
**#BLACKGIRLSMATTER: AFRICAN AMERICAN GIRLS' EXPERIENCES WITH
SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PRACTICES AND THEIR ACADEMIC IDENTITY IN
MIDDLE SCHOOL**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the relationship between ten African American girls' experiences with discipline practices and their academic identity in middle school. In the U.S., Black girls continue to suffer from inequitable treatment in school discipline resulting in disparate academic outcomes and have higher suspension rates than all other students including boys. This study attempted to answer the central question: *what is the relationship between students' experiences with school discipline practices and their academic identity?* Ten African American girls associated with a middle school in New York fit the following criteria: (1) students in grades 6-8; a female student (2) self-identified as being African American (3) have received an out of school suspension in the previous school year. A one-on-one interview was conducted with the girls individually. The five major themes were related to: (a) good vs. bad student, (b) strict rules, (c) negative and positive teacher-student relationships, (d) different treatment by black and white teachers, and (e) role of peers. The conclusions derived from the study were: (1) African American girls educational experiences are influenced by teachers' and administrators' lack of cultural knowledge and understanding; thus, teachers and administrators can reflect how their biases manifest themselves in disciplinary actions, educational outcomes and student participation (2) teachers and administrators can work together to develop different ways to support African Americans to feel welcome and safe in school. (3) Teachers and administrators need to review and revise the current school discipline policies that are too harsh. Addressing these issues will help support African American girls to be successful in middle school.

DEDICATION

I give all thanks to my lord and savior Jesus Christ for staying by me the entire way. In addition, for giving me strength, knowledge, ability and opportunity, especially during all the challenging moments I had to undertake in completing this dissertation.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother and father, Edelyne and Servin Sainvil. Mom and Dad, you two have always been my number one fan. You both have always believed in my dreams and did everything you can to help me reach them. Thank you for all you have done for me. Thank you for your prayers and encouraging words. You both were my first teachers and I have learned so much from you two. I learned to be faithful, to preserve, seek wisdom and be joyful. Thank you for these lessons.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore experiences of African American middle school girls who have experienced school discipline practices in their school and to examine the relationship between African American girls' experiences with discipline practices and their academic identity. The current study will add to the body of knowledge on what Black girls are experiencing in schools. Nationally, 1.2 million African American students were suspended from K-12 public schools in 2011-2012. (Harper & Smith, 2015). During the same year, it was found that African American girls were suspended more than six times as often as their white counterparts (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Suspensions and expulsions can take a toll on a student's academic progress in school (Wong, 2016). Data reveals that African American females continue to lag behind their white counterparts academically (Barton & Coley, 2009). African American girls who are suspended from school are less likely to graduate on time and more likely to repeat a grade (Camera, 2017). In the code of conduct handbook for 11 states in the United States, suspended students are counted as absent, given failing grades, or are unable to make up work (Wong, 2016). Some of these disciplinary practices could have an impact on African American girls' educational experiences and their academic identity. For example, in 2011 eight African American girls from Sojourner Truth Academy Charter School¹ received two-day suspensions for being loud when singing Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror" and "We Lift Our Hands" (Carr, 2012). The girls were suspended for "willful disobedience" (Carr, 2012). Several of the girls suspended were honor students who were worried that the suspension on their record would jeopardize their college admissions. In summary, literature has pointed out the disparities related

¹ A pseudonym

to school discipline that Black girls face, and I have personal experience with the issue as well. The rest of this section will outline my experiences working with African American girls, their experiences in school and the need for the current study.

Over the course of my teaching career, I have witnessed African American girls like the eight girls at Sojourner Truth Academy Charter receive harsher forms of discipline such as suspensions compared to white girls. I remember sitting in a parent meeting and witnessing my principal suspend an African American female student for being disrespectful of her. The mother stated, “when you keep suspending my daughter, know: how do you expect her to get into a good school?” At that moment, I wanted to cry because I understood where the mother was coming from. I began to question our school discipline practices and whether our practices were setting up our students for success for middle school and beyond. The statistical data on school suspensions of African American girls is indeed alarming but what draws me to this topic on school discipline practices is not the data but the comments made by African American girls during their suspension hearings at the school I work at, “I am only being suspended, because that teacher doesn’t like me.” I have constantly heard frustrating comments like these from African American girls being suspended from school. Notably, there is a concern about how school discipline practices may negatively influence African American girls’ educational experiences, academic identity, and ultimately their well-being. The ultimate consequences of negative school disciplinary climates are academic disengagement and disruptive behaviors in the classroom (Barbadoro, 2017). Educators should begin to understand African American girls’ perspectives of school discipline and respond to these girls in ways that foster positive outcomes (Corprew, 2013).

As an African American woman, I feel an obligation to educate and empower young African American girls. I felt a responsibility to work towards closing the achievement gap. This study allowed me to reflect on how my experiences of growing up relate to or contrast with those African American girls. My personal school discipline and academic experiences as an African American female provided the means with which to receive and interpret data about African American girls. Through my middle school experience, I was suspended from school once. I made a poor decision towards a white teacher who I had a hard time building a personal relationship with. I remember when I was suspended from school, I was extremely disappointed in myself and was afraid of how my friends and other teachers would think of me when I returned to school. Going through that difficult situation in my life, led me to be disengaged in that teacher's class and to not care about my grades. Although I wanted to be on the honor roll and not be labeled as the "bad kid," I did not have teachers who believed in me because of my behavior and the discipline system. It is for this reason that I wanted to talk with young African American girls and allow their voices to be heard on their experience with school discipline practices and their academic identity. This study was a reflective journey for many of the African American girls who participated in this study. I believe our job as educators is to support all students regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. By understanding the relationship between school discipline practices, student perceptions of those practices and their experiences in school, we can better support African American girls in having the opportunity to succeed.

Problem Statement

Racial inequality in school discipline practices is a major problem in U.S. public schools (Levy, Siegel-Hawley & Tefera, 2017). African American students are suspended at a higher rate than their peers from other racial groups (Harper & Smith, 2015). In the 2011-2012 school year 90% of all girls expelled from New York City public schools were African American (Harper & Smith, 2015). African American boys have increasingly been the focus of research and discussion regarding disproportionality in school suspensions and expulsions (Caton, 2012; Annamma et al., 2016). Research has indicated that African American girls have higher suspension rates than all other students including boys (Annamma et al., 2016; Losen & Skiba, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Although Black girls made up only 8% of the K-12 student demographic, they accounted 14% of students who were suspended at least once (U.S. Department of Education 2014). Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than white students. On average, 5% of white students are suspended, compared to 16% of Black students. Black girls are suspended at higher rates than girls of any other race or ethnicity and most boys; approximately 12% of Black female students are suspended, whereas about 2% of white girls are suspended.

Schools districts across the United States rely on suspension and expulsion as a main way to discipline African American students (Arcia, 2016; Gregory, Noguera & Skiba, 2010). School suspensions and expulsions may increase the achievement gap between African American and white students (Gregory, Noguera & Skiba, 2010). These harsh disciplinary practices in public schools leads to what Morris (2016) describes as the criminalization of African Americans being “pushed out” of school. (Jacobs, 2017). School “push out” increases risk of retention, school dropout and low wage employment (Jones-Castro & Johns, 2016). When African American girls

continue to be suspended from school it may influence their concepts of self and their achievement (Person, 2008). As a result, Gregory, Noguera and Skiba (2010) argued that racial discipline gaps influence racial patterns in academic achievement among African American students. By understanding the relationship between African American girls' experiences with discipline practices and their academic identity, educators can better support the girls in having the opportunity to succeed academically.

The purpose of this study was to explore experiences of African American middle school girls who have experienced school discipline practices in their school and to examine the relationship between African American girls' experiences with discipline practices and their academic identity. This was important because this study allowed us to hear from African American girls rather than teachers, administrators, or parents about their own perspective of school discipline practices and academic identity. In summary, the conceptual framework that guided the current study is as follows: first, discipline practices may influence student perceptions of climate, which occurs in conjunction with school rejection/disengagement, which in turn influences academic identity; and second, discipline practices may lead directly to feelings of school rejection, which in turn influence academic identity. Notably, the conceptual framework has many components that are working with or influencing each other, potentially many times; the framework is more of a complex web of factors impacting academic identity instead of a top-down approach where an isolated factor produces another. The results of the study can inform school leaders about the challenges that influence the educational experiences of African American girls.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived educational experiences of African American middle school girls who have experienced school discipline practices in their school. Specifically, this study aimed to examine the relationship between African American girls' experiences with discipline practices and their academic identity. Many researchers, advocates, policy makers and funders have placed their full attention on African American girls' high school suspension rates because they are disproportionately targeted and given more severe punishments than white girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Kinsler, 2010; Monroe, 2005; Townsend, 2000; Odumosu, 2015). A primary example of this is from the U.S. Department of Education, who reported that patterns of suspension or even expulsion for African American high school girls continues to increase each year. Severe disciplinary policies among African American girls can limit their educational opportunities (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Middle school is an important developmental step for girls and is important for setting the stage for high school studies. The middle school age group is important to me as I teach middle schoolers; therefore, the sample was also selected as a convenience sample.

Research Questions

This study examined the relationship between school discipline practices, student perceptions of those practices, and their experiences in school. In this study I examined the relationship between African American girls' experiences with discipline practices and their academic identity at Freedom College Preparatory School (FCPS)², a public middle school in a large urban district in northeast. The central question of this study is what is the relationship between students' experiences with school discipline practices and their academic identity? The following questions guide this study.

1. How do African American girls make sense of school discipline at FCPS?
2. How do teacher expectations and school climate contribute to African American girls' experiences with school discipline and their academic identity?

² A pseudonym

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter first presents an overview of the literature on the racial disparities in school discipline among African American girls and impacts on their academic identity. In an effort to provide historical context for the study, this review addressed the literature on racial disproportionality in disciplinary practices in public schools. Next, the factors that contribute to racial disproportionality such as, teachers' demographics, teachers' expectations, and school climate among African American students. Then, research pertaining to family, socioeconomic status, and gender identity and expression because they are factors that contribute to African American students' behaviors in the class; this ultimately can impact academic identity. Finally, the academic identity development of African American girls will be described. These bodies of literature provide a theoretical foundation for understanding school discipline practices towards African American girls and how school discipline may influence African American girls' academic identity.

Racial Disparities in School Discipline Practices

Research on the factors that contribute to racial disproportionality in disciplinary practices among African American students have increased (Skiba et. al., 2011). National studies have concluded that African American students in general are not disciplined the same as their white counterparts for incidents (Blake et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Gastic, 2017). For example, African American students are more likely to be sent to the principal's office for being disrespectful and disruptive compared to white students receiving infractions for vandalism, alcohol use and smoking (Skiba et al., 2002; Gastic, 2017). Another study had found that African American students are disciplined harsher than white students for the same offenses (Gregory, 1995; Kewel Ramani et al., 2007; Gastic, 2017).

After federal legislation, in 1994, required states to expel for one year any students who brought a firearm to school, many schools across the nation adopted the zero tolerance policies (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Gastic, 2017). Zero-tolerance is a policy that requires school officials to give harsh punishment, such as suspensions, to students for breaking certain school rules. Since the 1990s, zero-tolerance policies instituted in schools have contributed to the rise of school suspension rates (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Gastic, 2017). Zero tolerance policies were created to be race-neutral, but these policies exacerbate racial disparities (Green et al., 2015; American Psychological Association, 2008).

Recent statistics show that the school suspension rates for African American students have grown faster than their white counterparts (Gastic, 2017). Additionally, statistics from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2013), African American girls in public elementary and secondary schools have higher suspension rates than white girls and girls of other races (U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Wun, 2018), as well as Asian and white boys (U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Wun, 2018). In summary, although the zero-tolerance policy cannot be shown to cause racial disparities in punishment practices, data shows that suspensions have increased, and this increase disproportionately impacts African Americans (Gastic, 2017) and particularly African American girls (U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Wun, 2018). Thus, further research is needed to identify why this occurs.

The Impact of Teacher Characteristics on Discipline Practices

Teacher demographics. A handful of studies have found that African American students are less likely to receive out-of-school suspensions with African American teachers (Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Nicholson-Crotty, 2009; Meier, 1984; Meier & Stewart, 1992; Hart & Lindsay, 2017).

In United States public schools, there are 3.8 million teachers (Kominiak, 2017). Of those 3.8 million teachers, 80% of them are white and 77% are female (Kominiak, 2017). Researchers argue that underrepresentation of Black and Latino teachers for students can drive inequality in student outcomes (Grissom, Kern, & Rodriguez, 2015; Hart & Lindsay, 2017). In addition, underrepresentation of Black and Latino teachers may affect student misbehaviors (Hart & Lindsay, 2017). Additionally, research has indicated that a teacher's race matters on how they perceive negative student behaviors (Hart & Lindsay, 2017; Staats, 2014). For instance, when the majority of classroom teachers is white, African American students are more likely to receive out of school suspensions compared to their white peers (Hart & Lindsay, 2017). The cultural differences between teachers and their students can increase cultural biases that in turn lead to differences in discipline practices (Staats, 2014); this will be discussed in more depth in the following section.

Teachers biases and stereotypes. Disciplinary actions begin with the teacher and his or her interpretation of negative behaviors (Kemp-Graham, 2017). Implicit bias is a contributing factor when analyzing disproportionality in school discipline (Rudd, 2014). Implicit bias is defined as “the mental process that causes us to have negative feelings and attitudes about people based on characteristics like race, ethnicity, age and appearance” (Rudd, 2014). Onyeka-Crawford and colleagues (2017) argue that African American girls are being disciplined for minor offenses due to implicit biases. If a white student does not receive a consequence for a particular infraction, but a Black student does, implicit bias may play a role (Martin & Smith, 2017). Skiba and colleagues (2002) found that African American students were often sent to the principal's office by their white classroom teachers for being disrespectful. The concept of “disrespect” is subjective and difficult to prove. Skiba and colleagues (2002) concluded that

white students were sent to the office not for being disrespectful, but for leaving the classroom without permission or using obscene language. Black students were typically sent to the office for being disrespectful, even though their behaviors were similar to those of their white peers.

Teacher bias towards African American girls. Recent literature reveals African American girls have received differential discipline because of implicit biases (Kemp-Graham, 2017). Research shows that African American girls are not viewed as a “physical” threat to teachers compared to African American boys (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Kemp-Graham, 2017). However, teachers continue to perceive African American girls who are aggressive, confrontational, and assertive as displaying negative behaviors in the classroom (Kemp-Graham, 2017). African American girls receive disciplinary consequences because teachers perceive African American girls’ behaviors as assertive, aggressive, confrontational, and defiant (Kemp-Graham, 2017).

Cultural misunderstandings between students and teachers can lead to African American students being disciplined for being perceived as unruly or inappropriate (C. Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003; C. S. Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004; Staats, 2014). For example, a lively debate among African American girls can be interpreted as aggressive rather than simply sparring common among girls (C. S. Weinstein, et al., 2004; Staats, 2014). For African American girls, “what may be perceived as loud and defiant behavior may actually be the manifestation of important survival qualities that have historically reflected resilience in the face of racism, sexism, and classism” (Morris, 2013; Staats, 2014). African American girls have been regarded as more physically and verbally violent, whereas white girls engage in more relational aggression, such as bullying, teasing, exclusion and gossiping (Esposito & Edwards, 2018). However, white girls are not less aggressive or less prone to violence when compared to

African American girls; they are just perceived as less aggressive and prone to violence because of the type of aggression they typically display (Esposito & Edwards, 2018). African American girls were even disciplined more often for wearing certain clothes and hairstyles (Kemp-Graham, 2017). For instance, Kemp-Graham (2017) found that school policies often led to unfair discipline practices towards African American girls; for instance, wearing dreadlocks is part of African American culture, but this was often a reason that African American girls were disciplined.

The disciplinary actions towards African American girls may be based on racial stereotypes and assumptions that African American girls should be obedient (Wun, 2018). African American girls have been disproportionately disciplined because of interpretations of behaviors (Kemp-Graham, 2017). African American girls are being penalized in schools for standing up for themselves in order to be heard by their teachers and counterparts (Kemp-Graham, 2017). On the contrary, teachers view white female students standing up for themselves in order to be heard as a strategy to enter middle-and-upper class careers (Morris, 2007; Kemp-Graham, 2017). Morris (2007) also discovered that African American girls who tend to speak up and question school policies are viewed as a threat to authority by their teachers and administrators. African American girls are told by teachers that voicing their opinions is “un-lady like” and they should correct their behavior to conform to lady-like traits such as being soft spoken and polite (Jacobs, 2017). When African American girls are consistently being silenced from their teachers from expressing themselves it can lead them to exhibit disruptive behaviors or be disengaged from school (AAPF, 2015; Fordham 1991, Grant, 1992; Jacobs, 2017).

