM. Descriptive statistics comparing each girls scores to those of the normative data offered an understanding of the scores, and provided an understanding of how each girl’s resiliency score compared with others (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Document analysis of office referrals allowed for the verification of some aspects of the girls’ accounts of discipline experiences (Brantlinger et

al., 2005).

Consensual validation seeks other's opinions. It is important the agreement is between component others. This involves agreement of the description, interpretation, evaluation, and themes of the educational situation are correct (Eisner, 1991). The researcher used inter-coder agreement, the fifth step in Colaizzi's (1978) method of qualitative analysis to obtain consensual validation. There were two coders in addition to the researcher. Both coders are doctoral students in the Exceptional Education program at the University of Central Florida who were not previously involved in the data collection. The coders completed a thorough review of both audiotapes and field notes. Inter-coders also served as peer reviewers and verified that the development of themes from the data corresponded with the field notes and transcriptions (Robinson, 2014). A rate of 90% was agreed upon to establish reliability. The final rate of inter coder agreement was 90%. Finally, knowledgeable committee members assisted the researcher by reviewing and critiquing the research and data analysis findings.

Lastly, to obtain referential adequacy, Eisner (1991) recommends criticism that allows the subject of research to be reviewed in a way that produces a sensitive understanding of perception (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research questions for this study were, *What are the lived experiences of Black females with disabilities as it relates to discipline?* and *What are the meanings the participants make of the experiences as they relate to gender, race, disability and socio-economic status?* The researcher learned about the participants' interactions with peers, teachers, and administrators, in school and specific experiences, with discipline. A review of literature regarding Black females with disabilities and their

experiences with discipline assured not only the appropriate data collection method was selected, but helped to provide adequacy in reference to data analysis and results compared to the literature. In the literature, positive behavior interventions and supports exist that are designed specifically to be culturally responsive (Johnson et al., 2018; Parsons, 2017); however, while positive behavioral intervention and supports were implemented at the school where interviews took place, five of the eight participants, Bethune, Cicely, Katrina, Zora and Dorothy, expressed the system of discipline in their school was not working. In an analysis of the studies included in the systematic literature review of Black girls with disabilities and their school experiences related to discipline, studies primarily focused on the perception of adult women (Ferri & Connor, 2010; Petersen, 2006; Petersen, 2009). Results indicated participants in those studies felt they had to work harder and receive less opportunities compared to white women (Ferri & Connor, 2010; Petersen, 2006; Petersen, 2009).

Participants also expressed having low wage jobs where people expect less of them; and, lastly, they expressed the belief that race, class, and gender affected their opportunities for success (Ferri & Connor, 2010). Some of the girls discussed the role their race identity plays in their lives, while others discussed their disabilities. Katrina and Zora discussed the need for respect and acceptance of all identities. Katrina talked about acceptance beyond her personal experiences at school, connecting respect for individuality to race, sexuality and socio-economic status. Zora's discussion of respect and acceptance of identity was more personal. She shared her feeling that despite her being bipolar, she deserves the same respect as everyone else. Researchers have found that Warm Demander Pedagogy supports the success of Black girls in K-12 education (Carter-Andrews, et al., 2019; Collins, 2000;

Hambacher et al., 2016; Ware, 2006). These studies were not discussed in the literature review because this implication did not arise until after the interviews, when themes emerged.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, the researcher demonstrates how this study is positioned amongst the current research regarding Black girls with disabilities and how the findings corroborate or contradict previous research. Also, this chapter presents the implications of these findings to special education and educational practice, as well as areas for future research, and the limitations of the study. The researcher also provides personal reflections regarding this study and what the researcher learned during the process of developing and conducting the study.

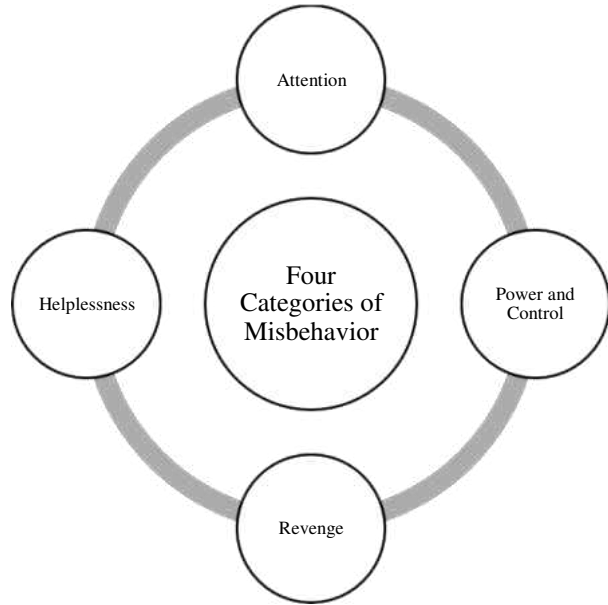
### **Discussion of Findings**

When exploring the experiences of Black girls with disabilities for this study, the goal was to widen the focus of social justice policies and practices within education, to include the perspectives of the girls who, because of their multiple identities, have historically and primarily been marginalized (Benjamin et al.,1997). The researcher in this study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Black girls with disabilities as it relates to discipline?
2. What meanings do the participants make of their experiences in school in relation to gender, race, disability, and socio-economic status?

### Corroboration with Earlier Research

Critically Conscious educators seek to interrogate, examine, and analyze social conditions, then follow through with enacting change (Freire, 1973). The CC framework supports culturally relevant pedagogy; considering culture, perspectives, and experiences of oppressed or marginalized groups (Carter 2008; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Sanders, 1997). Existing research supports the idea that discipline is a social construct (Dreikurs, 1957; Greene-Esq & Allen, 2017; Hipwell & Loeber, 2006; Vavrus & Cole, 2002; Walker et al., 1995). Therefore, changes in teacher preparation, practice, and policy should involve an approach considerate of diverse student experiences and behavioral needs (Osher et al., 2008; Watson, 2003). The themes that emerged from each girl’s experience with discipline included some level of struggle for power, control, acceptance, attention, or revenge. All of these components comprise Dreikurs’ (1957) goals, which motivate student misbehavior.



**Figure 11** Dreikurs’ Categories of Misbehavior

In moving from examining the girls' experiences with discipline and onto agency and action, it is important to choose responses to behavior using a lens that considers the social aspect of behavior. Dreikurs' model of social discipline was created based on psychologist Alfred Adler's (Dreikurs, 1957) socio-teleological approach to managing behavior in the classroom. According to Dreikurs (1957):

1. Humans are social beings and their basic motivation is to belong.
2. All behavior has a purpose.
3. Humans are decision-making organisms.
4. Humans only perceive reality, and this perception may be mistaken or biased.

