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THE PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE HIGH-NEEDS
STUDENTS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF THE DISCIPLINARY SYSTEM IN
LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS IN ARKANSAS

A Dissertation Submitted
to the Graduate College
Arkansas Tech University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in School Leadership

in the Center for Leadership and Learning
of the College of Education

May 2019

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Bertha Mae Isom Barnes Sykes. She was a lady who sacrificed so much for her family. She had taught me many skills and life lessons through every experience we encountered, which I apply to my life. I recall the week before I started my doctorate journey. Grandma Bertha became ill. I had the responsibility of being there every day while she was hospitalized, and mustering up the strength to call the family in to make a decision. I remember her always opening her eyes when my voice entered the room to talk and sang to her, to comb her hair, or as I covered her in a purple, her favorite color, crocheted quilt I had made just for her.

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I know my grandma is smiling down on me from Heaven. Your granddaughter, Renata, has done it again. I have raised the bar higher for our family. It is because of you and your fight that I continue to fight and press towards my greater purpose in life. I hope you are proud.

Bertha Mae Isom Barnes Sykes

(1933 – 2017)

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told you that I would become a doctor one day when I was just a young girl. Well, Pops,
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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate why African American female students are being “pushed out” of learning environments in public schools. This study attempted to answer the central question: *According to the “lived experiences” of African – American female students in Arkansas, what are the perceived factors contributing to the disproportionate number of African American female students receiving serious disciplinary consequences in public schools?*

Eleven African American female students associated with three school districts in Eastern Arkansas fit the following criteria: student in grades 10-12; a female student; self – identified as being African-American; received education in a traditional and non-traditional school setting; had experienced out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension, and expulsion. The semi-structured questions were conducted face-to-face in with in-depth dialogue.

Five major themes emerged from the conversations. The first theme was the *Impact of a Rough Living Environment*. The second theme was *Traumatic Experiences*. The third theme was *Home Support*, which is broken down into two subthemes, *Lack of Home Support* and *Consistent, Positive Home Support*. The fourth theme that emerged was *Racial Resistance to Leaders / Teachers*. The fifth theme emerging from the interviews was *Use of Disciplinary Action* which is broken into three subthemes: *Minor Nonviolent Infractions*, *Minor Violent, and Weapon Infractions*, and *Major Violent and Weapons Infractions*.

The conclusions derived from the study were: 1) Living conditions and the level of support for high needs African American female students in low performing schools

foster a sense of hopelessness regarding the importance of their educational pathways; 2) High-needs African American female students understand racism is prevalent, but they do not accept failure as an option for they have developed and embraced a renowned fight to prove society wrong despite all the reforms and laws created for “permission to fail”; and 3) High needs African American female students recognize there must be consequences for their infractions, but do not accept being overly disciplined to cause more harmful lived experiences, but instead demand schools have people who have an ear to listen and a voice that is slow to speak.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Over the last 30 years, schools have increased out-of-school suspensions creating what Fedders (2018) refers to as a new version of exclusion that doubles the chance a student will be suspended. Fedders (2018) also states three and a half million students during the 2011-2012 school year received at least one out-of-school suspension, while over 100,000 students were expelled. Furthermore, districts and schools have the autonomy to transfer students deemed to have academic or behavioral issues out of regular schools and into Alternative Education Programs (AEPs) (Fedders, 2018). This new version of exclusion is what Morris (2016) refers to as being pushed out.

Research reveals suspensions and AEPs have little educational benefit, and may actually cause significant harm (Fedders, 2018). Suspended students tend to fall behind in academics, face an elevated risk of being involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Suspended students also experience multiple challenges associated with poverty such as homelessness, exposure to environmental pollutants, lack of access to health care, and chronic stress and depression can hamper their readiness for school and performance as a student (Fedders, 2018). Furthermore, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds struggle to attain academic success due to being removed from school, decreasing the chances for a student to graduate or enroll in college, which exacerbates the circle of poverty (Fedders, 2018).

Punitive disciplinary practices in schools throughout the U.S. disproportionately affect African American students as young as age six (Morris, 2016). Although well-intentioned educators desire to provide support to these students, schools are lacking the resources to address student needs (Heitzeg, 2014).

Today's findings indicate bias continues to affect the decision-making process leading to suspensions or expulsions (Fedders, 2018). Evidence also suggests suspensions disproportionately affect African American students due to the lack of cultural awareness of teachers and administrators, different communication styles, and curriculum that lacks student engagement (Fedders, 2018). Fedders (2018) contends low-income African American students suffer the consequences of harsh disciplinary policies because schools rely heavily on school exclusion to manage misbehaviors. Teachers and administrators in schools often lack, or believe they lack, the resources needed to meet the needs of students resulting in schools adopting an exclusionary ethos designed to utilize resources for only students whom they believe are deserving and have a greater chance for success (Fedders, 2018).

According to the United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights [CRDC] (2014), 20% of African American males and 12% of African American females are suspended, exceeding the rates of suspension for Caucasian females at 2% and Caucasian males at 6%. Morris (2016) argues African American females are being criminalized by beliefs, policies, and actions that demote learning and humanity. These issues are the leading factors in causing the African American female to be pushed out of school and exposed to even more harm by places that should help them thrive (Morris, 2016). Minor infractions such as falling asleep in class, standing up for themselves, asking questions, wearing natural hair, wearing revealing clothing, and engaging in unruly acts in school are deemed as threats to safety (Morris, 2016).

Fedders (2018) explains data suggest students are less violent in school now than in the past. Schools report minor misbehaviors such as disrespect and disruption are 95%

of suspensions and expulsions (Fedders, 2018). Arkansas' discipline data for 2008-2015 school years define minor, nonviolent infractions as disorderly conduct, insubordination, and others. Minor violence and weapons infractions are defined as fighting, student assault, gang infractions, and explosive infractions; major nonviolent infractions are defined as bullying, tobacco, and vandalism; major violence and weapon infractions are defined as club infractions, knife infractions, and staff assault; truancy infractions; and drugs and alcohol infractions (Office of Educational Policy [OEP], 2018).

Fedders (2018) explains 17% of African American students are suspended at least once compared with 5% of Caucasian students. Suspensions are heavily concentrated in the South, with 55% occurring in 13 southern states (Fedders, 2018). A report by Smith and Harper (2015) indicates 18,185 African American students were suspended from Arkansas' K-12 public schools in a single academic year. African Americans make up 21% of the students in school districts across the state but comprise 50% of suspensions and 33% of expulsions (Smith & Harper, 2015). Furthermore, Arkansas' out-of-school suspension rate for the African American female is 14% compared to 5% for Native Hawaiians, 3% for Caucasians, Hispanics, and American Indians, and 1% for Asians (CRDC, 2014).

Problem Statement

Even though males are suspended in higher numbers than females overall, race and ethnicity are significant factors for African American females when compared to their Caucasian counterparts (Morris, 2016). The CRDC (2014) indicates one of the most pressing problems is 16% of African American students are suspended and expelled compared to 5% of Caucasian students. Data released by the U.S. Department of

Education for the 2011-2012 school year revealed while African American males were suspended more than three times as often as their Caucasian counterparts; the African American female was suspended six times as often as their Caucasian counterparts. Only 2% of Caucasian females were subjected to exclusionary suspensions in comparison to 12% of African American females (CRDC, 2014).

Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is the high rate of suspensions and expulsions in U.S. public schools and the fact African American students of both genders are suspended and expelled at much higher rates than Caucasian students. Specifically, this qualitative, phenomenological study sought to determine the factors leading to this disparity between African American and Caucasian females by examining the lived experiences of African American high-needs female students in low-performing schools in Arkansas.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate why African American female students are being pushed out of learning environments in public schools. By using a phenomenological design, it is hoped the lived experiences of these African American female students will provide more information that might explain why this is occurring across the nation and provide potential solutions to the problem. This study focused on discovering the factors contributing to African American female students being disproportionately suspended and expelled for relatively minor infractions.

Significance of the Study

This study provided insight for public school educators to determine why African American female students are being disciplined in learning environments are designed to

prevent harm. The significance of this study was to reveal to stakeholders the importance of collaborating with other constituents to gain multiple perspectives on how to stop the trend of criminalizing and marginalizing African American female students' learning and humanity (Morris, 2016). The hope was to bring awareness to underlying factors leading to marginalization, and for policymakers to examine the findings and recreate policies and practices that are equitable and age-appropriate.

Research Question

The central question this study attempted to answer is: According to the lived experiences of African American female students in Arkansas, what are the perceived factors contributing to the disproportionate number of African American female students receiving serious disciplinary consequences in public schools?

Assumptions

The assumption of this study was for each participant to answer the interviewers' questions completely and honestly. Students may very well have different points of views than their peers. Because of this assumption, conducting a phenomenological study allowed one to hear about the "lived experiences" of each participant. Analyzing the experiences in juxtaposition to one another revealed essential lessons learned that might be put to use in addressing the problem of disciplinary disproportionality as it relates to African American female students.

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to identify the contributing factors impacting the disproportion number of African American female students receiving serious discipline consequences in public schools. There are limitations in qualitative research, and

research bias may influence the interpretation of the data because the researcher was the instrument of data analysis, and could affect the way lived experiences are reported (Butina, 2015).

Delimitations

This study interviewed a limited number of girls from three school districts in a rural high-poverty region of Arkansas known as the Delta. While the results/findings were not to be generalized in the traditional sense, other educators and policymakers may nevertheless find the results/findings relevant to their situations.

Definition of Terms

Criminalization, as used in this study, is physical and mental harm from policies, policies, and actions that degrade and marginalize both learning and humanity leading to conditions that push students out of schools and render them vulnerable to even more harm (Morris, 2016).

Discipline policy in schools, as used in this study, is policy developed through the commitment, cooperation, and involvement of the district's administrators, teachers, students, parents, and counselors. The policies are to describe the district's expectations of student conduct and specify the consequences of violating the rules. As the need arises, school officials may adopt additional policies containing student conduct rules (Arkansas Department of Education: discipline policy, 2018).

Discipline referral, as used in this study, is a written account of a student's inappropriate behavior.

Exclusionary discipline, as used in this study, is the use of out-of-school suspension, which is not restricted to severe, safety-threatening behaviors, but rather is

distributed across a wide range of infractions. The majority of offenses for which students are suspended appear to be non-violent, minor to moderate infractions, such as disobedience and disrespect, defiance, attendance problems, failing to report to detention, and general classroom disruption (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014).

Expulsion, as used in this study, is a longer removal of a student from the regular educational setting for a major rule infraction. Some expulsions result in a complete cessation of educational services and other expelled students receive educational services in an alternative setting under local policies (Fedders, 2018).

Gun Free Act of 1994, refers to each state receiving federal funds to have a state law in effect requiring local educational agencies to expel, for at least one year, any student who is determined to have brought a weapon to school. The one-year expulsion is mandatory, except when a chief administering officer of such local education agency may modify it on a case-by-case basis. Also, schools are directed to develop policies requiring referral to the criminal justice or juvenile delinquency system for any student who brings a firearm or weapon to school (Wun, 2016).

High needs students, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2018), are students who are at risk of educational failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, such as students who are living in poverty, who attend high-minority schools (as defined in the Race to the Top application), who are far below grade level, who have left school before receiving a regular high school diploma, who are at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, who are homeless, who are in foster care, who have been incarcerated, who have disabilities, or who are English learners.

Low performing schools, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2018), are schools in the bottom 10% of performance in the state, or who have significant achievement gaps, based on student academic performance in reading/language arts and mathematics on the assessments required under the ESEA or graduation rates.

Non-exclusionary discipline, as used in this study, is discipline that represents sanctions whereby students received some form of disciplinary action occurring on campus such as in-school- suspension, lunch detention, restricted lunch/recess, parent conference, school counselor conference, community service assigned and/or Saturday school assigned (Butler, Lewis, Moore III, & Scott, 2012).

School Resource Officer (SRO), as used in this study, is a sworn law enforcement officers intended to carry out their duties by the “triad model,” which expects them to be law enforcers, counselors, and educators. In their law enforcement role, they monitor school grounds, consult with school administration regarding school security, respond to incidents, and take part in schools’ disciplinary responses to student misbehavior, among other tasks. Making arrests when students misbehave falls under this role. Their counselor and educator roles require them to undertake conflict resolution efforts, befriend at-risk students and help them avoid misbehavior and teach classes on topics such as drug abuse and gang avoidance for safety and crime prevention in schools (Wolf, 2014).

School to prison pipeline, also known as the *school-to-prison link* or the *schoolhouse-to-jailhouse track*, is the disproportionate tendency of minors and young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds to become incarcerated because of increasingly harsh school and municipal policies (Heitzeg, 2014).

Suspension, as used in this study, is the temporary removal of a student from the regular educational setting for a violation of school policies or rules. During a suspension, a student may not attend school for a specified length of time (Fedders, 2018).

Title IX, as used in this study, is a comprehensive federal law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity. The principal objective of Title IX is to avoid the use of federal money to support sex discrimination in education programs and to provide individual citizens effective protection against those practices. Title IX applies, with a few specific exceptions, to all aspects of federally funded education programs or activities (Tonnesen, 2013).

Summary

This study was organized and presented in five chapters. Chapter One introduced the problem and provided background information on the impact of policies and practices in public schools affected African American female students, which influences the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions. The problem was stated, the purpose and significance were explained, the assumptions and limitations were addressed, and terms specific to the study are defined. Chapter Two contained a review of the literature supporting the need for further study in this area. The literature also focused on the historical background of femininity in education, systems, and structures in schools, the impact of the systems and structures in schools, biases in schools, environmental factors and other implications such as oppression. The major research focused on interventions to provide insight on policies and practices that “restore,” heal relationships and encourage community and school-based programs to be proactively

supportive and aware of the effects of marginalizing African American females' learning and humanity (Morris, 2016). Chapter Three included a description of the methods and procedures used to obtain and process data. Chapter Four included a presentation of the data and Chapter Five contained an analysis of the data, conclusions, recommendations for implementing effective restorative programs of intervention, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

While exploring topics related to the factors associated with the disproportionate gap of African American female students in schools, the researcher utilized multiple databases: American Law Journals, ProQuest Education Journals Online, and Urban Journals in relation to discipline. These searches were conducted using Google Scholar, Arkansas Tech University's library, Dean B. Ellis Library, and RefWorks. The researcher also searched government websites such as the United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, Arkansas Department of Education Data Center, and the Office of Educational Policy (OEP). Other information was found using key terms such as restorative justice in schools, disproportionate discipline in schools, zero tolerance policies in schools, factors leading to disproportion gap, the school-to-prison pipeline, and criminalization of African American girls focusing on peer-reviewed articles.

Despite the fact males are suspended in greater numbers than females overall, race and ethnicity turn out to be substantial risk factors for African American females when they are compared to their Caucasian counterparts (Morris, 2016). Morris (2016) explains some of the most blatant uses of school discipline in this country have penalized African American females as young as six years old. Although well-intentioned educators desire to provide support to these students, schools are lacking the resources to address student needs (Heitzeg, 2014). The purpose of this study was to provide an understanding of why African American female students are being pushed out of learning environments in public schools.

The literature review focused on theories to explain why African American females have too often been disciplined physically and mentally at young ages. The literature also focused on the historical background of femininity in education, systems, and structures in schools and their implications, implications of environmental factors, biases in schools, and the implications of oppression. The primary research included in the literature review focused on interventions to provide insight on how to restore policies and practices, heal relationships, and encourage community and school-based programs to be proactively supportive and aware of the effects of marginalizing the African American females' learning and humanity (Morris, 2016).

Despite the decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) prohibiting segregation in public schools, African American students still encounter racial oppression and inequalities in high-risk learning environments today (Morris, 2016). According to the United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (CRDC, 2014), African American students are three times more likely to be suspended and expelled than Caucasian students. The CRDC (2014) also indicates African American females are suspended at a rate of 12%, while Caucasian females are suspended at a rate of 2% and Caucasian males at 6%.

A report by Smith and Harper (2015) indicated 18,185 African American students were suspended from Arkansas' K-12 public schools in a single academic year. African Americans make up 21% of the students in school districts across the state, but comprise 50% of suspensions and 33% expulsions (Smith & Harper, 2015). Furthermore, Arkansas' out-of-school suspension rate for the African American female is 14%

compared to 5% for Native Hawaiians, and 3% for Caucasians, Hispanics, and American Indians, and 1% for Asians (CRDC, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Current research states although some educational improvement has occurred across racial lines over the past two decades, disparities remain intact because African American students are not graduating at rates comparable to their Caucasian peers, disciplined at disproportionate rates in K-12 schools, and challenged with obstacles that prevent pathways for postsecondary opportunities (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Howard and Navarro (2016) contended the focus in education should be on the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its impact on the educational landscape for racially diverse students and not on debates addressing the root causes of those disparities (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

According to Joseph, Viesca, and Bianco (2016), CRT has roots in Critical Legal Theory (CLT), which began in the 1970s. CLT represents the nomenclature in the legal field that analyzes, explains, and critiques accepted norms and standards in legal practices that claim to emphasize neutrality, objectivity, and truth. CLT was one of the first movements from the Civil Rights Era to challenge conventional ideas about the objectivity of the law, which had oppressed minorities and Caucasian women for centuries. However, some scholars felt the CLT too often excluded the perspectives of men and women of color.

In 1980, Bell (1987) developed CRT, which deepened CLT's analysis of race, education, and the explanation of the achievement gap between African American students and their Caucasian peers. Crenshaw, Delgado and Stefancic (as cited in

Cabrera, 2018) explain CRT developed from Critical Legal Studies (CLS) as a way to critique color blindness and was later adapted to educational research by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). It is frequently applied by higher education scholars as a method of framing scholarship (Cabrera, 2018).

Solórzano and Yosso (2001) explain CRT as an attempt to understand the oppressive aspects of society in order to understand both societal and individual transformation in regards to the role of race and racism in the U.S. educational system. It is a critique of racial reform with a focus on marginality of race (Solórzano and Yosso, 2001). They also report CRT examines the oppressive constructs inhabited when race is connected with other factors such as class, gender, and sexual orientation. In CRT, race is viewed as both a social construct and to be endemic based on society and the way the educational system and institutions have attempted to camouflage the many forms of racism such as self-interest, power, and privilege from dominant groups (Solórzano & Yosso; 2001).

Furthermore, CRT as a methodology or framework is often used to present research grounded in the experience of marginalized people of color such as African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians, and other people of ethnicity, culture mannerisms, and color (Solórzano & Yosso ;2001). CRT can also be used to present a theological and methodological approach to racism in what Marable (as cited in Solórzano & Yosso; 2001) defined as a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress people of color includes multiple faces, voices, and experiences.

Delgado and Stefancic (as cited by Cabrera, 2018; Joseph et al., 2016) explain the overarching goal for CRT is to study and change the relationships between race, racism,

and power by highlighting inherent racism in American society and promoting racial progress which tends to be rooted in either law or education. Cabrera (2018) explains there are five tenets associated with CRT in law: (a) racism as normal, (b) interest convergence, (c) social construction, (d) differential racialization, (e) intersectionality, and (f) unique voices of color. Cabrera (2018) explains racism as normal is considered a structure of everyday life in the U.S. as opposed to a few racist individuals. Interest convergence argues people of color will only advance if it warrants advancement of White interests. Social construction explains race should not be based upon stereotypical or intrinsic traits. Differential racialization examines patterns of racial marginalization across racial groups. Intersectionality views multiple forms of oppression that studies lived experiences. Unique voices of color state minorities have a perspective different from Caucasians and racial truth is spread from this standpoint.

In the mid-1970s, scholars such as Ramirez and Castaneda (as cited in Howard & Navarro, 2016) discussed the cultural differences possessed by students of color and the need for educational practitioners to note the diverse ways of knowing, thinking, and communicating (Howard & Navarro, 2016). The terms culturally appropriate, culturally compatible, and culturally congruent were used in the mid-1980s to help educational practitioners understand the value of cultural characteristics in African American students (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Furthermore, Edmonds and Boykins (as cited in Howard & Navarro, 2016) argue there are unique cultural features that explain how African American students processed and participated in the learning process and instruction should be refined accordingly (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

In the mid-1990s, Ladson-Billings and Tate provided a spotlight on race, school, and educational outcomes, while many others such as W.E.B DuBois and Carter G. Woodson also served as key pioneers in delving deep to examine the concerns of race and educational opportunities (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Data suggest African American students experience schools in a different way than their Caucasian peers despite several school reform efforts, standards-based education movements, and legislative mandates such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS; Howard & Navarro, 2016). The most pressing issue with reform efforts and education movements is students of color are expected to learn in environments where the content, instruction, culture, and assessment are racially informed, exclusive, and serve as components for school success (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

Howard and Navarro (2016) note the makeup of classroom teachers in the United States can be analyzed through the CRT framework. Data from the U.S. Department of Education suggest 80% of classroom teachers are Caucasian, middle class, and monolingual resulting in the likelihood most teachers, today, are unaware of the racial experiences, cultural knowledge, practices, and dispositions African American students encounter in their homes and communities (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Gay and Howard (as cited in Howard & Navarro, 2016) argue current demographics of today's student makeup provided the possibility of a significant racial and cultural knowledge gap between teachers and students known as a demographic divide. Howard and Navarro (2016) explain it is essential teachers understand how White privilege and its components impact their practice, and how Whiteness has a profound influence on how students of

color experience schools. Howard and Navarro (2016) also explain what is needed is a way to translate theory to practice for in-service and pre-service teachers and to be clear about the development of racial consciousness. It cannot be taught in a superficial way reducing racial awareness to simple do's and don'ts. Instead, it requires a deep level of analysis, self-reflection, and understanding of racial realities from the past and present for all classroom teachers in their content and instructional practices.