Teacher expectations. A 2007 meta-analysis study found that teachers hold lower expectations for African American students compared to white students (Rosenthal & Jacobson,

1968; Rudd, 2014). Lowered expectations in the classroom may lead to more disciplinary actions from teachers (Rudd, 2014). In schools with high academic expectations, teachers are more likely to react less punitively to misbehaviors compared to teachers in schools with low academic expectations (Gregory, Cornell, and Fan, 2011). Moreover, Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011) found African Americans students with high rates of suspension reported having low levels of academic expectations and low support from teachers. In the study, schools with low levels of support but high academic expectations had low suspension rates compared to school climates with low academic expectations (Gregory, Cornell, and Fan, 2011). A positive school climate with high academic expectations and support can invest students to follow the school rules (Gregory, Cornell, and Fan, 2011). Overall, these studies suggest a connection between school climate and racial disproportionality in disciplinary practices in schools (e.g., Gregory et al., 2011).

Contributing Factors to Student Behaviors

School presents a unique challenge for African American girls with behavior issues. Behavior is a form of communication (Minahan & Rappaport, 2019). An African American female student who is unable to express her frustration verbally may engage in disruptive behaviors such as fighting or yelling. Although some student behavior can be bizarre, their actions are purposeful and their attempt to solve a problem (Minahan & Rappaport, 2019). The only way to understand the relationship between African American girls' experiences with discipline practices and their academic identity was to identify the root causes of student behaviors. Understanding these factors was important for this study because it determined whether these factors were a key component related to school discipline practices among African American girls.

School climate. School climate is a key component of students' and teachers' sense of safety in a school (Cornell, Heliburn, & Konold, 2018). Moo (1979) defines school climate as "the social atmosphere of a learning environment in which students have different experiences, depending on the protocols set up by the teachers and administrators" (Watkins & Aber, 2009). A positive school environment can make students feel safe and motivated to learn (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Cornell & Shirley, 2011). Researchers have found that positive student perceptions of school climate can lead to lower misconduct and suspension rates (Bickel & Qualls, 1980; Welsh, 2003; Skiba et. al., 2011). However, African American students have a negative perception of school climate compared to white students (Kupchik & Ellis, 2008; Mattison & Aber, 2007; Ruck & Wortley, 2002; Watkins & Aber, 2009, Skiba et. al., 2011). Marsh and Cornell (2001) found that African American students encountered negative experiences in school because of lack of adult and peer support and constantly being threatened with violence by other students.

Family socioeconomic status. Researchers have found a correlation between racial disproportionality and socioeconomic status (SES; Skiba et. al., 2002). African American students of low socioeconomic status are more likely to be suspended from school compared to their white counterparts, meaning SES could be an underlying factor in the racial disparities of school discipline practices (Skiba et. al., 2002). McCarthy and Hoge (1987), conducted a study on the racial disadvantage of African American students and the results of the study showed that the level of parents' education (which is related to SES) is associated with suspension rates.

Additionally, a study conducted by Wu et al. (1982) found that "students whose fathers did not have a full-time job were significantly more likely to be suspended than students whose fathers were employed full-time" (Skiba et. al., 2002). Both studies concluded that low-income

students from poorer neighborhoods are more likely to be disciplined under current school discipline policies (Skiba et. al., 2002). In addition, students from different social classes are punished differently (Skiba et. al., 2002). Socioeconomic status can have a significant effect on a family and how parents behave with their children. This effect continues into the school environment and could be directly related to how African American girls behave in schools (Skiba et. al., 2002).

Gender identity and expression. Baum and Westheimer (2015) defines gender expression as the way a person expresses their gender identity through their appearance and behavior. Being an African American girl and growing up in the United States results in unique challenges and consequences regarding gender identity and expression. This is problematic because issues related to gender expression have an impact on educational experiences of African American girls (Majied, 2010). Crenshaw, Ocen and Nanda (2015), revealed that African American girls who act masculine are more likely to be disciplined by their teachers than white girls who exhibit the same behaviors. Fordham (1993), asserts that labeling African American girls as “loud” in school silences them and African American girls should avoid being labeled as “loud” to feel accepted in the educational environment (Odumosu, 2015). By forcing girls to act like a “lady,” educators are implying that being “loud” is a negative trait (Odumosu, 2015). Morris (2016), found that teachers described African American girls’ behavior as “loud, defiant and precocious” and African American girls were more likely to receive consequences for their “unladylike” behaviors compared to their white counterparts in the classroom (Jacobs, 2017).

Academic Identity

In general, academic identity is how students see themselves in an academic domain (Rouland, 2017). Welch and Hodges (1997) defined academic identity as willingly committing to persist in one's education despite the challenge, struggle, excitement and disappointment that occur throughout the learning process. Academic identity development is influenced by life experiences, the cultural contexts in which academic identity occurs, and the meaning attributed to those experiences (Spencer, Dupree & Hartman, 1997; White, 2015). Generally, adolescents' identity emerges from the collective exchange of physical, intellectual, emotional, and social systems that transform how they make sense of the world (Spencer & Tinsley, 2008; White, 2015). Understanding academic identity is important to predict and help increase desired learning outcomes for African American girls.

Moreover, Fergus, Noguera and Martin (2014) include academic press and academic engagement as dimensions of an academic identity. Fergus, Noguera and Martin (2014) refer to academic press as the extent to which schools are driven by achievement-oriented values, goals and norms. When academic press is present in the school, students and faculty perform at a higher level. Academic engagement refers to students' active involvement in academic activities, such as studying, participating in the classroom and extracurricular activities.

Academic identity development among African American girls. African American girls are disproportionately suspended from school, putting them at greater risk for negative school stigma (White, 2015). African American girls who are considered "at risk" often feeling disconnected from school and in the classroom (White, 2015). Oyserman et al. (1995) described that African American girls battle between refuting negative stereotypes associated with their race and gender and attempting to develop their own sense of self (White, 2015). These

researchers suggested that African American girls developed “gendered African-American identity schema as a means of making their sense of self and group membership, in order to provide meaning and context to their experiences of historical racism and to understand the gendered experience of African-American identity.” (White, 2015).

Schools are significant in the development of one’s academic identity, and this is especially true for African American girls (Elmore, 2009; White, 2015). African American girls developed their academic identity when they perceive themselves as being capable of excelling academically in school (Graham and Anderson, 2008). Academic identity is shaped by African American girls’ internal and external comparison with their white counterparts (Awad, 2007). African American girls have come to believe the notion that white girls have more academic ability than themselves (Okeke, Howard, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2009). African American girls believing this false ideology as the truth can influence how they engage in school and select courses (Okeke, Howard, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2009).

Hatt (2012) argues that smartness is not about who a student is, but rather who they are set to be. Schools are one of the places where students learn who they should and should not be. Therefore, African American girls form a strong academic identity by getting good grades and having a high GPA (Hatt, 2012). When African American girls begin to believe they are not smart as their white peers this thought may influence an African American girls’ academic identity (Hatt, 2012). Studies have shown that African American girls misbehave in the classroom because they become disengaged from school (Hatt, 2012). Students with positive academic identity are less likely to participate in delinquent behaviors (Chung & Elias, 1996). However, students with negative academic identity are more likely to participate in delinquent behaviors (Chung & Elias, 1996). African American girls who receive failing grades and a low

GPA have been shown to believe that they are incapable to perform academically high compared to their white counterparts and become disengaged in school (Hatt, 2012).

While African American girls' school experience have been a topic of study, the experiences of African American girls' perception of their academic identity is less studied. African American girls establish an academic identity within their school experiences. The meaning African American girls attribute to their experiences of race and gender may offer important insight into their academic development process (White, 2015). As educators, it is important to understand the agency and the necessity for African American girls to have a choice in what they receive as truth related to their academic identity (Murrell, 2007).

Outcomes of academic identity. Academic identity influences behaviors and choices that all students make, regardless of race, which affects their educational outcomes (Rouland, 2017). In schools, motivation is a key factor in contributing to a student's academic successes or failures. One consequence of academic press is when students expect to do well, they put greater effort, persevere through difficult tasks, and perform better on any given task. Achievement motivation is, "the personality factors that come into play when a person undertakes a task at which he will be evaluated, enters into competition with other persons, or otherwise strives to attain some standard of excellence," (Smith, 1959). Achievement motivation is important to African American students' educational experiences, which can influence the type of coursework they select and the amount of effort they put into their learning (Redd, Brooks, & McGarvey, 2001). Was, Al-Harthy, Stack-Oden and Isaacson (2009) conducted a study using AIM and discovered that the academic identity status of students was related to the academic goals they adopted. King (2008) concluded that academic identity was a positive and significant predictor

of students' final grade in English. Therefore, these studies indicate that academic identity plays an integral role in the lives of students and how they perceive themselves in the classroom.

African American Girls' Experiences with School Discipline Practices

Few studies have examined students' experiences with school discipline practices, particularly African American girls' experiences. One ethnographic study conducted by Morris (2007) did investigate teachers' perceptions of their students' experiences and found that African American girls seemed to dominate classroom discussions and talk a lot in the classroom setting (Morris, 2007). During physical conflict, even with boy students, African American girls would often be physical back, and would refrain from involving adults to solve issues. Morris (2007) found that teachers, particularly female teachers, often reported disciplining African American girls because of talking out during class and challenging teacher authority. Future research is needed to obtain information on students' perceptions of these issues, with more focus on school discipline.

Like Morris (2007), Cogburn, Chavous, and Griffin (2011) conducted a study with both African American girls and boys to investigate school-based racial and gender discrimination and their academic and psychological impacts. African American students' experiences with school-based discrimination, including discipline-related practices, were found to impact academic and psychological adjustment (Cogburn et al., 2011). Both gender and racial discrimination impacted depressive symptoms and self-esteem for both genders, and grade point average for boys (Cogburn et al., 2011). However, more research is needed to get in-depth information on African American girls' experiences, directly from students themselves.

Other researchers have examined oppression faced by African American female students and how they resisted such oppression. Murphy, Acosta, and Kennedy-Lewis (2013) conducted a

qualitative study to examine the disproportional discipline practices used against African American female students. The researchers investigated how seven African American middle school girls examined and justified their school behaviors and how the students' interactions with their teachers shaped their feelings towards their school behaviors (Murphy et al., 2013). African American girls were found to be disciplined for subjective, ill-defined behaviors, and that these students felt alienated from the learning process because of a hostile school environment, lack of support, presumptions of guilt, and experiencing miscommunications and misunderstandings (Murphy et al., 2013). Similar to Morris (2007), Murphy et al. (2013) found that African American students tend to voice their opinions, speak out and assert themselves in school and that oppression in school impacted the learning process of the African American students that participated.

Thus far, literature regarding general school infractions has been discussed but other research by Wun (2018) has also focused on the experiences of girls regarding school violence-related discipline practices. Wun (2018) interviewed Black and non-Black female students and found that compared to non-Black girls, Black girls were subject to multiple forms of violence outside of the school and displayed more signs of anger and resistance in school, often impacting their disciplinary records (Wun, 2018). However, further research is needed to better understand how African American girls specifically perceive school discipline practices and other outcomes of school discipline practices such as impacts on academic identity.

The Research Gap and Current Study

Qualitative research on African American girls' experiences with school discipline practices and their academic identity is limited. The need for further research regarding the experiences of African American girls was evident because African American girls out-of-school

suspension rates are increasing, and they continue to lag academically behind their white female counterparts. In considering African American girls' experiences in school, there was little research that incorporates their voices and direct experiences with school discipline practices and their academic identity. Much of the research about African American girls only provides data on how African American girls receive high out-of-school suspensions rates compare to white students and are lagging behind their white counterparts academically but does not include their conception of their self and their achievement. It was important to hear from African American girls about their experience with school discipline practices and their academic identity rather than teachers, administrators and parents because their voices offer more meaning on the problem. This research added to the literature on African American girls' perspective on school discipline practices and how this shapes academic identity. The current study will build on the research, such as that by of Morris (2007) and Murphy et al. (2013), by examining the experiences of African American students' perceptions of school discipline and academic identity. Additionally, like Murphy et al (2013), the current study will examine school climate (e.g., whether the school climate is hostile, etc.) but also considers teacher expectations.

Contribution

This study contributed to the field of education by offering a perspective of school discipline practices among African American girls. Specific to education, my study brought awareness to the problem on how school discipline practices influence African American girl's academic identity. Currently, the research on African American girls shows that they receive higher suspension rates and are lagging behind academically compared to their white counterparts, but there was no research to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences in school. This study contributed to providing these African American girls the opportunity to

voice their lived experiences and hear from the girls rather than teachers, administrators, or parents. This study elucidated the relationship between African American girls' experiences with school discipline practices and their academic identity. By focusing on African American girls, discipline, and academic identity in urban schools this study shined a spotlight on the various factors that influence their educational experiences.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of school discipline practices on African American girls' academic identity. The central questions to this study were, what is the relationship between students' experiences with school discipline practices and their academic identity? The following questions guide this study.

1. How do African American girls make sense of school discipline at FCPS?
2. How do teacher expectations and school climate contribute to African American girls' experiences with school discipline and their academic identity?

In order to understand African American girls' perspective of school discipline practices and their academic identity in middle school, a qualitative research method was used. The type of qualitative research used was phenomenology. Phenomenology helps to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, phenomenology attempts to "understand people's perceptions, perspectives, and understanding of a particular situation" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). A key aspect of phenomenology is its aim to explore individuals' meaning making in their everyday lives and experiences (Creswell, 1998). It was this emphasis on "meaning" that made phenomenology appropriate for the study of the lived experiences of African American girls' and their perspective of school discipline practices and academic identity. Using phenomenology, I was able to understand the lived educational experiences of African American middle school girls who have been impacted by the school discipline practices in order to answer the research questions. Gee (2000) proposes exploring how being recognized as a "certain kind of person, in a given context can be used as an analytic tool for studying important issues of theory and practice in education" (p. 100). Therefore, in considering African American girls' experiences in school, it was important to hear from them

rather than teachers, administrators and parents because their voices offer “meaningful commentary” on the issues that may influence their success (Anderson, 2008).

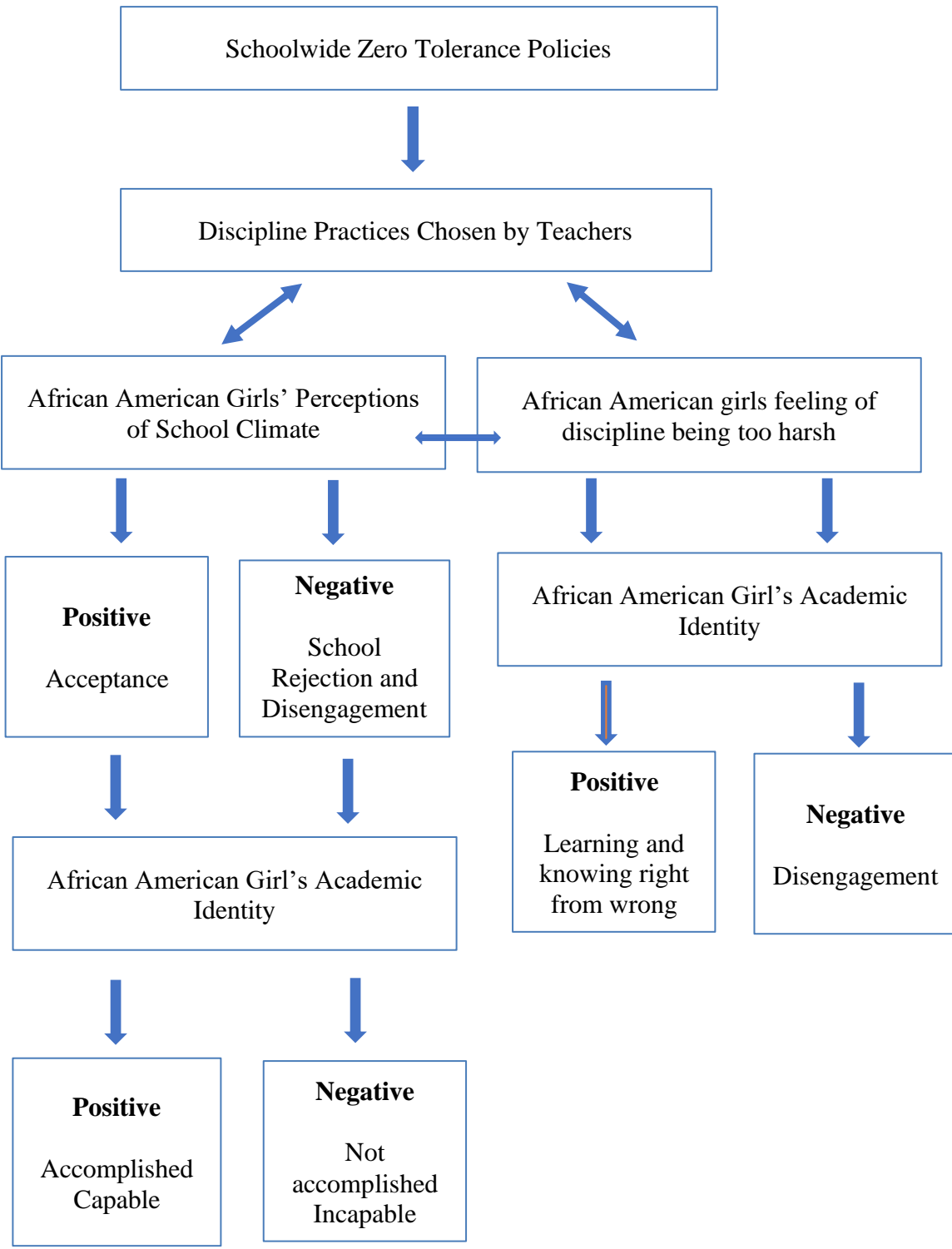
There is a substantial body of research about African American girls, but little research that incorporates their voices and direct experiences (Anderson, 2008). Anderson (2008) conducted a study on African American students’ perceptions of school and found that African American students want to be heard. African American students have different perspectives than teachers, administrators, and parents, particularly when it comes to perspectives on issues that bring about education reform (Anderson, 2008). Understanding African American girls’ lived experiences addressed the educational experiences of African American girls from the point of view of the actual perspectives of African American girls on school discipline practices and their academic identity.