In this study, adults filtered the girls' emotions by either restricting, punishing or ignoring them, rather than viewing behavior as an attempt for power, control, acceptance or revenge. Furthermore, discipline was approached in a punitive way. The girls' experiences with discipline included isolation from peers-in-school suspension (ISS) or from out-of-school suspension (OSS)-can increase anti-social and other undesirable behaviors (Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Gregory et al., 2018). The use of exclusionary discipline has also been found to increase student disengagement, loss of opportunity to learn, and drop out (Losen et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2014; Welsch & Little, 2018). All eight participants expressed a need for social supports. The information from each girl's story can help address problem behaviors using preventative rather than reactive measures. SWPBIS was implemented at the site for this study; however, the girls' stories made it clear something existed in the school culture that made them feel powerless, not listened to, and subject to a discipline system that was not working. In-school suspension was often used for minor behavioral incidents. The girls

described in-school suspension as a time for them to complete worksheets, occasionally discuss students' personal lives, or for teachers to gossip about other students as Katrina and Zora said happened regularly.

With Driekurs' approach to behavior management in mind, it is important to address the ecology of the classroom. Each girls' struggle for power, acceptance, attention or revenge was intertwined in a desire to belong. The school experience should support cooperation, engagement, and motivation rather than compliance, control, and coercion. Educators must go beyond educational or curriculum needs. "Black girls need spaces to cultivate community with same race and same gender peers" (Andrews et al., 2019, p. 2564). One suggestion has been the use of sister circles that are commonly implemented in post-secondary spaces. Sister circles are culturally relevant support groups where narrating is encouraged, experiences are shared and voice is validated (Gatson et al., 2007; Neal-Barnett et al., 2011). They are traditionally used in higher education settings, but would be give the girls the freedom and validation they desire in school. They want to feel they have more independence in school, and these spaces are a means to allowing them to express and support one another, and to discuss the things that bother them. Creating a space where girls, like the ones in this study, can talk to other girls about their experiences places their wellbeing first. Give them a safe space where they can feel at home. In this space, girls will be encouraged to express themselves, their emotions, and responses to injustice. Some researchers call these critical conversation spaces (Andrews et al., 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2018), a K-12 replication of sister circles.

Adults in schools often serve the role as emotional socializers (Clonan-Roy et al.,



2020) and the daily interactions teachers and administrators have with students affects how they view themselves. It was apparent in each girl's description of themselves. Transformative policy practice and teacher education efforts should include a shift towards social emotional practices, which recognize the importance of interpersonal relationships.

Historically, Black women educators have been the “other mothers” for Black students in the public school system. Many researchers have described their interactions and teaching styles as warm demander pedagogy that provides adult mentorship and motivation (Butler, 2007; Collins, 2000; Guffrida, 2005). Being a warm demander became a Black cultural practice rooted in African tradition, essential in the Jim Crow era, in which Black women educators go above and beyond educational duties and attend to students’ psychological and emotional needs (Collins, 1986; 2000). This style of communication and teaching often served as a buffer for negative experiences. Other mothering creates a strong sense of self and academic success. The girls in this study are in need of such a culturally responsive pedagogical style. Research on Black girls’ school experiences also supports the need for warm demanders (Carter-Andrews et al., 2019; Hambacher et al., 2016; Ware, 2006).

It is not only the warm demander and other mothering that Black students embrace, but also trust and respect between teachers and students. As Bethune, Cicely, and Shirley stated, the teachers they felt cared about them were the ones that “pushed them.” Holding students to high- standards and self-accountability is described in the literature as a warm demander (Carter- Andrews et al., 2019; Hambacher et al., 2016; Ware, 2006). The girls felt surveilled, interrogated, isolated and punished because they felt the adults who disciplined

them did not care about them. In our practice and in teacher preparation, we have to shift to the style that is representative of the culture of our students. Too often, teachers and administrators operated in a deficit perspective of the girls behaviors. Resiliency, strength, and assertiveness, all characteristics the girls from this study possessed, are interpreted as defiance and disrespect (Blake et al., 2011). The girls simply will only listen to adults they trust have their best interest in mind. Instead of criminalizing the lessons girls learn at home, school systems need to evaluate their approaches to discipline and reorganize the structure so that it does not exclude them and demonize their behaviors (Bierria, 2014).

Research regarding discipline equity in schools asserts school personnel have an unspoken desire to always be in control of student behavior (Graca et al, 2013; Pane et al., 2014). Autonomy is a psychological need (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Therefore, in environments where the primary focus is a perceived loss of control, adolescents, similar to the girls in this study, interpret punishment as a threat (Monroe, 2006). Given their fear of losing autonomy, students resist and reject authority. Several of the girls discussed the low level of autonomy they experienced during the school day, often feeling like adults and leaders in the school used their power to control students. Research regarding power and control in the classroom further demonstrates that teachers' responses to student misbehavior is determined by a perceived loss of control (Morris, 2005; Raible & Irizarry, 2010; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Choosing such externally regulated control by implementing punishment to influence student behavior often reinforces a student's inappropriate behavior (Cruz & Rodl, 2018; Gregory et al., 2018). However, using authority to build relationships and promote connectedness can reinforce and support student autonomy (Heilbrun et al., 2018; Sanches

et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2014; Tyler, 1997). This was evidenced in the requests from the girls, who desired interpersonal connections. Connectedness recognizes a mutual desire for respect and acceptance. Building relationships with students also reduces confrontation and misinterpretation of behaviors (Carter et al., 2014; Obi & Obiakor, 2001).

Instead of immediately responding to behavior, especially those that are reoccurring, take the time and ask students, why did you do that? Consider what may have influenced the behavior, search for solutions, and seek to understand behavior problems (Morris, 2007; Collins, 2000; Greene Esq. & Allen, 2017). Black girls, like the participants in this study, need educators to be warm demanders (Delpit, 1995; Kleinfeld, 1975; Ladson-Billings, 1994). There are unique teaching styles that aid to the success of Black children and children of color. Because students perceive their parents as authority figures, warm demanders mirror that relationship with students in the classroom (Fraser, 2002; Lindsay-Dennis et al., 2008). Telling girls like the ones in this study, “I care about you,” is not enough. Educators must communicate they care not with control, but high expectations, respect and an insistence they succeed (Kleinfeld, 1975; Irvine & Fraser, 1998). To be a warm demander will require teachers to examine their own cultural identities. Teacher’s cultural and racial identities influence their connectedness (Fordam, 1991; Irvine, 2003; Gay, 2002) and commitment to students. Examining your own identity is part of becoming a healthy and whole, culturally responsive teacher (Fraser, 2002). Schools must engage in practices for and with black girls and recognize that children from different cultural groups, including themselves, have different strategies for communicating. Our cultural communication style affects how we problem solve, socially interact and conceptualize

(Kochman, 1981). These cultural styles are not muted when we enter the school space; however, based on the experiences of these girls and others like them, they are often punished because of white, gendered, and racial norms for behavior.