Racial formation theory defines race as socially and politically constructed (Wun, 2016). This theory finds that although race is a permanent feature, the formation, order, and set of meanings inscribed onto racialized subjects are dependent upon historical and political contexts resulting in anti-Black racism as a social order affects policies, policy outcomes, and organizes the relationship between non-Black and Black (Wun, 2016). However, the authors do not account for reasons why characterizations of Blackness are criminal (Wun, 2016). Kandaswamy and Smith (as cited in Wun, 2016) are among the many scholars challenging the racial formation theory because it lacks essential parts of the U.S. racial landscape and history. Also, the authors state the theory should integrate an intersectional analysis of the relationships between race, class, gender, and sexuality to discern how African American females are at multiple risks for exclusion (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Wun, 2016).

Wun (2016) argues racism has been foundational to U.S. institutional policies and social relations for nearly three decades. Discipline research indicates students of color are more likely to encounter discipline in the form of referrals, suspensions, and expulsions as well as arrest far more than their counterparts (Wun, 2016).

The principles of CRT were applied to this qualitative, phenomenological study to deepen the understanding of how CRT educational tenets, intercentricity of race and racism, and challenge the dominant ideology and commitment to social justice. The centrality of experiential knowledge and interdisciplinary perspective are connected to the lived experiences of African American female students in regards to the disciplinary system in low-performing schools in Arkansas.

These CRT education tenets will determine what the perceived factors are contributing to the disproportionate number of African American female students receiving serious discipline consequences in public schools. The tenets will define if system and structures in schools have an impact on systems, structures, policies, and practices associated with specifically African American female students and their behaviors.

Historical Perspective of African American Females

During the two and a half centuries of legalized slavery in the United States, African Americans were regarded as property and often put to work at ages as early as two and three years old (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017). According to Dumas and Nelson (2016), African American males and females were imagined as chattel who were rarely perceived as being worthy of playtime and were severely punished for exhibiting normal child-like behaviors (Epstein et al., 2017). Morris (2016) explains attaining an education for African American people during the era of legalized slavery was considered unlawful. African Americans were only allowed to undertake unskilled domestic tasks such as picking cotton, cooking, and caring for children rather than engaging in any work that required or contributed to their intellectual skills (Morris, 2016).

Green, McIntosh, Cook-Morales, and Robinson-Zañartu (2005) state after emancipation, African Americans appreciated and valued education. Moreover, the authors mention African Americans viewed it as newfound freedom that provided participation in what the authors considered to be the American society. Because many African Americans believed in the power of education, more than 500 schools were opened without support from the government (Green et al., 2005).

Now, 65 years after the landmark decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), which attempted to tear down separate and unequal facilities and mentalities, new outlets through legal mandates and assessment opportunities have created new segregation (Green et al., 2005). For example, research by Tonnesen (2013) notes the image and stereotypes of African American females have real-life implications, as they alter the way people's minds perceive African American females as young women. The author describes implicit bias as a combination of structural and psychological mechanisms by which violence is condoned and ignored against, in this case, African American females (Tonnesen, 2013). In Tonnesen's (2013) article, Goff describes a social psychological phenomenon dehumanizing, which characterizes African American people as being animal-like or nonhuman, reducing their worth and need for physical and legal protection (Tonnesen, 2013). The author mentions these biases operate when leaders and decision makers determine interventions for the African American female (Epstein et al., 2017; Tonnesen, 2013).

Feminism has occurred as early as the 1800s with the intent to voice the need for African American females to have equal rights (Acuff, 2018). Acuff explains African American abolitionists such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Maria Stewart, Frances

E. W. Harper, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church Terrell addressed the intersections of race and gender to dismantle the acts of institutionalized legal slavery and sexual abuse, which is known as Black feminism. According to Acuff (2018), this battle was ongoing even through the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's' Liberation Movement in the 1960s, resulting in the development of theory and praxis explicitly designed to address unique issues for African American women. Black feminist organizations had target tasks that integrated analysis and practice based on the major systems of oppression interlocking and casting aside the race of African American women (Acuff, 2018).

Systems and Structures in Schools

The creation of punitive policies has been traced back to the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 designed to manage youth and produce school order. Moreover, zero tolerance has become a phrase for policies of immediate suspension and/or expulsion of students from a list of infractions not limited to drugs and weapons (Wun, 2016). One pattern of anti-Black racism formalized in policies, outcomes, and social relationships can be found in the U.S. public education system (Wun, 2016). Blanchett, Mumford, and Beachum (2005) state, "Although there have been many positive changes, as American schools have enjoyed limited integration through busing and other transportation strategies, at the same time, educational policies and practices have created a new system of segregation" (p. 72). Formerly, zero tolerance was associated with law enforcement to prevent drug trafficking (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). However, a growing concern about school safety and student discipline has resulted in the development and enforcement of a host of policies related to student behaviors and the desire to enhance levels of student performance (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016).

In response to school shootings such as Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas; Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, and Heath High School in West Paducah, Kentucky, schools began to adopt zero-tolerance policies as a way to keep schools safe, although many schools had not been in great danger (Mitchell, 2014; Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). In addition to adopting a zero tolerance policy for schools, School Resource Officers (SROs), metal detectors, and surveillance cameras were also implemented to maintain order and safety in schools (Wolf, 2014). A qualitative study was conducted to examine the relationship between zero-tolerance policies and their effects on the African American female at a suburban high school in California and found African American females were susceptible to racialized and gendered forms of discipline and punishment consciously and unconsciously by adults and nonblack peers (Wun, 2016).

Tonnesen (2013) notes the civil rights law Title IX as another policy that fails to address the unique effects experienced by the African American female. The civil rights law, Title IX, requires schools to have formal anti-discrimination and sexual harassment grievance policies (Tonnesen, 2013). Although schools are accountable for sexual harassment in school hallways, Tonnesen (2013) explains African American females are unable to access legal remedies. Moreover, African American females are often ignored or misunderstood by school administrators rather than addressing the root causes and holding people accountable who condone violence against the African American female (Tonnesen, 2013).

Epstein et al. (2017) and Tonnesen (2013) add to this narrative by citing media outlets reporting African American females can handle themselves robbing the African

American female of their innocence and causing a false narrative of adultification (Epstein et al., 2017; Tonnesen, 2013). Epstein et al. (2017) also define the adultification of students as two forms: (a) a process of socialization, in which children function at a more mature developmental stage because of situational context and necessity occurring in communities that lack resources and (b) a social and cultural stereotype based on how adults, who lack the understanding of children's behavior and verbalizations, perceive children. In Epstein et al. (2017), Morris contends:

The assignment of more adult-like characteristics to the expressions of young African American girls is a form of age compression. Along with this truncated age continuum, African American girls are likened more to adults than to children and are treated as if they are willfully engaging in behaviors typically expected of African American women.... This compression... [has] stripped African American girls of their childhood freedoms [and]...renders African American girlhood interchangeable with African American womanhood. (p. 4)

The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) mandates district student discipline policies are to be created in a collaborative approach with the involvement of district administrators, teachers, students, parents, and counselors to define expectations for student behavior as well as consequences for violating rules (ADE, 2017). Morris (2016) notes the following:

The culture of zero tolerance has seeped into nearly every corner of school discipline, creating rigid, unforgiving policies aimed at demographic - kids - whose existence is defined by growth, development, and change. Recall

that the African American females were not at the center of the debate on public safety when zero-tolerance policies were being passed, so little thought went into how these new policies might uniquely affect them. (p. 78)

The American Bar Association and National Bar Association explain three out of ten cases for African American females' cases are dismissed compared to seven out of ten of Caucasian girls' cases resulting in the African American females' confinement to be more severe (Hall & Karanxha, 2012; Morris, 2016). In Wun's (2016) article, James contends punishment of African American students is not about discipline, but is indicative of the dreams and desires of U.S. racial society.

Impact of Systems and Structures in Schools

Sheras and Bradshaw (2016) argue it is not just about the policies, but more importantly about the implementation of the policies, as well as the successes and challenges associated with these types of policies have a significant impact on the lives of children in school.

Despite comparable rates of infractions, the school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately impacts the poor, students with disabilities, and youth of color, particularly African Americans, who are suspended and expelled at the highest rates (Heitzeg, 2014). Research indicates females are being detained far more often than males for less serious offenses such as truancy or running away (Miller, 2015). Heitzeg (2014) argues the school-to-prison pipeline is a consequence of schools criminalizing students for minor infractions based on zero tolerance policies. The pattern has become so

prominent many activists refer to it as the schoolhouse to jailhouse track, or the cradle to prison track, as younger students of color are targeted (Heitzeg, 2014).

Recently, Miller (2015) identified massive incarceration imposes immense social and economic burdens on African Americans due to poor policies and legislative decisions. Morris (2016) argues the California unemployment rate for African American youth in 2013 was the highest of all groups, and remained high in 2014. As a result, African American youth had a graduation rate of 59%, which impacted opportunities to be employed (Morris, 2016). Henceforth, the unemployment rate for African American Californians in 2014 was 14.6% higher than rates of Caucasians at 8.3% and 9.9% for Latinos (Morris, 2016).

Biases in Schools

Blake, Butler, Lewis, and Darensbourg (2011) explain classrooms have played a vital role in the impact of student identity. Furthermore, teacher inexperience and lack of knowledge and understanding of cultural influences are contributing factors for a high volume of office referrals (Blake et al., 2011). Teachers unskilled in classroom management strategies are another contributing factor to excessive office referrals and punitive discipline strategies implemented to contain the African American female (Blake et al., 2011). Despite the African American female being portrayed as ghetto or ratchet loud and angrily aggressive, masculine, hostile and hypersexual in today's media, they are not perceived to be dangerous; yet, the African American females defy traditional standards of femininity (Blake et al., 2011; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Morris, 2016). African American females have enveloped a loud and tough persona in order to

be heard and not overlooked in classrooms and school buildings tend to ignore them and marginalize them as students (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

Ogbu (2004) contends African Americans tend to find it in their best interest to embrace the behaviors of Caucasians in order to be accepted in places, meaning African Americans have developed biases for acting White resulting in many minorities abandoning their culture and dialect to conform to the mainstream of others. Taylor (as cited in Ogbu 2004) refers to this as the flight into the White role behavior, because it required minorities to think, manage, and behave like a majority group member. African Americans have also overtly assimilated to adopting a White culture to be deemed successful in what Ogbu (2004) refers to as White controlled institutions that also evaluate people of color based on White criteria. Ogbu (2004) also explains many African Americans function in this capacity for two reasons: (a) it helps maintain sanity in a racist society, and (b) it helps make gains in Caucasian establishments. Wiederman (as cited in Ogbu, 2004) explains African American must develop a “seventh sense,” meaning African Americans must be swift in teaching and recognizing the invisible barriers disciplining the space in which they move because nothing is what it seems. It is imperative African American be skilled in decoding and picking out abstractions that are designed to keep them grounded in place (Ogbu; 2004).

Impact of Environmental Factors

Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) contend many African American females encounter stressors from families, communities, and schools make it hard to hide adversity. Researchers conducted a study on 35 incarcerated females and found females were more likely to experience traumatic events compared to males. In the study, data



revealed 80% of the females had experienced trauma while 43% of them described sexual abuse, 40% indicated neglect or abandonment, and 34% recalled witnessing acts of violence (Miller, 2015).

Cammarota (2011) explains youth face problems such as educational failure, drug abuse, and violence, but they are not inherent or internally adopted from their environment. It is too easy to state students have problems because he or she resides in a bad neighborhood. These ideas are what is defined as socially-constructed learned behaviors caused by exposure to social toxins of institutional oppression. However, these ideas can be overcome by understanding how and why people of color experience social marginalization is beyond their control (Cammarota, 2011).

Impact of Oppression

Gloria Ladson-Billings argues student identity grants African American children permission to fail not only in classroom settings but also in their minds, causing internalized gendered racial oppression (Morris, 2016). Morris (2016) goes on to note underfunded schools, limited resources, access to quality early education, and past negative experiences have tainted the ability and confidence of the African American female to be considered high performers. African American females conform to silence as a strategy for getting ahead in class, because speaking out against discourse and practices was not viewed to be in their best interest (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Tonnesen (2013) argues that regardless of context; African American females are entitled to fair and just treatment, which includes protection. African American females possess a variety of skills and experiences that provide them with a multitude of ways of being unique (Epstein et al., 2017). There should not be limitations placed on set

expectations or demanded behaviors in order for African American females to be afforded equal access to educational opportunities (Epstein et al., 2017).

Hoang (2013) contends many people of color experience imposter phenomenon (IP) based on internal feelings which create limited success and achievement. Students who suffer from IP tend to believe they do not deserve to be successful and are anxious about being exposed resulting in self-criticism of their ability to perform in school. This phenomenon also creates a cycle of emotions, thoughts, and actions causing students to feel less qualified, average, and ineffective in environments where society tells them they do not belong (Hoang, 2013). Hoang (2013) also explains that IP can be fostered through interactions such as relationships and interaction with friends and family, which puts up a false front. Providing opportunities and space for students to be motivated with healthy dialogue could afford the type of support required to achieve (Hoang, 2013).

Restorative Interventions for At-Risk Youth

Legal remedies do not appear to exist for challenging what Fedders (2018) refers to as the new exclusion. Over the past 30 years, this new exclusion has led to an increase in out-of-school suspensions and provided states and schools districts an opportunity to push students into AEPs that effect graduations rates, unemployment, and juvenile criminal records (Fedders, 2018).

Many states and school districts are taking voluntary actions to make improvements to refine and implement non-exclusionary discipline (Fedders, 2018). Criticism from advocates have led many school districts to deviate from zero tolerance suspension policies, replacing them with policies granting administrators discretion whether to suspend students for a wide range of minor and subjective infractions while

other districts have designed restorative or meditation programs as a means of resolving conflict (Fedders, 2018).

A report by the American Bar Association and National Bar Association (2002): states:

As the number of girls in the justice system continues to climb, it is imperative that the organized bar, policymakers, and others ensure that in our quest to provide better services and programs for girls we do not inadvertently cast the net wider.... We must, therefore, ensure that communities and courts support an array of gender-specific community-based services and alternatives for girls....While it is true that some girls need to be in secure, confined settings, the vast majority of delinquent girls can be more appropriately dealt with in culturally competent, gender-specific programs that are developmentally sound. (p. 89)

Currently, effective interventions encourage the use of research-based programs, procedures, and activities related to discipline, structure, and teacher behavior to create a positive school environment, student connectedness and pro-social behavior (High, 2017; Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). Schiff (2018) defines restorative justice practices (RJP) not only as a strategy to address harm and build a positive culture in schools, but also as a movement with the potential to confront injustice and disrupt strategies organized from, and resulting in ongoing domination and oppression of marginalized groups. Although RJP first pioneered in Australia school settings, RJP has become increasingly popular in the U.S. to help reduce suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary referrals (Schiff, 2018).



Schiff (2018) explains the process for implementation as one that is multi-tiered requiring all students to receive core universal instruction and supports. The next tier is composed of targeted interventions and supports designed to address specific behaviors can disrupt classroom or school activities. The last tier, incident-driven conflict, is designed for a small number of students who may cause severe class or school disruptions such as fighting, bullying, vandalism, and theft (Schiff, 2018).

Tonnesen (2013) reasons African American females should be offered the same interventions and strategies as their peers at the discretion of prosecutors, who hold youth accountable for actions that avoid formal processing, leading to criminalization (Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2016). Schiff (2018) argues the benefits of RJP consist of giving voice to affected participants, engaging students and adults in collaborative problem solving, and encouraging participants to take personal responsibility. RJP allows those with a stake in the event to develop a strategic plan of agreements and amends to restore broken relationships and offers students a means to build empathy, earn redemption, and rebuild their dignity (Schiff, 2018).

On the other hand, Schiff (2018) explains implementation limits restorative justice through programs located within the auspices of state justice agencies. Another limitation of RJP derives from school policy decision-making being vested at the district level, but school-level administrators can exercise discretion to either support or sabotage district-level policy (Schiff, 2018). Implementation differs from school to school and from classroom to classroom due to insufficient training, not being comfortable with the subject or methods recommended, or the feeling of working against an entrenched culture perceives RJP as a soft response to misbehavior and rule violations (Schiff, 2018).

In order to cultivate quality learning environments in high-risk schools, it is paramount for schools to:

- protect the African American female from violence and victimization,
- be proactive in discussing healthy intimate relationships while also building strong, positive student-teacher relationships,
- seek an increased focus on higher levels of expectations in academic achievement,
- deemphasize inequitable discipline and surveillance,
- establish and create school-based wraparound services to support and enhance traumatic students,
- be consistent, fair and just in implementing credit recovery programs that allow the African American female to be challenged intellectually in any setting such as alternative learning environments, traditional schools, or community schools, and
- develop cross-system strategies for class management with interdisciplinary understanding (Blake et al., 2011; Morris, 2016).

Furthermore, Schiff (2018) suggests schools need a normative, holistic, restorative education creates just and equitable learning environments where all students and adults are acknowledged and accepted for who they are, irrespective of race, gender identity, or another cultural identity. By just and equitable environments, Schiff (2018) means to shift towards models that demand power of decision making, and accepting responsibility for the impacts of historical racial harm such as slavery reflected in the behavior of both students and adults.

Research has shown suspending students does not improve behavior (Fedders, 2018). There is hope the tide will turn and lead to retaining students rather than pushing out troubled students. States and school districts must commit to a vision and belief all students are deserving of the full promise of public education envisioned by common-school proponents (Fedders, 2018).

Wun (2016) expresses in order to understand school discipline policies and their impact, one should begin to reconsider how we think and judge discipline in schools by focusing on the dominant social order of everyday forms of discipline and punishment institutionalized into policies. Wun notes these policies are not only institutionalized, but also are ingrained in daily encounters of anti-Black racism. Sexton (as cited in Wun, 2016) summarizes anti-Black racism is a condition that positions young African American females as structurally vulnerable to layers of violence such as appropriation, and perpetual and involuntary openness, including all the free uses of her body. Discipline policies, suspensions, expulsions, referrals, and arrests are a part of the excess form of anti-Black punishment that must be recognized to enable the politics of liberation to support young African American women in resisting multiple forms and layers of anti-Black racism performed by their peers and society (Wun, 2016).

More importantly, the literature reviews have provided much insight on what types of interventions, programs, resources, and additional support is needed for African American females to be successful in any setting. It recommends stakeholders such as policymakers, organizations, schools, and communities to work collaboratively to reassess policies, interventions, and structures to ensure African American females are appropriately dealt with in a more culturally competent manner that fosters academic

success and restores relationships. The purpose is to not only reiterate the importance of developing the whole child as a human being but to also support and repair the harm caused by these policies (Morris, 2016).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed above revealed why African American females in learning environments are too often disciplined. History has shown this has been an ongoing concern since the early days of slavery (Epstein et al., 2017). The information obtained also noted other events such as school shootings have led to the development and adoption of zero tolerance policies, SROs, and the heightened need for metal detectors and surveillance (Wolf, 2014).

The review of the literature has shed light on why African American females are disproportionately represented in the juvenile system (Morris, 2016). Studies also indicated issues such as traumatic events, internalized gender oppression, biases, inexperienced teachers, and the community culture are all crucial factors that impact the African American female in school settings (Morris, 2016).

The literature also focused on what factors contribute to African American female students being overly suspended and expelled for minor infractions, which lead to a high disproportion gap in suspensions and expulsions compared to Caucasians, American Indians, Native Hawaiians, and Asians. The purpose of this study was to reveal to stakeholders the importance of collaborating with other constituents to gain multiple perspectives on how to stop the trend of criminalizing and marginalizing African American female student's learning and humanity (Morris, 2016). The purpose was not

only to reiterate the importance of developing the whole child as a human being but also to support and repair the harm that has been caused (Morris, 2016).

This study provided insight for public school educators to determine why African American female students are being disciplined in learning environments that are designed to prevent harm. It also examined the perceptions of African American female students, teachers, and administrators to expose their lived experiences. The hope was to bring awareness to underlying factors that lend to marginalization, and for policymakers to examine the findings and revisit policies and practices with the intent to recreate policies and practices that are equitable and age-appropriate.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Even though males are suspended in higher numbers than females overall, race and ethnicity are substantial risk factors for the African American female (CRDC, 2014). Data released by the U.S. Department of Education (2016) for the 2011–2012 school year revealed that while African American males were suspended more than three times as often as their Caucasian counterparts, and the African American female was suspended six times as often as theirs. Only 2% of Caucasian females were subjected to exclusionary suspensions in comparison to 12% of African American females. According to CRDC (2014), one of the most pressing problems with exclusionary discipline is 16% of African American students are suspended and expelled compared to 5% of Caucasian students.