Conceptual Framework

Ravitch and Riggan (2012) defines conceptual framework as “a way of linking all of the elements of the research process: researcher disposition, interest, and positionality; literature; and theory and method”. The goal of this section is to present a framework of how discipline practices can have an influence on African American girls’ academic identity. Using my conceptual framework, review of the literature, an initial data analysis as guides, I have developed a diagram that describes the key components of school discipline practices and academic identity and how these concepts relate to each other. Overall, the conceptual framework that guided the current study is multidirectional and as follows: first, discipline practices may influence student perceptions of climate, which occurs in conjunction with school rejection/disengagement, which in turn influences academic identity; and second, discipline practices may lead directly to feelings of school rejection, which in turn influence academic

identity. Notably, the conceptual framework has many components that are working with or influencing each other, potentially many times; the framework is more of a complex web of factors impacting academic identity instead of a top-down approach where an isolated factor produces another. Figure 1, shown below, illustrated how I conceptualize the link between school discipline practices and academic identity. It is important to note that the factors of the proposed conceptual model are interactive; there is constant feedback and interactions between the components. The next section will describe the components of the conceptual framework and their connection to the current study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Diagram



Schoolwide Zero Tolerance Policies and Discipline Practices

Many schools across the U.S. adopted the zero tolerance policies in 1994 (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Gastic, 2017). Zero-tolerance is a policy that requires school officials to give harsh punishment, such as suspensions, to students for breaking certain school rules. This policy has contributed to the rise of school suspension rates for decades (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Gastic, 2017). Not only are Zero-tolerance policies related to increased school discipline, but they are also associated with racial disparities. Zero tolerance policies were created to be race-neutral discipline practices, but these policies may exacerbate racial disparities as shown by recent statistics (Green et al., 2015; American Psychological Association, 2008).

Recent statistics show that the school suspension rates for African American students have grown faster than their white counterparts (Gastic, 2017). African American girls in public elementary and secondary schools have higher suspension rates than white girls and girls of other races (U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Wun, 2018), as well as Asian and white boys (U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Wun, 2018). In summary, since the introduction of Zero tolerance, suspensions have increased, and this increase disproportionately impacts African Americans (Gastic, 2017) and particularly African American girls (U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Wun, 2018).

Discipline Practices, School Climate, School Rejection, and Academic Identity

The first component of the conceptual framework involves the following: discipline practices may influence student perceptions of climate, which in turn leads to school rejection/disengagement, which in turn influences academic identity. Zero-tolerance policies are unique because they require school officials to give harsh punishment, such as suspensions, to students for breaking certain school rules (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Gastic, 2017). Since the 1990s,

zero-tolerance policies instituted in schools have contributed to the rise of school suspension rates (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Gastic, 2017). Zero-tolerance policies in schools result in egregiously unfair punishments towards African American girls. This is especially true within schools with poorly written policies because these policies are vague, subjective and inconsistent (Barbadoro, 2017). These inequitably used disciplinary policies, have resulted in a disproportionate percentage of out-of-school suspensions (Barbadoro, 2017).

School climate refers to the quality and character of the school life. Previous researchers have found the fairness of a school's disciplinary climate to be significantly correlated with student motivation, achievement, and engagement (Rumberger, 1995). When a teacher or administrator finds him or herself in a new situation with an African American girl with which he or she is unfamiliar, a teacher or administrator may rely on racially charged stereotypes, rather than consciously assessing the situation (Okonofua & Quershi, 2017). The ultimate consequences of negative school disciplinary climates (a component of general school climate) are academic disengagement and disruptive behaviors in the classroom (Barbadoro, 2017). These discipline practices may then lead to African American girls' negative perceptions of school climate.

Furthermore, the negative perceptions of school climate could negatively impact the academic identity of African American girls. The academic identity refers to a student's own experiences and the perceptions founded by such experiences. Disciplinary disparities have been shown to impact African American girls' perspective on their academic identity (Verdugo, 2002; Barbadoro, 2017); this could occur in a school that is perceived as having a negative school disciplinary climate. As noted previously, negative school disciplinary climate leads to academic disengagement (Barbadoro, 2017), and when African American girls are disengaged in the

classroom it may influence their academic identity (Oppenheimer & Ziegler, 1988; Barbadoro, 2017).

Discipline Practices, Student Feelings of Rejection, and Academic Identity.

The second component of the conceptual framework involves the following: discipline practices may lead directly to student feelings of school rejection, which in turn influence academic identity. Students perceive being removed from their school environment as a form of school rejection (Skiba & Noam, 2012; Brown, 2007; Young, 2013). When African American girls are rejected from their school environment, they will feel disconnected from their learning community, which may influence their academic identity (Brown, 2007). Removing a student from the classroom sends them the message that they are unwanted, which may lower their motivation to put any effort into their learning (Redd, Brooks, McGravey, 2001). Moreover, out-school-suspension can also make African American girls feel isolated from their classroom and peers, which can lower the academic motivation (Redd, Brooks, McGravey, 2001). Ultimately, these issues can impact African American girls' academic identity.

Research Site

The research study was conducted at FCPS, an urban New York City school, my place of work where I teach English Language Arts to all 7th graders. The rationale for the choice was convenience and a high population of African American girls. The school has a total of 400 students, with 25 full-time teachers. Of the 400 students, 98 percent are classified as economically disadvantaged based on the student enrollment forms submitted by parents and guardians. FCPS qualifies for a federal government program that pays for universal free lunch. The school has a total minority enrollment of 99 percent including 0.8 percent white, 33 percent

Black and 76 percent Latino. The school gender breakdown is 60% female and 40% male. For the sake of confidentiality, neither the school nor students of this study were identified.

Recruitment

Recruitment for the study began with letters being sent out to families who identified their child as an African American female on their student profile. The letters explained the purpose of this study and the steps that would be taken to secure their child's confidentiality. In addition, to recruit more participants, I explained the study to teachers in the building and had them recommend African American girls they knew had been suspended from school. In total, the teachers were able to recommend ten girls. Next, after I received some teacher recommendations, I sent out letters to all families with African American girls from each grade to meet my target. I selected 15 sixth grade, 15 seventh grade and 15 eighth grade students for the study. My goal was to recruit a total of 12-25 participants from each grade. I recruited more than 12-15 participants just in case the parents or the participant did not agree to participate in the study and/or the student did not meet the inclusion criteria.

Twenty families expressed interest in having their child participate in the study. The families who expressed interest in the study received an email containing documents including a consent form for one parent and the student (Appendix A & B), instructions that inform the participant of the procedures of the study along with information regarding the interview process, and expected time expenditure. If parents did not have an email address, I printed out the documents and mailed them to their home address. I knew if a family member agreed to have their child participate in the study by following up with the parent via phone or email the week after emailing the documents.

In addition, after I received the parent's consent from 20 families, I spoke to the student

via phone or email. During our phone conversation, I informed the participants that their participation in this study was voluntary, would not impact their relationship with the school and that any and all information gathered was strictly confidential. Participants were advised that a signed consent form must be turned in before the face to face interview could begin. Since this study included minors who were not able to give consent, a consent form was provided to their parent/guardian to provide proper consent.

Out of the 20 consent forms mailed home or emailed, 15 participants turned in their signed consent forms. Then I selected the participants who met the requirements for the study before I conducted interviews. I used the school database to search for all the girls who met the following criteria of having received an out of school suspension in the previous or current school year. I did not focus on in-school suspensions rates because the school does not have an ISS program. I looked for other areas that could potentially provide data to support my study inclusive to variations with student GPAs and course selections. Of the original 20 potential participants, only ten were able to meet the criteria. Five of the girls had never been suspended and another five were not available.

Table 1: Characteristics of Participants

Names	Age	Grade Level	Number of Suspensions Between 2018-2019	Reason for Suspension	Course Selections	GPA
Belinda	11	6th	5	Fighting & Use of Profane or Obscene Language	English 7 Science 7 History 7 Math 7	2.88
Edelyne	11	6th	1	Fighting	English Honors 7 Science Honors 7 History Honors 7 Math Honors 7	2.57

Thea	13	7 th	5	Fighting, Bullying, Use of Profane or Obscene Language	English 7 Science 7 History 7 Math 7	1.87
Ravynne	12	7 th	1	Fighting	English 7 Science 7 History 7 Math 7	2.88
Rebecca	12	7 th	2	Cyberbully & Fighting	English Honors 7 Science Honors 7 History Honors 7 Math Honors 7	3.43
Shanique	12	7 th	3	Fighting, Cyberbullying, Use of Profane or Obscene Language	English Honors 7 Science Honors 7 History Honors 7 Math Honors 7	2.43
Taylor	13	8 th	3	Cyberbully, Leaving School Without Permission, Arson	English 8 Science 8 History 8 Math 8	2.22
Mirabel	13	8 th	2	Bullying & Willful Disobedience	English 8 Science 8 History 8 Math 8	1.65
Cynthia	13	8 th	1	Fighting	Living Environment Algebra 1 English Honors 8 History Honors 8	3.62
Hariell	13	8 th	1	Fighting	English 8 Science 8 History 8 Math 8	2.52

Participants

Ten African American middle school girls who have experienced out of school suspension participated in the study. The number of study participants was recommended in the literature of qualitative studies. Due to the labor-intensive nature of qualitative research, a smaller sample size is more practical (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). The middle school population of students was selected for this study because they have the highest suspension rates (Loveless, 2017). In addition, middle school is the “chronological dividing line for when African-American suspension rates escalate” (Loveless, 2017).

The girls were purposely selected if their parent/guardian identified them as African American on their student profile survey. In addition, the girls were selected if they were suspended from school in the past academic or present school year. The table above includes respondent pseudonyms, race, gender, age, number of suspensions and GPA. Overall, the girls in the study were in grades 6-8. Two were in the 6th grade, four were in the 7th grade and four were in the 8th grade. The girls ranged in ages 11 to 13; half of the girls were age 13. The girls’ GPAs ranged from 1.65 to 3.62, but only two of the girls had a GPA over 3.0. Notably, all of the girls in this study had been in trouble for fighting or bullying/cyber bullying; all of the girls had been suspended. Additionally, three of the girls had also been in trouble for obscene language. Some of the other reasons for being in trouble involved arson, willful disobedience, and leaving school without permission. Three of the girls were in all-Honors courses, and one girl was taking a mix of Honors and traditional-level courses. The remaining six girls were taking traditional-level courses.

Academic identity measurement. In order to measure key components of academic identity, information was gathered from interviews with multiple African American girls. Was

and Isaacson (2008) developed a self-report measure of academic identity status. The questions on the academic identity measure (AIM) tool focus on these following topics: (a) choosing a college, (b) reasons for college, (c) classroom attention, (d) priorities, I academic goals, (f) interest and motivation, (g) discipline (h) responding to failure, (i) persistence in the face of failure, and (j) volition. Was and Isaacson (2008) used AIM to look at the relationship between the academic identity statuses and final scores in a college psychology course. The total score of student academic identity was measured by the total of 12 exams and 12 quizzes throughout the first semester. The Academic Identity Measure helped guide the interview questions of the current study by setting a foundation on what areas to focus on when developing the questions such as classroom attention, priorities, academic goals, interest and motivation, discipline, responding to failure and persistence in the face of failure. Gaining this information from the interviews helped me understand African American girls' experiences with academic identity.

Data Collection

To collect data, I conducted interviews with ten African American female students in the study. The purpose of the interview was to explore the views, experiences beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters (Chadwick, Gill, Treasure Stewart, 2008). Interviews provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena (Chadwick, Gill, Treasure Stewart, 2008). This was important because the responses from the girls in the study provided me a deeper understanding of their perception of school discipline and their academic identity. Each of the girls participated in two separate, individual interviews for a total of 20 during this research study. The interview questions were open-ended and were developed based upon research questions and reviewed literature. Each interview was digitally audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to confirm accuracy, but the identities of the participants remain

anonymous. The protocol questions (see Appendix G) were designed to address the key areas of the participants' understanding of the school discipline practices, and the participants' personal involvement with the discipline practices in the school. The questions also addressed the relationship between African American girls' experiences with discipline practices and their academic identity.

The average duration of an interview was 60 minutes. Due to the large amount of research questions in the study, I conducted two interview sessions collect the information I was interested in receiving from the participants. On the first interview I focused on school discipline practices and on the second interview I focused on academic identity. Moreover, since the interviews were conducted after-school, I notified parents via telephone to let them know that their child was arriving home at a later time since majority of our students walk home or take public transportation. I informed the participants and parents the date and time of the interview two-weeks in advance after I worked with the participants to find a convenient time.

All ten participants consented to be interviewed and recorded during the interview. Interviews took place at the end of September during the academic school year, which allowed the participants to settle into building relationships with teachers and students. During the interview, I created a safe and welcoming interview environment for the participants in the study. I ensured that all participants felt comfortable by making eye contact and smiling each time they spoke. I crafted student-friendly questions to have a dialogue with the participants. I made sure to check my language and tone to ensure the participants felt comfortable sharing their thoughts, opinions and stories with me. The girls were each advised of their rights to stop the interview at any time and to ask questions any time. I also advised them of their right to answer only questions of their choosing. I checked in with them frequently during the interviews to make sure

they clearly understood my questions. I also attended to their non-verbal cues and gave extra clarification if I sensed any hesitation. For example, if I asked a question and the girl paused before responding or displayed confusion, but did not ask for a clarification, I would explain the reason for my question in order to help her gain clarity and respond. I also asked the girls to describe themselves. They spoke of their schooling experience and life experiences, which provided a comprehensive picture of how they developed a sense of identity in terms of school. The girls shared their stories, including elements such as teacher expectations, family structure, school climate, and life experience as they deemed them relevant to their own story. I allowed the girls' stories to unfold naturally.

To add more depth to the study, I collected school data on disciplinary records (including reasons for suspensions), GPA and course-taking for each participant. Collecting data on disciplinary records for each participant provided me further insight on why the participants were suspended and look for common trends of behaviors. GPA was used as the measure of academic achievement. GPA does provide some indication of academic achievement and was still widely used in research looking at academic identity (Rodriguez, 2009; Worrell, 2007; Berzonsky, 1985). Coursework selection was used as the measure of academic motivation. Collecting data on coursework selection allowed me to see whether the participants are enrolling in difficult courses to challenge themselves.

Data Analysis

I expected participants to have negative perceptions regarding the disciplinary actions in their school. I also expected to find the participant's perceptions of failure, disengagement, poor academic achievement, and lack of motivations which increased negative academic identity of the students. Based on my conceptual framework in the current study, discipline practices may

influence student perceptions of climate, which in turn leads to school rejection/disengagement, which in turn influences academic identity. Additionally, discipline practices may lead directly to feelings of school rejection, which in turn influence academic identity.