### *Power*

The girls' descriptions of their discipline experiences, with the use of power by authority figures, also correlate with the current literature regarding school organization and its connection to the school to prison pipeline (Annamma, 2014; Losen, 2011; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2007; Srsic & Rice, 2012; Wald & Losen, 2003). Themes such as surveillance, isolation, interrogation, and rejection emerged from the interviews. While almost all the girls related the meaning of these experiences to their racial identity, their frustrations with others' reactions to their behaviors involved both their gender and race (Crenshaw, 1991). Black girls are more likely than White girls to verbally express themselves and defend other students (Morris, 2007).

However, the dominant culture has shaped femininity to encompass quiet and compliant behavior. This is evidenced by descriptions of behavior which are stereotypically non-feminine, yet the girls from this study embraced characteristics such as "wild" and "crazy." Often, when teachers and administrators are not reflective of how dominant cultural expectations shape interactions, the characteristics the girls view as assets are interpreted as deficits.

The girls' perceptions of power in the classroom could also be explained by their basic human desires for freedom. As research regarding reactance by psychologist Jack Brehm (1966) supports, human beings must feel they can choose how to think, feel, and act.

When they feel their freedom is threatened, a resistance process is triggered against this threat to reaffirm their autonomy and control of the situation (Brehm & Brehm 1981). This is especially true for those who belong to nondominant groups and has particularly been found in Black women (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1989). It is important that, just as teachers and administrators recognize their role as authority figures within a school, they are also conscious of how they may be perceived. More importantly, they need to be aware of how perceptions of them will differ based on students' experiences and backgrounds.

Many of the participants experienced some level of disconnect from their schools. Different adults' beliefs and responses to the girls' behaviors affected their sense of belonging. The girls' focus on trust, respect, and relationships demonstrated that teachers need to be student-centered and culturally sensitive in order for the girls to feel accepted and successful in the classroom. While the specific authority figure varied with each girl, it was clear the relationship they had with the teacher, administrator or school personnel affected their perception of consequences. If the girls felt the adult cared about them and was fair, they were less resistant to adult directives and consequences for behaviors.

Connectedness can impact engagement and sense of belonging. The girls felt comfortable enough to advocate for themselves when there was trust and reciprocal respect between them and teachers. Literature regarding urban education further supports the need for asset-based pedagogy to guide teaching and research practices. The use of culturally responsive pedagogy (Delpit, 1995; Hoover, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Luter et al., 2017; Richards et al., 2007) and culturally responsive classroom management skills (Brown,

2004; Gay, 2002; Weinstein et al., 2004) requires teachers to explore appropriate and effective management practices for the cultural groups they serve. Although the literature asserts that all students seek relief from lessons by exhibiting off task behaviors regardless of their race, (Ferguson, 2000), teachers' reactions to behavior differ for each student (Artiles, 2011; Bowers & Flinders, 1990; Carter et al., 2017). For the girls in this study, teachers' reactions to their behavior often resulted in removal from the classroom. Most disciplinary incidents cited were subjective, including disrespect, non-compliance with directives, substantially disruptive or dangerous behavior, and the use of inappropriate language.

### *Awareness*

The second theme which emerged was awareness. The girls discussed a passionate sense of pride in their racial identities. Qualitative studies have shown most Black girls struggle to navigate their identities. Many girls in this demographic exhibit mixed emotions of strength, often demonstrated during opportunities to stand up for themselves, and that of sadness due to negative teacher-student relationships, policed bodies, and sexual objectification (Nunn, 2018; Yang et al., 2018). The girls' stories affirmed that disciplinary decisions are often connected to subjective behavioral interpretations. Girls, such as the participants in this study, are often punished because of culturally-based judgements for disruptive behavior such as voice tone and speech.

The girls felt they experienced unreasonable levels of punishment, enforced through the school's discipline policies. This was most apparent in their stories involving in-school

suspension. Aligned with the literature regarding school discipline policies, suspensions are designed to decrease student misbehavior in school (Brent, 2019; Chen, 2008; Gregory et al., 2016). However, suspensions have become an ineffective and often detrimental way to implement consequences for student misbehavior (Gregory et al., 2011; Huang, 2018; Skiba et al., 2014). Recounts from some of the girls' stories implied they spent a lot of time in the ISS room completing worksheets and received additional days of suspension based on how many worksheets they completed.

The school, outside of the home, is the sole environment where adolescents search for and shape their identities (Collins, 2009; Kohlberg, 1981). Strict disciplinary codes often reject socio-cultural and psychological elements of identity development and can be criminalizing (Anyon et al., 2014; Losen et al., 2015). The girls' experiences with discipline caused them to feel rejected, isolated, and consistently watched by teachers and administrators. When asked about teachers' or administrators' comments about the girls' behavior, all the girls identified negative character traits.

Race was overwhelmingly the identity girls associated with their discipline-related experiences. The stories of each girl suggested that school is a place where Black students need more discipline. When communicating about their sense of self, the girls demonstrated behaviors which support the values of Black culture. In Black female socialization, many Black families encourage their daughters to use their voices to stand up for themselves and others (Collins, 2000; Fordham, 1993; hooks, 1992; O'Connor et al., 2005). However, there is a hidden curriculum in schools which support Eurocentric paradigms, such as being permissive and soft-spoken, to represent womanhood (Collins, 2000). The girls described

feelings of isolation and rejection in their experiences. When they refused to conform to school norms and they rejected conformity, they felt punished.

Scholars and researchers who support socio-historical theory would argue the hidden curriculum in these schools was developed from a history of capitalism used to control others, especially people of color (Delpit, 1995; Ferguson, 2000; Jackson, 1968; King, 1988). People of color were viewed as threatening and were determined to need more social control. The first phase of this social control was slavery, then Jim Crow laws were used to enforce legal segregation. Further, hyperghettos were established, whose citizens occupy most of the U.S. prisons (Raible & Irizzarry, 2010). Social control in schools was implemented using discipline codes which include zero tolerance policies. These policies resulted in policing and patrolling student behaviors and the removal of those who resist authoritarian control (Ferguson 2000; Pane et al., 2014; Perry, 1987).

Students' desire for autonomy should be an opportunity for teachers to create a more inclusive classroom democracy in which students' individual identities are supported, encouraged, and empowered (Evans-Winter, 2011; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Morris, 2016; Murphy et al., 2013). Using frameworks such as the critical conscious framework helps us view these girls as assets and not problems. The Black girls in this study all had negative encounters, ultimately implemented under zero tolerance policies, which ignore the cultural capital each student contributes to the classroom (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Morris, 2016).