Minor behavioral infractions at school have led to penal discipline for African American female students such as suspension, expulsion, and transferring to AEPs (Fedders, 2018; Morris, 2016). Although well-intentioned educators desire to provide support to these students, schools are lacking the staff, programs, and resources to address student needs (Heitzeg, 2014). Fedders (2018) explains this new exclusion has caused out-of-school suspensions to heighten over the past 30 years. It has been proven to be ineffective and in many cases causes more harm. Fedders (2018) argues this new exclusion provides states and schools districts the opportunity to push students into AEPs, which transfers into more pressing factors affecting graduations rates, unemployment, juvenile, and criminal records.

Arkansas' discipline data from 2008-2015 school years define minor, nonviolent infractions as disorderly conduct, insubordinations, and others. Minor violence and weapons infractions are defined as fighting, student assault, gang infractions, and

explosive infractions. Major nonviolent infractions are defined as bullying, tobacco, and vandalism. Major violence and weapon infractions are defined as club infractions, knife infractions, and staff assault. Then there are truancy infractions and drugs and alcohol infractions (OEP, 2018).

Fedders (2018) explain 17% of African American school children are suspended at least once compared with 5% of Caucasian school children. Also, suspensions are heavily concentrated in the South (Fedders, 2018). The author notes of the 1.2 million African American students suspended in K-12 schools, 55% transpired in 13 southern states resulting in 50% of African American students being expelled from public schools in the United States (Fedders, 2018). A qualitative study with a phenomenological research design was utilized to determine the factors leading to disparity among ethnic groups and solutions to the problems.

This study provided insight for public school educators to determine why African American female students are being disciplined in learning environments that are designed to prevent harm. It also examined the perceptions of African American female students to expose their lived experiences. The hope was to bring awareness to underlying factors that lead to marginalization, and for policymakers to examine the findings and revisit policies and practices with the intent to recreate policies and practices that are equitable and age- appropriate.

The central area of this study was to provide an understanding of why the African American female student is being pushed out of learning environments in public schools. The literature reviewed above revealed why African American females in learning environments are too often disciplined. The articles have shed light on why

African American females are disproportionately represented in the juvenile system. Studies also indicated issues such as traumatic events, internalized gender oppression, biases, inexperienced teachers, and the community culture are all crucial factors that impact the African American female. More importantly, the literature reviews have provided much insight on what types of interventions, programs, resources, and additional support is needed for African American females to be successful in any setting. It recommends stakeholders such as policymakers, organizations, schools, and communities to work collaboratively to reassess policies, interventions, and structures to ensure African American females are appropriately dealt with in a more culturally competent manner that fosters academic success and restores relationships.

Research Design

The participants selected for this study were African American female students in tenth through twelfth grade from three school districts in Eastern Arkansas, geographically referred to as the Delta region. Superintendents of the three districts were contacted via email, with one resulting in a face-to-face conversation before being approved to contact school administrators. The researcher made phone contact with school administrators at each chosen campus to get recommendations for participants who represent a variety of discipline infractions. Each participant was contacted in person, and their parent/guardian was contacted by phone, or by social media to explain the purpose of the study and, if agreeable, to set up a time and place for interviews.

In order to interpret the lived experiences of each participant, an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized. IPA allows multiple participants who have experienced similar events to share stories without any distortions and prosecutions

(Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Phenomenology was first conducted by Husserl (as cited by Alase, 2017) as a way to gain a deeper understanding of lived experiences of people and their experiences. Smith et al. (2009) proposed IPA is a double positional role for the researcher, which is like the participant for drawing on human resources to make sense of the world; and, not like the participant resulting in having access to the participant's experiences through what is reported, and viewed through the researcher's experimental lens.

Creswell (2013) also stated the participants' lived experiences are what helps and guides many of these qualitative approaches to make sense of their research analysis.

However, Smith et al. (2009) state:

The suggestions for narrative analysis present a general template for qualitative researchers. In contrast, in phenomenology, there have been specific, structured methods of analysis advanced.” And this advancement by Moustakas is to give phenomenological researchers added advantage in their data analysis (pp. 11-12).

The nature of conducting an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research study with homogenous participants is to get a better understanding of the overall perceptions among the participants' lived experiences (Alase, 2017). Additionally, Creswell (2013) stated “it is essential that all participants have similar lived experience of the phenomenon being studied” (p.155).

Setting

High School One serves 796 students in grades 9-12 (ADE, 2018). Minority enrollment is 34% of the student body with a student population of 524 Caucasians, 247

African Americans, 20 Hispanics, three Asian Americans, and two students with two or more races (ADE, 2018). This school's female population is 388 (approximately 49% of the student body; ADE, 2018). High School Two serves 693 students in grades 9 through 12 (ADE, 2018). Minority enrollment is 91% with a student population of 622 African Americans, 60 Caucasians, five Hispanics, and three Native Americans (ADE, 2018). The population for female students is 361 (approximately 52% of the student body; ADE, 2018). High School Three serves 911 students in grades 10 through 12 (ADE, 2018). Minority enrollment is 54% of the student body with a student population of 439 African Americans, 415 Caucasians, 45 Hispanics, six Asians, four Native Americans, and two with two or more races (ADE, 2018). The female student population is 459 (approximately 50% of the student body; ADE, 2018).

Table 1

Disproportionate Impact in Three Districts for African American Students

Districts	Total District Enrollment	Total District Suspensions	Percentage of African American Enrollment	Percentage of African American Suspensions	Disproportionate Impact
District of High School One	2819	234	30.2%	57.3%	1.9X
District of High School Two	3123	602	82.0%	88.0%	1.1X
District of High School Three	4235	926	45.5%	72.2%	1.7X

Table 1 reveals the disproportionate impact for each of the three districts. The data indicate African American students are over-suspended relative to their enrollment in the district's schools (Smith & Harper, 2015). Although all sites have a low disproportionate rate in discipline, a report by Smith and Harper (2015) indicated 18,185

African American students were suspended from Arkansas' K-12 public schools in a single academic year. African Americans were 21% of the students in school districts across the state but comprised 50% of suspensions and 33% expulsions (Smith & Harper, 2015).

Table 2

Suspension Rates in Three High Schools for African American Students

Schools	African American Student Population	Suspension Rates	Number of African American Students Suspended (rounded to the nearest whole number)
High School One	247	57.3%	141
High School Two	622	75%	466
High School Three	439	100%	439

Table 2 indicates the number of African American students enrolled in each of the three high schools along with the number of African American students who have been suspended and the suspension rate in each high school. High School Three has a 100% suspension rate which means virtually every African American student in the school has been suspended. However, that was not verified in the data. The data do not account for students with multiple suspensions (OEP, 2018).

Table 3

Number of Days Missed for Out-Of-School Suspensions in Three High Schools

Schools	School Population	Female Population	Days Missed by	Days Missed
			African Am. Females	by Caucasian Females
High School One	796	388	80	80
High School Two	693	622	813	46
High School Three	911	439	180	62

Table 3 explains the number of school days' African American female students missed verses their Caucasian counterparts in the three high schools. According to the data, the number of days missed for an out-of-school suspension was equal for African American female students and Caucasian female students in High School One. The data revealed that High School Two witnessed a large increase in days missed for out-of-school suspension for African American females in comparison to Caucasian female students. High School Three days missed for out-of-school suspension were about three times the days missed for Caucasian female students (CRDC, 2014).

Context of the Study

The study was conducted in three school districts within Eastern Arkansas, often referred to as 'the Delta.' According to the Encyclopedia of Arkansas Mississippi Alluvial Plain data (2018), The Delta is a region with 16 counties traveling along the Mississippi River from Blytheville in the north, to Eudora in the south. As a result of urbanization and the shift to farm mechanization, many people have followed jobs out of the region. This exodus has caused a decrease in tax support for education, infrastructure

development, community health, and other vital aspects of growth. The result is the people who have remained in the Delta suffer from unemployment and extreme poverty (Encyclopedia of Arkansas Mississippi Alluvial Plain, 2018).

This qualitative, phenomenological study captured perceptions concerning discipline policies and practices affecting African American female students in tenth through twelfth grade. Students were interviewed using semi-structured, open-ended questions designed to answer one central question: *What are the perceived factors contributing to the high disproportion gap indicated in student discipline data pertaining to the African American female in public schools?*

This study sought to identify supports critical to restoring the relationship between African American female students and school leaders. It intended to examine why African American female students are being disciplined in learning environments designed to prevent harm. It also examined the perceptions of African American female students to expose their lived experiences. It was determined a qualitative approach was the most appropriate design to answer the research question by allowing the researcher to describe in-depth, the perceptions and thoughts expressed by students concerning the disproportionate rate of suspensions and expulsions for African American female students.

Instrumentation

The purpose of using a qualitative research design was to explore the nature and extent to which practice has a constructive impact on individuals in schools (Patton, 2015). Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted to allow maximum use of ideas, thoughts, and memories in the participants' own words rather than the

researcher's words (Patton, 2015). The purpose of using interviews to collect data was to capture how those participants viewed their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their perceptions and experiences (Patton, 2015). The semi-structured questions were carefully worded and arranged to take each participant through the same sequence of questions to provide comparability across sites (Patton, 2015).

The primary data sources utilized were semi-structured, open-ended interview questions created from a study on *The Perceptions of Alternative Education Students Ages 18-21 About the Factors in the Traditional School Setting that Inhibited Their On-Time High School Graduation* (Hursey, 2017). Contact with Hursey was made to obtain permission to base the interview protocol on that instrument. Hursey (2017) developed the questionnaire based on literature in three areas: environmental/social, family, and student at-risk factors. The data collected from the participants was recorded digitally and then transcribed. The narrative data obtained from these interviews served as the primary source of data for the study (See Appendix I).

Questions were asked of each participant to gain trust and to create a positive culture for honest, meaningful dialogue separately from the influence of the other participants. An 'interview protocol' developed by Asmussen and Creswell (1995) was also implemented. This protocol, according to Creswell (2013), allows a "person to take notes during the interview about the response of the interviewee" (p. 168). It also helps a researcher "to organize thoughts on items such as headings, information about starting the interview, concluding ideas, information on ending the interview..." (Alase, 2017, p. 13).

Students were given a consent form to be signed a parent or guardian. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to maintain confidentiality. Units of data were gleaned from the transcripts as representative of their “lived experiences.” The study was deemed to be one of minimal risk to participants, and the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research was not any higher than any ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Data Collection

The first phase of the research study was to receive authorization from the Arkansas Tech University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to begin collecting data (See Appendix J). Obtaining permission from the superintendent of schools and the administrators in each of the three school districts was the next phase (See Appendix A-G).

A purposive sampling procedure was employed to identify participants especially knowledgeable or experienced with the phenomenon being studied. In this case, African American female students who have been suspended for various reasons by the schools (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). From these three schools, 11 participants were selected based on similar lived experiences in terms of having been suspended or expelled from school at some point in their high school years. The researcher worked with the administrators of these high schools to identify suitable participants met the design criteria. The students were then contacted and invited to participate, with parental consent. Participants needed 30 minutes to fill out consent forms and demographic profiles; 30 minutes to an hour for individual interviews. The interviews were conducted in private settings at their school or in local restaurants.

Creswell (2012) suggested “when selecting participants for a study, it is important to determine the size of the sample you will need” (p. 146). Likewise, in phenomenological research design, the number of participants can be between two and 25. The selection of these participants should reflect and represent the homogeneity that exists among the participants’ sample pool (Creswell, 2012).

Bracketing

The role of the qualitative researcher is to explore and maximize the potential of collecting data relevant to the problem under review (Alase, 2017). In order to capture the nature of a valid research investigation, the researcher needs to be bracketed from the issue under investigation. Moustakas (as cited in Alase, 2017) explains the researcher must avoid biases and preconceived ideas about what they are trying to understand. While all researchers have biases, they can equally say as Polkinghorne (1989) stated in his book, “I understand better [now] what it is like for someone to experience that” (p. 46). As a research tradition that is interpretive, interpersonal, and interactive, the qualitative research approach, IPA, provides many features that can help equip researchers with a rich abundance of data insight and add holistic flavor to the stories being heard from the participants (Alase, 2017).

Rapport

Smith et al. (2009) express the most important thing a researcher must do at the beginning of the interview process is to establish a rapport with the participants to create an atmosphere that is comfortable and full of trust. The IPA interview process is one that requires the researcher to learn how to put the participants at ease when asking them about their lived experiences (Alase, 2017).

Data Analysis

Butina (2015) explains qualitative data analysis is the “process of making sense out of the data” by submerging in the data and combining the data with a focus on the segments providing insight into the research questions (p.192). Comparing segments to discover themes in the data is the next phase of the process resulting in the interpretation of what was said. The result of this process, Butina (2015) explains, is the meanings and understandings that become the findings within the study.

Butina (2015) asserts there are several benefits to a narrative approach in a qualitative study: (a) humans are natural storytellers, (b) gathering in-depth data provides rich, thick descriptions, and (c) participants usually reveal themselves in their stories. For example, Patton (as cited in Butina, 2015) states,

if you want to know how much a person weighs then you conduct a quantitative research study and collect numerical data, but if you want to understand what their weight means to them then you must conduct a qualitative research study to learn about their experiences and hear their stories. (p.191)

McAdams (as cited in Butina, 2015) explains narrative identity as:

Stories we construct to make sense of our lives are fundamentally about our struggle to reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and bodies with who we were, are, and might be in the social contexts of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, and culture writ large. (p.191)

Narrative analysis has four approaches in qualitative research studies: narrative, thematic analysis, structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis, and visual narrative analysis

(Butina, 2015). Narrative thematic analysis is the approach utilized, for it has a primary focus on the content in the text (Butina, 2015). The five stages Butina (2015) describes are (a) organization and preparation of the data, (b) obtaining a general sense of the information, (c) the coding process, (d) categories or themes, and (e) interpretation of the data.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of collected data was maintained at all times. All participants had code numbers in the order of the initial interviews. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Some quantitative data were gathered, from the Arkansas Department of Data Center and the OEP. These data provided information on school demographics, as well as discipline infractions for African American females and other students, mainly associated with suspensions, expulsions, minor infractions, and infractions reported by School Resource Officers (SROs).

Data Security

Alase (2017) suggested the following measures for securing and safeguarding the research data from outsiders; deletion of any video and audio recorded information after it has been transcribed for added protection of the participants, and provide a safe file storage system for the data through the use of protected passwords (Alase, 2017).

Trustworthiness

Creswell (2013) explains there are eight procedures for verifying qualitative research findings. He urges researchers to utilize at least two of the eight procedures in any research: (a) prolonged engagement and persistent observation; (b) triangulation; (c)

peer review and debriefing; (d) negative case analysis; (e) clarification of researcher bias, (f) member checking; (g) rich, thick description; and (h) external audit.

Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, and Neville (2014) explain qualitative research triangulation refers to the use of several methods of data sources to understand phenomena. In this study, to add to the trustworthiness of the data, triangulation was utilized through the use of interview data and descriptive statistics related to student suspensions and expulsions. In addition to triangulation, member checking was used by providing each participant with a copy of the narrative transcripts of their responses to review for accuracy and approval for use in the study (Creswell, 2013). Participants were given 48 hours to review the transcripts and provide any feedback.

Researcher Positionality

Husserl (as cited in Hopkins, Regehr & Pratt, 2017) explains in order to study the essence of something, to expose the true essence of people's experiences, researchers refrain from their pre-understandings and focus on the research participants' experience. Hopkins et al. (2017) also note that putting aside one's pre-understandings is also commonly called phenomenological reduction, meaning the field of the researcher's attention is reduced to the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, Hopkins et al. (2017) state:

the putting aside of our pre-understandings allows us to be open to learning about something through the experience of others, rather than turning to what we already know. In this sense, bracketing is an attempt to objectify research findings and increase scientific rigor, positioning the researcher as a detached observer. (p. 22)

I am an African American female educator who spends a great deal of time working with African American female students in school settings. I have also been afforded the opportunity to run an Alternative Learning Environment (ALE) program in which the culture was chaotic because it is assumed students are to be viewed as prisoners and should not be granted a second chance for decisions made at very young ages. I have been a leader who has been the voice for ALE students as they embark on second chances with their respective campuses. I have also been a leader who has had to suspend or recommend expulsion of African American female students.

I also have lived experiences as a student in a rural school possessing a heightened racial bias, for my predominately African American school district I attended in early elementary school consolidated with a predominantly Caucasian school district during my fifth-grade year. During my experiences in high school, the police presence was mandated by the superintendent to promote the safety and well-being of all students. I have also experienced being suspended for defending myself as a high school student.

The reader should understand my life story in relation to this study and know I have biases. I have made concerted effort to let the participants tell their story in their own voices and refrained from letting my own history cloud my interpretations. The reader will have to make the determination of how successful I was in this effort.

Conclusion

In Chapter Three a description of methods and procedures were used to obtain and process data were explained. The purpose of qualitative research was also explained. The research design, setting, instrumentation, and data analysis were detailed. The process for choosing participants was also clarified. The importance of building a

rapport and bracketing all bias was explained and defined. The method for utilizing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was stated with support from multiple researchers. My role as a researcher was articulated carefully to provide valuable insight into the data analysis process. Chapter Four includes a presentation of the data and Chapter Five contains an analysis of the data, conclusions, recommendations for implementing effective restorative programs of intervention, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate why African American female students are being pushed out of learning environments in public schools. By using a phenomenological design, it was hoped the lived experiences of these African American female students provided more information as to why this is occurring across the nation. In addition, this study attempted to answer the central question: *According to the “lived experiences” of African American female students in Arkansas, what are the perceived factors contributing to the disproportionate number of African American female students receiving serious disciplinary consequences in public schools?*

In this chapter, I reported the demographic profiles and summarized narratives of each of the 11 African American female students who participated in this study. A profile chart, listing the participants’ pseudonym, age, number of persons in the household, and their parent/guardians’ highest level of education preceded the profile and narrative. Each participant had to complete the demographic profile before the face-to-face interview. The information from the demographic profile was later recorded. The demographic profile, description, and narratives were collected using open-ended questions, handwritten field notes, and a demographic questionnaire. The data were transcribed no later than a week after the interview had taken place. The interviews ranged in length from 25 minutes to 55 minutes. In this chapter, I presented a summarized narrative that includes a description of the location and environment of the interview setting, a synopsis of the participant’s parent/guardians highest level of education, along with brief excerpts that provided a glimpse into the lived experiences of each participant. I also explained the

emerging themes and subthemes from the interviews. Table 4 provides a list of the study participants.

Table 4

Study Participants' Demographic Profile

Name	Grade Level	Age	# of People in Household	Mother's Highest Education Level	Father's Highest Education Level	Held a Job or Currently Holds a Job
Hope	12 th	18	3	Some College	Unknown	Held Job
Kay	12 th	18	1	Dropped out 12 th grade	HS graduate	Currently Works
Da'Lani	12 th	17	2	College Graduate	HS graduate	No Job
Cherry	11 th	16	3	2-year college graduate	Unknown	No job
Cateria	12 th	17	2	College Graduate	Dropped out 11 th grade	No job
Miracle	12 th	17	3	College graduate	Dropped out 9 th grade	Held Job
Nicole	11 th ,12 th	17	3	Dropped out 10 th grade	Incarcerated	No job
Marie	10 th	16	5	Unknown	Unknown	No job
Judy	10 th ,11 th	17	4	Dropped out 10 th grade	Unknown	Currently Works
Amber	10 th	16	6	HS graduate	Dropped out	Held job
Layla	12 th	17	3	Dropped out 10 th grade	Dropped out 11 th grade	Currently works

Summative Narratives of Each Participant

Hope. A participant referred to as Hope was identified as a possible participant by the researcher and administrator because she met the criteria for the study after reviewing discipline data. After reviewing the demographic profile information and learning about the purpose of the study, she agreed to participate. After Hope agreed to participate, contact was made to her parent for consent. After the parent consented, the interview

was scheduled for November 20, 2018, at 11:30 a.m. The interview lasted 30 minutes, and it took place at an ALE campus in a counselor's office space.

Hope is classified as a senior, who was expected to have graduated from her high school last year. She is 18 years of age, and she had previously held a summer job at a local food restaurant but is no longer employed at the time of the interview. In Hope's younger years, she lived with her grandmother and grandpa after her uncle had passed away. Her grandparents had a small three-bedroom home that had to be expanded so her two other siblings on her Mother's side of the family could also live there. In the past five years, she had moved to live with her Mother and Step-Father, who is African. Hope's Mother attended some college but dropped out after a time and began working in home health, where she met Hope's Step-Father. Hope also has nine siblings on her Father's side of the family with which she has a close relationship.

Further, in the conversation, Hope expressed how the community where she lived is quiet and has a lot of "old people" living in the area. She explained you could walk around and ask for things and the neighbors would give it to you if they had it. Hope also explained how the guns and violence in the community sometimes came into the school setting. She recalled, "whatever is going on out there is going on in here, too. If you get to fighting in the streets, it's going to come to the school. You get to arguing, it's going to come to school." When I asked if the guns and violence had impacted the way she feels about the community, Hope smiled and laughed saying, "I love the city." She explained she likes the city and the school, because it is easier to do the schoolwork, although there is drama from time to time. She went further to say, "the high school is terrible." High school is where Hope began to explore and hang with the wrong people influenced her.