After collecting the digital audio recording from the interviews, I began my analytic process by transcribing the 20 recorded interviews without grammatical corrections. I used transcriptions to conduct a constant comparison method of data analysis. I transcribed the text, appropriately coded or named areas of interest relevant to this study, and categorized them according to the distinct, observable emergent themes, associated with my research questions and conceptual framework (Bloomberg & Volpe ,2008; White, 2015). The data coding process involved me going through each transcript line by line using auditory and visual methods. I listened to the digital audio recording three to four times to begin the coding process. I manually entered initial codes on the computer using a colored font while keeping a written journal of my thoughts and feelings throughout the process. Then I printed the transcripts and read them line by line, noting additional codes by hand and altered the codes as patterns and emergent themes arose within the data (Litchman,2010; White, 2015). I placed all the codes under appropriate themes and categories in a codebook in a Microsoft Word document. From this data analysis, themes emerged (See, Appendix A). Both deductive and inductive coding were used initially as open coding and then as code by list: the elements in the conceptual framework were used as broad code subjects, like “discipline practices chosen by teachers” or “African American girls’ perception of school climate” hence the deductive aspect of the coding. Then a variety of sub-codes were created like “acceptance,” “school rejection” and “disengagement.” Hence the inductive aspect. When analyzing the data, I looked at not only what was said but what was being done. In this study, GPA, course-taking selections, and disciplinary records were used as a

means to measure academic identity. GPA measured academic achievement. Coursework selection measured academic motivation and disciplinary records measured student behaviors. The codes were set based on the research questions and information provided in the participant's responses. These measures were used to categorize students based on GPA and courses taken.

After the interviews, the girls' responses were transcribed with open-coding initially applied and resulted in eight emergent themes that were significant to the student's perception of school discipline practices and their academic identity in school. In addition, I used conceptual framework to understand how school discipline affects academic identity to help guide the codes that I created and used in analysis of the participants' responses. There were two parts of my conceptual framework: first, discipline practices may influence student perceptions of climate, which in turn leads to school rejection/disengagement, which in turn influences academic identity; and second, discipline practices may lead directly to feelings of school rejection, which in turn influence academic identity. This framework played a role in the development of the codebook and initial codes. For instance, discipline, school climate, school rejection, school disengagement, and academic identity were included as the main initial codes.

In terms of coding and themes I used critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis focuses on how identity, knowledge and power are constructed through written and spoken texts in schools and classrooms (Graham & Luke, 2011). Moreover, Critical discourse analysis analyzed the language participants used to express their experiences to see how they made meaning of some of the issues that influenced their educational experiences. New codes were added as needed based on the narrative if the narrative did not fit into an already existing code. To conduct a member check, I sent a copy of the findings to each participant via email. I followed-up with each participant via email to confirm if they received a copy. The participants

were encouraged to review their responses and provide any additional comments or areas where their responses may need clarifying. According to Mertens (2015), member checking was recommended practice for credibility. Member checks allowed me to understand and evaluate what the participant intended to say during the interview. Member checking gave participants the opportunity to verify their responses to accurately reflect their position (Mertens, 2015).

Credibility and Dependability of the Study

Guba and Lincoln (1989) identified dependability parallel to reliability (Mertens, 2015). To check the dependability of this study, I used peer review. Peer review “provides support, plays devil’s advocate, challenges the researchers’ assumptions, pushes the researchers to the next step methodologically, and ask hard questions about the methods and interpretations” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Miller, 2009). I sought feedback from two fellow doctoral student colleagues, to clarify and review different aspects of my research methods and analysis. I selected these two peer reviewers because I have established a strong relationship with them through the doctoral program. Seeking assistance from peers provided credibility to this study (Creswell & Miller, 2009). I invited both colleagues to provide feedback throughout the analysis process. Both reviewers were involved in the final report. I emailed the final report to the reviewers to solicit feedback. Lastly, I collected data on the participants’ GPAs, discipline records and course selection to measure each participant’s overall academic engagement and resilience. This data could show that despite being suspended or in trouble numerous times, the student was able to maintain a high GPA. This data could also help to confirm/disconfirm reports of the students; for instance, they may feel they earn good grades but have a low GPA or may report being a good student and also have a high GPA. The GPA reflects the student’s success at their current academic level. The discipline records show how often a student is reprimanded for

breaking school rules. The course selections show how each student is choosing to challenge themselves at their current academic level; this was based on the level of difficulty of the course. Based on the participants' GPAs, discipline records and course selection, I categorized each participant. Categorizing data allows someone to construct conceptual schemes for comparing and organizing the data holistically (Basil, 2003). I categorized the participant by the number of suspensions and their GPAs. Therefore, I created a matrix with the mentioned students' attributes to illuminate how school discipline practices influence young African-American girls' academic identity by comparing and contrasting the data. The matrix encompassed three columns: data, code, and memo. Data referred to raw data (GPA, discipline records and course selections) which was obtained for the study. Code refers to descriptions that would put the data into some categories. Memos helped me notice some relations with some other categories and provided extra details and explanations for applied codes. This helps to ensure there is a clear repeatable process for coding and data analysis so that the steps taken in this study are fully understood and could be completed by future researchers.

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made in the study:

1. African American girls would want to talk about their lived experiences related to school discipline practices and their academic identity development.
2. The girls would accurately recall their personal narratives
3. I would adequately interpret meaning from the participants' personal narratives
4. The findings might not be generalizable to all African American girls but would speak to the experiences of the girls who participated in this study.

Ethical Considerations

IRB procedures and requirements governed this study. Each participant and parent received a consent form through email. I communicated via email with parents and participants to explain the purpose of the study and answer any questions they may have. I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. In addition, all data collected from the interviews were kept in a locked filing cabinet to maintain confidentiality. I understand as a teacher in the school there might be a power dynamic between myself and the participants. First there was no conflict of interest, as I did not have any of these participants in a class or as a student. I established a comfortable, trusting environment in which the participants felt at ease enough to share their thoughts and feelings without feeling concern about my role as a teacher. I ensured them that everything shared to me was confidential and this study did not have an impact on their relationship with the school. In addition, during the interview process, I brought up sensitive topics that caused emotional stress on the participants. I do not believe that the study caused any of the participants emotional distress, based on their openness, relaxed behavior and positive mood; none of the participants asked to withdraw or end the study early.

Additionally, I allowed the participant to make the decision to whether to proceed with the interview. If the participants brought up problems with a specific teacher or administrator in the building, the identities of those teachers or administrators were confidential in the study. When reporting the results of the study, I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. Data was de-identified by removing all direct personal identifiers. I did not keep a key so none of the data collected would identify participants. I did not ask a participant to state their name the recorded interview. If the participant stated their date of birth, I just wrote down their year of birth. After the conclusion of the study, data such as audio recordings and

transcripts will be destroyed after two years. Once data was collected, I began the process to de-identify each participant's interview.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

There were two main purposes of this study. First, this study explored how African American girls make sense of school discipline at FCPS. Second, this study explored how teacher expectations and school climate contribute to African American girls' experiences with school discipline and the development of their academic identities. This study involved the use of secondary data to describe and categorize participants (as shown in the matrix that was previously mentioned); specifically, the school's database was used to obtain data on the girls' date of births, ethnicity, class schedules, GPAs and behavior reports. The interviews (more specifically, the transcripts of the interviews) were the main source of primary data that was analyzed to answer research questions for this study.

In this chapter, I will present the common experiences that I identified concerning discipline practices, and academic identity. The common experiences were related to: (a) good vs. bad student, (b) strict rules, (c) negative and positive teacher-student relationships, (d) different treatment by Black and white teachers, and (e) role of peers. In this chapter, these common themes are supported by quotations and segments from the interview data along with my interpretations.

Before addressing the research findings, it is important to provide context to the school's discipline policy, which can be found in Appendix G. Overall, the policy describes the positive incentives the school uses to motivate students to follow rules, as well as their consequence system for students that do not follow the rules. Students can earn merits for positive behavior

(e.g., assisting teachers, doing extra homework, etc.) and demerits for negative behavior (e.g., chewing gum, being late, etc.). The policy notes the importance of a consistent code of conduct to ensure students are maximizing the time spent learning and in class. However, based on the perceptions of the girls in this study, school discipline practices are not so consistent.

Findings Related to Research Question 1: Making Sense of School Discipline

This section provides a description of the themes related to the first research question: How do African American girls make sense of school discipline at FCPS? The one overarching theme was the perception of rules as being strict or not; the majority of the students felt that the school discipline policies at FCPS were too strict and do not allow them to make mistakes and express that they are not perfect. One important insight from the interviews was that many of the girls felt like they could not make mistakes.

Theme One: Students have Different Perceptions of School Rules. Five girls stated they believe that the school rules at FCPS are too strict. They felt like they could not express themselves and did not have freedom to voice their opinions. For instance, when I asked Hariell (13 years, 8th grade) to explain the school discipline policy at FCP she shared,

It's strict, really strict like when you wear necklaces and stuff some people have religious necklaces, like [student]. You know how when your necklace falls out your shirt sometimes she gets in trouble for it and I get in trouble for my necklace too because it comes out of my shirt and sometimes when you get in trouble the teachers do not give you a warning because you have been here for so long, I feel like everybody needs a refresh. I have been at the school for three years. I understand the rules since I have been here for since the beginning. I got suspended twice even understanding the rules, but everybody is not perfect you know.

Thea (13 years, 7th) also felt like the school discipline policy at FCP was too strict. However, this student's response seemed more negative and, in a way, hopeless. She stated,

This school is different man, you cannot do nothing here without getting a demerit. You

talk, that's a demerit, you call out, that's a demerit, you slouch your body in class, that's a demerit. You get a demerit for every little thing here. We get no freedom and get no room to make mistakes. I got suspended five times this school year I stopped caring after the first suspension. I know the rules but at this point I am over school and these strict rules.

Similar to Thea, Taylor seemed to be very negative and hopeless in her response, comparing treatment of students to treatment of prisoners. Taylor (13 years, 8th) shared,

The school rules are too strict, and I feel like we are being treated like prisoners. You get demerit or suspended for every little thing. If you hug someone in the hallway during transitions you get a demerit, if you are writing when the teaching is teaching, you get a demerit. It's like I cannot do nothing wrong here. Even if you make a mistake you do not get a warning but a demerit. After being suspended three times from school I was over it. It so sad that I have been at the school for three years and I still do not understand what the rules mean. It is confusing.

Ravyne (12 years, 7th) felt that the FCP suspension policy was too harsh when compared to other schools, and she described the negative feelings that stemmed from her experience with school discipline. Notably, it was not the punishment in general that was upsetting and unfair; it was the degree of punishment. Although the school was a public charter school, she seemed to separate it from other public schools in her response, indicating a sense of detachment from other public schools because of the discipline practices that she experienced. Specifically, she reported that her school is not like public schools in terms how their suspension practices. She shared,

Public schools do not suspend students the way this school does. I mean the fact that you can get suspended for walking out of class without permission or cutting class is too much. I was suspended for fighting. I know I was wrong, but I was suspended for 10 days. I felt like that was too many days off from school. My mother was trying to fight to reduce the days of suspension, but the principal did not change the days. I was out of school for two weeks and I felt terrible.

Shanique (12 years, 7th) shared the same experience as Ravyne. Shanique was also suspended from school for 10 days for fighting. Although Shanique understood why she was suspended but she felt like 10 days was too harsh. Notably, she felt that the principal could not

change the policies, when in reality, this is something that principals can have an influence; Shanique seemed to think of the policies as unavoidable. She shared,

When I sat in the principal's office to receive my suspension letter, I was shocked to find out that I will be out of school for 10 days. Like geesh, that is a lot of days away from school. My mother was in the room going crazy and trying to fight for me to get less days, but the principal said that these are our school rules and she cannot change the policy. I felt like my punishment was too harsh.

On the other hand, Cynthia (13 years, 8th) and Rebecca (12 years, 7th) felt that the school rules were not strict. They both expressed that they like the school rules because they are fair, and that teachers who enforce the rules help to "hold them accountable" for their actions.

Cynthia started off believing the rules were too strict; however, her perceptions completely changed over time. Cynthia's perspective changed because there were times she did not follow the rules and was able to do whatever she wanted. Cynthia was a student that did not like to be told what she could and could not do. She gained respect for her teachers who enforced the rules at school because they would hold her accountable for her actions. Teachers who held students accountable for their actions was a sign that the teacher cared for the well-being of the student, which meant a lot to Cynthia. Cynthia (13, years, 8th) shared,

When I first came to the school two years ago, I used to hate coming because the school rules were so strict. You will get in trouble for everything but now that I am getting older and an 8th grader, I realize that the school rules are not really strict but hold us accountable. The school rules are fair. I know I need structure and if I do not get it, I know I will misbehave and not do the right thing all the time. I understand the school rules, I do not like them all but there is nothing I can do about it.

Although Cynthia came to realize that the school's rules were not too strict, Rebecca seemed to disagree; Rebecca seemed to believe that the rules were indeed strict, but that they were fair. Unlike Cynthia, Rebecca struggled with understanding consequences for each school rule. Rebecca was suspended twice from school for cyberbullying and fighting. Rebecca believed that her actions were justified because she was the victim in both incidents. Rebecca felt like she

was defending herself when she was bullied and got into a fight. In contrast, Cynthia was only suspended once for fighting but understood why her actions led to an out of school suspension.

Specifically, Rebecca (12, years 7th) shared,

Yes, I do think the school rules here are strict but they are fair. I think the school rules teaches us from right and wrong. In the beginning of the year, when we had to read the student code of conduct, I understood all the school rules but did not agree with all of the rules. I just know we were told to follow them and if we do not, we can get a demerit or even suspended. If you do something wrong you should receive a demerit. I do not like getting demerits, but it holds me accountable. As an honor student, I have to lead by example because students...know I am the smart kid and I should not get in trouble. I got suspended twice for cyberbullying this chick in my class and fighting. I did not like what I did but its whatever.

In summary, the first theme involved students having different perceptions of school rules. Some of the girls felt that the rules were too strict, and they could not express themselves or voice their opinions. One student even compared the school's rules to those of a prison. The suspension policy was a specific component of school rules that some of the girls felt was too harsh. However, it is important to note that some of the girls felt the school rules were not too strict, and a couple felt the rules and discipline policies were fair. The remaining girls did not share their perspective of school rules.

Findings Related to Research Question 2: Factors Impacting Academic Identity

This section is about themes related to the second research question: What factors, such as teacher expectations and school climate contribute, to African American girls' experiences with school discipline and their academic identity. The main themes related to the second research question involved self-perceptions, perceptions of teachers, differential treatment depending on teacher race, and relationships with teachers and peers.

Theme Two: Good Student vs. Bad Student

The first overarching theme was: Good Student vs. Bad Student. There were two sub-themes related to this theme that seemed to impact the girls' academic identity: self-identifying as a good or bad student and being perceived by others as a good or bad student. The girls showed a clear distinction between how the school viewed them versus how they viewed themselves. Nine of the ten girls identified themselves as a "good student" even though some of their peers and teachers think they are a bad student due to their out-of-school suspension. Moreover, some of the girls expressed how being called a "bad kid" made them think that they were and begin to second guess their character.

Self-identifying as a good or bad student. Nine of the girls identified themselves as a "good student" before they had encountered the school discipline system. For instance, Thea (13 years, 7th) said, "*I am a good student. I respect my teachers.*" When I asked her to explain how she sees that connection with school, she stated,

I think myself as a good student because I know that I am trying. Most students and teachers see me as the bad student because I am always getting demerits, getting suspended from school and have under a 2.0 GPA.

One of the girls suggested that her self-concept as a good student trumped her teacher's perceptions of them. This is notable because this shows a strong sense of self and a strong academic identity. Ravyne (12 years, 7th) expressed that she viewed herself differently than how she understood that teachers viewed her. More specifically, she stated,

I know I am a good student because before I got suspended from school, I was getting all A's and B's in my classes. My teachers saw me as a smart student. After I got suspended from school I literally gave up and did not care about school anymore. I stop caring about my grades. So when I got low grades my teachers stop caring about me but I know deep down I am a good student even if my teachers do not think I am.

When I asked Taylor (13 years, 8th) to explain how she sees herself academically as a student, she stated, “I am a good student because I try really hard even though my grades do not really show that but I still participate in class and try my best.” Then, Shanique (12 years, 7th), Edelyne (11 years, 6th), Cynthia (13 years, 8th) and Rebecca (12 years, 7th) identified being smart and good students, and specifically noting they are in honors classes. Further, these girls seemed to think of themselves positively based on their current courses, regardless of their past experiences with being suspended.