### *Voice*



The final theme emerged, based on how the girls made meaning of their identities relative to their experiences. Voice and the subthemes of respect, advocacy and empathy overlapped with themes of awareness and power. The girls often connected their race to being seen, heard, accepted, and understood. Most of the girls talked about how they felt teachers and administrators treated them differently because they were Black. Literature regarding middle school development discusses an increased need for student independence at this level of education. Each girl expressed a need for independence in her explanation of who she was and how she felt school either supported or inhibited her identity.

From the girls' perspectives, resistance to teachers and other school officials was categorized as disrespect. However, current literature regarding Black girls and debating with authority figures asserts that talking back is a social interaction in which the girls exercise their intellectual autonomy and search for a leveling of control over their lives (Collins, 2000; Fordham, 1993; Murphy et al., 2013). Debating is also an attempt to investigate knowledge and information taught by the dominant culture, thus making their own meaning and connections to each experience in the classroom (Collins, 2000; Ferri & Connor, 2010; hooks, 1981; Petersen, 2009, 2012). Characteristics of Black girls' speech patterns such as a heightened tone of voice and level are often seen as attacks and confrontational (Collins, 2000; Morris, 2007; Murphy et al., 2013; Skiba et al., 2002). As aligned with previous qualitative studies, the girls in the current study struggled to both resist and embrace dominant cultural expectations and teachers' views of their identities and behavior. They desire to be recognized as "good" and "strong." This double consciousness has historic roots in Black intellectual thought, and it was namely Dubois (1903) who

explained the Black experience in America as a constant contradiction. Dubois described this double consciousness as “always looking at yourself through the eyes of others... African Americans have to display two selves, one that is acceptable to dominant society and the one that wants to be their true self” (Dubois, 1903, p.38) Although the girls did not fully articulate this struggle, it was made evident in their descriptions of interactions and feelings towards teachers and administrators.

Many researchers assert race and class privilege are intertwined with teachers’ perceptions and expectations of students. Recognition of privilege is an important consideration in classroom decision-making (Blanchett, 2009; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Noguera, 2008). In this study, one participant said: *“I know I’m fortunate enough to be financially stable and have a parent that is able to come here and say, ‘This isn’t right,’ scheduling parent teacher meetings and stuff. A lot of kids just don’t have the resources...”*

Current studies regarding racial match at the classroom level have reported mixed results (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Jordan & Anil, 2009; Kinsler, 2011; Lindsay & Hart, 2017). One study used discipline data from four middle schools, and racial matches between teachers and students did not reduce referrals for Black students (Jordan & Anil, 2009). Furthermore, when examining racial and gender combinations, Black male teachers were 1.4 times more likely to send Black students to the office (Jordan & Anil, 2009). It has been suggested that cultural, contextual, and economic differences between Black students and Black teachers affect responses to misbehavior (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Other studies have found an increase in student referrals when there is a mismatch

between the race and ethnicity of teachers, administrators, and students (Blake et al., 2016; Rocha & Hawes, 2009). Research on Black teachers also posits they often have 30% to 40% higher expectations for Black students than non-Black teachers (Gershenson et al., 2016). More specifically, Black female teachers often take on the role of ‘other mothers’ and appeal to not only academic, but Black students’ psychological and emotional needs (Collins, 1986; 2000).

These inconsistencies have also been explored using qualitative methods. In a study which collected data using teacher interviews, many explained the misbehavior of Black students using a deficit model, focusing solely on social forces working against the students (Gregory & Mosely, 2004). As critically conscious educators, we must think beyond the analysis of social injustice and commit to action implementation (Freire, 1973) regarding racism, which is at the core of discipline disparities. Racism has created negative stereotypes which can inform teacher and administrator perceptions of behaviors, like those of the girls in this study, and cause implicit biases. Inevitably, although often unconscious, implicit biases influence our practice and disciplinary decisions (Gullo, 2017; Staats, 2014). What must be considered is that Black culture is linked to experiences within society. Beliefs, values and behavior patterns developed are coping mechanisms. More so, behaviors such as pride and resistance to dominant cultural norms are a generational means to surviving systemic oppressions (Collins, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000). When teachers misunderstand Black students’ cultural goals, exclusionary discipline is disproportionately used with Black students (Bal et al., 2019; Monroe, 2009; Skiba et al., 2002).

No empirical evidence demonstrates Black students misbehave more than White

students (Fabelo et al., 2011; Shaw & Braden, 1990). However, the girls in the study overwhelmingly felt teachers and administrators had a hypersensitivity towards them and the Black boys compared to their White peers. The girls expressed a desire for teachers and administrators to listen to them and hear their sides of the story or incident. As studies which compared cultural interaction styles have shown, the girls' desires are legitimized (Irvine, 1990; Waldron, 2010). Black people sometimes interact with others using behaviors which could be perceived as misbehaviors (e.g., cultural humor and discourse, play fighting, overlapping speech) but were not intended as such (Ferguson, 2000; Gay, 2010; Irvine, 1990; Weinstein et al., 2004). Many of the participants discussed playing around with friends, being wild, crazy, and being told they were loud.

The misalignment of the girls' behaviors with school norms caused them to be labeled as troublemakers. Their referrals served as documentation of them being a "problem." Classroom interactions need to precede the referral and reexamine the perception of the students shaped by our social practices (Graca et al., 2013; Pane et al., 2014; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Teachers often perceive misbehavior of students as a loss of control in the classroom. In reaction to feeling a loss of control, as described by the girls in this study, certain students are isolated, removed from the classroom or written up for misbehavior. As vocalized by the Black girls with disabilities in this study, and supported by research, those who are isolated are most often Black students (Blad, 2015; Losen, 2018). The high demands of academic achievement, driven by national standards and high stakes testing, has created a dominant ideology of education. Students are expected to listen and learn from primarily scripted lessons. However, and as expressed by the participants,

many students disengage when they feel disconnected from the content. This disengagement occurs when the curriculum is not tied with examples and engaging lessons from the students' cultures, backgrounds, and interests. This disengagement also occurs when personal connections are missing, which cannot occur with a robotic scripted lesson. In turn, disengagement often leads to resistance and disruption. This push against a "boring" curriculum creates a narrative students from nondominant racial backgrounds may refuse to learn from or behave. The current response to this isolation of self through curriculum and testing is behaviors resulting in the use of exclusionary discipline practices to maintain control (Pane et al., 2014; Welsch & Little, 2018).