Because of the people she hung with, she ended up being placed in an ALE. She recalled,

...well, when I started hanging out, it was people that I was hanging with that I shouldn't be hanging with. And, you know, they graduated and stuff. You know, they out of school now, and I'm still here an extra year. I got to wait. I'm a year behind, and that's why they have me out here. If I could start over I would, because girl- (laughs). It's just so much, like, you know, ... your family, you know, they got negative stuff to say like ... it's just messed up.

Hope expressed her family was always saying negative things. This statement led to the discussion of home support. Hope explained she did not feel she had any support at home. She went further to say,

My Momma, she always at work, and when she at home, we argue a lot. I mean, they be like, you know, go to school. You gonna graduate, but it ain't support-support. Like, when they come to, you know, school, when you get your grades and, you know, they honor you or the game ... we had a softball game ... they don't come. Nobody comes. Ain't no support.

Hope mentioned her relationship with her Mom just recently started getting better because she has gotten older and realizes her mom was right.

Hope also shared her best memories of elementary school and after elementary school. She specifically mentioned how she had a teacher who influenced her to read because she did not like to read at a young age. The more the teacher gave her attention, she began to read and became the top Accelerated Reader in her grade level. Even after

she had been promoted to a higher-grade level, Hope would still go to visit the teacher and also help clean the reading carpets. Hope recalls a situation where the teacher impacted her behavior in elementary school. Hope recalled,

I used to be an attention ... When I was younger, I used to be an attention seeker. Like I used to always want attention. I used to try to be the jokester in class. And she'd be like, you can't do that. That's not cute. You know, young ladies, act like young ladies, you know? You can laugh when it's funny, but you know, just don't go all out. And Coach, he told me like how to control my anger. Like I used to be just mad. When I was younger, it didn't- it didn't take much for me to get mad.

When we discussed Hope's most negative experiences in school, she shared one separate event transpired during her adolescent years as a seventh grader in school. Hope shared,

when I was goin' to school, I was hangin' out with these girls. Like they was bad, they was bad, bad. I was in the seventh grade, and then when I came in here, I had to- I had to repeat the seventh grade again. So, when I was down there, you know, they fight ... I'm-I'm-you know, I'm a friend. Like it's my friend. You know, if I see my friend fightin' ... I used to be like that. Like if I see my friend, I'm gonna help my friend cause I used to think I needed friends. You know, I used to try to be too good of a friend and try to jump in they mess or, you know, help them fight and just cause a problem that's not my problem. I had that really, really bad. And so, that's really what got me juiced.

As the conversation shifted to Hope's lived experiences of race and discipline in school, Hope at first stated she had never really had to deal with racism because most of her teachers were African American in elementary school. On the other hand, there was a lived experience in elementary school with a Caucasian student, whom she liked as a boyfriend but told her he could not be her boyfriend any longer. As time progressed, the Caucasian student began to tell Hope what his Father had explained to him, "White go with White and Black go with Black, and that he couldn't be my boyfriend anymore." As the conversation went on, Hope recalled a situation with a teacher in her current setting she considered racist. She described an experience with an online course instructor muting the African American students while answering the Caucasian students in the chat groups. It was not until the students began conversing amongst themselves and sharing grades; they all began to realize the online instructor's treatment was different towards the minority students in the online course.

Hope shared more lived experiences that encouraged and discouraged her from performing well in school. She also shared the reason why she had been transferred into an ALE setting:

...well, at the high school, it can be a good high school sometimes, but sometimes, in, in the morning, I'd be like, I don't wanna go to school, because you got some people, they wanna pick with you 'cause they know you gonna get a reaction. When I was at the high school, there was this one girl, like she just used to pick on me for no reason. I didn't know why she- like she bigger than me. Like she's like a dude, like I don't know why

she didn't like me. Like we actually fought. I was- I was like, Okay, you wanna fight? Let's fight.

Hope stated she had been in at least 15 fights. Hope went further to share her current environment, ALE, does not prevent her from being in trouble. She recalled,

I'm not gonna say my environment right now is keepin' me out of trouble.

Because not too long ago, I got into an altercation with a girl. Her and her friends jumped me. They grown though. Like her and her friend's grown.

Well, this girl, it, they cousins really.

Hope's only reason for not pursuing revenge with the girls that fought her is because of her administrator reminding her the goal is to graduate this year, and if she chose to fight, she would not graduate. Hope expressed how her administrator has helped her in learning not to allow others to control her and her emotions.

As far as needing other support, academically, socially, or athletically, Hope stated she does not feel she needed anything else in her current setting. She expressed, "Um, I don't feel like I need anything. I feel like I'm doin' good. I am right now by myself. Like I got friends but not a lot, like I got like four just close friends, but I don't even trust people anymore."

Kay. Kay is an 18-year-old student-adult in an ALE program. She is classified as a twelfth-grade senior. She learned about the study from a previous participant. She informed her administrator she was interested in participating in the study. After I met with Kay to review her demographic profile to determine if she was indeed eligible to be a possible participant in the study, I explained the purpose of the study. Kay still agreed to participate. The interview was scheduled for November 20, 2018, at 12: 25 p.m.

The interview took place during Kay's lunch period. There was a tap on the door to deliver her lunch, which she immediately turned down. I intervened and urged her to eat something. I offered her my Lifesavers® Gummies. She agreed to eat those as we talked about her lived experiences. The interview lasted about 21 minutes. We met in the school counselor's office. I moved the furniture around, two chairs, and a small rectangular table, to ensure the participants were comfortable with sharing their experiences face-to-face since the office was adjacent to the cafeteria. It was a challenge to remain focused due to the noise level and the aroma of food lingering in the air.

Kay began the interview by explaining her home life. When asked if she was reared in a one-parent household or two-parent household, Kay replied, "back and forth." She went on to share she sometimes lived with her Dad and sometimes lived with her Mom in the Projects. Kay at the time of the interview had been living on her own and working at a local food restaurant to provide for herself. Kay has five female siblings on her Mother's side of the family, and she has 14 siblings on her Father's side of the family. Her Mother was a 12th-grade dropout, and her Father graduated high school. Kay shared, "Um, my Momma, she went to the 12th grade, but she dropped out because, well, nobody would babysit my sisters. My Daddy graduated high school."

In describing where Kay grew up, she explained she grew up in two different areas. She described one area as,

... Um, when I'm with my momma, we in the Projects, you know. Like, people that ain't got it. They really ain't got it. They just living check to check, or from like off the government, or whatever. When I'm with my

dad, like suburbs. Well, you see the same stuff, but like my daddy, he got more money, so he's like ... feel me?"

Kay explained growing up in these areas "made me want more; they made me wanna go to school, and have more. Somewhere to go... where I'll get away from it, um, like this life. Drugs, drama, a lot of stuff."

Kay felt she received very little support from her Mother. She explained how she was never home and rarely saw her. Furthermore, her Mother did not have a job. She lived off of a "first of the month check." Dad, on the other hand, supported Kay a lot more than her Mother did. Kay explained although Dad provided for her, she never wanted to live with him. She shared, "I feel like.... I believe my Momma would struggle alone. So I was gonna stay with my Momma."

We shifted the dialogue to sharing lived experiences of Kay's best memories of elementary school and after elementary school. Kay recalled she loved the class parties the most. She went on to explain she has attended three different elementary schools, and the best memories out of all were the parties, especially Valentine's day with the cards. She expressed how she missed those days, and "we didn't do that no more (laughs). I wanna go back."

When I asked about her best memories after elementary school, Kay's response was, "uh, well I-I've been in and out of trouble, so I really didn't even like get the chance to enjoy my high school years."

Kay shared several negative experiences. She recalls her most negative experience occurred during her ninth-grade year. She explained it was her "biggest regret" because it led to expulsion due to officials saying the fight was gang-related. Kay

shared it was not even her fight. She was helping a friend. Another lived experience Kay regrets is being caught with paraphernalia while on school premises. As a result, she was expelled and was unable to graduate that year, which is why she is currently placed in an ALE setting.

Kay's last lived experience was during her eighth-grade year. She recalled, "my eighth-grade year, I feel like that was a racist thing." Kay explained a special needs student sexually assaulted her as she walked to the class. As a result of the inappropriate gesture, she hit the student. An investigation was conducted. The findings were the incident did not happen and officials could not make out what happened on the video recording. She explained several other students had also witnessed the incident, but she was found guilty of hitting a special needs student and received a harsh punishment of expulsion. She described the teacher and principal as "White." She explained it was her first experience with racism in school.

The dialogue changed to sharing lived experiences that encouraged and discouraged Kay to perform well in school. Kay's voice began to change when we began discussing what encouraged her to perform well now in her current school setting. She recalled,

Well, my brother, he got ... uh, I have four brothers who died. But my brother who just died, he raised me. Like cause, you know, growing up my momma wasn't around, and I didn't wanna go with my daddy. So like, like he raised me. And like when he died, I was like, I can't. I gotta get myself together.

Kay mentioned all four of her brothers had been killed due to gang-related activity. She took that situation and turned it into a positive. She described the importance of getting her life on track so her nieces and nephews, who no longer have a Father can have a role model. Kay is “striving hard for them.” She does not want her nieces and nephews to grow up with similar experiences like their Father and her. Kay also expressed how her “graduating is gonna prove a lot of people wrong. It's gonna prove me wrong too, cause I doubted myself too.” Kay also mentioned one Caucasian female administrator had a major impact on her life and helped her stay focused. She explained,

...she ain't give up on me, and she believed in me when nobody else did. When I didn't even believe in myself. ‘Cause I was at ... what really woke me up is when I got, when I got expelled last year. I can't keep running with the same people. She didn't give up on me even though she knows I'm really behind.

As we wrapped up the interview, Kay asked me about my experiences and where I had grown up. That conversation led me to discover Kay had several goals to attain in life. One of her goals is to graduate from high school. I shared I was a teen mother. She expressed, “Uh, ama be the first outta all my sisters, I'm gonna be the first one to graduate. Cause like all three of my older sisters dropped out of school ‘cause they were pregnant. Yes, ama be the first to graduate.” She noted she wanted to go to the military, go on to college, and to become a probation officer and a motivational speaker.

Judy. Judy is a participant who has lived experiences of being suspended and arrested three times in a regular school setting. This participant is a 17-year-old student

classified as a 10th and 11th grader. At the time of the interview, she had a job at a local food restaurant. When I first began to search for possible participants, Judy's administrator informed me she would be a great participant for my study. Also, there was a concern about how she had struggled with respecting adults in authority and had an issue with controlling her thoughts. I met with Judy, and she immediately agreed to participate in the study. The interview was scheduled for December 4, 2018, at 11:40 A.M. in an ALE setting.

When I walked in the building to meet with participants, Judy approached me asking, "Are you coming to see me so we can talk?" I nodded in agreement. She was so happy to talk freely about her lived experiences. Her mother also gave consent to the interview. The interview lasted about 27 minutes inside a classroom full of natural lighting from the windows. The interview had begun with her living conditions. She shared she grew up in a one-parent household between two different houses- her Mother's and Grandmother's house. She also shared her Mother's highest level of education was the tenth grade. Her Father's highest level of education was unknown. She informed me she did not know much about her Father, because "he just be in and out the system- jail."

In regards to Judy's lived experiences of the neighborhood and the impact it had on her schooling, Judy expressed she "grew up in a rough neighborhood – the Projects." She recalled "where I grew up; you've got to be tough. You can't let nobody talk to you no kind of way. Some parts in the Projects, you show respect to the elders. Even when you know you wrong you still show respect."

She explained growing up in that type of environment, impacted her and she had to be tough to get through it. “You've got to show that you're not afraid of them. Some students, they take advantage of you, and think you're not going to say nothing back.” Judy explained her support at home was not very structured. She could come and go as she pleased. She informed her Mother or Grandmother she would be back later and would not be staying overnight with anyone.

The interview shifted to the lived experiences of Judy's best and most negative memories of elementary and after elementary school. Judy recalled her most negative experiences were in junior high and high school settings, which led to her arrest for disorderly conduct. Judy explained she

... was talking back to the teacher and cussing. She thought she was right about the classroom ... I told her like ... everybody knew I was right about it. I asked her one simple question, and she got an attitude, and I'm like, It's right here on the paper. And she thought I was getting smart with her and she called the police down there to the room, and he arrested me.

Another altercation was from a boy who spat in her face, which led to a fight. Her last negative encounter led to her being suspended from her current ALE setting. She shared

...last year when I was here in the 10th grade I got in trouble for smoking. The teacher said I was smoking on school property, and it wasn't really on school property. I came to school smelling like weed but I really wasn't, I was at home smoking.

The conversation changed to discuss discipline received and whether Judy thought she was targeted, because of her race. She explained she did not feel her discipline was unfair at times. She explained in one class

... no White kid gets in trouble in class during our period. It was just only Black folks. Like she would call our names and we don't do nothing. She'd get mad. Sometimes I deserved it, but the other times I don't. Like she would tell me to get out for no reason. Like there was no reason. I don't mean to be tripping though. I would barely learn, she would write me up and everything 'cause I would just ask her questions. So I was just say I ain't coming back to your class no more."

Judy also shared her concern with being targeted by her race,

... it don't just be White, it be Black, too. I got an experience with a Black teacher she was always on the White person's side. I be like dang, that's kind of bogus because they White and you should be on my side

Judy shared the lived experiences that landed her in ALE were due to lack of attendance in school. She explained her Mother had left Judy and her siblings while attending a rehabilitation center for drugs. This caused her to live with her Grandmother. There was no consistent transportation to get her to and from school. As a result, she had decided in order to finish school and not repeat a grade; ALE was the best placement for her at the time.

Judy also shared her current ALE setting had not been as successful. Just that morning she had gotten into trouble for her language with a teacher. She recalled,

... I told him he got me effed up. And he wrote me up. I don't care you can write me up all you want to. Ain't nobody talking about my best friend behind her back. There's certain stuff that you keep to yourself.

Amber. Amber is a 16-year-old participant, who has many lived experiences with being suspended in her high school setting. Amber was not an original participant for my study. I discovered Amber and another participant through conversations with possible participants and other adults in the school setting. My first round of possible participants were identified by the school leader was not eligible for my study. Not one of the girls had experienced being in school suspended, out of school suspended, or expelled. They had never been in trouble, and only two had received detention for being tardy to class and for losing their school name badge. When I learned about more possible participants, I reached out to the leader to assist me in making contact. I was given Amber's email address to make contact, because like another participant in the study, Amber had been suspended during the time I came to visit the campus. Almost two weeks had gone by without no response to my email. I had to contact the leaders again for support in making contact. As a result, I did not receive a response from the leaders. I then used social media to develop a relationship with the participant. I sent a message via Facebook Messenger, and Amber immediately made contact with me. She expressed an interest in participating in the study and provided me with her parent contact information. After I received parent consent, the interview was scheduled on December 7, 2018, at 3:30 P.M. at a local food restaurant in Amber's local town. The interview lasted about 20 minutes in length.

Amber grew up in a one-parent household with five other siblings and her mother. She is classified as a tenth grader. Her Mother's highest level of education was a high school diploma. Her Father dropped out of school. Amber explained her home life is one that requires her to stay home a lot because everyone leaves. She expressed,

... everybody leave the house. I'm the type of sister that I won't ... You've got to stay home with the baby, and I don't want to just because everybody's younger than me. I can't go nowhere because I'm stuck now, I've got the baby. I got to stay now. They be gone all night.

Amber felt she had no support at home, which is one reason she had a job to help take care of herself, and to try to help her mother out from time to time. The neighborhood she grew up in was considered "the country." She explained it was boring, but there was always something going on in the streets preventing her from going out to play as a young child.

Amber explained her most negative memories of school with,

... the teachers. It's a lot of favoritism. When I catch on to it, sometimes I be saying stuff to the teachers, and sometimes stuff I say I should've got in trouble, but they know it's wrong so they don't say nothing back. Usually I just let it go.

She shared one specific lived experience happened the day of the interview:

... I was in class.... She said, "Put your phones away." There's a group of White people that sit by they self, and there's a group of Black people, which is me, and I sit with them. She was like, we're not supposed to be on our phones anyways, but she said, "Put your phones up and complete your

work first." They didn't even have their work done and they phone was still out. She looked at me and said, "I asked you to put your phone up. If I see that again, you get detention." I looked at her like; I said, "So you're telling me you don't see them over there on they phones?" She said, "Yeah, I see them." "Is their work done?" She said, "Oh, no, they haven't did any work." So they hadn't did any work and I hadn't did any work, so you're telling me, you're not telling them to put their phone away? I said, "You know what? I'm not putting my phone up." I kept it up the whole class period."

Amber went on to say,

I feel like we all should get treated the same. We tell everybody to put their phone up, and some White people don't listen. It's not fair. You should tell everyone to put their phone up, give them the same as the other kids, so I feel like I should keep my phone out.

We shifted the conversation to the impact race had on the discipline received in the school setting. Amber shared a family member's lived experience she felt was unfair and unjust. She explained,

... I know one situation where it was a few years ago, my cousin. Some White boys had tried to hang him in school. The same boys that did that was suspended, but they came right back to that school, that same year, and graduated. But if it would have been a different color, which is us, we would've been expelled from the whole school year. If we brought a gun, anything. We would've got expelled for the whole school year.

When we discussed what supports were needed in her school setting, Amber suggested that “there be some Black teachers in the building. There aren’t any Black teachers unless they subs (substitutes).”

As the interview ended, there was one thing Amber advised for African American females. She shared her thoughts on how

... they still going to believe the teacher, I would say don't say nothing.

Whatever you do, you know it's not wrong, or whatever, just take what they give you and go on. If you keep saying stuff, you'll add on to your sentence. Or if they think you're talking back or nagging, there're going to be more days of discipline. If they give you a little discipline, and you know it's wrong, just take it and just go.

Cherry. Cherry is the referred participant. She was a 16-year-old 11th grader who had been placed in an ALE setting. She was an eligible participant because she had lived experiences of being suspended and expelled for 45 days as a sixth grader and as an 11th grader. She was reared in a one-parent household with a Mother and two siblings. Her Mother’s highest level of education is a two-year college degree. Her Father’s highest level of education is unknown. At the time of the interview, Cherry was unemployed, yet looking for a job.

Before the interview, Cherry’s demeanor was one that was hesitant of sitting and talking to me. I had arranged a meeting with her before the interview, for I had observed how distant she was when I observed her in the ALE setting. On November 26, 2018, I met with Cherry at 11:50 A.M. The interview lasted about 26 minutes. Cherry expressed although she lived in a one-parent household, her mother was very supportive. They

would talk and play games every week, and they were happy with life. She explained “she's there a lot. She pays attention to me and my brother since my sister, she's older.”

Cherry shared her best and most negative experiences was as a student in elementary and after elementary. She explained she had moved to Arkansas in her early elementary years, but her mother did not like it there resulting in them moving back to Iowa. The rest of the family had moved to Arkansas, which prompted her Mother to relocate, too. It was her sixth-grade year, she recalled, as one of her most negative lived experiences. She shared,

... I used to get bullied on. Like, this girl, she used to pick on me, but now she don't pick on me. I don't know why she used to pick up on me. My first time, when I came to ALE was when I brought a weapon to school. A Taser, because some girl was trying to jump me. I didn't tell nobody about it. Some people knew, and they went to the office and told that I had brought a weapon, some girl that was trying to jump me. They called me to the office and called my mom. I got expelled for 45 days.

Cherry shared her most recent encounter with racism as one resulted in her returning to an ALE setting. She explained,

... they got some new teachers now, and they're from a different country. Nobody even understand them, because they barely knew English. So, it was hard for me to learn and understand them. So, when you try to tell them, they'll try to break it down, but then you really didn't understand what they were saying because they didn't know proper English. I really didn't slap her. She said I slapped her, and then another teacher that was in

her classroom said I hit her in her mouth. Well, I was getting my stuff. I was trying to get my stuff. We was taking exams the last week, and I was trying to get my score and stuff, and my stuff that I left in her classroom. She didn't want me to go get it. Then, one of the teacher in the office told me to get it, and when I was trying to, she kept trying to put me out. She didn't want me in her classroom, but the person in the office was telling me to go get it. They called down to her classroom when I was going. She tried to shut the door in my face, and it made me angry. I don't feel like, that I should be here, because I didn't touch her. I just like slammed my hand on the door, and she accused me of hitting her. But it was better than missing a whole year of school and then have to repeat the same year over.

Cherry shared there were several teachers in her school settings that had a positive impact on her. She recalled,

... It's like, the stuff that we used to talk about in class, and how to communicate with each other, and when they sat down ... Some will sit down and talk to you. My anger and how I let it get above me. It's like, how I feel like you're coming towards me like you're talking with an attitude, so I'm going to talk back with an attitude. If you're trying to talk bad to me, I'm going to end up talking bad to you.