Cynthia discussed that she is enrolled in two high school courses and honors courses which automatically makes her a good student. She identifies being a smart student as a good student. This comment, as well as the previous comment by Shanique demonstrate that the girls had strong feelings about being a good student and that they value being in Honors classes and earning good grades. She stated,

I have always been a smart student. I always did good on my tests, so I was not surprised to be in honors this year. I think I am a good student because I am hard working and get good grades.

When I asked Taylor (13 years, 8th) to explain how she sees herself academically as a student, she stated,

I know I am a good student and I am happy that Ms. M believes I am a good student too. Even though she gives me demerits.”

Taylor’s comment transitions into the next sub-theme, which involves being identified as a “good” or “bad” student by others (e.g., peers and teachers). Taylor felt internally that she was a good student and was smart, and this was further solidified by actions of her teacher, despite getting demerits from that teacher; further, Taylor felt that getting demerits did not make her less of a “good student.”

When I asked Belinda (11 years, 6th) to explain how she sees herself academically as a student, she shared,

I am a bad kid, because I do not try enough in school. After being suspended from school more than two times, I just stop caring about school. I used to get As and Bs but I am just unmotivated and rather be the bad kid so teachers do not call on me in class. I do care if my teachers or classmates think I am dumb.

Being identified as a “bad” student by others. After being suspended from school all the girls stated that they were treated as “the bad kid.” They expressed this because after they were suspended, teachers and students treated them differently and they interacted with them differently. The girls described when returning to school from an out-of-school suspension, they felt that everyone was staring at them, which made them feel uncomfortable. This aligns with the conceptual framework that after being exposed to the school’s discipline system, some girls’ interactions with others became more negative and negatively impacted them internally.

The girls who felt they were labeled as a bad student after being suspended seem to be upset with the label, feeling that they had a strong sense of self as a good student. For instance, Hariell (13 year, 8th) reported being very upset, to the point where she cried. She stated,

When my suspension was over, I was nervous going back to school because I did not know how people will think of me. When I got back to school, everyone was staring at me and that really made me uncomfortable. When I asked one of my friends why is everyone starting at me and she told me that “everybody think you are a bad student now that you were suspended.” When I heard that, I cried.

Hariell described herself as a “good student” and was extremely disappointed that she felt like she had a bad reputation. She stated, “I am a good student, I really am, I made one mistake and that should not make me a bad student.” Thea (13 years, 7th) felt the same way, she shared,

I was so bored when I was home but when I went back to school, I wished that I stayed home. I was trying to figure out why everyone was staring at me, like what the heck.

Because of the out-of-school suspension, some of the girls felt that their reputation was ruined and could never get past being labeled as the “bad kid.” Ravyne (12 years, 7th) was crying after discussing her experience returning back to school after an out-of-school suspension. She expressed,

I hated that experience man, it sucked a lot. When I was walking down the hallway I could hear other students whispering in other student’s ears then pointing at me. I felt like an outsider and the “bad kid”. Instead of feeling welcomed back in the school community, I felt like people were judging me. All I was thinking in my head was that I wish I never gotten suspended.

As noted previously, Thea stated, *“I am a good student. I respect my teachers.”* When I asked her to explain how she sees that connection with school, she stated that although she believes she is a good student because she is “trying,” most students and teachers see her as the bad student because she is always getting demerits, getting suspended from school and has under a 2.0 GPA.

Additionally, Mirabel (13 years, 8th) and Cynthia (13 years, 8th) both felt isolated from their school community when they were called the “bad kid” by their teachers. Mirabel stated, “I could not believe that one of my teachers told me I was a bad kid for being suspended from school. I was unsure if the teacher was joking but that really hurt my feelings. I begin to think that I was really a bad kid.” Moreover, Cynthia stated, “when I was walking down the hallway one teacher stated, “there goes that bad kid that was fighting at the park, shaking my head, get your life” I was so upset that I just wanted to disappear in the moment. I started to second guess myself and ask myself, am I really a bad kid?” This relates to previous statements by girls such as Hariell regarding internally feeling the girls were good students but then having to second guess their academic identity. Shanique shared,

I knew coming back to school from an out-of-school suspension was going to be challenging but geesh people in the school did not make it any better. My teachers told

me I needed to make up all of my missing work since I decided to make a poor decision to get suspended. Plus, my friends were acting weird around me because they felt like I was a bad person for what I have done.

Although FCPS provides a discipline structure for the girls, the discipline system determines what was acceptable and unacceptable student behaviors in the classroom. Based on the school's discipline system there are behaviors that are more valuable than others such as a student receiving a merit for helping a teacher versus a student receiving a demerit for disrespecting a teacher.

Theme Three: The Importance of Student-Teacher Relationships

Relationships with teachers were important to the girls' academic identity. Overall, the girls specifically felt targeted by their teachers, in comparison with other students; they felt that they got into more trouble in the classrooms compared to other students because of their discipline records. In addition, the girls expressed that they felt like their white teachers treated them differently because of their race. Although a few girls reported positive relationships with their teachers, most of the girls had negative relationships with their teachers. All of the participants were asked to discuss their relationship with their teachers. An underlying concern related by the girls was the manner in which the majority of them found it hard to advocate for themselves with teachers they do not have a positive relationship with. In this regard, not having a relationship with teachers seemed to negatively impact the girls in this study.

Negative relationships with teachers also contributed to the girls' feeling not welcomed in their teacher's classroom. The girls complained of being yelled at, talked down to and ignored by teachers in the school. The girls noted that they either do not trust the majority of their teachers or feel that they have no relationship with them at all. This resulted in feelings of isolation between the girls and their teacher in classroom settings. The girls explained that they do not

participate in class because they feel uncomfortable and targeted. When it came to relationships with teachers, the findings were mixed. A few of the girls have built strong relationships with a handful of their teachers and feel comfortable talking to them about anything. Hariell (13 years, 8th grade) described her feelings toward her teachers in school: She said,

Some of the teachers are annoying because in ELA I raised my hand in class to ask for help then the teacher told me to wait. Then I waited the entire period and the teacher did not come in help me. I was mad and gave the teacher an attitude. When I gave the teacher an attitude she gets upset and gave me a demerit. When I tried to advocate for myself the teacher did not listen, and this is why I do not like or respect her.

Thea (13 years, 7th) also recalled having a negative relationship with her teachers because she believes they all do not like her. She shared,

Honestly, I do not know why my teachers do not like me, they always accuse me of doing something and half the times I don't be doing nothing like I don't understand why I am always being blamed. I know that I get a lot of demerits, but it is hard to redeem myself or try to talk to a teacher because no one listens to me. I really think they do not like me... I just feel that way.

From Thea's perspective she found it hard trying to build relationships with her teachers. Thea is a second-year student and felt hopeless when she cannot talk to her teachers and do not want to do work in class. She added,

I get so frustrated being at this school man, when teachers keep giving me demerits, I do not want to do work which makes me not like them point blank period. I do not want them to talk to me just leave me alone.

Ravynne (12 years, 7th) recalled a negative relationship with her math teacher because it is not a professional one. She stated:

I do not know why my math teacher was even hired. You should see the way he talks to us. He is so mean and rude to us. How is the school telling us that we need be professional, but he is not being professional with us? I am struggling in math, but I do not want to ask him for help because I do not like him. I do not like the way he talks to us and I am afraid of asking for help-it's ridiculous

Ravyne expressed concerns about how her math teacher treats the students. She described herself as a “good and intelligent student” who loves math. She shared, “I used to love math but now I do not like it because of this teacher.” This is notable because Ravyne’s response indicates that her opinion of an educational topic has completely changed solely because of her current teacher.

Edelyne (11 years, 6th) shared her negative experience with a teacher as first year student at FCPS. Like Ravyne, her school experience was shaped by negative interactions and experiences with one teacher, further aligning with the conceptual framework in this study regarding interactions with others after being involved in the school’s discipline system. Edelyne reported mixed school experiences because of the relationships with her teachers. She shared,

I am a new student here and I always look forward to getting to know my new teachers. I like some of my teachers, some of them are nice to me and give me lots of merits. I love merits because it tells me that I am doing good. But some teachers are too strict here. There is one teacher that always gives me a demerit for not tracking the speaker. I get so mad when I get a demerit because I do not want a detention. There was one time my head was hurting so I had to put my head down then the teacher started yelling at me to pick my head up, I got upset. I waited after class to speak to the teacher to tell them why my head was down in class, the teacher just brushed me off and did not even want to hear what I had to say. It is really hard trying to build a relationship with a teacher when they do not respect us students.

Cynthia (13 years, 8th) had more of a mixed experience with her teachers similar to Edelyne. Like Edelyne, Cynthia emphasized the importance of being listened to by their teachers and the negative feelings that can result when you are not being listened to. Cynthia further explained experiencing a hard time trying to talk to her teachers. She shared,

Some of my teachers are mad cool, I do like some of them. But I get so frustrated and upset when I try to advocate for myself and some teachers do not want to hear what I have to say especially when I felt like I received an unfair demerit. I find it easier for me to talk to teachers I have a strong relationship with because they listen to me like a real human. But those teachers who do not like to listen to me are the ones that I do not like or have a strong relationship with. I feel like adults are not always right and they should listen to us.

Taylor (13 years, 8th), Mirabel (13 years, 8th) and Shanique (12 years, 7th) shared their positive experiences with their teachers in all subjects. Taylor and Mirabel were taught by the same teachers. The girls expressed that the teachers care for them as humans and they have built strong relationships with their teachers. Moreover, these three girls expressed that they feel comfortable speaking with few of their teachers about anything. Like Edelyne and Cynthia, Taylor and Mirabel highlighted the need to be able to openly talk with their teachers, but unlike Edelyne and Cynthia, Taylor and Mirabel had positive relationships with their teachers.

Taylor expressed “love” for *all* of her teachers. She also expressed feeling cared about and important to her teachers. She also voiced that she is able to tell them anything. (13 years, 8th) shared,

I love all my teachers. They are so nice to me and they are truly looking out for me. When I am sad, they always ask me if I am ok. I appreciate that because that makes me feel important. I like spending my lunch time helping some of my teachers. I think some of them are mad chill and I can talk to them about anything. Yes, it’s really cool.

Similarly, Mirabel (13 years, 8th) shared that she felt liked by her teachers and is able to tell them anything. However, unlike Taylor, Mirabel voiced less of a personal relationship with her teachers and more of a professional, respectful relationship. Specifically, she stated,

I have no problem with my teachers, I like them, and they like me. They help me know right from wrong. My teachers always push me to my full potential. Anytime I struggle in class, I feel comfortable coming up to them after class asking for help. One of my teachers always look out for me. I can talk to her about anything and I never feel like she is judging me. I see my teachers as my school parents, and I respect them.

Shanique (12 years, 7th) expressed that she had a good relationship with her English teacher because she takes time to help her and talk with her, which made her a good person to look up to. Shanique shared,

I love Teacher 1 she is definitely a mother figure to me. Teacher 1 always make sure I understand what is going on in the classroom. When I am confused, Teacher 1 her time to help me understand what I was confused on. I really appreciate Teacher 1 We have built a strong bond together. She always visits me and my friends in the cafeteria to talk to us about clothes, hair and makeup. She is my role model.

Overall, the nature of relationships were a critical part of the girls' discussions. Girls reported a great range of relationships: some had no relationships with teachers; some had positive or negative relationships with some of their teachers, and some girls had positive or negative relationships with all of their teachers. A few of the key aspects of relationships with teachers that were identified by the girls included communication, trust, respect, and being cared about. Interestingly, some of the relationships with teachers were described in a personal, friendship-related manner, while others were described in a professional, transactional manner.

Another notable finding related to student-teacher relationships was that the relationship seemed to have academic impacts. For instance, when I asked Taylor (13 years, 8th to explain how she sees herself academically as a student, she stated,

I know I am a good student and I am happy that Ms. M believes I am a good student too. Even though she gives me demerits, she always talks to me after class to make sure I understand why I got the demerit. Ms. M reminds me of my mom a lot they both show tough love. She continues to push me and make me feel like I am smart. Ms. M tells me that I am smart and that boosts up my confidence. Ms. M told me I remind her like herself as a middle school student. Would you believe that Ms. M got suspended five times in middle school? I could not believe it but she is so smart and if Ms. M can be successful I know that I can.

Theme Four: Different Treatment by Black and White Teachers

The girls often reported the feeling of being treated differently by their Black and white teachers. Rebecca (12 years, 7th) shared an experience with the same white female teacher (Teacher 2). Like Belinda and Hariell, Rebecca directly stated that her issues with this teacher were *because* she was not Black.

I got suspended for apparently being rude to Teacher 1. Let me tell you what happened. We in class right. I am doing my work and [student] pulls my hair. I got so mad because I hate when people touch me, so I turned around and pull [student] hair back. Teacher 1 saw what I did then said I am receiving a demerit, I got upset and asked her why am I getting a demerit, did you not see what [student] did to me. Teacher 1 said she did not want to hear it and said that I need to lower my tone and I told her no because you gave me an unfair demerit. Then Teacher 1 said I was being disrespectful to her and I need to be removed from class. I got mad and left the classroom without permission. I was tight because Teacher 1 always blames me for something but [student] never gets in trouble because she not Black.

Notably, Rebecca seemed to group white teachers together instead of seeing them as separate individuals. She stated, “I am tired of being treated unfairly by these white teachers, it is annoying man. It is hard for white teachers to understand us.”

Belinda (13 year, 6th) shared her experiences with her two favorite teachers, who are African American. Notably, her two favorite teachers were identified as her favorite because they were the same race as her. She stated,

Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 are my two favorite teachers because they understand me and because they are Black. When I have my problems, I can always come talk to them. When I do something wrong, they still give me a demerit but talk to me in a nice way for me to understand why I received the consequence. When they hold me to a high standard, I know it is because they care about me.

Belinda proceeded to share her experience with a white female teacher. In this quote, she described why she does not like one of her White teachers. She stated,

Teacher 2, ooooooh I cannot stand her. She is so mean to me and think I am a bad child. One time I received a demerit from her for chewing gum but instead her just giving me

the demerit she yelled at me. She did not even talk to me about it. Sometimes I feel like she does not like Black students.

Hariell (13 years, 8th) described her experience with her African American teachers who supported her when she got suspended from school. Like Belinda, Hariell seemed to have a more positive perception of her teachers that were the same race as her. Very similar to Belinda, Hariell felt that she has a better connection with her teachers *because* they have the same skin color as her. She shared,

When I was getting suspended from school, the two teachers that talked to me were Teacher 3 and 4. Teacher 3 and 4 are my school moms. They always tell me when I am wrong and when I am right. That made me feel happy because I know they are looking out for me. When people match your skin, they have a better connection with you but when they don't it is just like you do not connect.

Also similar to Belinda, Hariell also shared that she did not receive any support from the white teacher who got her suspended from school for pushing a Latino female into the wall. She shared,

I was so upset that I got suspended because of this teacher. She literally took the other student's side and not me. She went straight to the Dean to report that I pushed [student] into the wall. I asked her can you allow me to explain what happen, she just said "I don't want to hear it, I saw what I saw." When she said that I got so mad.

Mirabel also shared her experience of being treated unfairly by another white teacher. She shared,

When I was in class Teacher 2 told us that we needed to be silent during the independent practice. I am doing my work right then [student] asked me for a pencil. I tried to ignore her because I did not want to get a trouble for talking so I turned around told the [student] I don't have a pencil. Teacher 2 saw me talking and gave me a demerit. I was in my feelings after that and told Teacher 2 I was not talking. She told me not to talk back. So now I am tight because I am innocent. After class I tried to talk to her and try and get the demerit removed she brushed me off and said "go to your next class I do not want to talk about it." I was like that is not fair you never want to hear what I have to say, if it was Teacher 3 she will always let me advocate for myself.

Maribel seemed to have different relationships with two of her teachers; one was a positive relationship with a better connection. Maribel continued to describe her relationship with Teacher 3, and also compared to Teacher 2. What stands out here is that most of the girls seem to agree that there is one teacher (Teacher 2) who is harsher on them; however, not all the girls felt that way about Teacher 2. There is also one teacher (Teacher 3) that they share a better connection with. For instance, Maribel shared,

Teacher 3 is like a mother to me. She always listens to what I have to say. We connect in so many different levels, we like the same type of music, food and other things. She knows my struggle because she looks like me, so I know she understands me unlike Teacher 2.