Currently, minimal research exists framing Black girls' experiences using their own narratives as a vehicle to explore positive adaptation and school resilience in the classroom (Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010). The mean scores from the CYRM-28 support these eight girls are "doing well" despite adversity. In most of the interviews, each girl talked about being engaged in some activity in or outside of school, whether it was a sport, playing an instrument, or singing in the church choir. These results support research showing resilient Black girls are more likely to be engaged in community organizations such as church or afterschool programs (Crick, 1997; Evans-Winters, 2005; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

Resiliency, though, is a process within the system (Gallagher et al., 2019; Murray, 2003; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011). Complex factors existed in the girls' lives; yet, they noted multiple systems and supports existing within their lives (parent, relative, a teacher who cared). Each story told noted both risk and protective factors aligned with discipline

experiences. Current research on resiliency in Black girls shows that if they can identify at least one positive female caregiver or role model, this variable supports their success in school (Evans-Winters, 2007; O'Connor et al., 2005; Paul, 2003). Most of the participants talked about either a positive relationship with a family member or an adult female at school who they respected and trusted. While having a role model outside of school is important in supporting their success, it is essential these girls also have an adult in school they trust. Having a relationship with an adult at school that they respect and trust affects their sense of belonging while promoting their self-esteem. Research on warm demander pedagogy supports, Black girls tend to flourish academically in classrooms with teachers who have high expectations; demonstrate caring and empathy; encourage students to ask questions; share their experiences; and build upon their students' existing academic and cultural knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lindsay-Dennis, 2010; Morris, 2007).

High self-esteem in Black women and girls' aligns with a strong connection in the Black community (Evans-Winters, 2007; O'Connor et al., 2005). In the community, Black girls learn to navigate strategies for coping with the stressors often imposed upon their culture. With such a high preponderance of White teachers, finding this cultural bridge to make this community connection into the classroom is essential. These girls seem to have found some connection as their projection towards achievement is evident in their high resiliency scores. However, without the right teachers who do not have a deficit perception of the girls' behaviors, their resiliency may not be able to overcome this deficit thinking to have a positive educational outcome.

### **Contradiction with Earlier Research**

While the intersection of identities affects a student's perception of themselves and how they fit within modern society, the current literature does clearly consider Black girls who may simultaneously struggle with their identities of having a disability. Despite the potential struggle one might assume exists, the girls in this study attested it was their racial identity that overwhelmingly affected their discipline experiences in school. The girls discussed being both proud of and troubled by their race. Their interactions with peers, in addition to school officials, affected their perceptions of discipline, school, and their identities. Yet, only two of the girls even mentioned their disabilities.

Six of the eight participants correlated disability with a physical impairment and did not identify with having one. This observation does correspond with current literature regarding invisible disabilities and perceptions of difference (Klingner & Vaughn, 1999). The same can be said about gender. Due to overgeneralizations of Black girls' strength and persistence despite challenges, Black boys are viewed as more "at risk" for poor outcomes and unfair treatment in school (Evans-Winters, 2011; Neal-Jackson, 2018). The girls only mentioned gender during their discussions of behavioral challenges of that of boys, and they were especially protective of Black boys. This finding is a cause for future investigation of Black feminist thought and the hierarchical representation within the Black family. Interestingly, this observation aligns with the predominant focus on Black boys in current discipline literature. Black girls often are used primarily as a comparison group. Future studies should be disaggregate this data further to find both quantitative patterns while continuing to try and better capture the voices of Black females with disabilities aligned

with identity and discipline.

### **How This Study Adds to the Body of Research**

This study offers empirical support for current research regarding discipline in school and the effect of punitive, and what these girls stated, racially differentiated practices on students. The themes of power, voice, and awareness contribute to the social organization of the school and the importance of strong relationships and connections between students, teachers, and the community is critical as defined by these Black girls with disabilities. The girls all desired to be heard, seen, and accepted, but how this varies from Black females in general is definitely a target for future research. From these girls' perspectives, the consideration of their specific needs were missing.

The stories of each girl further supports the importance of culturally responsive, positive behavioral interventions and encouragement for students. The stories the girls shared attest to the need for consistency in the implementation of school policies and interventions and the further need for a strong, positive, culturally aligned network of support for students. While I hypothesized the girls' disabilities would affect their perceptions of and experiences with discipline, their stories inform current research regarding the intersectionality and the marginalized identities. For Katrina, Dorothy, Thelma, Cicely, Shirley, Ida, Bethune and Zora, their racial identity impacted them the most in school. This finding is important for culturally responsive research, practice, teacher education and policies that affect Black girls with disabilities and suggests the use of culturally responsive pedagogy to improve their experiences in school.



The implications of this study contribute to transformative educational ideologies such as the critical conscious, intersectional and socio-historical frameworks. Practice, preparation and policy should be critical of social practice views of discipline, teaching, and learning (Hines- Datiri & Andrews, 2017; Osher et al., 2010). Further, research and practice should explore and encourage the implementation of discipline as a democratic, social process (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). A shift towards critically conscious learning conditions would encourage agency the girls desired within their school experiences. The development of identity, particularly for adolescents, must be cultivated through empowerment and increased autonomy. Educators, policymakers, and researchers should reflect on the results of this study to shift current practices and role in changing the oppressive conditions of student discipline. Leaders also should continue to recruit and prepare high-quality, Black teachers to ensure these females have role models in their lives. Currently, the perception from these Black girls with disabilities is they feel they do not belong, and they voiced that many of their culture also are misunderstood. The stories from this study add shift, which must occur regarding how we think about the culture, behavior, and make-up of our classrooms and disciplinary policies. We need to think differently about expectations and practices such as exclusionary discipline. Transforming the oppressive conditions that cause girls to feel like they are “loud,” “disrespectful,” “terrible problems” requires a commitment to using the power given to those in education to lift up students and positively influence student behavior rather than control it.

## **Implications**

### ***Teacher Education***

Most of the girls had some way of regulating their emotions throughout the school day. However, not all of their choices for self-regulation were positive and productive. This finding suggests teacher preparation programs should include a component on the importance of teaching students positive and effective ways to regulate their emotions and support the vitality of social and emotional learning (Bear et al., 2015; Cardichon & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Durlak et al., 2011). Content in teacher preparation also should include components on the recognition of stress and anxiety in behavior and classroom management courses, as many of the participants discussed they felt these issues impacted their education, in some capacity.

While research supports a developmental peak in emotional regulation for adolescents (Bear et al., 2015; Cardichon & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Montague et al., 2011), preparing both preservice and practicing teachers in helping students recognize and regulate emotions needs to occur at all levels; and more importantly, for all students. The girls' experiences also position teacher preparation programs to continually support innovative thinking regarding consequences for behaviors, especially related to school suspension. To encourage positive behavior interventions and support models, teachers should consider behavior flexibly. According to the critically conscious framework, and aligned with intersectional and socio-historical lens, it is important to first seek understanding of the behavior by remaining aware of the behavior's context (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017; Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Osher et al., 2010; Dreikurs, 1957; Walker et al.,

1995). Critically conscious educators seek to interrogate, examine and analyze conditions (El-Amin et al., 2017; Freire, 1973). Misconceptions and responses to behavior that are misaligned to students cultural beliefs, needs, attitudes and experiences create a disconnect between the teacher and student. Responses to misbehavior should be critical of why the behavior is happening, and if a change in environment is needed, this should be a temporary change. Dreikurs' (1957) social discipline goals can be used as a framework for response to behaviors; central to understanding behavior change is all behaviors have a purpose.