She went further to express “I don't know. It's like, how your tone of your voice, you're yelling or something, and it's not no cause for no yelling. If you yell at me, I'm going to yell back.”

Cherry shared her current ALE setting is successful for her. She explained it has “smaller classes with very few people.” She also mentioned she would like to have the opportunity to have time to run track and have someone to come in to talk to her weekly like her previous teachers had in the junior high and high school settings to keep her focused on controlling her anger and behavior. Her advice to another African American female who might have similar encounters was,

if you're having problems with your anger or something, sit down and find somebody you can trust. Sit down and talk to about it, and why you're having anger problems. Just walk away from whatever they did, or find somebody. Just walk out the class and go to the office somewhere.

Miracle. Miracle is a 17-year-old 12th grader in an ALE setting. She was an eligible participant in the study because she had lived experiences with being suspended in traditional school. Miracle lived in a one-parent household with an older sibling. She is the baby of her family. Her Mother’s highest level of education was college. Her Father’s highest level of education was ninth grade, which is the year he dropped out of school. Miracle had held a job before at a local restaurant. I met with Miracle before the interview process to determine if she would be interested in my study. She immediately became excited about participating. She expressed “her mom would be happy to have her story told to help bring about something good.” After I received her mother’s consent, the interview was scheduled for December 4, 2018, at nine A.M. in her current school setting, ALE. The interview took place in a classroom with just seating for two people. The room had a chill in the beginning, but it soon had begun to warm up once we got started on the interview. The interview lasted about 51 minutes.

When I walked down to greet Miracle, she had a big smile on her face, and we embraced each other with a hug. She appeared to be excited to talk. As we walked down to the classroom, we made small talk about how cute her braids were. I learned she had braided her own hair. Miracle's neighborhood where she grew up was,

in East St. Louis It's kind of violent. I grew up in these apartments. It was okay but every house we went to, it was kind of like being shot at. It was like dodging bullets. I almost got hit by a bullet before actually when I was a kid.

She shared her current neighborhood "is a bit more peaceful and you can walk around knowing you will return home." Also, Miracle explained,

growing up in those city streets made me grow up to think that I was tougher than a boy. I still think like that now. I was a tomboy, I guess. I don't know. They used to be thinking they was tough and I used to think that I was tough, so I used to try to fight them.

The interview took a turn and talked about the support Miracle felt she had at home. Miracle expressed,

...to be honest; at first, I feel like it wasn't no support at all. Over the years, I feel like I didn't have any support. I didn't feel no support, but now as I'm getting older, the support coming heavier. Because me and my mama, we didn't always get along. We was always arguing, saying words towards each other that no parent or child should say to each other.

On the other hand, Miracle explained her Father has always been supportive. He had informed her once she graduated, she would return to live with him so he could train her for the Army.

When we discussed her best and most negative lived experiences during elementary, and after elementary school, Miracle recalled an event that led to her being raped. Miracle shared when she had been raped, it was her Father that was there to support her in that process because her Mother was so angry and did not know how to feel or communicate in a supportive manner. She explained, “it felt like she was trying to blame me for it, but my daddy, he was there every step of the way.”

Miracle also shared an event that led to her and a best friend fighting, because of words being discussed behind her back. She specifically recalled,

...it was a friend who I grew up with. She had said something behind my back and then she lied on another female like that female said it. So I went back to that female. She was like she never said it, so I went back to ask the friend I grew up with. She tried to like get buck with it and admitted that she was talking behind my back. I was just like you don't do that, because even after everything I know about you and what you're going through, I ain't never said nothing about you. It actually kind of hurt me because she was my rollie, like my best friend.

In regards to the lived experiences of racism, Miracle shared she never really experienced or felt her leaders disciplined her unjustly. She shared there are times teachers did say and did some things that are not necessary and are inappropriate. She explained,

...some teachers, they yell. They be rude, because they're the teacher and they just feel like ... Well they are in more power. It's like how you talk to a student to get a reaction. If you don't yell at them, they're not gonna yell

at you, but if you're coming in like oh, you need to do this and you need to do that, then that's what makes the students angry. They would talk to the White people; the White children differently than they would talk to us. They would show them more respect than they showed us. They'll yell at us but they talk to them respectfully. It just was weird because you're the teacher. You're supposed to show everybody the same vibe, and they weren't showing it.

Miracle mentioned she had several people who had impacted her ability to fight through her pain and anger. She recalled

one day when I came back from suspension; a teacher had sat me down. She told me, '... I know that you're going through some things because I can see it.' She told me how she used to go through the same thing. Everything she described was happening to her and the same thing that I was going through. She was gonna help me get through it because she been there, and then ever since that day, she was helping me, and I was getting better. Then I got in trouble which caused me to come to this school. The ladies in this setting help me stay on the right track. They showed me more support than most people in my family will show me. They actually connect to me, and they be understanding me. I respect that. That just warms my little heart.

To help make her ALE setting more beneficial, Miracle shared “many students had complained about the class arrangements. They have a teacher, but the students worked on computers mostly all day.” She explained,

... teachers don't teach. They just pass out papers and go back to sit at their desk. They don't care. They just here to get a paycheck. They could have fashion classes, art classes, and type of things to make coming here more interesting. Make students just want to come to school. It's like a punishment at first, but now I'm used to it. I wasn't familiar with the way that they do things, but now I'm like ... I'm the reason that I'm in this place, so I've got to accept it.

Marie. Marie is a 16-year-old participant. She had become a teen mother during her ninth grade year of school. She has a beautiful child. At the time of the interview, she was in the tenth grade and enrolled in an ALE program. She has never held a job before. She grew up in a one-parent household with her Mother who had a live-in boyfriend along with four other siblings. Marie's mother's highest level of education is high school, and her Father's highest level of education is unknown. Marie made it very apparent that her "Father has never been much of a father."

On my first initial visit to the ALE, Marie was absent. She was out for medical reasons. Her administrator gave me her name and parent contact information because she was eligible to participate in the study. I made contact with Marie via Facebook Messenger and telephone. It took me a while to get in contact with her parent for consent. I called and spoke with two different adults in regards to my study. They seemed appalled that I wanted Marie to participate. Marie's other sibling, asked if I was doing a study with African American males, because he had a "few lived experiences to share with the world." After a third attempt, I finally received consent to interview Marie. The interview was on December 4, 2018, at 11:00 A.M. in a classroom in Marie's

school. The interview was during Marie's lunchtime. So, we both ate lunch and talked to help set the tone and create an atmosphere of trust. The interview lasted about 25 minutes.

Marie grew up in a neighborhood that,

...was a good community. People would always come together and do things for the kids that's out there. But then again it could also get dangerous at times. So where you have to stay to yourself and if you have kids keep your kids close to you. Things like that. Boys growing up wanted to be thugs, and they just started shooting, having shootouts for no reason at each other. And bullets don't have a name on them. And anybody's kid could get hurt. Half of the times things like that goes on is for no reason.

Marie shared the way she grew up and the things she witnessed had an impact on her life. She explained,

...when I grew up, the way I seen my Dad treat my Mom or treat anybody else, it made me feel like I don't have a purpose because that's what I grew up around. But I do have a purpose. I shouldn't treat people wrong because I was raised up with what I have saw. It make me feel like I don't have much respect, or my Mom don't have much respect because of how she's been treated and what I've been seeing, like, looking at.

Marie's mother was in an abusive relationship during her childhood. Marie explained her best memories of elementary and after elementary with me. She recalled her most negative lived experience by expressing,

...I don't like to be yelled at, period. Being yelled at, it triggers me to a whole other level because there's just no point. And especially if we right beside each other and you in my face yelling, there's no point. And if you yell at me I feel like I have to yell back. I don't like to be belittled.”

Furthermore, she explained her teachers never provided a reason as to why they were in trouble. She stated,

...I was tired of getting in trouble. Why am I getting in trouble even if I'm doing good? What's the reason? Like she don't have a reason, that she never told me a reason. It's just like I always got wrote up, for simple things, like if I put my head down. If I'm done with my work she expect me to find more work and not put my head down. But everybody else could put they head down.

Marie also shared a lived experience of racism from a teacher during her pregnancy. She mentioned, “I've seen my teachers show favoritism in kids. Like I could do something simple, by me being Black I would get in trouble big for it. But a Caucasian kid do something and they punishment wouldn't be near as worse as mine was.” Marie recalled,

...I was pregnant and the teacher that I had, it's like she didn't like me at all. If I missed days because of my pregnancy, she had asked me why, and she don't think that I should miss days because it's not that important. Yeah, she'll say stuff like that. Like when I left from school for maternity leave she sent none of my work home. Even if I went to the school she'd say she had no work for me and I end up failing my math class. That's one

reason I came to an ALE because I failed my math class. Because it was like she had no help for me and she didn't wanna help.

Marie shared her current setting is successful to her. She recalled,

...I mean I can honestly say I have gotten better at school. Well, I don't get in trouble over here. But when I was in regular school it was just I didn't like people attitudes. And if I feel like you have an attitude with me then I'm gonna have an attitude with you, because I did nothing for you to have an attitude with me. And most of my teachers had attitude problems. And that would get me in trouble because once I say something I go off at the mouth. And if I'm all fired up it's not easy for me to calm myself down; it'll take a minute.

Nicole. Nicole is 17 years of age. She is classified as an 11th and 12th-grade student in an ALE program. I met Nicole when I came to observe and recruit possible participants. She agreed to participate. After which, I spoke with her Mother, and she gave consent for me to interview her for my study. The interview took place on December 4, 2018, at 10:15 A.M. The interview lasted about 28 minutes in a secluded, cold classroom with two desks. Nicole is an eligible participant because she had lived experiences in several schools. She has been to at least four different elementary schools, one middle school, and only a few months in a high school setting. She had experienced being suspended on several occasions. She lived on a one parent household with three siblings. She has never held a job before, but shared she was looking for work at the time of the interview. Nicole's Mother had a 10th-grade education. Her Father had been incarcerated since she was two years old.

Nicole shared she never was allowed to attend the traditional high school setting in her current district. She was sent to the ALE. She explained,

...this is my first time in any ALE. Well, my first year here was like last year, October. I ain't never got the chance because they had said the reason why they got me over here is because my behavior and my attitude. Every time I turned around, the school, my name was already in some nasty stuff that I didn't know about, some stuff I didn't do.

Nicole described her many lived experiences from several school settings. She recalled,

...see, when I was in middle school, I was a troublemaker. It's like I would get all my work done before, I get to play with everybody else. It's like my discipline, like the last time I got suspended, I got suspended for like five to 10 days, or it's like when somebody would say something to me, and I didn't like it, or the way how they did it, or something, it's like the teachers, they knew me.

Also, Nicole expressed how many of her encounters were due to other people being ridiculed. She explained,

...I don't like people ... I don't like to see other kids getting bullied or none of that. It's like when I was in middle school, I used to see this one kid get bullied every day. I used to tell them to leave him alone. He's just like you leave him alone, but one day when they threw his papers on the floor and got to stomping on them, and then I tried to help him. But, he pushed me, and I had a bruise on my neck, and then I just started fighting him.

Nicole's lived experiences with racism were also from her previous school settings. She shared,

...my other schools, like it was more of White teachers than it was Black.

It was like, every time I get up or try to say something, or ask to go the restroom, like that teacher would tell me no. You need to sit there, or wait until the end of the class period, which I tell them, I have a bladder issue that and the nurse just know, I don't want people to know. She'll tell me no, or roll her eyes at me. I have dyslexia, like it's hard for me to catch on and hard for me to focus on some stuff, like it was taking our time. We was in a big class and I used to tell her, 'I don't understand and I don't get it. Can you go back?' She'd like roll her eyes, and keep going forward. Then, I started failing in that class. She failed me my first ninth grade year. When I asked her for help, she ignores me, or leave my hand up, or won't take my paper or none of that. I think she just didn't like me, just the way I act and the color and stuff, and so. Every time we had projects or get to like to get in groups, like she would make me feel down, like, and I just shut down, and put my head down."

Nicole shared a most recent lived experience that made her feel her current placement did not help her to be successful. She explained,

...a couple months ago, here, I had asked for some headphones, and then I had asked another teacher. Then the officer, he was like, 'Go and sit down.' I'm like, 'I need some headphones so I can do my work like my teacher said, when we come back from the restroom, get on your work on

the computer.’ I seen my other teacher. I yelled out, ‘can you get me some headphones?’ She was talking to me, and she was like, ‘I ain’t got no headphones.’ I said, ‘Well, can you ask another teacher?’ Then, the officer, he was yelling all at my face. I’m like, ‘You ain’t got to yell at my face just to tell me to sit down. I understand it, you ain’t got to get in my face.’ Then, he was like, ‘As a matter of fact, come up here,’ and then they put me in handcuffs and took me to jail.

On the other hand, Nicole understood if she was placed in a traditional setting, she would struggle. She reflected by stating,

...if I go over there, I know I’m going to lose all control and I ain’t going to be focusing on my work, because I know it’s a bigger group and bigger classes. I know I ain’t going to be able to get done what I need to. I have a bad temper and I take medicine for that. It’s like someone, like I hear a little voice that says stuff, so I take medicine for that because I know I need it.

Finally, Nicole explained there was one thing that would benefit her in her current setting. She explained,

...it needs more new teachers. They got us in this four-block like- I got ADHD. I can’t be in no hour class. I got to be able to move. I gots to move. I want to go to cosmetology, so I don’t know if they could let me do it. When I was in MLK, I was doing cosmetology. I would get my hours because that’s what I want to be when I grow up, I want to be a cosmetologist, and get my license and get my own building and stuff.

Cateria. Cateria is a 17-year-old senior, who was enrolled in an ALE program at the time of the interview. She lived in a one-parent household. She had never held a job before but was in pursuit of getting a job soon with the help of a family member. Cateria's Mother was a college graduate, and her Father dropped out of school in the 11th grade. I met Cateria during my first visit to observe and recruit participants. She learned about my study through conversations with her administrators and peers. When we were formally introduced, she had a big smile on her face and was very anxious to participate in my study. After I received parent consent, the interview was scheduled for November 26, 2018, at 12:30 PM. The interview lasted about 24 minutes.

Cateria shared her lived experiences where she grew up as a child. She recalled,

...I live like, it's a nice neighborhood. Got nice neighbors. There's a little drama here and there, but it's kind of quiet. It's like right around the corner from the projects. Violence, gun shots that you just hear throughout the night.

She also explained how the community and friends influenced her as she grew up. She expressed,

...the crowd of friends I was around was just grown. Just not listening, just off the chain. Staying out late. Going to clubs. Stuff like that. The wrong crowd. I was on probation. I got put on probation when I started being around them. I was pressured, and just doing all the wrong things. It got so big to where I started using drugs sometimes because I used to feel depressed about a lot of things, like I said, depression. My mom, she's the only one to calm me down really, and talk to me. I used to have

bad depression. My counselor used to tell me I had low self-esteem. I used to get bullied a lot, and stuff like that, so I was just going through depression about stuff like that. I just started using drugs. When I got off probation, they helped me with rehab (rehabilitation) and stuff like that. I started failing some of my classes and stuff like that, just thinking I was grown, but last year I got my stuff together.

Cateria explained she had much support from her Mother. She stated,

...I just chose the wrong things to do. My Mom, she's the head. Some people ain't really got a parent that's gonna help them with their work, or getting them right, or get them allowance to have something to do, just go out to eat or something. My mom, she just helped me a lot. She helped me with my work. She tried to tell me right. She tried to keep me on the right track. I just chose all the wrong things to do. It was my fault.

Cateria shared her lived experiences of her best memories of elementary, which were the field trips outside of her local town. She also shared her most negative experiences in school. She expressed,

...It was my freshman year I got to fighting. I got on probation and all that. That's the worst memory I have really in school. I was at school and some girls jumped me, and I had to go to court for it. They just put me on probation. There was girls picking on me. They were like in eleventh, and just bullying. My sister tried ... she used to go to school, and I guess they were messing with her. They started seeing me ride with her, and they just thought, I don't know, teasing me too. One day my sister wasn't

in school, so they decided to flag me too. Officer came and arrested us, took us to the station. They just made us the court date.

Cateria's encounter with racism occurred during her high school setting. She recalled,

...I just feel like it was just that they weren't really concerned about some people's education. They got picks in their students, who they know.

There's always a teacher like that there. Some teachers will be like, 'Yeah, you can come in and make up the work,' and the whole time they really don't care because they just feel like, 'Oh, she don't really wanna go to school. She don't really want to get her work done. She don't never show up,' but it'd be reasons why people can't come to school on time, or catch just show up some days. Some of them, like when we've been out sick or something, you come back to school, you asked for your makeup work.

They wait like two or three days before they give it to you, or, 'You're too late. I already turned the credits in.' Always something like that.

Cateria explained her reason for being placed in an ALE setting was due to fighting. She explained,

...it was like two weeks after I had got into a fight, the principal thought I was a trouble student, but I never really got in trouble. I ain't got sent out of the classroom. I ain't really did none of that. He just told me I was behind on some of my credits, so I needed to come back and catch up. He just felt like I was the reason of the fighting and the rag. There was more

than one person fighting, a whole gang of people fighting. He just thought I was the cause of all the stuff.

Layla. Layla is a 17-year-old senior in a traditional high school setting. She did not live with her parents at the time of the interview. She lived with a best friend and her best friend's boyfriend. She was currently working in a local restaurant to provide for herself. "Well, apparently, I don't live my parents I live with my best friend and her boyfriend now." She explained her living conditions as,

...see, me and my sister planned. We moved out over the summer time, and I was only 16 and moved out, and she was 17, and it didn't work out. She had another roommate, too. So my sister took our rent money and spent it, and they got evicted and the people that I live with now, they took that house, and yeah, now we still live in the same house.

Layla's mother and father were 10th and 12th grade high school drop-outs.

Meeting with Layla was a bit of a challenge. I had visited her school to observe and recruit possible participants for my study. During that time, she was suspended for 10 days. I learned about Layla through several conversations with other peers in her school. I immediately attempted to reach out to create dialogue via her school email as I was instructed to do by her leader. Two weeks had passed, and I still had not received any response. So, I used social media to locate Layla. I sent a message to her via Facebook Messenger, and she immediately agreed to participate as long as we could meet off campus. I also gained parent consent with her guardians prior to the interview on December 7, 2018, at 4:30 PM at a local restaurant in the town she resided in during the time of the study. The interview lasted about 25 minutes in length.

When I asked about the neighborhood where she had grown up in, Layla responded by calling it the “ghetto.” She explained, “it was bad. People being killed.” She went further to explain that she had stayed with her Mother and Stepfather mostly as a child. She shared that her Mother was very supportive of her. She recalled,

whatever I need, she does. If she's really a chill mom, she not the strictest parent, she let us do whatever we want as long as she know about it, and she spoiled. I'm spoiled, really spoiled, so. She a good supporter, and then she supported, like I'm fitting to go to college when my boyfriend move in with me.

Layla shared her memories at her current setting were not so great after elementary. She had been suspended three times during sixth grade and seven to eight times during junior high. She also got suspended during her junior year for defending her sister in a fight, which led her to be placed on probation and suspended for 10 and 20 days. She explained,

...it was this group of girls, they was my best friends, and one of them didn't like my sister over a boy. They was trying they best to make me not like my sister and I wasn't gonna do that, so I was on my sister's side. The girl, me and my sister and one of her best friends, we worked at Burger King.... all of us worked at Burger King together. Well, the girl would come up there on her off day and pick on my sister. So one day she came up there and wanted to fight. I was still friends with them then, I was just on my sister's side. And the girl just started, I told the girl she need to quit picking on my sister. So she wasn't listening so then the night we got off we went to her house trying to you know fight, but she called the police on

us. The next day at school, we got to fighting with the girl best friend and her other friends.

Layla shared her experience with racism with one leader in particular. She expressed she is classified as a mixed-race student and the leader is African American. She stated,

...I, too much, don't have the best memories out here 'cause the principals didn't even like me when I moved to this school a lot of people didn't like me, and I was fighting every day, I stayed suspended from junior high. I moved back to my previous school district in my seventh-grade year, and came back eighth-grade year here and got into some more fights. In high school, I liked it, but now, they just doing me wrong right now, the principle didn't like me. I would get in trouble for anything. A fight had happened in the school one day, everybody was talking about what I was talking about, and then they suspended me cause I was talking about it.

Furthermore, Layla recalled,

...I never really had a race issue besides our principal, she's a Black principal, but she don't like Black people. She try to put us under the bus and stuff, but when it comes to the Caucasian people, she's all up there with them. I don't know, but I never had a problem with racists and stuff, all the teachers like me, and I'm mixed so they really shouldn't have a problem with me.

When I asked what has helped her to perform well now, she explained,

...the fact that I don't wanna be how my mom is, she don't wanna be how she is. She want me to actually go to college, and do what I wanna do in life, and I wanna be a lawyer and an accountant, so I'm gonna go ahead and do that. She, you know, she didn't finish school and stuff. My mom went through a rough life, she got raped most her life, and was going back and forth to foster care. She don't want us to grow up like how she did, so she want us to actually be someone in life.