To summarize the fourth theme, it was very clear that the girls in this study identified race as a crucial aspect and even direct reason for their relationships with teachers. Being an African American girl and growing up in the United States results in unique challenges and consequences in regard to gender identity and expression. This is problematic because issues related to gender expressions have an impact on education experiences of African American girls (Majied, 2010). In addition, these issues related to gender expression have an impact on how African American girls perceive themselves and how teachers perceive them. Fordham (1993), asserts that labeling African American girls as “loud” in school silences them and African American girls should avoid being labeled as “loud” to feel accepted in the educational environment (Odumosu, 2015). By forcing girls to act like a “lady,” educators are implying that being “loud” is a negative trait (Odumosu, 2015). Morris (2016), found that teachers described African American girls’ behavior as “loud, defiant and precocious” and African American girls were more likely to receive consequences for their “unladylike” behaviors compared to their white counterparts in the classroom (Jacobs, 2017).

Based on the findings, the girls expressed receiving differential discipline from their Black and White teachers. Skiba et al. (2002) concluded that African American students were often sent to the principal's office by their White classroom teachers for being disrespectful. The concept of "disrespect" is subjective and difficult to prove. Similarly, Rebecca was sent to the Dean's office for being disrespectful. Rebecca expressed being frustrated because she was silenced by her White teacher and felt that her teacher did not understand her. When African American girls like Rebecca perceive that White teachers treat African American girls differently then she would begin to feel she is receiving differential discipline from her teachers. Cultural misunderstandings between students and teachers can lead to African American girls "being disciplined unnecessarily for perceived unruliness even when their actions were not intended to be inappropriate" (C. Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003; C. S. Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004; Staats, 2014). Belinda, Mirabel and Hariell struggled with understanding why they are being reprimanded for their behaviors by their White teachers. Some girls felt like their actions were just and did not understand why they were getting in trouble for being disrespectful, loud or rude. Even when the girls wanted to talk to the teachers after class the teachers did not even want to speak with them. Based on the what these girls experienced, the girls found it extremely difficult to build relationships with their White teachers. In addition, these negative relationships with teachers led to the girls feeling rejected and disengaged in the classroom.

Theme Five: The Academic and Psychological Importance of Peers

The girls discussed their peer relationship with their classmates. Some of the girls described having a positive relationship with their peers and other students describe having a negative relationship with their peers. Shanique (12 years, 7th), Edelyne (11 years, 6th), Cynthia (13 years, 8th) and Rebecca (12 years, 7th) are all enrolled in honor classes and expressed a sense of belonging, can work together and felt they could support and encourage each other to learn; this showed that having a positive relationship with peers helped these girls academically. The positive peer relationships allowed the girls to have a support group in which they felt more comfortable. Each of the girls stated that when they struggle academically, they seek support from their classmates because they are all smart and can help them. Positive peer relationships allowed the girls to speak with students who understood their own experiences and have similar feelings about what was happening in school. Rebecca shared,

All the students in my class are smart and majority of the students do not misbehave in class. Students in my class barely receive demerits or get suspended, I was so embarrassed when I was the first one to get suspended from my class. Teachers always tell us we are the leaders in the building, and we must lead by example. I do appreciate that some of my friends did not turn their backs on me and still helped me to catch up on my missing work we look out for each other.

Shanique expressed that she had a positive relationship with her classmates before she was suspended from school but after she was suspended her relationships with some of her peers seemed to shift. She shared, “My classmates have always been supportive of me, but after I got suspended so my classmates stop talking to me for a couple of days, I really did not know why.” This statement shows that Shanique felt that her suspension changed her relationship with peers. However, instead of seeming distressed about this, Shanique described a sense of internal awareness, thinking of friends she did have and the friends that were important to her. She went

on to state, “I realized that I did not need all of my classmates to like me and I was satisfied for the few friends I had left. Some of my friends really looked out for me and help me when I do not understand something.”

To summarize the fifth theme, the girls expressed having a positive relationship with their peers. It was clear that the girls enrolled in honors classes were in a much supportive academic environment. The girls in the honor classes expressed after returning from a suspension they were not judged by their peers but given support to catch up on their missing assignments. In this study, the academic environment had an impact on how the girls felt about their peer relationships. Overall, the findings support the conceptual framework in the study in that: first, discipline practices may influence student perceptions of climate, which in turn occurs in conjunction with school rejection/disengagement, which in turn influences academic identity; and second, discipline practices may lead directly to feelings of school rejection, which in turn influence academic identity. Notably, the conceptual framework includes many interconnected components that are not working in isolation; the findings from this study show that the impacts of discipline on African American girls’ academic identity can be complex.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of school discipline practices on African American girls' academic identity of 10 African American girls. The girls' individual stories revealed a depth of experience relative to discipline practices and their academic identity. In total, the young girl's experiences collectively gave voice to the lived experiences of African American girls with discipline practices and their academic identity. The research questions posed were: (1) How do African American girls make sense of school discipline at FCPS? (2) What factors, such as teacher expectations and school climate contribute to African American girls' experiences with school discipline and their academic identity? The conceptual framework for the current study involved two parts: first, discipline practices may influence student perceptions of climate, which in turn leads to school rejection/disengagement, which in turn influences academic identity; and second, discipline practices may lead directly to feelings of school rejection, which in turn influence academic identity.

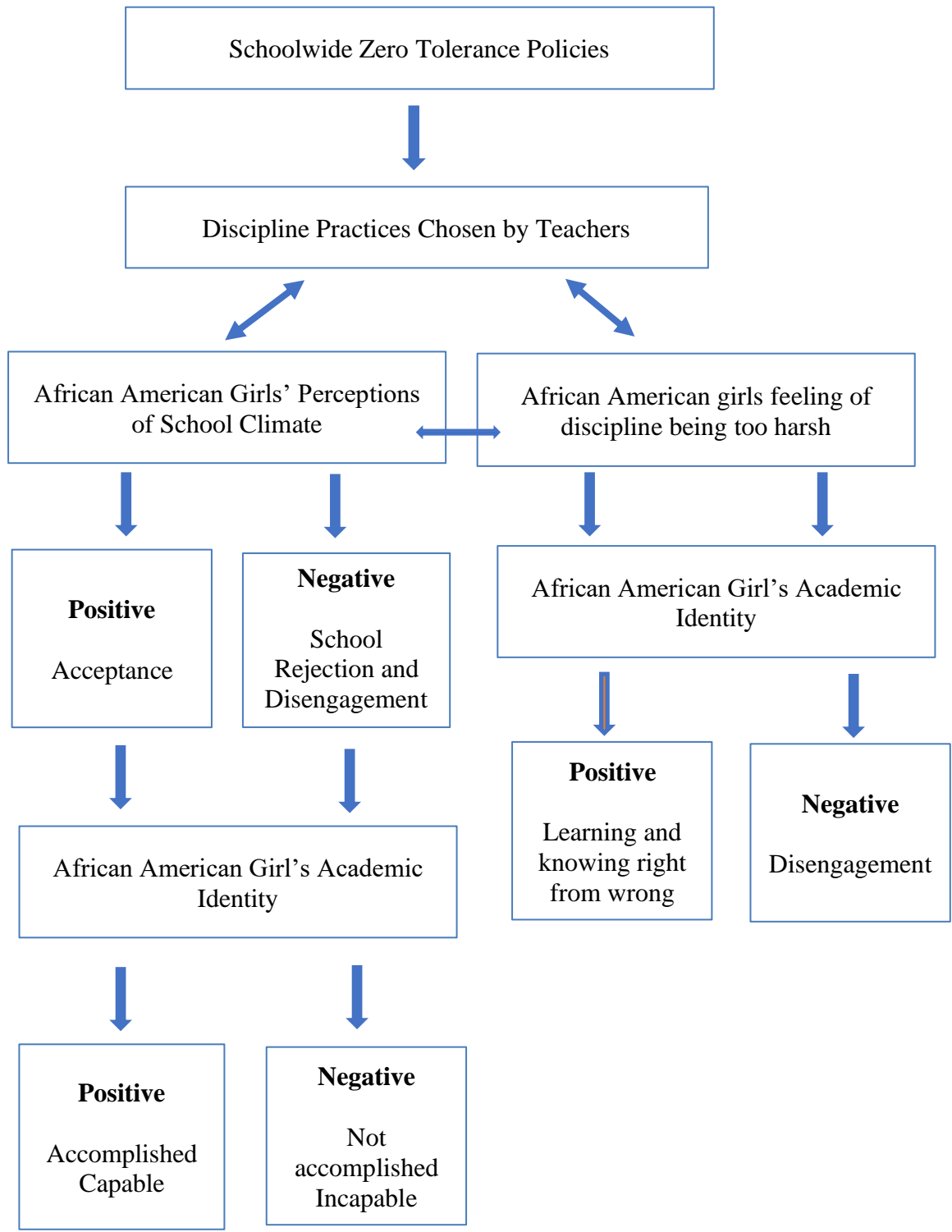
This study involved interviews with ten African American girls to understand their experiences with school discipline practices and their academic identity. In regard to research question one (How do African American girls make sense of school discipline at FCPS?), I believe that it is notable that there was only one major theme that emerged, namely that there are different perceptions of the school discipline practices at FCPS. This seems to indicate that the disciplinary practices do not make much sense to these girls. Across the nation, studies have concluded that African American students in general are not disciplined the same as their white counterparts (Blake et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Gastic,

2017). The girls with negative views of school discipline tended to feel the rules were too strict and they seemed sad and hopeless while describing their perspectives.

In regard to the research question two (What factors, such as teacher expectations and school climate contribute to African American girls' experiences with school discipline and their academic identity?), it is notable that there are multiple factors that seem to impact academic identity, indicating that academic identity is a complex process. In this study, self-perceptions, perceptions of others, differential treatment depending on teacher race, and relationships with teachers and peers all impacted the girls' academic identity. This chapter summarizes the implications for the literature, the strengths and limitations of the study, and the implications for practitioners.

Connection with the Conceptual Framework

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework Diagram



This chapter presents the data collected during the interviews of the ten African American girls. The interviews provided the girls a platform to discuss their own experiences with school discipline practices and their academic identity and to speak back to research that often speaks for them and not with them. There were five emergent themes contributed to lived experiences of the African American girls: Students have Different Perceptions of School Rules; Being Identified or Self-Identifying as a Good Student vs. Bad Student; The Importance of Student-Teacher Relationships; Different Treatment by Black and White Teachers; and The Academic and Psychological Importance of Peers.

The conceptual framework for this study posed the idea that school discipline practices are complex, interconnected factors that can influence student perceptions of school climate (resulting in school rejection, disengagement and ultimately negatively impacts academic identity) or can directly lead to school rejection and disengagement (which in turn negatively impacts academic identity). The results from this study suggest that both pathways help explain the girls' experiences with school discipline practices and their academic identity. The school discipline practices were overall described as too strict and harsh, specifically the use of suspension and the degree of suspension (e.g., multiple days). The experience with the school discipline practices seemed to influence their perceptions of school climate. For instance, the girls in this study felt that their school was "different" and that they were not given any room to make mistakes, even comparing their school climate to a prison. Because of the strict school climate, some students felt school rejection and disengagement. For example, one of the girls seemed detached from her school because of their suspension policies, separating her school from others public schools. Other girls seemed to feel that the discipline practice alone led to rejection, disengagement, and isolation. For instance, some of the girls stated that after being

suspended, they were labeled as “the bad kid.” They expressed this because after they were suspended, teachers and students treated them differently. The girls described when returning to school from an out-of-school suspension, they felt that everyone was staring at them, which made them feel uncomfortable.

Whether or not school climate was involved, the feelings of rejection and disengagement seemed to greatly impact the academic identity of the girls in the study. Engagement seemed to be directly linked with school climate, and a powerful influencer of academic identity. For example, one of the girls reported they did not care about their grades or their school after being suspended once, even though just prior to being suspended she achieved A’s and B’s. Overall, the results of this study seem to indicate that the girls’ academic identity was negatively impacted by the school discipline practices, specifically suspensions, because their academic identity seemed to be torn between feeling like they are a good student internally but feeling upset with how others perceive them in school. The remainder of this chapter will provide a discussion to summarize the findings, implications, and suggestions for future research.

Implications for Practice

This study revealed that the girls in this study experienced various forms of challenges related to race. These girls continue to face a variety of trials that are rooted in historical, institutional, and social issues. These trials heighten their risk of underachievement and detachment from school (Crenshaw, Ocen and Nanda, 2015). It is important for practitioners, administrators, teachers, and policymakers to be aware of these challenges and find solutions to ensure that these African American girls are supported in the school system.

This study has vital implications for the way practitioners can improve the educational experiences of African American girls in urban schools. For practitioners, this study revealed the

following: African American girls' educational experiences are influenced by teachers and to combat this, teachers and administrators can reflect on their own bias and how those biases manifest themselves in disciplinary actions, educational outcomes and student participation. For instance, the girls were positively and negatively impacted by the relationship (or lack thereof) with their teachers, and the girls seemed to identify many biases held by teachers. An example of how teachers and administrators can reflect on their own biases is taking a few minutes to "reflect on who participate most in in the class." When teachers ask themselves and reflect on which student participate the most in class displays an equal representation (and if not, why not) can be a starting place for more equality in the classroom. Another way teacher should reflect on their biases is how they approach the assessment process. Teachers should as themselves, "do you begin with strengths and interests, then use those as starting points? Or, do you focus first on the deficits?" Deficit-focused teachers who have low expectations of certain student are more likely to have students with low expectations for themselves. Teachers are supposed to uplift and motivate their students and not bring them down. Lastly, teachers can reflect on certain societal and cultural assumptions. For example, if teachers believe that African American students are lazy and unmotivated can make them treat African American students who do not succeed as if their failures are purely the result of lack of hard work and ability. Moreover, teachers can be mindful of students' different backgrounds, which can help them avoid biases and sending them to the Dean's or Principal's office for disciplinary actions. For instance, a student may resist looking a teacher in the eye while speaking because some cultures interpret direct eye contact as a lack of respect; on the other hand, some teachers might think that same lack of eye contact indicated disrespect. Teachers need to remind themselves that not all student will have the same cultural assumptions as their teachers and it is their responsibility to bridge the gap.

Additionally, African American girls need and value support from teachers and peers following suspension. The girls in this study voiced that they felt isolated after being suspended; therefore, a strong support system could be really beneficial for girls who are suspended. It would also be beneficial to provide trainings to teachers and administrators on social emotional curriculum given the girls continuous discussion of relationships, acceptance and academic identity. Providing these discussions would provide the girls the social emotional support they need in order to feel successful in the classroom. Another way schools can promote support among peers is to providing in-class supports through facilitating open discussions. Moreover, teachers can facilitate team building activities during homeroom to help build strong peer-relationships. The girls in the study expressed not feeling welcomed in their classroom after returning from an out of school suspension. If homeroom teachers are able to incorporate some team building activities or ice breakers in their classrooms, this would help increase positive peer-relationships among peers. Lastly, schools can provide workshops or assemblies with students on topics such as relationships, acceptance and academic identity to promote support among peers.

The results from this study also made it very clear that teachers and administrators need to review and revise the current school discipline policies that result in a high suspension rate based on certain infractions. For teachers and school administrators, there seemed to be one implication that stuck out from the findings: assigning demerits instead of warnings can negatively impact African American girls. The results from this study show that demerits have a very negative impact on African American girls and on how African American girls think others perceive them. Demerits seem to provide no second chances and hinder students from learning from their mistakes. Therefore, teachers and school administrators may want to issue warnings

and work through problems with students instead of assigning demerits; then the students can bond with teachers and build understanding of right and wrong without potentially negatively impacting their academic identity. Addressing these issues will help support African American girls on their journey to be successful in middle school.

Implications for Policy

The first implication is to have a clear alignment between the intention of the discipline practices and the execution of the discipline practice. African American students categorized school discipline policies as “unfair” or “strict”, especially when they are being held to a higher behavioral standard than the world does beyond high school. These discipline policies, such as 2-day suspensions for cutting class or disrespecting or classmate, seem unrealistic and create a misconception of the real world consequences. It is critical that all schools reduce the existing ambiguities within their school rules, which often lead to racial disparities. Therefore, it is suggested that the school create a written policy regarding when certain actions elicit certain discipline practices. In many cases, warnings may be more beneficial than demerits and suspensions, which seemed to negatively impact the girls’ perception of themselves and their perceptions of how others viewed them.

The second implication involves education and training policies for school administrators and teachers. It is suggested that more emphasis be placed on training school staff to work with students when they do something wrong to help them understand their actions and how to improve for the future, instead of working against them. It seemed clear from the results of this study that the girls were all invested in school and would likely benefit from a positive, working relationship with teachers who offer constructive criticism instead of demerits. Another

suggested policy would be an enactment of an annual training course on recognizing one's personal biases to prevent them from impacting one's work.