Also aligning with critical conscious framework, teacher education program faculty members should reflect on their current content and ensure pre-service teachers become critical consumers of educational policies such as scripted curricula, high stakes testing, and zero- tolerance. These policies impact student perception, progress, and success in the classroom (Osher et al., 2010; Welsh & Little, 2018). Much like the framework, which guided the analysis of the interviews, programs should facilitate the development of critical consciousness, with regard to multicultural issues among preservice teachers. Race, as demonstrated by the girls' expression of their needs, beliefs, and attitudes were the most prominent determinant of their school experiences. As previous researchers suggest, and the girls in this study reiterated, teachers must learn to lessen their gaze from the hyper-surveillance of students of color (Ladson- Billings, 1994; Noguera, 2003; Raible & Irizarry, 2010). Teachers need to dissolve their view of students, who do not conform to the norm or comply, as “problems.” The field of education decision-makers need to investigate why and how school-wide practices, policies, and expectations promote empowering or oppressive conditions. Further, students' resistance needs to be viewed with positive empowerment as a

way in which they communicate (Pane et al., 2014; Raible & Irizarry, 2010). Students need to feel a sense of control in their lives and over the decisions they make. Their feelings can be legitimized by providing choices and implementing consequences as restorative interventions (Greenberg et al., 2003; Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

Teacher education program faculty members should ensure new candidates are prepared to promote a safe space in schools, including a space where girls like those in this study can have critical dialogues. The space should be relaxing and informal, but also educational. These girls did not mention rules for feeling, but instead many learned to use their voices to call out inequities they felt they were experiencing. These spaces should allow girls, like those in this study, a positive pathway to voice and to transform their feelings into positive action. Providing such spaces could allow them to transform their emotions into social critiques and place them in a position to promote change in their schools and larger social worlds (Clonan-Roy & Gross, 2020). Teacher education leaders, building-based leaders, and policymakers need to encourage caring behaviors as part of a larger social justice agenda for the framework of discipline both in schools and society.

### ***Practice***

Most of the girls' stories supported a clear need for strengthening the relationship between school and home. Who has authority in each girls' life and at what level was clearly a conflict for some of the girls. The culture in their home and expectations often did not align with the expectations and culture within the school. This misalignment affected their perception of teachers and administrators use of power in school. Each girl had a clear

need for acceptance, trust, and respect. However, because of inconsistencies between school personnel and the messages they received at home regarding acceptable behavior in school, the girls sometimes resisted and questioned the authority of teachers, administrators, and school personnel. Conversely, they often felt interrogated and constantly watched at school. To improve our practice, schools should make a concentrated effort to connect with families. These connections could demonstrate to students and their families that they are allies in educational process. These connections also help to engage families by reinforcing expectations, understanding misalignment of expectations between school and come while considering what works best for all students.

Much like the importance of communication with families, teachers and school leaders need to realize behavior is another form of communication. As suggested by Dreikurs (1957), teachers should ask themselves questions when a student is misbehaving, with the objective of determining the goal of the misbehavior. The following explains some goals for student misbehavior (Johansen, 2006 p. 233-234):

- If the teacher feels annoyed, then the child's goal is to get attention.
- If the teacher feels beaten or intimidated, then the child's goal is power.
- If the teacher feels hurt, then the child's goal is revenge.
- If the teacher feels incapable, then the child's goal is helplessness.

Efforts to prevent discipline problems also should include the development of culturally represented teams, including parents, who can collaborate to create proactive discipline consequences. As research supports, the field of education and society in general has to become warm demanders, adults who not only have high expectations for students to

succeed, but also appeal to their psychological and emotional needs while insisting in that success. Educators who are warm demanders interact with students using a firm, calm tone, not intended to control students and their behavior, but rather to discipline with concern for student wellbeing. Warm demanders would better support Black girls with disabilities, like the ones represented in this study. Professional development initiatives focused on culturally competent classroom management should include opportunities to discuss and practice how we engage with students.

All teachers, staff, and school personnel should reflect on student perception in relation to how we talk to students *and* what we say (Obi & Obiakor, 2001; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). According to Zora's comments, she reminds the field, most days begin with teachers asserting their power. As soon as she entered the building, someone badgered her about her phone being out or headphones in her ears. These initial interactions, she stated, often escalated to a referral. What could be reminders of expectations for her daily turned into battles of power and control. The loss, if not clear, in what these battles cost is financial, but these girls remind the field of the social-emotional impact of controlling lives instead of lifting them up to be the next leaders of their own lives and in society.

Collaborative teams must reflect the demographics of the school, contributing to the importance of diversity. Some researchers suggest the overrepresentation of Black students in exclusionary discipline can somewhat be attributed to White educators who do not understand their privileged place in society (Blanchett, 2009; McIntosh, 1997; Sleeter, 2017; Smith-Maddox et al., 2002; Welsh & Little, 2018). Beyond knowing who you teach, Obi and Obiakor (2001) assert educators need to know themselves and how

they identify within society at large. Self-identity, according to Obi and Obiakor (2001), contributes to the perspective teachers bring to the classroom and, therefore, has a direct impact on how they interpret behaviors and, to some degree, intelligence.

Again supporting the importance of culturally responsive practices is critical in education. Culturally responsive education involves curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, and performance assessments (Gay, 2002). For these girls, the learning context climate and relationships were most important. Some educators may perceive the warm demander's no nonsense approach as "harsh," which is why it is important for teachers to learn their student's home culture. Some of the behaviors normal in students' homes may be perceived as "bad" in school. Therefore, teachers, leaders, and school discipline committee members need to check in with any implicit biases they may have in their role of power. Ensuring biases are checked can communicate a caring culture to students and keeps educators reflective of their responses to certain behaviors. Research on warm demander pedagogy supports, Black girls tend to flourish academically in classrooms with teachers who have high expectations; demonstrate caring and empathy; encourage students to ask questions and share their experiences; and build upon students' existing academic and cultural knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lindsay-Dennis, et al., 2008; Morris, 2007). Warm demanders in the classroom and school space use a matter of fact, calm tone, not to threaten, demean or create a power struggle. As the themes of power, awareness and voice that emerged from this study support, students desire an adult who communicates they are "important enough to be pushed, disciplined, taught, and respected" (Wilson & Corbett, 2001, p. 88). The training and practice

of warm demander pedagogy supports culturally responsive management strategies, including the following. The implementation of the initiatives provided could support students similar to those in this study:

- The development of personal relationships with students
- The creation of caring communities
- The use of culturally and ethnically congruent communication
- Demonstrations of assertiveness
- Clearly stated and enforced expectations

### *Policy*

“What matters for schools and students is what happens as a result of the law, not what policy makers intended the law to do” (McDermott, 2007, p. 97). Focusing on improving the interpersonal skills of educators cannot, solely, rectify hundreds of years of inequity and racism (Welsh & Little, 2018; Wilson et al., 2020). Additional evaluation and transformation of current school and nationwide colorblind policies are a beginning, but not enough (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Monroe, 2006; Wilson et al., 2020). Power, privilege, and oppression must be addressed within discipline policy changes (Anyon et al., 2018). Codes of conduct, mandated by the zero tolerance policies of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), have contributed to discipline disparities and school experiences for students, much like the eight girls in this study.