Da'Lani. Da'Lani is a 17-year-old senior in an ALE setting. She was a teen mother of one handsome baby boy, and a soon to be mother of child number two. At the time of the interview, she was pregnant. She is a participant in my study because she had been in ALE since the first semester of her ninth-grade year and has been suspended several times in her previous school settings. She lived in a two-parent household until her Father passed away at the age of three. Since then, she had lived in a one-parent household with her Mother. She is the youngest among her siblings. Her Mother is a college graduate, and her Father was a high school graduate. She had never held a job before but was seeking employment at the time of the interview. Da'Lani has lived in four different states throughout her childhood. She recalled,

...Florida, I think that was 10th grade. Little Rock, was like fifth, sixth grade. Oklahoma, was the same thing. I just moved from there to there and then Tennessee, it was eighth or ninth, somewhere up in there. My Momma didn't move. It was me, I was living with my auntie and uncle. I was with them most of the time. They basically used to take custody of me just because they wanted to keep me. Since it's my Momma's uncle,

she trusted him, like to give her a break, so I lived with them. I used to live with my Daddy, too, before he passed away.

I was able to observe Da'Lani on two separate occasions. The first time I entered the ALE building, she was in the office because she had been put out of class for being disruptive. She was so busy and full of energy, it was hard trying to build a rapport with her, for she did not trust easily. The second time, I came to visit, she was once again in the front office sitting. It was then, I had discovered she was on her medication because she was pregnant with child number two. She saw me greet and interview her peers and wanted to know what I was asking them about. She had grown interested in my study. I sat with her to explain the purpose of the study. She had agreed to participate. After I received consent to interview, the interview took place on November 26, 2018, in the school counselor's office at 10:45 A.M. The interview was one of my most extended interviews. It lasted about 45 minutes in length.

We started the interview off discussing the support she felt she had in the home. She expressed,

...Oh, I've always felt like my momma was the main person that have supported me. My brothers, I've never really had a relationship with none of my brothers 'cause they were always gone. My oldest two brothers, they got the same momma and daddy, which is my momma. And then, they got the same daddy, so they were always at their grandmother's house. They never really lived with us like that. They've never really been home with us. They'll come and stay but then they'll go back to they grandma's house. And my brother, well, he was never home either, my one

that's got a different daddy from ... One that's above me. The 19-year-old, he's never really home either. It was more of a ... He was active. He always was places, like he never stayed home. He was either at parties with friends, riding bikes, you know. I've never really had a relationship with none of them. It's like, I always got my support from my momma and being the only girl, she was always hard on me, like, you can't go outside or you don't need to go outside, you're gonna mess your hair up, you gonna mess your clothes up, you gonna stink, you can't be like the boys. You know what I'm saying? And so, it was always, you're gonna be smart and you're not gonna be like everybody else. She's trying to say is, I'm gonna be the one to graduate and go to college, you know what I'm trying to say.

We shifted the dialogue to best memories and most negative memories after elementary school. Da'Lani shared her lived experiences of one of her best memories when she learned how to ride a bike from an elderly man who had recently passed away. She also shared her Mother had become concerned about the path she was taking. She recalled,

...I remember she told me, she seen that I had gone a different path. I was getting older and I was starting not to listen and stuff like that. You know, starting to think I was a little grown. She said she had to send me somewhere. I was at a facility. I got sent to a bad facility for behavior. They was like, we gonna work on your anger problems. Oh yeah, anger problems. I have anger problems. They was like, we gonna fix your anger

problems, it's gonna be all ... they was telling me the agenda and all I had to do to get out fast.

Da'Lani shared several of her lived experiences while in the facility. She explained she was only to be there for a few months, which turned into almost six months. She explained the reason for the longer stay in the facility as,

...they was trying me. There's always that one person who think, oh, I'm gonna show them. Okay, I'm gonna bully them. One person who always try to bully people, like the new people or the younger folks. She was trying to bully me. I was like, baby, you got the wrong person. I was just real, you got the wrong one 'cause you not fixing to bully me. I don't know you, you don't know me. We can be the bestest of friends, baby, what you're not fixing to do is try and bully me. Picking on me, trying to say little slick stuff, trying to fight me all the time. I was like you know what, I'm gonna show you something. She pushed me that one time, baby and it was on and popping. I was so for real that White girl had me so bent. I'm like, baby, you know ... she's like, let me show you skin color ain't got nothing to do with what we got going on. I was like, baby, do you know that I am Black and you are White? Do you know what I would do to you? And she was like, skin color doesn't have nothing to do with this. I was like, you're sure right. Sure don't. Let me show you skin color ain't got nothing to do with this. I had to fight with that White girl.

Da'Lani's second altercation in the facility also led to a longer term due to her fighting a girl who had spat on her. She expressed,

...I got to fighting one more time 'cause a girl spit on me. Can't let them do that. I was just laying in bed; she spits on me. I went crazy, I blacked out. She spits on me for no reason. Okay, she was going ... See, they had ... in the facility they inject some kind of medication in you, in your cheek and it puts you to sleep in like five minutes. She was like, fighting everybody, so they was fixing to come put some of that in her and she spit on me. I promise you she spit on me for no reason. I don't know why; I was just lying in bed. It was time to go to bed. It was night time, she was in there going on, beating on the walls, beating on the windows, slamming doors and she just thought 'cause I was laying in there, she should spit on me.

Da'Lani was released and sent to a high school setting, where she lasted only one semester. She was then transferred to an ALE program. She stated the principal

...just used to have me messed up. I was always at his office. He got tired of me being in his office, I was in his office like every other day. Well, basically every day really, because first period teacher, I never stayed in there. I used to go and be like ummmm I don't wanna be in her classroom, so I'm fixing to go over here and do my work in your office. It used to always be like that. He said he got tired of seeing me in his office, so he was gonna send me down here and I've been here ever since. The principal said he didn't want me in his school no more.

In addition, Da'Lani explained issues with her teachers, who were of the same race as her. She recalled,

...it was always my first period teacher and my seventh period ... Not my seventh period, sixth period. I had one more period after him. She was always picking with us, like, why do you have that on and I told you to sit over there and y'all two can't sit together, I don't want y'all talking and just being all mean and rude and stuff. I don't think I can be told what to do. I don't like that. Like, if my Momma don't tell me what to do, what makes you think you tell me what to do?

Da'Lani shared many of her infractions were for,

...cursing, fighting, disorderly conduct, that's the same thing. Disobedient, there's a list. I might not seem like I do most of that stuff but it's true. I have a record as long as the Mississippi River. I don't know. It's just me. I have anger issues like I said earlier. Somebody try to tell me what to do, my own momma don't tell me what to do, you not fixing to tell me what to do. Somebody was threatening me, to stab me. I told him I was gonna kill him and they took both us to jail.

Finally, Da'Lani mentioned the importance of being successful, because she had gone through a lot with her Father's family members talking very negatively about her and the way she behaves. Through it all she remained confident in being the best Mother she can and graduating from high school to attend a college in Arizona. It was her hope to move her Mom out there with her. She also explained besides her mother being supportive of her, she also mentioned how great an impact her leader had on her ability to focus and try to graduate this year.

Themes That Emerged from the Interviews

There were five major themes that emerged from the 11 participant interviews that took place in traditional and non-traditional settings. However, there were several other demographic themes: (a) most of the participants had resided in one parent households with a mother, father, or grandparent, or friend present; (b) most of the participant's parents had either dropped out of school at a young age, had some college experiences, or had a high school diploma; and (c) most participants were in search of a job, had held a job previously, or was currently working at the time of the interviews.

The first theme was the *Impact of a Rough Living Environment*. The second theme was *Traumatic Experiences*. The third theme was *Home Support*, which is broken down into two subthemes, *Lack of Home Support* and *Consistent, Positive Home Support*. The fourth theme that emerged was *Racial Resistance to Leaders/Teachers*, which is broken down into two subthemes: *Caucasian Versus African American Female Student* and *Minority Versus African American Female Student*. The fifth theme that emerged from the interviews was *Use of Disciplinary Action*, which is broken into three subthemes: *Minor Nonviolent Infractions*, *Minor Violent and Weapon Infractions*, and *Major Violent and Weapons Infractions*. The themes and subthemes are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Emerging Themes and Subthemes from Data Analysis

Major Themes	Subthemes
Impact of Rough Living Environment	
Traumatic Experiences	
Home Support	Lack of Home Support Consistent, Positive Home Support
Racial Resistance to Leaders / Teachers	Caucasian vs. African American Female Minority Vs. African American Female
Use of Disciplinary Action	Minor Nonviolent Infractions Minor Violent and Weapons Infractions Major Violence and Weapons Infractions

Impact of the Living Environment / Community

The *Impact of a Rough Living Environment* was the theme that emerged most often from the participants. Overall, the theme means most of the participants expressed the community and their living environment was rough and unsafe at times. This rough living environment was often referred to as “the Projects” or “ghetto”. It had a major impact on how challenging it was to adjust to the traditional and non-traditional school setting. This theme was evident in ten out of the eleven participants. It was state most succinctly by Judy, a 17-year-old student in an ALE program, who was working to provide for her younger siblings, who said:

Where I grew up, you've got to be tough. You can't let nobody talk to you no kind of way. Some parts in the Projects, you show respect to the elders. Even when you know you wrong you still show respect. You had to be tough to help you get through it. You've got to show that you're not

afraid of them. Some students, they take advantage of you, and think you're not going to say nothing back.

Expanding from Judy's lived experiences with her community is Kay, who is an 18-year-old senior who lived on her own, who said:

When I'm with my momma, we in the Projects, you know. Like, people that ain't got it. They really ain't got it. They just living check to check, or from like off the government, or whatever. When I'm with my dad, like suburbs. Well, you see the same stuff, but like my daddy, he got more money so he's like ... feel me? It made me want more. They made me wanna go to school, and have more. Somewhere to go... where I'll get away from it, um, like this life. Drugs, drama, a lot of stuff.

Similar to Judy's and Kay's lived experiences, Miracle shared her living environment as:

It's kind of violent. I grew up in these apartments. It was okay but every house that we went to, it was kind of like being shot at. It was like dodging bullets. I almost got hit by a bullet before actually when I was a kid. City streets made me grow up to think that I was tougher than a boy. I still think like that now. I was a tomboy, I guess. I don't know. They used to be thinking they was tough and I used to think that I was tough, so I used to try to fight them.

Marie, a 16-year-old, a teen mother, who said:

It was a good community. People would always come together and do things for the kids that's out there. But then again it could also get dangerous at times. So where you have to stay to yourself and if you have kids keep your kids close to you. Things like that. Boys growing up wanted to be thugs and they just started shooting, having shootouts for no reason at each other. And bullets don't have a name on them. And anybody's kid could get hurt. Half of the times things like that goes on is for no reason.

The data provided by many of the participants lived experiences related to the theme: *Impact of a Rough Living Environment* indicated most participants have been effected by their living environment at young ages.

Traumatic Events

Theme two, *Traumatic Experiences*, was another one the most prevalent themes emerged continuously throughout the interviews. Overall, the theme *Traumatic Experiences* meant most participants had experienced severe trauma or a close relative had experienced trauma effected them as youth. This theme was evident in ten of the eleven African American female participants. One of the most traumatic lived experience stemmed from dialogue with Kay, an 18-year-old senior who lived on her own as an adult, who said:

Well, my brother, he got ... uh, I have four brothers who died. But my brother who just died, he raised me. Like cause, you know, growing up my momma wasn't around, and I didn't wanna go with my daddy. So like,

like he raised me. And like when he died I was like, I can't. I gotta get myself together.

Layla's lived experience was similar to Kay, who said:

I don't wanna be how my mom is, she don't wanna be how she is. She want me to actually go to college, and do what I wanna do in life, and I wanna be a lawyer and an accountant, so I'm gonna go ahead and do that. She, you know, she didn't finish school and stuff. My mom went through a rough life, she got raped most her life, and was going back and forth to foster care. She don't want us to grow up like how she did, so she want us to actually be someone in life.

Da'Lani, pregnant with child number two, who had lived in four different states during her junior and high school years with relatives while her mother checked in for help in a facility, who said:

My momma didn't move. It was me, I was living with my auntie and uncle. I was with them most of the time. They basically used to take custody of me just because they wanted to keep me. Since it's my momma's uncle, she trusted him, like to give her a break, so I lived with them. I used to live with my daddy, too, before he passed away.

Furthermore, Da'Lani recalled vaguely the reason for being sent to a facility by her Mother:

I don't know why she sent me off. I really don't. I know they told me I was in there for my behavior, nothing else. I remember she told me, she seen that I had gone a different path. I was getting older and I was starting

not to listen and stuff like that. You know, starting to think I was a little grown. She said she had to send me somewhere. I was at a facility. I got sent to a bad facility for behavior. They was like, we gonna work on your anger problems. Oh yeah, anger problems. I have anger problems. They was like, we gonna fix your anger problems, it's gonna be all ... they was telling me the agenda and all I had to do to get out fast.

Judy echoed the same trauma of being separated from her mother at a young age due to having drugs in her system during her two pregnancies. Judy, a 10th and 11th grade ALE student, who said:

My momma she had left to go out of town and so then we weren't in the house then we was in we were living before she left in there we had to go to my grandma's house and at my grandma's house it was hard for us to get back and forth to school. Like sometimes I found a ride and sometimes the ride never came. So that's what happened. I had them all at first but when she left it was pretty hard. She had to leave for the babies. When she had them she was smoking weed and they found weed in the baby's system so she had to go to rehab for that.

Nicole, an ALE student, whose mothers dropped out of school and whose father had been incarcerated, who said:

Well, last year, my mom and her boyfriend... they was like rocky. Where my mom was going through abuse. It's like every time I think about it, I get emotional. It's like she got beat in front of me and stuff. I didn't know what to do at the time, but then he out us out. He had the police

escort us and pick up our stuff and sent us out the house. So, we was homeless.

In addition, the feeling of not belonging also affected her state of mind, Nicole, who also said:

My dad been locked up since I was two, and he been gone for 11 years, and he's just back out. Me and my dad we just not on good terms. It's like when I get angry, mad, or stressed out, I like get my mannequin doll, and get to do my hair. My dad stresses me out. Like sometime he tell me he don't want to be there for me and stuff. I don't know him, but I know who he is. It stress me out. Once upon a time, like I started smoking weed to hide the pain. But I don't know. It's like I don't see him or he don't call me. Like the only time he calls me is when he's drunk. I get tired of that. Like he got three boys and it's like I'm the only girl he got. The only good daughter. His momma don't like me. His mom tells me I'm not his child. She curses at me and all of that. So, I just leave that side alone.

Marie, who expressed her thoughts said:

When I grew up, the way I seen my dad treat my mom or treat anybody else, it made me feel like I don't have a purpose because that's what I grew up around. But I do have a purpose. I shouldn't treat people wrong because I was raised up with what I have saw. It make me feel like I don't have much respect, or my mom don't have much respect because of how she's been treated and what I've been seeing, like, looking at.

Miracle, who was excited about being a part of the study, who explained how she felt special someone wanted to know her story, who said:

Well, this thing that stays in my head a lot... like twenty-four seven is the memory of me... me being raped. It just stays there. Never leaves my mind. I was in the hospital and my dad was there, because my mama was so mad at the thought. It felt like she was trying to blame me for it, but my daddy, he was there every step of the way. I think she was just hurt.

Cateria, an ALE participant, who had support from her Mother, who said:

I was pressured, and just doing all the wrong things. It got so big to where I started using drugs sometimes because I used to feel depressed about a lot of things, like I said, depression. My mom, she's the only one to calm me down really, and talk to me. I used to have bad depression. My counselor used to tell me I had low self-esteem. I used to get bullied a lot, and stuff like that, so I was just going through depression about stuff like that. I just started using drugs. When I got off probation, they helped me with rehab (rehabilitation) and stuff like that. I started failing some of my classes and stuff like that, just thinking I was grown.

Home Support

The theme three, *Home Support*, emerged from all participants. The dialogue in regards to the theme *Home Support* varied between the two subthemes: *Lack of Home Support* and *Consistent, Positive Home Support*. Five participants shared lived experiences that lacked support at home from their parents. Whereas, the remaining six

participants spoke highly of having parent support in the home. The most predominant response for the subtheme, *Lack of Home Support* was from Hope, who said:

I don't feel like I got support at home. My mommy, she always at work, and when she at home, we argue a lot. I mean. They be like go to school go and graduate. But it ain't support – support. Like when they come to you know school. You get your grades and you know, they honor you or the game... we had a softball game and they don't come.

Amber had a similar lived experience, who said:

I don't have no support at home, because everybody leave the house. My momma does the same thing my sisters do... She leave, too. I'm the type of sister that I won't.... You've got to stay home with the baby... I'm out here wanting to go places, but I'm 16. Everybody younger than me, kind of, so when they want to go somewhere, they just leave. I can't go nowhere. I feel like I got to do stuff on my own.

Miracle echoed the similar response, who said:

Well, to be honest, I feel like it wasn't no support at all. Because me and my momma didn't always get along. We was always arguing. Saying words towards each other that no parent or child should say to each other.

Marie had almost the same experience, who said:

I feel like I don't have much support at all. Because anything I bring up to my family, like they'd rather see me doing bad than see me doing good. And if I need help them with something, everybody would act so clueless to what I need help on, but if any of my other siblings need help with

something they expect me to know it or to do it. But when it's time for me, I don't have no support.

The subtheme, *Consistent, Positive Home Support* data indicated some participants did have support in the home from their parents. Layla response was the most succinct with this subtheme, who said:

Whatever I need, she does. She's really a chill mom. She not the strictest parent. She let us do whatever we want as long as she know about it. I'm spoiled, really spoiled. She is going to help when I go off to college with my boyfriend.

Da'Lani mimicked a similar dialogue:

Oh, I've always felt like my momma was the main person that have supported me. I always got my support from my momma and being the only girl.... She would say you're not gonna be like everybody else.

Cherry also followed in similar dialogue:

My mom she's there a lot. She pays attention to me and my brother since my sister is older.... We sit at the table. She asks us about our days and stuff, and how our day was. We do family game night.

Racial Resistance to Leaders/Teachers

The fourth emerging theme, *Racial Resistance to Leaders/Teachers*, was very evident in most of the participant's conversations. Overall, this theme was created when participants were asked if they felt race had an impact on their schooling, and when asked if race impacted the discipline they received in the traditional school setting. The participants explained this theme more often as "favoritism". This theme occurred in all

eleven participant's responses to the questions asked. From the theme emerged two subthemes: *Caucasian Leader/Teacher verses African American Female Student* and *Minority Leader / Teacher verses African American Female Student*. Ten out of the eleven participants had a lived experience with this theme.

The subtheme, *Minority Leader or Teacher Versus African American Female Student*, is defined by three of the participants Layla, Cherry, and Da'Lani. Layla, a senior in a traditional high school setting, who lives with a friend and her boyfriend, who said:

I never really had a race issue besides our principal. She's a Black principal, but she don't like Black people. She try to put us under the bus and stuff. When it comes to the Caucasian people, she's all up there with them. I don't know, but I never had a problem with racists and stuff, all the teachers like me, and I'm mixed so they really shouldn't have a problem with me. I really don't know how to put this, I just know, last year was my first year ever getting in trouble at high school cause I swore I was never in trouble, but defending my sister, they gave us the maximum suspension. But when other people got in a fight, they didn't have to go through the court, or nothing else. But we had to go through court cause the school pressed charges on us, all of us ended up on a year probation, and we still having to pay fines. But everybody else, haven't nobody else gone through court or nothing else, except for us. The Caucasian people that gets in trouble, it was some that have been in multiple fights, and haven't none of them been in court for it.

Cherry, who had a very supportive mother, who had a similar lived experience with another Minority ethnic group, who said:

It's like, last year ... Well, they got some new teacher now, and they're from a different country. Nobody even understand them, because they barely knew English. So, it was hard for me to learn and understand them. So, when you try to tell them, they'll try to break it down, but then you really didn't understand what they were saying because they didn't know proper English. I really didn't slap her. She said I slapped her, and then another teacher that was in her classroom said I hit her in her mouth. Both of them were Filipino. I don't feel like, that I should be here, because I didn't touch her. I just like slammed my hand on the door, and she accused me of hitting her. But it was better than missing a whole year of school and then have to repeat the same year over.

Da'Lani, had an encounter with an African American teacher being rude and the leader of her traditional school setting, who said:

The principal. We always used to argue. He just used to have me messed up. I was always at his office. He got tired of me being in his office, I was in his office like every other day. Well, basically every day really, because first period teacher, I never stayed in there. I used to not... I don't wanna be in her classroom, so I'm fixing to go over here and do my work in your office. It used to always be like that. He said he got tired of seeing me in his office, so he was gonna send me down here and I've been here ever since. It was always my first period teacher and my seventh period ... Not

my seventh period, sixth period. I had one more period after him. They fired her, she don't work there no more. She was Black. Old, mean little scrub lady. She was rude. She always used to be picking with the students. Like why do you have that on and I told you to sit over there and y'all two can't sit together, I don't want y'all talking and just being all mean and rude and stuff. Now, I wasn't having it. I never stayed in first period, never.