Limitations of the Study

The following elements of the study can be considered limitations. This study solely focused on the experiences of African American girls; the results of this study may not be directly applicable to African American boys. This is beneficial for gaining an in depth understanding of the girls' experiences as well as centering their voices; including African American boys' stories would also allow for an increased understanding of the similarities and differences related to gender school experiences.

Also, this study was limited to girls who identified as Black, but it is important to include other students of color in order to understand how school discipline practices and academic identity could positively influence larger student groups. This is important because if all students are experiencing similar issues with school discipline, that may indicate a much larger school-wide issue; however, if only certain subgroups of students (e.g., students of certain races, etc.) experience such issues, this indicates a differential treatment of certain students but not others. Third, this study focused on a small size and a specific location (one urban school district). This study included 10 African American girls who attended the same predominately Black urban middle school. A larger study that included African American girls from various school districts could reveal more information about the educational experiences of school discipline practices and academic identity.

Another challenge that arose in the study was the legitimacy of information provided by the participants during the interview process. Having participants share their experiences about school discipline was sensitive. Providing a warm, comfortable, and respectful environment for

the participants was a great strength to the study. I did not want participants feeling they needed to provide the right answers, and I was transparent with them about focusing on being honest. I let the participants know there was not a right or wrong answer to each question.

Being an employee at FCPS arose another challenge to the study. Due to my relationship with the school, the girls may not have been completely honest with me in their responses. Although the girls were made aware that they could be honest with me, some of the girls might have not felt comfortable to be honest since I worked for the school. To address this concern, during the interview I reminded the girls that their information was confidential and I they would not be affect their relationship with the school. Moreover, as an African American girl in middle school, I had negative experiences with school discipline practices. I did not understand the school rules and the first time I was suspended from school I felt like the decision was unfair and the school rules were strict. The principal and my teachers did not make me feel welcome when I returned back to school and my classmates started calling me the, “bad girl.” My school experiences may had influenced my interpretations of the findings. In order to avoid potential biases, I conducted a peer review. I sought feedback from my dissertation committee and two doctoral colleagues to clarify and review aspects of my research.

Suggestions for Future Research

It is critical to conduct work that focuses on the lived experiences of African American girls. Student discipline is one of many forms of oppression girls face in school; therefore, it is important to study how discipline practices relate to other forms of oppression that impact Black girls; this may call for quantitative studies that statistically examine the relationship between certain discipline practices and outcome variables (such as GPA, academic identity, etc.). It is important to continue research on African American girls from diverse backgrounds by

understanding that African American girls have diverse experiences in education. Based on some of the information that surfaced during research, data collection, analysis, and the writing process involved in this study, I have a few ideas for future research on African American girls. One recommendation for future research would be replicating the study with African American boys and older African American girls in high school. This is important because boys may process discipline differently than girls and have different perceptions of peer and teacher relationships, which could in turn impact academic identity differently. Also, middle school is a pivotal point between elementary and high school, and as shown in this study, results in a variety of important experiences for African American girls. However, their experiences may change as they get older and mature; factors that impacted them in middle school may not impact them as much in high school.

Another recommendation for future research related to this study is to compare African American girls' experiences across locations and settings such as rural, suburban and private to determine what is similar and different across the board. Moreover, I would like a follow-up with the same group of African American girls and track their academic outcomes as a way to determine the long-term outcomes of school discipline practices and academic identity in this urban school. It would be interesting to identify schools that exhibit the best practices to support the girls' academic and behavioral success and learn from schools who are using an effective school discipline policy. Lastly, I would like to recommend conducting this study with a larger population size, targeting girls from numerous school districts in various states to find differences and similarities in the experiences of African American girls in urban school settings to increase the focus on African American girls.

In summary, there were two main purposes of this study. First, this study explored how African American girls make sense of school discipline at FCPS. Second, this study explored how teacher expectations and school climate contribute to African American girls' experiences with school discipline and the development of their academic identities. The research questions posed were: (1) How do African American girls make sense of school discipline at FCPS? (2) How do teacher expectations and school climate contribute to African American girls' experiences with school discipline and their academic identity? The common themes were related to: perceptions of school rules (e.g., strict or fair), being perceived or feeling like a good student versus bad student, the importance of student-teacher relationships, being treated differently by teachers based on the teacher's race, and the academic and psychological importance of peers.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

African American girls receive harsher forms of discipline, such as school suspensions, compared to their white counterparts. Despite the troubling trends, there is little research highlighting how African American girls' perception of school discipline practices influences their academic identity. As the researcher in this study, it was my hope that the voices of the girls in it were heard. The findings indicated a need for more research to explore the educational realities of our school practices for African American girls. The girls in this study shared many positive experiences, but also shared many challenges related to coming to terms with the school discipline practices and their academic identity as an African American girl. The findings have shed a light for educators like myself to establish a safe, non-hostile school environment for these girls to have a positive experience with school discipline practices and their academic identity. The girls in this study showed resilience in the face of adversity.

This study highlighted the importance of hearing from the African American girls from the study instead of teachers, administrators and parents because their voices offered meaning on the issues of racial inequality. In order to address the issues of racial inequality in school discipline practices, we were able to hear the point of view of African American girls. By conducting this study, I created a platform for African American girls to discuss their own experiences with school discipline practices and their academic identity. The findings from this study left me with mixed emotions. Overall, it is troubling to hear of negative experiences faced by the girls in this study, most of which aligned with the experiences that I had heard from students that I worked with previously. However, this study shed light on the positive experiences that some girls had, and I gained a better understanding of their complex relationships with school staff and peers. I believe school personnel can greatly benefit from the

findings of this study. Furthermore, the opinions of the girls in this study provide valuable insight into the perceptions and outcomes of school discipline practices and the impact that discipline and school climate can have on African America girls' academic identity.

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APPENDIX A: THEMES

Emergent Themes	Round 2
Race Matters	Strict Rules
Strict Rules	Good vs. Bad Student
I'm the Bad Kid	Negative/Positive Teacher-Student Relationships
Good Student vs. Bad Student	Roles of Peers
Positive and Negative Peer Relationships	Different Treatment by Black and White Teachers
Perceptions of Academic Identity	
Detention vs. Suspension	

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL



Office of the Vice President
for Research

Research Integrity & Compliance
Student Faculty Center
3340 N. Broad Street, Suite 304
Philadelphia PA 19140

Institutional Review Board
Phone: (215) 707-3390
Fax: (215) 707-9100
e-mail: irb@temple.edu



Approval for a Project Involving Human Subjects Research that Does Not Require Continuing Review

Date: 08-Aug-2019

Protocol Number: 25953

PI: CORDES, SARAH A.

Review Type: EXPEDITED

Approved On: 08-Aug-2019

Committee: A1

School/College: EDUCATION (1900)

Department: ED LEADERSHIP: K-12 (19032)

Sponsor: NO EXTERNAL SPONSOR

Project Title: #BlackGirlsMatter: African American Girls Perspective of School
Discipline and Their Academic Identity in Middle School

The IRB approved the protocol 25953.

The study was approved under Exempt or Expedited review. The IRB determined that the research **does not require a continuing review**, consequently there is not an IRB approval period.

If applicable to your study, you can access your IRB-approved, stamped consent document or consent script through ERA. Open the Attachments tab and open the stamped documents by clicking the Latest link next to each document. The stamped documents are labeled as such. **Copies of the IRB approved stamped consent document or consent script must be used in obtaining consent.**

Note that all applicable Institutional approvals must also be secured before study implementation. These approvals include, but are not limited to, Medical Radiation Committee ("MRC"); Radiation Safety Committee ("RSC"); Institutional Biosafety Committee ("IBC"); and Temple University Survey Coordinating Committee ("TUSCC"). Please visit these Committees' websites for further information.

Finally, in conducting this research, you are obligated to submit the following:

- **Amendment requests - All changes to the research must be reviewed and approved by the IRB.** Changes requiring approval include, but are not limited to, changes in the design or focus of the research project, revisions to the information sheet for participants, addition of new measures or instruments, increasing the subject number, and changes to the research funding. Changes made to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects and implemented prior to IRB approval must be promptly reported to the IRB.
- **Reportable New Information -** using the Reportable New Information e-form, report new information items such as those described in HRP - 071 Policy - Prompt Reporting Requirements to the IRB **within 5 days**.

- **Closure report** - using a closure e-form, submit when the study is permanently closed to enrollment; all subjects have completed all protocol related interventions and interactions; collection of private identifiable information is complete; and analysis of private identifiable information is complete.

For the complete list of investigator responsibilities, please see the HRP – 070 Policy – Investigator Obligations, the Investigator Manual (HRP-910), and other Policies and Procedures found on the Temple University IRB website: <https://research.temple.edu/irb-forms-standard-operating-procedures>.

Please contact the IRB at (215) 707-3390 if you have any questions.

APPENDIX C: SCHOOL APPROVAL

July 18, 2019

Dear Institutional Review Board at Temple University,

I am writing this letter to grant Diana Sainvil permission to conduct her study: African American Girls Perspective of School Discipline and their Academic Identity in Middle School at [REDACTED] College Prep.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Parent/Guardian of [Name] –

Hello, my name is Diana Sainvil and I am a doctoral student at Temple University in the Graduate School of Education. In my studies, and my day job as a middle school teacher at Legacy College Preparatory School, I am extremely interested in examining the relationship between African American girls' experiences with discipline practices and their academic identity.

[I recently spoke with NAME, and s/he recommended that I talk with you as part of my dissertation study about African American girls' perspective of school discipline practices and their academic identity.]

For my dissertation, I am interested in interviewing your child to delve deeper into their personal experiences with discipline practices and their academic identity. By agreeing to have your child participate in an interview, in no way is the student bound to answer all of the questions if she does not want to. The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. This interview will take place in a Legacy College Preparatory School classroom that the interviewee is familiar with. As a teacher at Legacy College Preparatory School I understand how busy some students are so we can schedule the interview at a time that is convenient for them.

I have attached the consent form that is part of the research study. As you will see on the form:

- It is completely optional for your child to participate in this study
- Your child can ask to stop at any time
- I will protect your child's confidentiality and your child's answers will not be shared with anyone. The final dissertation will make efforts to conceal your child's identity and the identity of your child's school
- If your child refuses to participate in or withdraws from this study it will not impact their relationship with the school
- To assist with my data collection and analysis I would like to audio record the conversation

With that being said, I really appreciate your support with allowing your child to provide a voice in the interview. I hope that you and your child find this opportunity to be mutually beneficial. Thank you again for your support in this study. Please let me know if you give consent for your child to participate in interview.

Sincerely,

Diana Sainvil

APPENDIX E: STUDENT CONSENT FORM

#BlackGirlsMatter: African American Girls Perspective of School Discipline and Their Academic Identity in Middle School

Diana Sainvil
Temple University
College of Education

Why are you being invited to take part in this research?

I invite you to take part in this study because you are identified as being an African American female. By sharing your experiences, you can help researchers, policy makers and others understand the relationship between African American girls' experiences with discipline practices and your academic identity.

What should I know about this research?

- The researcher will explain this research to you.
- This form sums up that explanation.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you. If you refuse to participate in or decides to withdraw from this study it will not impact your relationship with the school.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- If you don't understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Why is this research being done?

Nationally, African American girls are suspended at rates six times higher than white girls (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014; Annamma et al., 2016). The United States has a problem with the way African American girls are disciplined. Severe disciplinary policies among African American girls can limit their educational opportunities (Crenshaw et al., 2015). The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the lived educational experiences of African American middle school girls who have experienced school discipline practices in their school. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, this study aims to examine the relationship between African American girls' experiences with discipline practices and their academic identity. This study will allow us to hear from the girls about their academic identity and the disciplinary practices they experience in public schools.

How long will you be in this research?

This study consists of interviews (in which you will only be asked to participate in two). The interview will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes each.

What happens to you if you agree to take part in this research?

By agreeing to participate in this interview, you will:

- Once you agree to participate in the study and sign the consent form, you will undergo a screening process by the researcher. The researcher will use the school database to search for whether or not you meet the following criterion: received at least one out of school suspension in the previous school year. If you meet the criterion then you will be invited to participate in the study.
- Participate in two sixty (60) to ninety (90) minute interviews
- The interview will occur during after school hours (4:00pm-5:30pm) in a Legacy College Prep classroom.
- The interview will be audio recorded but participants can opt out from being recorded.
- The interview will occur at a time of convenience for you and will take place in a Legacy College Prep classroom or a public location that is comfortable for you (e.g. library, counselor's office)
- The records that may be disclosed, the purpose of disclosure, and identity the party to whom the disclosure may be made (disciplinary records, GPA, etc). That upon request of you the educational agency or institution will provide you with a copy of the records disclosed.
- A written report will be submitted to Dr. Sarah Cordes, chair of my dissertation committee, as well as the members of the dissertation committee. Any identifying features will be masked in the final report to protect your confidentiality.

What are your responsibilities if you take part in this research?

If you take part in this research, you will be responsible to:

- Review the consent form
- Participate in two sixty (60) to ninety (90) minute interviews

Could being in this research hurt you child?

There is no financial or physical risk to participating in this study, however since you are asked to share personal school experiences around race and culture you may experience emotional and psychological discomfort. If you refuse to participate in or withdraw from this study it will not impact your relationship with the school. When withdrawing from the study, you should let the investigator know via email that you wish to withdraw. You may provide the investigator with the reason(s) for leaving the study, but is not required to provide your reason.

Will being in this research benefit you?

I cannot promise any direct benefits to you or students taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to you include an opportunity to reflect on your experiences and possibly

evaluate your personal goals and motivations. Second, you will have the opportunity to share your story and let your voice be heard. Finally, as a part of the research, I will share my findings with the participants, providing you with an opportunity to take advantage of some of the resources and opportunities that they may not have known existed, was beneficial, or was taken advantage of, in order to improve your educational experiences in middle school.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

To the extent allowed by law, we limit the viewing of your personal information to people who have to review it. We cannot promise complete secrecy. The IRB, Temple University, Temple University Health System, Inc. and its affiliates, and other representatives of these organizations may inspect and copy your information. The researcher will be using your student records such as disciplinary records, GPA and course selections. The researcher will use the school database to search for all the girls who met the following criterion: has received at least one out of school suspension in the previous school year. The researcher will only be given access to the records in order to perform the screening and data analysis. Upon your request, Legacy College Prep School or Temple University will provide the subject with a copy of the records that were disclosed. For this research, all records of the interviews will be stored on a personal computer and shared only with my dissertation committee. I may publish the results of this research. However, I will keep your name and other identifying information confidential. The data including your keys linking coded information will be kept with the investigator for two-years.

Who can answer my questions about this research?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt you or made you sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or irb@temple.edu if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

Can you be removed from this research without your approval?

The person in charge of this research can remove you from this research without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include:

- If you are no longer a student attending Legacy College Prep School
- If you are unable to keep your scheduled appointments

We will tell you about any new information that may affect your health, welfare, or choice to stay in this research.

Statement of Consent

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow me to participate in the study.

This study involves audio-recording during the interview. Please initial here if you consent to said documentation

This study involves audio-recording during the interview. Please initial here if you do not consent to said documentation

Your signature documents your permission for you or the individual named below to take part in this research.

Printed name of subject

Signature of adult subject capable of consent or adult subject's
legally authorized representative

Date

Printed name of adult subject's legally authorized representative
(leave blank if subject is capable of consent)

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

APPENDIX F: PARENT CONSENT FORM

#BlackGirlsMatter: African American Girls Perspective of School Discipline and
Their Academic Identity in Middle School

Diana Sainvil
Temple University
College of Education

Why is your child being invited to take part in this research?

I invited your child to take part in this study because she is a student identified as being African American. By your child sharing her experiences, she can help researchers, policy makers and others understand the relationship between African American girls' experiences with discipline practices and their academic identity.

What should I know about this research?

- Someone will explain this research to your child.
- This form sums up that explanation.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether your child takes part is up to her. If your child refuses to participate in or decides to withdraw from this study it will not impact their relationship with the school.
- Your child can choose not to take part.
- Your child can agree to take part and later change her mind.
- If you don't understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Why is this research being done?

Nationally, African American girls are suspended at rates six times higher than white girls (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014; Annamma et al., 2016). The United States has a problem with the way African American girls are disciplined. Severe disciplinary policies among African American girls can limit their educational opportunities (Crenshaw et al., 2015). The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the lived educational experiences of African American middle school girls who have experienced school discipline practices in their school. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, this study aims to examine the relationship between African American girls' experiences with discipline practices and their academic identity. This study will allow us to hear from the girls about their academic identity and the disciplinary practices they experience in public schools.