Current guidelines and implementation of zero tolerance policies have created a culture of removing children with problem behaviors without teaching them tools to prevent



future misbehavior. Furthermore, the damaged caused by time spent out of class is difficult to measure, but research supports positive engagement in activities in and out of school does make a positive impact. Schools should have clear and consistent guidelines for instructional time lost for the student when they are removed. Codes of conduct need to be amended and redefined to specify which behaviors warrant suspension. Suspension is used repeatedly as a consequence, but research has suggested it does not work and it, conversely, results in the loss of instructional time and increases anti-social behaviors (Greene-Esq & Allen, 2017; Mayer, 1999; Novak, 2018). The girls in this study remind us that they need to be empowered and taught self-regulation techniques, while still embracing their cultural differences, than behavioral policies often shaped and defined by White culture.

### ***Implications for Researchers***

The results of this phenomenological study prompts many questions and topics for future research. Given the girls' concentration on their race dominance over their remaining identities, further investigation should inform how their identities (Black and disability) collectively impact their needs within school culture. The researcher in this study also raises questions regarding how the girls spend their time when given out-of-school suspension. As Katrina expressed and previous research has supported, not all students have the resources to supplement time outside of school. The results from the CRYM-28 show the need for more qualitative research on girls who are successful, despite multiple experiences with discipline. Comparison studies of both those who struggle and those who are successful could help researchers examine the resources girls need, who are Black with a disability,

both inside and outside of school. Participants should include girls who have been court involved and non-court involved with cultural and disability identifies. Researchers should explore these two groups' school experiences and the risk and protective factors present. Which protective factors are strong enough to mitigate risks and which are contributing to the issues raised in this study by these eight girls' voices?

Another question raised during this study was, what exactly happens in ISS? To what extent are front office staff and personnel engaged in the discipline process? How do those relationships affect student's perceptions? In some of the girls' stories, incidents were either escalated by the student or the adults in the front office space, according to the girls. This study lends itself to more qualitative studies of student experiences in all the spaces in school that students occupy, including hallways and the front office. Questions regarding school culture should explore how students similar to the girls in this study are treated by staff and other school personnel. Interviews should extend to staff, teachers, and administrators in schools to continue the exploration of ways in which schoolwide discipline policies and practices target students of color for removal from the classroom and suspension.

This study prompts the need for document content analysis of school discipline codes, including comparisons at elementary, middle, and secondary levels. In the most recent reviews of disciplinary codes, suspension was listed as an option for tardy behavior, a reactive consequence, rather than direct teaching of alternative replacement behaviors (Allman & Slate, 2011; Gregory et al., 2017; Welsh & Little, 2018). Gregory and Fergus (2017) suggest the practice of responsible decision making, that considers "...ethical

standards, safety, social norms, and your own wellbeing and that of others when making choices about personal behavior and social interaction.” (Gregory & Fergus, 2017, p. 130) When analyzing discipline codes, researchers should examine proactive consequences for their level of restorative qualities. For example, they should ask, are students given opportunities to be taught the expected behavior? (Greenberg et al., 2003; Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Pane et al., 2014; Raible & Irizarry, 2010). To help teachers and schools transform exclusionary discipline practices, researchers should continue to explore how, if, and when teachers use power to enforce exclusionary discipline. This will include using Dreikurs' (1957) social discipline model to evaluate and observe goals, expectations in the classroom, and views of culture and relationships, which either support or prohibit the development of student agency.

### **Study Limitations**

As a qualitative researcher, constantly evolving instrument, given people and settings are dynamic and diverse, is necessary. Thus, data collection must often be conducted in creative ways. The limitations of this study include the recruitment of participants, post data collection procedures, and researcher bias. The researcher used a purposive strategy of sampling to secure the participants needed for this study. The researcher began the recruitment process by contacting schools and organizations that serve Black females with disabilities. The participants from this study were recruited using an established partnership with a colleague who works at a Middle school. This may have affected the representation of the sample because the girls were selected based on

recommendations from school personnel. This could have also limited the perspectives which were included.

Post data collection follow-up also was a limitation of this study. Immediately following the interview period, the country was forced into quarantine with COVID-19, and any follow-ups the researcher may have chosen to explore with teachers, students, and parents were not an option. Lastly, because of my experience working with Black girls with disabilities and being a member of IEP and intervention teams, I had to dismiss personal opinions regarding behavior intervention. I also had to put aside my personal school experiences as a Black woman. Nonetheless, the findings are presented, representing the viewpoint of the researcher.

### **Personal Reflections**

I began this research study with ideas regarding what I thought the girls would say and what would be most meaningful to them. Some of my hypotheses were affirmed. Other stories the girls shared have implications for future exploration. Through the process of exploring, analyzing, and summarizing my findings, I repeatedly asked myself, *what social messages do I send when interacting with students? How does my membership in different identity groups shape my assumptions and behaviors?* Sustainable change will require these questions to be a consistent dialogue as educators make decisions, edit, and revise policies regarding equitable discipline practices.

While I only spent a few days interviewing the girls in this study, as they shared their stories, I felt connected to them. In the process of writing the implications for this

study, I realized the suggestions I contribute to the success of these girls I myself have benefited from in my educational journey. Starting with Kindergarten to my current graduate level status, I can name every educator, who I had a relationship of trust and respect. Each one of them fit the characteristics of a warm demander, showing me they cared by setting high expectations with a no nonsense attitude. They made me feel I was going places and could do whatever I set my mind to accomplish. It seems the girls in this study either had someone like that at home or in school, but rarely did they have both. Currently, as the girls' stories implied, the message the current school disciplinary system sends is, "*Censor your identity or else.*" These girls need school to be a space where responses to behavior promotes reflection and leads to regulation of emotions. Ways of being, learning and existing successfully in the school system cannot continue to be measured against how well students fit into the dominant White culture. My suggestions for change allow students to express their full range of emotions without penalty. More importantly, they give them people who are genuinely meeting them where they are and insisting they do well, regardless of race, gender, class, culture and disability status.