The remaining seven participants had lived experiences with the subtheme, *Caucasian Leader or Teacher Versus African American Female Student*. Overall this subtheme meant most participant's had an encounter with a leader or teacher in a traditional or nontraditional setting with racism being a factor in their schooling.

Hope, who had just begun to develop a positive relationship with her mother, who said:

In my online computer class, the teacher he was givin' us work and stuff, but we was Black ... You know, on video call, he'll mute us, like the Black people where we couldn't say nothin'. And you know, talk to the White people, get the White people email. They took us all of us off Virtual Arkansas, and put our class in, um, in our, um, Credit Recovery. Like all the Black people had Fs in there. Even it was an Asian girl in there, she even had an F in there, and she is really smart. So, he, uh, that man, he was a- yeah, he was a racist because he- we knew 'cause he treated all of us differently.

Miracle had a similar encounter, who said:

She was a White teacher. She was very mean. Real mean. Because she was always angry. She just didn't like me. I don't know. She would just send me to the principal's office. I don't know how to explain it. Kind of different. They didn't have referrals. I just remember her because I got in a fight with this boy. When he busted my lip, she laughed. Because she was that kind of teacher.

Judy echoed the same response, who said:

No White kid got in trouble in her class during our period. It was just only Black folks. Like she would call our names and we don't do nothing. She would just get mad. Sometimes I deserved it, but the other times I don't.

Amber shared a different lived experience that occurred the same day of the interview, who said:

It's a lot of favoritism. When I catch on to it, sometimes I be saying stuff to the teachers, and sometimes stuff I say I should've got in trouble for, but they know it's wrong so they don't say nothing back. Usually I just let it go. Okay, today I was in class, and everybody ... She said, 'Put your phones away.' There's a group of White people that sit by theyself, and there's a group of Black people, which is me, and I sit with them. She was like, we're not supposed to be on our phones anyways, but she said, 'Put your phones up and complete your work first.' They didn't even have their work done and they phone was still out. She looked at me and said, 'I asked you to put your phone up. If I see that again, you get detention.' I looked at her like, I said, 'So you're telling me you don't see them over

there on they phones?’ She said, ‘Yeah, I see them.’ ‘Is their work done?’ She said, ‘Oh, no, they haven't did any work.’ So they hadn't did any work and I hadn't did any work, so you're telling me, you're not telling them to put their phone away? I said, ‘You know what? I'm not putting my phone up.’ I kept it up the whole class period. I feel like we all should get treated the same. We tell everybody to put their phone up, and some White people don't listen. It's not fair. You should tell everyone to put their phone up, give them the same as the other kids, so I feel like I should keep my phone out. Yeah. I guess because, I don't know, it feels like the White people got more, a different mindset.

Disciplinary Actions Taken

The fifth theme, *Use of Disciplinary Action*, had three subthemes: *Minor Nonviolent Infractions*, *Minor Violence*, and *Weapons Infractions and Major Violence and Weapon Infractions*. Arkansas’ discipline data for 2008-2015 school years define minor nonviolent infractions as disorderly conduct, insubordination, and others. Minor violence and weapons infractions are defined as fighting, student assault, gang infractions, and explosive infractions; major nonviolent infractions are defined as bullying, tobacco, and vandalism; major violence and weapon infractions are defined as club infractions, knife infractions, and staff assault; truancy infractions; and drugs and alcohol infractions (OEP, 2018).

The subtheme, *Minor Nonviolent Infractions*, had five out of the eleven participants who had experienced discipline for disorderly conduct, disobedient and

cursing in classrooms. Amber, Cherry, Miracle, Marie, and Nicole had similar infractions that led to a suspension, and/or being handcuffed and taken to jail.

Nicole had the most succinct, who said:

Well, a couple months ago, here, with a teacher I had, like asked for some headphones, and then I had asked my teacher. Then the officer, he was like, 'Go and sit down.' I'm like, 'I need some headphones so I can do my work like my teacher said, when we come back from the restroom, get on your work on the computer.' I seen my other teacher. I yelled out, 'Can you get me some headphones.' She was talking to me, and she was like, 'I ain't got no headphones.' I said, 'Well, can you ask Miss Lake?' Then, the teacher, he was yelling all at my face. I'm like, 'You ain't got to yell at my face just to tell me to sit down. I understand it, you ain't got to get in my face.' Then, he was like, 'As a matter of fact, come up here,' and then they put me in handcuffs and took me to jail.

Amber, Cherry, and Miracle echoed very similar encounters. Amber, who lives with five other siblings in a single parent household, said;

It's always the teacher's got to be right, or the teacher's never wrong. But when you know they wrong, and it come from the student's perspective or their way of thinking, then it's always we saying it wrong, or something. I know if it's wrong and I stand up for myself and I say, 'Hey, that ain't right. I'm going to go to the office.' 'If you walk out of here you're going to get a write up.' I'll say I don't care, because everywhere I go, whatever you write, whatever teachers write, it don't even got to be a big deal,

whatever they write up is going to be a long paragraph to make it seem like this kid is being insolent. It ain't even what you think it is. Even if I tell my part of the story, I still get in trouble. I just get mad, and I get suspended, because they don't understand. They don't even try to listen.

Cherry, who lives with her Mother, who said:

I be talking back. It's like, how you come ... It's how I feel like you're coming towards me like you're talking with an attitude, so I'm going to talk back with an attitude. If you're trying to talk bad to me, I'm going to end up talking bad to you.

Miracle, who is an ALE student, who said:

Some teachers, they yell. They be rude. Because they're the teacher and they just feel like ... Well they are in more power. It's like how you talk to a student to get a reaction. If you don't yell at them, they're not gonna yell at you, but if you're coming in like, 'Oh, you need to do this and you need to do that,' then that's what makes the students angry.

The subtheme, *Minor Violence and Weapons Infractions* had been experienced by five of the eleven participants. These infractions meant the participants had fought in school settings, which led to the maximum day suspension, probation, and/or expulsion. Layla, recalled the disciplinary action taken:

It was this group of girls, they was my best friends, and one of them didn't like my sister over a boy, and they was trying to they best to make me not like my sister and I wasn't gonna do that, so I was on my sister's side. The girl, when me and my sister and one of the best friends, we worked at

Burger King, all of us worked at Burger King together. Well the girl out there, she would come up there and pick on my sister and so one day she came up there and tried to fight. Well, I was still friends with them then, I was just on my sister's side. And the girl just started, I told the girl she need to quit picking on my sister, so she wasn't listening so then the night we got off we went to her house trying to you know, fight, but she called the police on us, and the next day at school, we got to fighting with the girl best friend and her other friends. They suspended us for 10 days. The girl who started all this, she's not even on probation, but the rest of us on probation for, well, I'm on probation along with them, but we all on probation. Not the other girl, she should be getting' in trouble, now, cause we got into it. That's why I just came back from being suspended.

Kay, a young adult shared:

My biggest regret would have to be my ninth grade year. It was like a big fight, which I got expelled 'cause I said it was gang related, and it wasn't. But it kinda was because the other girl had, um, a gang with the flags. It wasn't even my fight, it was my friend's fight, but other people jumped in.

The subtheme, *Major Violence and Weapons Infractions*, meant participants had club infractions, knife infractions, staff assault, truancy infractions, drugs and/or alcohol infractions. Two participants out of the eleven had received disciplinary action with these infractions.

Cherry, an ALE student, who had been expelled for 45 days, who said:

My first time, when I came to LE was when I brought a weapon to school. A Taser. Some girl was trying to jump me. I didn't tell nobody about it. Some people knew, and they told the ... went to the office and told that I had brought a weapon, some girl that was trying to jump me. They called me to the office and called my mom. I got expelled for 45 days.

Kay, who is classified as a young adult, who said:

Last year at the high school, I had got expelled. Um, I forgot ... well, I had forgot, cause I didn't know it was on me, but I got caught with weed. But like, it was like a little piece, but I didn't know it was on me.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide relevant information on the lived experiences of the 11 African American female participants in traditional and nontraditional settings in rural Arkansas. The first section of this chapter examined each participant in detail regarding their demographic backgrounds, specific parts of the interviews, and interview locations and time using the interview questions and field notes. This data was combined to formulate summarized narratives for each participant. The second section of this chapter consisted of analyzed data based on the dialogue from the interviews, which led to the five major themes created.

Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Chapter Five summarizes the findings of this research study on the perceptions of African American female high-needs students regarding the impact of the disciplinary system in low-performing schools in Arkansas. The researcher discusses the findings and perceived factors the participants specified. This study included face-to-face in-depth conversations, the researchers' field notes, and journaling throughout the process. The researcher explains the relationship between previous research and the findings of this study and makes recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

This study attempted to answer the central question: *According to the “lived experiences” of African American female students in Arkansas, what are the perceived factors contributing to the disproportionate number of African American female students receiving serious disciplinary consequences in public schools?* A qualitative design was utilized for this study was to investigate why African American female students are being “pushed out” of learning environments in public schools. By using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design, it is hoped the “lived experiences” of these African American female students will provide more information as to why this is occurring across the nation.

Eleven African American female students associated with the three school districts in Eastern Arkansas, often referred to as ‘the Delta’ with a focus on grades 10

through 12 were selected for this study. Each participant fit the following criteria: student in grades 10 - 12; a female student; self-identified as being African-American; received education in a traditional and/or non-traditional school setting; had experienced out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension, and/or expulsion. The semi-structured questions were conducted face-to-face in with in-depth dialogue. The semi-structured interviews, ranging in length from 21 minutes to an hour, with the average interview lasting for an average of about 30 minutes. These interviews were the main source of data for this study. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed. The other sources used for this study were field notes, documents, and observations.

The data was analyzed using an IPA, which allows multiple participants who have experienced similar events to share stories without any distortions and/or prosecutions (Smith et al., 2009). Creswell (2013) explicitly truncated the added advantage of phenomenological approach; he stated, “The suggestions for narrative analysis present a general template for qualitative researchers. In contrast, in phenomenology, there have been specific, structured methods of analysis advanced” (p. 193). Narrative thematic analysis was also the approach utilized, for it has a primary focus on the content in the text (Butina, 2015). The five stages that will be utilized that Butina (2015) explains are (a) organization and preparation of the data, (b) obtaining a general sense of the information, (c) the coding process, (d) categories or themes, and (e) interpretation of the data.

Five major themes emerged from the conversations. The first theme was the *Impact of a Rough Living Environment*. The second theme was *Traumatic Experiences*. The third theme was *Home Support*, which is broken down into two subthemes, *Lack of*

Home Support and *Consistent, Positive Home Support*. The fourth theme that emerged was *Racial Resistance to Leaders / Teachers*, which is broken down into two subthemes: *Caucasian Versus African American Female Student* and *Minority Versus African American Female Student*. The fifth theme that emerged from the interviews was *Use of Disciplinary Action* which is broken into three subthemes: *Minor Nonviolent Infractions*, *Minor Violent and Weapon Infractions*, and *Major Violent and Weapons Infractions*.

The first theme entitled, *The Impact of a Rough Living Environment* was the theme that emerged the most from the participants. Participants expressed the community and their living environment was rough and unsafe at times. This rough living environment was often referred to as “the Projects” or “ghetto”. The second theme was *Traumatic Experiences*. It was another one of the most prevalent themes and emerged continuously throughout the interviews. This theme meant most participants had experienced severe trauma, or a close relative had experienced trauma that affected them as a youth. These traumas were situations such as depression, bullying, separation from a parent, physical abuse, rape, sexual assault, death, incarceration, homelessness, and becoming sexually active at young ages.

The third research finding, *Home Support*, which is broken down into two subthemes, *Lack of Home Support* and *Consistent, Positive Home Support*. This theme and subthemes spoke to the type of support the participants felt was important in order for them to have a sense of belonging at home and in school settings. The fourth theme from the study was *Racial Resistance to Leaders / Teachers*, which is broken down into two subthemes: *Caucasian Versus African American Female Student* and *Minority Versus African American Female Student*. This fourth theme refers to the data that

demonstrated the participants' resistance to authorities, leaders, and teachers, who showed how the participants' experiences were negatively impacted by both their race and class membership. More specifically, they could not strive to be successful as a student due to racial biases, lack of understanding of culture and social and emotional needs.

The fifth and final theme, *Use of Disciplinary Action*, which is broken into three subthemes: *Minor Nonviolent Infractions*, *Minor Violent and Weapon Infractions*, and *Major Violent and Weapons Infractions*, spoke directly to how the overall culture of the African American female student had to experience harsher punishments for infractions were classified as minor nonviolent, minor violent and/or major violent. The infractions were disorderly conduct, talking back to the teacher, cursing, weapons, drugs, disobedient, fighting, and /or having a voice when they feel mistreated.

Response to Literature

The literature review focuses on the CRT that seeks to explain why African American females have too often been disciplined physically and mentally at young ages. The literature also focuses on the historical background of femininity in education, systems, and structures in schools and their implications, implications of environmental factors, biases in schools, and oppression. The major research included in the literature review focuses on interventions to provide insight on how to “restore” policies and practices, heal relationships, and encourage community and school-based programs to be proactively supportive and aware of the effects of marginalizing the African American females' learning and humanity (Morris, 2016).

The 11 African American female students that participated in this research study specified a variety of factors that positively or negatively impacted their pathway. Research reveals suspensions and AEPs have diminutive educational benefits, but instead cause significant harm (Fedders, 2018). Suspended students tend to fall behind in academics, face an elevated risk of being involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems, as well as experience multiple challenges associated with poverty (Fedders, 2018). Fedders (2018) explains students in poverty are more likely to experience multiple challenges such as homelessness, exposure to environmental pollutants, lack of access to health care, and chronic stress and depression can hamper their readiness for school and performance as a student.

This study produced findings related to the principles of CRT (Howard & Navarro, 2016), and are applied to this qualitative, phenomenological study to deepen the understanding of how the CRT educational tenets-intercentricity of race and racism, challenge to the dominant ideology, commitment to social justice, and centrality of experimental knowledge and interdisciplinary perspective are connected to the lived experiences of African American female students in regards to the disciplinary system in low – performing schools in Arkansas.

Delgado and Stefancic (as cited by Cabrera, 2018 & Joseph et al, 2016), explains the overarching goal for CRT was to study and change the relationships between race, racism, and power by highlighting inherent racism in American society and promoting racial progress which tends to be rooted in either law or education. Cabrera (2018) explains there are five tenets associated with CRT in law: (a) racism as normal, (b) interest convergence, (c) social construction, (d) differential racialization, (e)

intersectionality, and (f) unique voices of color. These CRT education tenets determined what the perceived factors are that contributed to the disproportionate number of African American female students receiving serious discipline consequences in public schools. The tenets defined how system and structures in schools have an impact on policies and practices associated with specifically African American female students. They also defined if behaviors of the immediate family, school and peer relationships affect African American females, as well as home support and traumatic life-altering events impacted students' perceptions of their educational pathway.

Each of the 11 students indicated at some point in their development one or more factors affected them. The students also talked about their "lived experiences" in their respective rough living communities, systemic structures within traditional and non-traditional school settings, as well as the racial biases from leaders and teachers and the disciplinary actions taken for minor infractions. They also expressed how life-altering events led to oppression. They also talked about their home support and the need for more support.

Tenet 1: Racism as Normal

Wun (2016) argues from the lens that racism has been foundational to U.S. institutional policies and social relations for nearly three decades. Discipline research indicates students of color, African Americans, and Latinos, are more likely to encounter discipline in the form of referrals, suspensions, expulsions as well as arrest and policed far more than their counterparts (Wun, 2016). African American females are often ignored or misunderstood by school administrators rather than addressing the root causes and holding people accountable who condone violence against the African American

female (Tonnesen, 2013). The participants in this study did share lived experiences that are aligned with the tenet, racism as normal. Racism had multiple meanings in this study. Many participants had experienced racism with Caucasian versus African American female student and racism with Minority versus African American female students. In all, the participants explained racism was something that is evident in not just leaders, but also in teachers and peers. They specifically expressed favoritism was very evident in some of the encounters with leaders and teachers.

Tenet 2: Interest Convergence

A growing concern about school safety and student discipline have resulted in the development and enforcement of a host of policies related to student behaviors and on the desire to enhance levels of student performance (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). Data suggest African American students experience schools in a different way than their Caucasian peers despite a number of school reform efforts, standards-based education movements, and legislative mandates such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS; Howard & Navarro, 2016). The most pressing issue with reform efforts and education movements is students of color are expected to learn in environments where the content, instruction, culture, and assessment are racially informed, exclusive, and serve as components for school success (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Participants shared lived experiences of their schools providing instruction to enhance student performance. Many expressed how they were not able to make up work, or receive the extra support when they voiced they were not understanding the lessons. It was explained it was as if teachers were just going through the motions of attempting to

educate them to be in compliance with the many reforms that have been mandated from the federal government and state.

Tenet 3: Social Construction

Howard and Navarro (2016) explain it is important teachers understand how White privilege and its components impact their practice, and how Whiteness has a profound influence on how students of color experience schools. Howard and Navarro (2016) also explain what is much needed is a way to translate theory to practice for in-service and pre-service teachers and to also be clear about the development of racial consciousness, which cannot be taught in a superficial way that reduces racial awareness to simple dos and don'ts for it requires a deep level of analysis, self-reflection, and understanding of racial realities from the past and present for all classroom teachers, their content, and instructional practices.

Participants felt their teachers honestly did not care about whether they gained the knowledge and understanding of the standards being taught. Often time's participants felt like they were denied the opportunity to be creative in class or express their thoughts verbally in class when they'd disagree with the way a lesson was taught in class, which caused them to become silent or become overly aggressive voicing their thinking and reasoning.

Tenet 4: Differential Racialization

Epstein et al. (2017) and Tonnesen (2013) add to this narrative by citing media outlets that report African American females can handle themselves resulting in reports that rob the African American girl of their innocence causing a false narrative of adultification (Epstein et al., 2017; Tonnesen, 2013). Epstein et al. (2017) also define

adultification of students as two forms: (a) a process of socialization, in which children function at a more mature developmental stage because of situational context and necessity occurring in communities that lack resources; and (b) a social and cultural stereotype based on how adults, who lack the understanding of children's behavior and verbalizations, perceive children. The participants in this study had shared many "lived experiences" caused them to become mature at young ages due to taking care of young siblings, or mother being absent in the home, or from living in a community that required one to have a tough persona. They also explained how many were influenced by their peers and became engulfed in doing wrongful things such as drinking, smoking, clubbing, being intimate at young ages, working instead of going to school to fill the need of having a sense of belonging or feeling loved.

Tenet 5: Intersectionality

Currently, effective interventions encourage the use of research-based programs, procedures, and activities related to discipline, structure, and teacher behavior to create a positive school environment, student connectedness and pro-social behavior (High, 2017; Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). Schiff (2018) defines Restorative justice practices (RJP) not only as a strategy to address harm and build a positive culture in schools, but also as a movement with the potential to confront injustice and disrupt strategies organized from, and resulting in ongoing domination and oppression or marginalized groups.

Many of the participants in the study gave suggestions they felt would benefit them in traditional and non-traditional school settings. Most importantly, they stressed the importance of having someone to talk through situations with. The participants also mentioned having a variety of classes that spark and motivate them to come to school.

Some explained the need for teachers and leaders who understood their culture and how they think. They also voiced the need for the family to be more involved in their education.

Tenet 6: Unique Voices of Color

Fordham elucidates that African American females have developed a loud and tough persona in order to be heard and not overlooked in classrooms and school buildings where they tend to be ignored and marginalized as students (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Gloria Ladson-Billings argues student identity grants African American children “permission to fail” not only in classroom settings but also in their minds causing internalized gendered racial oppression (Morris, 2016). Morris (2016) goes on to note that underfunded schools, limited resources, access to quality early education, and past negative experiences have tainted the ability and confidence of the African American female to be considered high performers.

Henry states the African American females conform to silence as a strategy for getting ahead in class, because “talking back” to speak out against discourse and practices were not viewed to be in their best interest (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Tonnesen (2013) argues regardless of context, the African American females are entitled to fair and just treatment, which includes protection. African American females possess a variety of skills and experiences provide them with a multitude of ways of being unique in character (Epstein et al., 2017). Furthermore, there should not be any limitations placed on set expected or demanded behaviors in order for African American females to be afforded equal access to educational opportunities (Epstein et al., 2017).

Participants in this study did explain they had to put on a tough persona to be heard or to not be classified as weak in their neighborhoods, which filtered into their behaviors in school. Only a few have conformed to the notion of being silent by putting their heads down on the desk, not responding to sarcastic remarks openly expressed in front of peers, or by underperforming due to insults as being a failure or being told they are not applying themselves academically. Many of the participants shared they had at some point in their lives they have or continue to deal with depression.

Conclusions

Through the data analysis and assessment of the findings of this study, there were three major conclusions developed from the study. The three conclusions were (a) Living conditions and the level of support for high-needs African American female students in low-performing schools foster a sense of hopelessness regarding the importance of their educational pathways, (b) High-needs African American female students in this study understand racism is evident in their educational pathways, but they do not accept failure as an option for they have developed and embraced their culture with a renowned fight to prove society wrong despite all the reforms and laws created for permission to fail, and (c) High-needs African American female students in this study recognize there must be consequences for their infractions, but do not accept being overly disciplined to cause more harm, but rather demand schools have people who have an ear to listen and a voice that is slow to speak. These conclusions will be addressed through the relative literature.