How long will your child be in this research?

This study consists of interview (in which your child will only be asked to participate in two). The interview will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes each.

What happens to your child if you agree to allow them to take part in this research?

By agreeing to participate in this interview, your child will:

- Once your child agrees to participate in the study and sign the consent form, your child will undergo a screening process by the researcher. The researcher will use the school database to
- search for whether or not your child meets the following criterion: received at least one out of school suspension in the previous school year. If your child meets the criterion then your child will be invited to participate in the study.
- Participate in two sixty (60) to ninety (90) minute interviews
- The interview will occur during after school hours (4:00pm-5:30pm) in a Legacy College Prep classroom.
- The interview will be audio recorded but participants can opt out from being recorded.
- The interview will occur at a time of convenience for your child and will take place in a Legacy College Prep classroom or a public location that is comfortable for your child (e.g. library, counselor's office).
- A written report will be submitted to Dr. Sarah Cordes, chair of my dissertation committee, as well as the members of the dissertation committee. Any identifying features will be masked in the final report to protect your child's confidentiality.

What is your child's responsibilities if they take part in this research?

If your child takes part in this research, your child will be responsible to:

- Review the consent form
- Participate in two sixty (60) to ninety (90) minute interviews

Could being in this research hurt your child?

There is no financial or physical risk to participating in this study, however since participants are asked to share personal school experiences around race and culture some participants may experience emotional and psychological discomfort. If your child refuses to participate in or withdraw from this study it will not impact their relationship with the school. When withdrawing from the study, your child should let the investigator know via email that she wishes to withdraw. Your child may provide the investigator with the reason(s) for leaving the study, but is not required to provide their reason.

Will being in this research benefit my child?

I cannot promise any direct benefits to your child or others from your child taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to your child include an opportunity to reflect on her experiences and possibly evaluate their personal goals and motivations. Second, your child will have the opportunity to share their story and let their voice be heard. Finally, as a part of the research, I will share my findings with the participants, providing your child with an opportunity

to take advantage of some of the resources and opportunities that they may not have known existed, was beneficial, or was taken advantage of, in order to improve their educational experiences in middle school.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

To the extent allowed by law, we limit the viewing of your child's personal information to people who have to review it. We cannot promise complete secrecy. The IRB, Temple University, Temple University Health System, Inc. and its affiliates, and other representatives of these organizations may inspect and copy your child's information. The researcher will be using your child's student records such as disciplinary records, GPA and course selections. The researcher will use the school database to search for all the girls who met the following criterion: has received at least one out of school suspension in the previous school year. The researcher will only be given access to the records in order to perform the screening and data analysis. Upon your request, Legacy College Prep School or Temple University will provide the subject with a copy of the records that were disclosed. For this research, all records of the interviews will be stored on a password protected personal computer and shared only with my dissertation committee. I may publish the results of this research. However, I will keep your child's name and other identifying information confidential. The data including keys linking coded information with your child will be kept with the investigator for two-years.

Who can answer my questions about this research?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt your child or made your child sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page. This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board ("IRB"). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or irb@temple.edu if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your child's rights as a research subject.

Can your child be removed from this research without your approval?

The person in charge of this research can remove your child from this research without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include:

- Your child is no longer a student attending Legacy College Prep School
- Your child is unable to keep her scheduled appointments

We will tell you about any new information that may affect your health, welfare, or choice to stay in this research.

Statement of Consent

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my child to participate in the study.

This study involves audio-recording during the interview. Please initial here if you consent to said documentation.

This study involves audio-recording during the interview. Please initial here if you do not consent to said documentation

Your signature documents your permission for you or the individual named below to take part in this research.

Printed name of subject

Signature of adult subject capable of consent or adult subject's
legally authorized representative

Date

Printed name of adult subject's legally authorized representative
(leave blank if subject is capable of consent)

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Study Title: #BlackGirlsMatter: African American Girls Perspective of School Discipline and Their Academic Identity in Middle School

Date:

Time:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Study Description: The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of school discipline practices on African American girls' educational experience and academic identity.

Interview Questions

Research Context

1. Tell me about your experiences as a student at FCPS?

School Discipline Practices

1. Can you explain the discipline policy/student handbook policy at FCPS? Do you think the rules are fair? Why?
2. Do you understand the range of consequences for breaking a school rule? Explain some of the to me.
3. When were you first suspended from school? Explain your experience.
4. Did you understand why you were given the consequence? Explain. Did you feel that you were part of the process?
5. Did anyone help you during the discipline process? Who? Did you ask for help to understand the procedures? Why or Why not?
6. Do you think the consequences you have received fit the incident? If so how do you perceive that the consequence was appropriate? If not why did the consequence not fit?
7. Do you think that race plays any part in the way students are disciplined at FCPS?
8. Did suspensions help change your behaviors? Why or Why not?
9. How did you feel when you were home during suspension?
10. How did you feel returning back to school after being suspended?
11. Describe your experience in meeting teacher expectations in the classroom? What happens when you meet the expectations? What happens if you do not meet the expectations?

Academic Identity

1. How do you see yourself academically as a student? Why?
2. Do you think about your identity in school? Why?
3. When I say the word "school," what comes to mind? Why?
4. In your opinion, what is the purpose of school? How do you feel about it?
5. How do you feel about students who do not finish school? Explain your reasoning.
6. How do you feel about your ability to succeed in school? Why?
7. When you've struggled academically, who have you turned to for help throughout your life?

8. Explain things that these people said or did to help you?
9. How do you think other students feel about you?
10. If I got all your current teachers together in one room and I asked them to give me one word that describes your academic ability, what word would they give me? Explain.
11. You have “X.0” grade point average. What do those numbers mean to you? What do you think they mean to your peers?
12. How does your identity have an impact on your academics in school?
13. Do you think the discipline practices at FCPS has made an impact on your academics? If so how? If not, why not?

Final Thoughts

1. Do you have any questions to ask me?

Thank you for participating!

APPENDIX H: FCPS SCHOOL DISCIPLINE POLICIES

Our Philosophy

At Freedom College Preparatory Charter School, we believe that students are able to make positive choices. A student can make the choice to follow the rules and meet behavioral expectations and a student can also make the choice not to follow the rules and not to meet behavioral expectations. We will use positive incentives to motivate students to follow the rules and a consequence system to reinforce following the rules. It is our philosophy that when students have a consistent code of conduct to follow they will learn to meet the expectations and maximize their time spent acquiring knowledge and skills in their classes and develop the values-based character needed for a life of true success. We believe that we must create an environment where students feel safe and valued, a place where students can focus on learning without worry of being bullied. Our culture will foster the creation of a Freedom College Preparatory Charter School family where we are confident and proud of who we are.

Individual Incentive and Accountability Systems

Freedom College Preparatory Charter School has developed a student behavior system to provide students, families, and teachers with a frequent, comprehensive report of student performance.

Students can earn merits for positive behavior and demerits for negative behavior.

Merits: Merits will be given when students perform above and beyond in the areas of professionalism, respect, integrity, determination, and engagement. Some examples include:

Behavioral Description	Value	Number of Merits
Beautifying the school	Respect	1
Showing kindness	Respect	1
Assisting staff	Respect	1
Doing the right thing when no one else is looking	Integrity	1
Displaying exemplary organization	Professionalism	1
Improvement due to extra effort	Determination	1
Doing extra homework	Determination	1
Displaying great academic posture	Professionalism	1
Academic grit	Determination	1
Finishing a book	Determination	5
Perfect homework for 1 week	Professionalism	10
Displaying leadership	Engagement	1
Showing contagious enthusiasm	Engagement	1
Displaying urgency	Engagement	1
Voracious reader	Determination	1
Making an insightful comment or question	Engagement	1

Volunteering to help	Respect	1
Taking academic risks	Determination	1

Merits are never given when a student asks for one for him/herself. Merits may result in a student being entered in a raffle for prizes or tickets to various events or special recognition.

Demerits: A student can be assigned from one to four demerits for a rule infraction. More serious infractions may earn more severe consequences as outlined in the SCC. Staff members determine the number of demerits based on the infraction, except as prescribed by the list below:

Common Infraction Demerit Counts

Infraction	Number of Demerits	Rationale for Infraction
Chewing Gum	4	Students often do not dispose of gum appropriately and it can be a distraction in class if students are chewing gum and not focused on learning.
Unprepared	1	Missing materials needed for class. (example: pencils, novels, binders and etc)
Food or drink visible outside of lunch or breaks. Water is permissible in clear bottles.	2	Students should not be distracted by eating in classes. Water is permissible but to ensure safety we must be able to see what is inside the water bottle.
Standing, yelling in the lunchroom or during lunch	Minimum 1	Students only have a short amount of time during lunch and should be professional about using their time to eat and leave the space nicer than when they found it.
Throwing food in the lunchroom.	4	Students only have a short amount of time during lunch and should be professional about using their time to eat and leave the space nicer than when they found it.
Not cleaning up space in lunchroom or during lunch	1	Students should show concern for others and respect by making sure the area is cleaner than when they found it.
Loss of ID Card or MTA Card.	1	Students should be responsible for their belongings.
Talking during an emergency drill	2	Practicing emergency drills is vital to ensuring that students and staff members know what to do should any emergencies

		occur. For that reason, students are professional and silent during all drills to make sure that the environment is safe and orderly.
Tardy to school	Less than 15 minutes: 1 demerit More than 15 minutes: Homework Club	Students should be professional and on time for school each day.
Unexcused absence school-mandated function such as mandatory homework detention or a community service event	4 demerits	Students need to be professional and attend the events for which they have signed up to attend and serve the detentions that they have earned.
In the hallways at any time without a pass (except during passing periods)	4 demerits	Students should be in class at all times and show integrity by not being in areas that they should not be in throughout the day.
Foul language including curse words or other slurs not directed at anyone	4 demerits	Students should be respectful of others and not use foul language. Students should also represent themselves in a professional manner that does not include the use of curse words.
Verbal harassment, in person or electronically	Minimum 4 demerits	Students should always show respect for others. Depending upon the severity of action, this may require a suspension.
Possession of a permanent marker or sharpie	4 demerits and confiscation	Permanent markers lead to vandalism and the use of a sharpie will never be necessary in a class setting.
Academic dishonesty, cheating, or plagiarism	Minimum 4 demerits	Students should show integrity in their classes as this is a skill that will be necessary in college especially related to academic cheating.
Rowdy or loud behavior anywhere in school	Minimum 2 demerits	Students should be professional in school and operate with the purpose of learning.
Inappropriate displays of affection	Minimum 1 demerit	Students should be professional in school and operate with the purpose of learning and not showing inappropriate affection in hallways or at lunch.
Loitering on school grounds	First time 2 demerits Any time after 4 demerits	Students should be professional and operate with a purpose which includes time spent exiting the building after school.
Disrespect to staff member	Minimum 1 demerit Maximum 4 demerits	A school cannot function properly if students are permitted to be disrespectful towards adults. For that reason, students

		may not disrespect any adult associated with the school, nor purposely ignore a staff member's directions.
Disrespect to student	4 demerits	Students should feel physically and emotionally safe in school. Students should be respectful to one another to preserve that environment.
Disciplinary removal of a student from class	4 demerits	Students should be able to maintain their behavior so as not to earn four consequences in a single class period. Students should show determination by filling out a reflection and adjusting so that they can return to class.
Disciplinary reset during class.	2 demerits	Students should be able to maintain their behavior in class and not earn two consequences for the same behavior.
Cell phone or audible electronic device (including headphones) visible, audible, or used during school hours without staff permission	4 demerits and confiscation of the device until parent retrieves the item from school.	Students should be professional in school and focused on learning. Cell phones and other electronic devices cause a distraction from that learning.
Dress code violations that cannot be corrected immediately (such as no belt)	2 demerits	Students should be professionally dressed and pay attention to the details especially with their uniforms each day.
Dress code violations that can be corrected immediately (such as untucked shirt)	1 demerit	Students should be professionally dressed and pay attention to the details especially with their uniforms each day.

Suspensions: A suspension is when a student is removed from school due to the serious nature of the inappropriate behavior for up to 10 consecutive school days for any one offense. Students who have been suspended may not appear on campus nor attend any school functions (before school, after school, or evening) while suspended. Violators of this policy will be considered trespassing. They may, however, enter the school to take or prepare for state assessments. Suspended students must be assigned homework and given the opportunity to make-up missing assignments, quizzes, or tests for full credit.

For the purposes of this Code:

- A short-term suspension refers to the removal of a student from school for disciplinary reasons for a period of ten or fewer days.
- A long-term suspension refers to the removal of a student from school for disciplinary reasons for a period of more than ten days.

The following is a list of consequences that may merit a suspension.

Severe Infractions and Consequences

Unacceptable Behavior	Minimum Consequence	Maximum Consequence
Cutting classes (reporting to school and failing to attend one or more programmed classes)	Double detention, mandatory parent conference	3-day suspension
Engaging in verbally rude or disrespectful behavior	Detention	3-day suspension
Behaving in a manner which disrupts the educational process (e.g., making excessive noise in a classroom, library, or hallway)	Detention	3-day suspension
Posting or distributing material on school premises in violation of written Department of Education policy and/or school rules	Detention	3-day suspension
Smoking and/or use of electronic cigarettes and/or possession of matches or lighters	Confiscation of item, 1-day suspension	5-day suspension, confiscation of item
Gambling	Detention, item/money confiscated	3-day suspension
Using profane, obscene, vulgar, or lewd language, gestures, or behavior	Detention	3-day suspension
Lying to, giving false information to, and/or misleading school personnel	Detention	3-day suspension
Inappropriate use of electronic technology (e.g., unauthorized audio/video recording)	Suspend network use privilege, conference with parent	3-day suspension
Leaving class or school premises without permission of supervising school personnel	Detention	3-day suspension
Shoving, pushing, or engaging in a minor altercation or similar physical confrontational behavior towards students or school personnel (e.g., pushing past another person), throwing an object or spitting at another person	Detention	Referral for expulsion hearing
Engaging in gang-related behavior (e.g., wearing or displaying gang apparel and/or accessories, writing graffiti, making gestures, or signs), or group organized disruptive activity	5-day suspension and/or behavior improvement course	Referral for expulsion hearing

Engaging in vandalism, graffiti, or other intentional damage to school property belonging to staff, students, or others. Including hacking into or disrupting network technology systems	1-day suspension, restitution of property and cost	Referral for expulsion hearing
Threatening to fight verbal	1-day suspension	3-day suspension
Engaging in any form of physical aggression or fighting, including but not limited to play fighting	5-day suspension and/or behavioral improvement course	Referral for expulsion hearing
Engaging in harassing, intimidating and/or bullying behavior, including using electronic communication to engage in such behavior (cyber-bullying); such behavior includes, but is not limited to: physical violence; stalking; verbal, written, or physical conduct that threatens another with harm; seeking to coerce or compel a student or staff member to do something; hazing; taunting; exclusion from peers groups designed to humiliate to isolate; using derogatory language or making derogatory jokes or name calling to humiliate or harass	1-day suspension	Referral for expulsion hearing
Possessing and/or using controlled substances or prescription medications without appropriate authorization, illegal drugs, synthetic hallucinogens, drug paraphernalia, and/or alcohol	5-day suspension and/or out-patient counseling or behavior improvement course	Referral for expulsion hearing
Taking or attempting to take property belonging to another or belonging to the school without authorization, without using force or intimidating behavior	1-day suspension and/or behavior improvement course	Referral for expulsion hearing
Possession, sale, and/or use of weapons, d/dangerous, illegal objects	Item confiscated, 5-day suspension and/or behavior improvement course	Referral for expulsion hearing
Arson; starting a fire	10-day suspension and behavior improvement course	Referral for expulsion hearing

Re-entry Meeting: A re-entry meeting is required after a suspension in order to return to school. An administrator, advisor and the student meet to discuss the student's readiness to return to school. Students may only return to school after the

administrator has determined the student is ready to return; if the administrator determines that the student is not ready to return, the suspension will be extended. The presence of parents/guardians of students is required to participate in the re-entry meeting. Should a scholar return to school without a parent or guardian, the Dean of Culture will make a decision whether the student must return home, return to class, or stay in the Dean of Culture's office.

Behavior Contract: A contract signed by the student, an administrator, and parent/guardian describing specific behavior from a student's previous offense and future consequences if that behavior is repeated. Violation of a behavior contract results in a disciplinary hearing.

Expulsions: Expulsion is defined as the permanent removal of a student from Freedom College Preparatory Charter School for disciplinary reasons.