## **APPENDIX A INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

**Semi-structured interview guide-**

The purpose of this phenomenological research study is to describe the beliefs attitudes, needs and experiences of Black girls with disabilities in the educational system as they relate to discipline.

Data	Question	Prompts & elicitations
To break the ice and provide some background.	Tell about the purpose of the interview and give overview of “rules”...answer questions as you see fit, you can elect to not answer and we can end the interview at any time	Age What other info would help you to contextualize the info you gather, not already covered later in the interview?
Experiences	How would you describe what your Middle School experience is like so far to a new student?	Positive experiences Negative experiences A typical day or week Anything you’d like to add
Social and Academic experience	What does a typical day involve for you at school? Walk me through a typical day.	What does a typical day look like for you
Experiences with administration in Middle School	How do you feel about how you are treated by administration at school?	What do you mean by that?
Experiences with teachers	How do you feel about how you are treated by teachers at your school?	Is there anything else you’d like to add?
Experiences with discipline	What experiences have you had with discipline at your school?	Positive experiences Negative experiences Tell me more about discipline at your school
Perception of Self in School-Teachers	If I asked you teachers about your behavior in school, what would they say?	
Perception of Self in School-Peers	If I asked your peers about your behavior in school, what would they say?	

Member-checking.	Paraphrase what I heard about the main data: 1. Social and academic experiences in Middle School 2. Experiences with administration and teachers in Middle School 3. Experiences with discipline in Middle School Ask for a response.	
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**Generally useful prompts and elicitations:**

**Silence:** Pauses suggest to the interviewee that you want them to continue talking. **Seeking**

**elaboration:** 'What did you mean...?' or 'Can you give more detail...?' **Probing for details:**

'Do you have any examples?' or 'Could you say more about...?' **Specifying questions:** 'What

happened when you said that?' or 'What did he say next?' **Reflecting meaning:** 'Do you

mean that...?' or 'Is it correct that...?'

**Reflecting emotion:** 'You sound [emotion] when you say that?' or 'Is it correct that you feel [emotion]...?'



**APPENDIX B**  
**IRB APPROVAL FROM UNIVERSITY OF**  
**CENTRAL FLORIDA**



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

**Institutional Review Board**  
FWA00000351  
IRB00001138Office of Research  
12201 Research Parkway  
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

APPROVAL

November 21, 2019

Dear Whitney Hanley:

On 11/21/2019, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

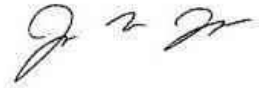
Type of Review:	Modification / Update
Title:	Keeping Their Voices at the Center of the Work: A Phenomenological Study on the Discipline Experiences of African American Females with EBD
Investigator:	Whitney Hanley
IRB ID:	MOD00000577
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and Youth Resilience Measure, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Hanley_Phenom, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Hanley_Prenatal_Consent, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• Preliminary Interview Questions, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Semi-Structured Interview Guide, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> </ul>

The IRB approved the protocol from 11/21/2019 to 9/5/2020.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or [irb@ucf.edu](mailto:irb@ucf.edu). Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Racine Jacques'.

Racine Jacques, Ph.D.  
Designated Reviewer

**APPENDIX C CHILD YOUTH RESILLENCY  
MEASURE**

**Children Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-28)**

To what extent do the sentences below describe you? Circle one answer for each statement.	Not at All	A Little	Somewhat	Quite a Bit	A lot
1. I have people to look up					
2. I cooperate with people around me					
3. Getting an education is important to me					
4. I know how to behave in different social situations					
5. My parents (s)/Caregiver(s) watch me closely					
6. My parent (s)/caregiver(s) watch me closely					
7. If I am hungry, there is enough to eat					
8. I try to finish what I start					
9. Spiritual beliefs are a source of strength					
10. I am proud of my ethnic background					
11. People think that I am fun to be with					
12. I talk to my family/caregiver (s) about how I feel					
13. I am able to solve problems without harming myself or others (for example by using drugs and/or being violent)					
14. I feel supported by my friends					
15. I know where to go in my community to get help					
16. I feel I belong at my school					
17. My family stands by me during difficult times					
18. My friends stand by me during difficult times					
19. I am treated fairly in my community					
20. I have opportunities to show others that I am becoming an adult and can act responsibly					
21. I am aware of my strengths					
22. I participate in organized religious activities					
23. I think it is important to serve my community					
24. I feel safe when I am with my family/caregiver					
25. I have opportunities to develop skills that will be useful later in life (like job skills and skills to care for others)					
26. I enjoy my family's /caregiver's cultural and family traditions					
27. I enjoy my community's tradition					
28. I am proud to be a citizen of (What Country)					

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**APPENDIX D PARENTAL CONSENT FORM**



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

**College of Community Innovation and Education**  
12494 University Blvd  
Orlando, FL 32816

Hello,

My name is Whitney Hanley and I am a graduate student at UCF studying outcomes for Black girls in our schools. As a Black female in the special education field, I have seen firsthand how the academic environment can be either one of support and resources for opportunities to excel or unequal and unwelcoming based on perceived abilities, gender, or race.

I am writing to ask your permission to allow your daughter to participate in my research study. This study is focused on Black girls and their lived experiences in school. The purpose of this study is to understand the beliefs, needs and experiences of Black girls with disabilities with the goal of informing and improving current systems of support. I know I would not be in the position I am in today without the support of my family, the school and other leaders in the community who made it their mission to make sure I had everything I needed to be on the path towards success.

Your daughter's opinions are very important to this study. Anything we learn about her experience will be kept totally confidential. Your daughter's name will not be attached to any part of this study and her participation is completely voluntary. It will consist of three parts. She will participate in two interviews so we can learn about your daughter's opinions about her school experience. We would like to tape record the interviews so we can focus on what your daughter has to say. The recordings will be destroyed after the analysis and names will never be associated with the recordings. You and your daughter will also have the opportunity to review the final results before publication.

There is little to no risk for taking part in this study. Your daughter's participation in this study is totally voluntary, and she may change her mind at any time. Everything your daughter says will be kept confidential and will not change how she is treated at school or her grades. Your daughter's safety is our top priority. If you are concerned about anything related to her participation, please contact me, Whitney Hanley, 770-820-4227.

I am asking your permission to allow your daughter to participate in this research study so that she may share her experiences and help to inform and improve current supports in place.

Sincerely,

Whitney Hanley  
770-820-4227

**Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study**

**Signature Block for Children**

Your signature documents your permission for the named child to take part in this research.

---

Printed name of child

---

Signature of parent or individual legally authorized to consent to the  
child's general medical care

---

Date



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