Living and support in hopelessness.

The first conclusion is living conditions and the level of support for high needs African American female students in low performing schools foster a sense of

hopelessness regarding the importance of their educational pathways. This conclusion addresses the research question - According to the “lived experiences” of African – American female students in Arkansas, what are the perceived factors contributing to the disproportionate number of African American female students receiving serious disciplinary consequences in public schools?

The reflection of the participants based on their rough living conditions, life-altering events, and support from the home regarding the impact throughout their lived experiences as young children and adolescent years is the center of this conclusion. Many of the participants' families are under-educated parents or uneducated single parent households, who live in or close to “the Projects”, where violence is an expected and acceptable way of living. Many of the families have accepted and transferred the trend of being inadequately educated to their younger families and communities. These trends are evident in the level of parental support or lack of parental support in educational achievements. These feelings are also displayed when the participants have witnessed or experienced life-altering traumatic events.

Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) contend many African American females encounter stressors from families, communities, and schools contest their competence to mask adversity. Researchers conducted a study at the Female Detention Project in Philadelphia on 35 girls. As a result of the study, it indicated females were more likely to experience traumatic events compared to males. Data revealed 80% of the females had experienced trauma while 57% also related physical abuse. Also, 43% of the interviewed females had described sexual abuse, 40% of the females reported neglect or abandonment, and 34% recalled witnessing acts of violence (Miller, 2015).

Hoang (2013) contends many people of color experience imposture phenomenon (IP) based on internal feelings which create inadequate success and achievement. Hoang also explains students who suffer from IP tend to believe they do not deserve to be successful, and are anxious about being exposed resulting in them being very critical of their ability to perform at work. IP also creates a cycle of emotions, thoughts, and actions can cause students to feel less qualified, average, and ineffective in environments where society tells them they do not belong resulting in self- doubt (Hoang, 2013). Hoang also explains IP can be fostered through interactions such as relationships, and interaction with friends and family, which puts up a false front.

Hoang (2013) stated that providing opportunities and space for students to be motivated with healthy dialogue can afford the type of support that is required to achieve.

Racism will not grant permission to fail.

The second conclusion is high needs African American female students in this study understand racism is evident in their educational pathways, but they do not accept failure as an option for they have developed and embraced a renowned fight to prove society wrong despite all the reforms and laws created for permission to fail. This conclusion addresses a portion of the research question in regards to racism being one of the perceived factors that allow a disproportion in the discipline of African American female student's educational pathways.

Participants in this study expressed the notion racism is displayed in their many school settings. Some had been exposed to racism as early as elementary grades by their peers in school settings. Racism had become more prominent in junior high and high school settings. The participants explained their encounters with racism were not solely

Caucasian versus African American, but were also Minority versus African American.

This was discovered in experiences with classroom teachers, and leaders in schools.

Now, over 60 years after the landmark decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), which attempted to tear down separate and unequal facilities and mentalities, new outlets through legal mandates and assessment opportunities have created new segregation (Green et al., 2005). Research from Wun (2016) argues racism has been foundational to U.S. institutional policies and social relations for nearly three decades. The civil rights law, Title IX, requires schools to have formal anti-discrimination and sexual harassment grievance policies (Tonnesen, 2013). Although schools are accountable for sexual harassment in school hallways, Tonnesen explains African American females are unable to access legal remedies. Moreover, African American females are often times ignored or misunderstood by school administrators rather than addressing the root causes and holding people accountable who condone violence against the African American female (Tonnesen, 2013).

Michael Omi and Howard Winant explain racial formation theory defines race as socially and politically constructed (Wun, 2016). The theory finds that although race is a permanent feature, the formation, order, and set of meanings inscribed onto racialized subjects are dependent upon historical and political contexts resulting in anti-black racism as a social order affects policies, policy outcomes, and organizes the relationship between non-black and black bodies (Wun, 2016).

Research by Tonnesen (2013) notes the image and stereotypes of African American girls have real-life implications, as they alter the way people's minds perceive African American females as young women. The author describes implicit bias as a

combination of structural and psychological mechanisms by which violence is condoned and ignored against, in this case, African American females (Tonnesen, 2013). In Tonnesen's article, Goff (as cited in Tonnesen, 2013) describes a social psychological phenomenon dehumanizing, which characterizes African American people as being animal-like or nonhuman, reducing their worth and need for physical and legal protection. The author mentions these biases operate when leaders and decision makers determine interventions for the African American female (Epstein et al., 2017; Tonnesen, 2013).

Another way to view this conclusion is through the stereotypes of the media. Epstein et al. (2017) and Tonnesen (2013) add to this narrative by citing media outlets report African American females can handle themselves resulting in reports that rob the African American girl of their innocence causing a false narrative of adultification. Epstein et al. (2017) define adultification of students as two forms: (a) a process of socialization, in which children function at a more mature developmental stage because of situational context and necessity occurring in communities that lack resources, and (b) a social and cultural stereotype based on how adults, who lack the understanding of children's behavior and verbalizations, perceive children.

An ear to listen.

The third and final conclusion is high-needs African American female students in this study recognize there must be consequences for their infractions, but do not accept being overly disciplined to cause more harmful lived experiences, rather they demand schools have people who have an ear to listen and a voice that is slow to speak. This conclusion addresses what interventions and/or programs can be recreated to ensure African

American females are appropriately dealt with in a more culturally competent manner that fosters academic success and restores relationships.

The participants in this study voiced a need for preventative measures they felt could be utilized in school settings to help eliminate infractions. The one most pressing concern was the need for mentors, counselors, caring teachers who understand their culture, more teachers who represent their culture in classrooms, or some form of restorative justice program in schools. The participants felt having someone to talk through their frustrations at times, which had nothing to do with their schooling was important because many times those frustrations and environmental factors had a huge impact on their ability to perform well in class and their ability to control their emotions. Many of the participants explained once they were sent out of class and attempted to explain the root cause of their behaviors, no one listened to them.

Minor behavioral infractions at school have led to penal discipline for African American female students such as suspension, expulsion, and transferring to AEPs (Fedders, 2018; Morris, 2016). Fedders also explains this new exclusion has caused out-of-school suspensions to heighten over the past 30 years, which has been proven to be ineffective, for they cause more harm. Fedders (2018) argues this new exclusion provides states and schools districts the opportunity to push students into AEPs, which transfers into more pressing factors that affect graduations rates, unemployment, juvenile, and criminal records. Discipline research indicates students of color, African Americans, and Latinos, are more likely to encounter discipline in the form of referrals, suspensions, expulsions as well as arrest and policed far more than their counterparts (Wun, 2016).

Schiff (2018) defines Restorative justice practices (RJP) not only as a strategy to address harm and build a positive culture in schools, but also as a movement with the potential to confront injustice and disrupt strategies organized from, and resulting in ongoing domination and oppression of marginalized groups. Schiff also explains the process for implementation as one that is multi-tiered requiring all students to receive core universal instruction and supports. The next tier is targeted interventions and supports, an intensive level, designed to address specific problem behaviors that regularly disrupt classroom or school activities for some students who cause behavioral disruptions in the classroom or school-wide (Schiff, 2018). The last tier, incident-driven conflict, is designed for a small number of students who may cause serious class or school disruptions such as fighting, bullying, vandalism, and theft (Schiff, 2018).

Tonnesen (2013) reasons African American females should be offered the same interventions and strategies as their peers at the discretion of prosecutors, who hold youth accountable for actions to avoid formal processing, leading to “criminalization” (Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2016). Schiff (2018) argues that the benefits of RJP are it gives voice to affected participants, engages students and adults in collaborative problem solving, and encourages participants to take personal responsibility. RJP allows those with a stake in the event to develop a strategic plan of agreements and mends to restore broken relationships (Schiff, 2018). In addition, Schiff (2018) states RJP offers students a means to build empathy, earn redemption, and rebuild their dignity through mature reparation of harm.

Implications for Practice

In addition to the theoretical implications, this study also presents implications for practice within traditional and non-traditional school settings for African American female students who have been disproportionately disciplined for minor infractions. As stated earlier in this chapter and also within the literature review, the African American female student has been targeted more than their counterparts for minor infractions, which lead to many African American female student populations in ALP's to rapidly increase. High needs African American female students are being suspended and placed in ALP's at a larger rate than in previous years. From the literature, we know these students more than likely do not have solid living conditions, family support or an understanding of why they have lived experiences with racism and being disproportionately disciplined.

Adult educators, conscious of these characteristics, should take this opportunity to provide service to African American female students stop the trend by doing the following:

- Establish and implement restorative justice programs (RJPs) designed to decrease a mindset of oppression and develop a mindset that gives a sense of belonging. These programs could provide students with the possibility of connecting and communicating with other students, and faculty, if possible, who are from similar backgrounds, similar family lives, and who have related interests. This would help all stakeholders gain valuable insight as to what factors affect African American female students on a daily basis, to build trust through mentoring to make conscious decisions

due to lack of support in the home and school and to communicate verbally to express their thoughts with specific situations.

- Provide professional development on being culturally aware and bias would also help alleviate some concerns with African American students being removed from their learning environments to understand and respect all parties in a school setting.
- Recreate policies in districts/ school with constituents to prevent marginalization of any minority ethnic group with a protocol for referring to juvenile systems and courts.
- Develop a more structured system of accountability to identify trends in discipline data among teachers and leaders in school settings to alleviate the concerns of African American students being overly disciplined.
- Assess needs, analyze discipline data, and determine if School Resource Officers (SRO's) are effectively utilized in school settings to develop or refine strategic plans of action that should be crafted and implemented to specifically define what are deemed to be appropriate consequences for minor infractions on a school level and/or district level. Districts should work with all stakeholders as a committee to update policies and practices with a heightened level of accountability for monitoring the systems and programs with fidelity.
- Provide training for SRO's, teachers, and leaders specifically geared toward building positive relationships with students in an effort to create safe schools with a warm and inviting culture and climate.

Recommendations for Future Research

In addition to the trends in literature and studies in other parts of the country related to discipline, racism, oppression, and the perceived factors associated with why African American female students are being pushed out of schools, this study will bring an awareness to the policies and practices in low-performing rural Arkansas where racism and discipline have been normalized in school settings. Future research concentrating on the perceptions of parents for students in traditional and non-traditional school settings to gauge what factors parents feel impact educational pathways for students. Future research could also concentrate on all minority groups to determine if they are also have lived experiences of harsh discipline in school settings.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a summary of the study, discussed how the study related to the literature presented, the derived conclusions from the analysis of the data and findings. Implications for the theory and practice in low performing school settings were provided, along with future recommendations in the research field. The following closing remarks are my thoughts about the experience of researching a subject and interviewing participants had a similar background and lived experiences as me.

Closing Remarks

In the beginning phase of my research, I pondered many days and nights on a topic to research. As I reflected on my experience as an administrator in an elementary and high school setting, I began to discover it was my African American female student population that frequented my office more often than any other race. In some instances, they needed love, attention, support, and an ear to listen without passing judgment. In



many other situations, they needed a voice to represent them when it came to discipline or what they considered to be harsh unfair treatment. The more I began to research the topic and analyze my own discipline data, something stirred up inside me to invest and research the perceptions of African American female students, and what they view as factors that impact how success less or successful African American female students are in a school setting that had strong implications that granted them “permission to fail” social, emotionally, and academically.

This research has not only stirred my mind to explore what interventions can be implemented, but it also awakened a fight in me to be strategic in how I interact and discipline my students at young ages. Through this research, I have learned the importance of thinking about the longevity of suspending, expelling, and/ or referring them to ALE programs, which are designed to control student behaviors with limited support and resources. I find myself investing time serving in a mentor/ nurturing capacity with many of my students specifically my African American female students. I now realize they have been screaming for help for years and no one has heard their cries. This research has also created some relationships with the participants and their parents. It has also aided the participants to become reflective in their actions that led to the many infractions. It has created a bond between some of the participants. It has inspired and encouraged them to keep pressing forward regardless of what naysayers had expressed. They immediately learned through my researcher positionality and my shared lived experiences although we encounter schooling and life differently from those who created the systems we dwell in, we can still rise above the adversities and become something greater if we become unified with one voice for change, which starts within.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Superintendent of Schools Letter for [REDACTED] School District

September 11, 2018

[REDACTED]

I am Renata Bryant, and I am a doctoral student at Arkansas Tech University as well as an administrator at Stewart Elementary in Forrest City, Arkansas. I am in the preliminary stages of studying the lived experiences of African American female students in school, in light of a growing body of literature that describes African American girls as receiving serious disciplinary consequences at disproportionate rates.

I am reaching out to see whether, when the time arrives, you would be willing to allow me to conduct my study in your district. I would like to conduct semi-structured open-ended interviews with African American female students focusing on grades 9 through 12 in an attempt to determine if the perceptions from the participants are consistent with published research.

Naturally, I would not begin recruiting participants unless/until my proposal is approved by Arkansas Tech's Institutional Review Board, and unless/until I have obtained authorization from [REDACTED]. In addition, all participants' identities would be kept confidential, and the identity of [REDACTED] would be obscured.

It is my hope to bring to the forefront, what are the perceived factors that contribute to the high disproportion gap as indicated in student discipline data pertaining to the African American female in public schools. Any assistance you can provide would be greatly appreciated. If you permit me to move forward with my request to conduct these confidential interviews, I would greatly appreciate confirmation. Please confirm by replying to this email. If there is further information needed in order to make your decision, I would be happy to cooperate. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Renata Bryant

Appendix B

Superintendent of Schools Letter for [REDACTED] School District

June 1, 2018



I am Renata Bryant, and I am a doctoral student at Arkansas Tech University as well as an administrator at Stewart Elementary in Forrest City, Arkansas. I am in the preliminary stages of studying the lived experiences of African American female students in school, in light of a growing body of literature that describes African American girls as receiving serious disciplinary consequences at disproportionate rates.

I am reaching out to see whether, when the time arrives, you would be willing to allow me to conduct my study in your district. I would like to conduct semi-structured open – ended interviews with African American female students focusing on grades 9 through 12 in an attempt to determine if the perceptions from the participants are consistent with published research.

Naturally, I would not begin recruiting participants unless/until my proposal is approved by Arkansas Tech's Institutional Review Board, and unless/until I have obtained authorization from [REDACTED]. In addition, all participants' identities would be kept confidential, and the identity [REDACTED] would be obscured.

It is my hope to bring to the forefront, what are the perceived factors that contribute to the high disproportion gap as indicated in student discipline data pertaining to the African American female in public schools. Any assistance you can provide would be greatly appreciated. If there is further information needed in order to make your decision, I would be happy to cooperate. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Renata Bryant

Appendix C

Superintendent of Schools Letter for [REDACTED] School District

September 11, 2018

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
625 Irving Street
Forrest City, Arkansas

I am Renata Bryant, and I am a doctoral student at Arkansas Tech University as well as an administrator at Stewart Elementary in Forrest City, Arkansas. I am in the preliminary stages of studying the lived experiences of African American female students in school, in light of a growing body of literature that describes African American girls as receiving serious disciplinary consequences at disproportionate rates.

I am reaching out to see whether, when the time arrives, you would be willing to allow me to conduct my study in your district. I would like to conduct semi-structured open – ended interviews with African American female students focusing on grades 9 through 12 in an attempt to determine if the perceptions from the participants are consistent with published research.

Naturally, I would not begin recruiting participants unless/until my proposal is approved by Arkansas Tech’s Institutional Review Board, and unless/until I have obtained authorization from [REDACTED]. In addition, all participants’ identities would be kept confidential, and the identity of [REDACTED] High School would be obscured.

It is my hope to bring to the forefront, what are the perceived factors that contribute to the high disproportion gap as indicated in student discipline data pertaining to the African American female in public schools. Any assistance you can provide would be greatly appreciated. If you permit me to move forward with my request to conduct these confidential interviews, I would greatly appreciate confirmation. Please confirm by replying to this email. If there is further information needed in order to make your decision, I would be happy to cooperate. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Renata Bryant

Appendix D

Letter of Permission for Instrument

June 12, 2018

Renata Bryant
Arkansas Tech University
Advanced Studies
Center for Leadership and Learning
227 State Road 333 South
Russellville, Arkansas 72802
rbryant11@atu.edu

Dear Dr. Ericker Roberson Hursey:

I am a doctoral student from Arkansas Tech University writing my dissertation titled “Why African American Females are “Pushed Out” of Public Schools: The Perception of African American Female Students, Teachers, and Administrators in Three Arkansas Public High Schools”, under the direction of my dissertation committee chaired by Dr. John Freeman, who can be reached via phone at (479) 356-2001 or via email- jfreeman44@atu.edu. The Arkansas Tech University IRB Committee Point of Contact, Mrs. Tiffany Henry, can be contacted at 479- 880-4327 or via email - thenry1@atu.edu, or by mail at Office of Sponsored Programs and University Initiatives (OSPUI), Administration 207, Russellville, Arkansas 72802.

I would like your permission to use the Student Questionnaire and Small Focus Group Guiding Questions instrument from your study, “The Perceptions of Alternative Education Students Ages 18-21 About the Factors in the Traditional School Setting that Inhibited Their On-Time High School Graduation” within my qualitative phenomenological research study when the time arrives. I would like to use and print your survey under the following conditions:

1. I will use portions of the questionnaire and guiding questions only for my research study and will not sell or use it with any compensated or curriculum development activities.
2. I will include the copyright statement on all copies of the instrument.
3. I will send a copy of my completed research study to your attention upon completion of the study.

If these are acceptable terms and conditions, please indicate so by replying to me through e-mail: rbryant11@atu.edu

Sincerely,

Renata Bryant, Doctoral Student
Arkansas Tech University

Appendix E

Superintendent Approval Response

Wed, Sep 12, 8:02 AM (7 days ago)

to me, [REDACTED]

ok, contact [REDACTED] to set up interviews. [REDACTED]

Appendix F

[REDACTED] Superintendent Approval Response

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

June 15, 2018

Dear Ms. Renata Bryant,

The Superintendent of [REDACTED] School District, [REDACTED], has **approved** your dissertation regarding “Why African American Females are "Pushed Out” of Public Schools: The Perception of African American Female Students, Teachers, and Administrators in Three Arkansas Public High Schools” for the duration of the 2018 - 2019 school year. You may conduct your research at the [REDACTED] High School and the Alternative Learning Environment. This approval is good for one year. You may not conduct your research during testing; both state testing and end of the year exams.

Please maintain the confidentiality of the data and do not make public the name of the district or schools. We ask that you provide us with a copy of your completed research.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Appendix G

Superintendent Approval Response



7:57 AM (4
hours ago)

to me

It is approved.



Appendix H

Permission of Instrument Approval Response

[REDACTED]

Mon, Jun 18,
9:09 AM

to Renata, me

Yes, you may use the questions. Please keep me posted on your progress and let me know if I can assist in anyway. Enjoy the journey.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Appendix I

Student Interview Question Guide

1. What is your current age?
2. Did you grow up in a one parent household or a two parent household?
3. Who was present in the household?
4. Have you held a job before or do you currently work?
5. What grade are you currently in?
6. Do you have any siblings? Do they live in the same household with you?
7. What is your parent's highest education level?
 - a. Mother / female guardian
 - b. Father / male guardian
8. Can you describe to me where you grew up?
9. How do you feel your community has impacted your experiences at school?
10. Tell me how you believe that growing up in that area impacted your experiences in school.
11. Tell me about the support you feel you had at home?
12. What is your best memory of elementary school?
13. What is your best memory of school after elementary?
14. Tell me about your most negative memory of school overall.
15. Tell me about the support you have at school? (Specifically ask about the individual named in the previous questions and how they impacted their lived experiences in school.)
16. What has encouraged or discouraged you from continuing to perform well in school?
17. Explain to me how you feel your race has impacted your education you received.
18. Explain to me how you feel your race has impacted the discipline you received.
19. Tell me about a time you believe race was a factor in your education and discipline in school.
20. Tell me about someone in the school system who you feel has made an impact on your life. Explain how.
21. Tell me as to why you are not completing your education in a traditional setting.
22. So, tell me why you believe your current environment is being successful to you.
23. Tell me why your current environment is not helping you be successful in education.
24. What is it about a traditional educational setting that you believe would benefit your educational experience here?
25. What type of support systems (socially, academically, or athletically) would be beneficial to you?
26. What advice would you give to a young lady in a similar environment on school?
27. Is there anything I have not asked you that you would like to discuss?
28. Before we end this interview, is there anything you would like to ask me?

Appendix J



ARKANSAS TECH
UNIVERSITY

**Office of Sponsored Programs
and University Initiatives**

Administration Building, Room 207
1509 North Boulder Avenue
Russellville, Arkansas 72801

Office: 479-880-4327
www.atu.edu

October 24, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

The Arkansas Tech University Institutional Review Board has approved Renata Bryant's IRB application, "The Perceptions of African American Female High-Needs Students Regarding the Impact of the Disciplinary System in Low-Performing Schools in Arkansas," through October 24, 2021. The approval code is Bryant_102418.

Thank you,



Masanori Kuroki, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

