

Disproportionate discipline policies: African American student and teacher perspectives within
the context of school-wide intervention efforts

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A dissertation to be submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2018

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

College of Education

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Abstract

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Discipline disproportionality is a complex problem plaguing public schools across the nation. Over the last twenty years, schools have implemented school-wide intervention models to address the overuse of exclusionary discipline. Despite this movement, discipline disproportionality still exists, and contributes to persistent educational inequities for African American students. Much of the research on this topic has been quantitative and focused on the experience of African American males. This study diverges from that tradition by using a participatory ethnographic method to gather qualitative data from the individuals who are most affected by disproportionate discipline practices, African American students and teachers. Data was collected via in-depth interviews with nine African American female high school students, seven long-term teachers who identified as White (four females and three males), and one African American female administrator. The study was conducted at a public high school experiencing discipline disproportionality within the context of a school-wide intervention model. The results show the complexity of how discipline disproportionality is maintained

within a racialized school context. A primary finding was that teachers and students see the student-teacher relationship as a critical factor in the maintenance of unfair discipline practices. Teachers also cite systemic and structural factors as key contributors to discipline issues in the school. Further, teachers reported feeling a lack of support from administrators, which contributed to teachers' low levels of self-efficacy in the face of discipline practices at their school. Finally, both the students and the teachers perceived the school-wide intervention model (PBIS) as not being fully realized in their school. Using critical race theory and social psychology perspectives, the author argues that the complexities of discipline disparities can be better understood by analyzing the transactional nature of student-teacher interactions within the context of the racial and power dynamics inherent in the institution of schools. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank the seven amazing young women who collaborated with me as co-researchers for this study. I absolutely could not have done this work without them, and will be forever grateful for having the chance to work with them. Getting to know these young women changed my life, and the imprint of this change will always be felt.

Across my years of graduate school, the guidance of my advisor, Dr. Janine Jones, has been amazing and absolutely instrumental in my success. Thank you for always believing in me and my ideas, while also challenging me to ask bigger questions and seek alternative interpretations. It has been an inspiration to learn from you, and experience your patience, wisdom and warmth. I feel honored to have worked with you over the last six years. I am also incredibly grateful to Dr. Megan Bang, Dr. Joe Lott, and Dr. Amelia Gavin for their support and guidance in creating this dissertation. I learned an incredible amount from each of you during this process, and will always be thankful for the opportunity to have worked with you.

Finally, I would like to thank the friends and family that supported me through my graduate school journey. I am so thankful for the friends I made in my graduate program, and am particularly grateful for their support through laughter, dancing, silliness and love. I am also very thankful to the friends who were there before graduate school started and still remain after the long haul. Your support and patience means the world to me. Thank you the ever present support of my family. Most importantly, I need to thank my husband for his love and support across this journey. Through the ups and downs of this journey, you were always there to encourage and support me, while adding love and laughter into my life. Thank you.

Introduction

The goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the maintenance of discipline disproportionality for African American female high school students in the context of school-wide positive intervention efforts. Specifically this study seeks to understand this complex problem through the voices of African American female students and White male and female teachers who live with the effects of disproportionate discipline problems on a daily basis within their school. Further, this study questioned why school-wide interventions aimed at reducing discipline disproportionality might not be effective or relevant for African American female students. The purpose of this participatory ethnography is to examine the cultural realities of the school under study, and better understand how students and teachers interpret and make meaning around disproportionate discipline practices, and the effects of those practices, in their school. It is hoped that this understanding can be used to inform culturally responsive interventions to reduce discipline disproportionality for African American female students.

This study employed a participatory ethnography methodology that was informed by a participatory action research framework. The participants for this study were purposefully selected in order to gather the perspectives of key stakeholders in the school. Participants included a group of 9 African American female student co-researchers, 7 White teachers (three males and four females) who had extensive histories with the school under study, and one female African American administrator. This introductory chapter is organized to provide background information and context for the study. It begins with a presentation of the background information related to the problem under study. Following this background information, a statement of the problem, and a detailed explanation of the purpose and significance of this study

is provided. This chapter concludes with a general statement of researcher positionality. The impact of the researcher's positionality on specific methodological choices is discussed in more detail within the methods section of this paper.

Background of the Problem

Academic disparities for African American students. An extensive amount of research has been conducted on academic disparities for students of color in the American public school system. Within the U.S. education system, there are a substantial number of students denied full access to the benefits of a high quality education due of their race or ethnicity (Howard, 2014). Research has shown that African American students are one of the most academically and socially marginalized groups in educational settings (Venzant Chambers, 2009; Howard, 2014; Mickelson, 2003; United States Department of Education, 2017). Across the country, schools are confronting and trying to eliminate a persistent 'achievement gap' for African American students. This achievement gap is often seen in key educational indicators and outcomes such as assessment scores, high school graduation, discipline disparities, high school dropout rates, and entry into secondary education (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Mechanisms that are related to these academic disparities have been tied to the existence of an *opportunity gap* for students of color (Howard, 2014; Noguera, 2001). The opportunity gap can be defined as disparities in access to key educational opportunities that are often associated with a high quality education, such as access to early childhood education, qualified teachers, classroom materials, and advanced placement or college readiness courses (Howard, 2014).

In late 2016, the White House released a report on the most recent collection of Civil Rights data (2013-2014) by the Department of Education (Black, Giuliano, & Narayan, 2016). This report confirmed the continued existence of educational disparities for African American

students across all grades, noting that these disparities continued to be associated with poor academic and occupational outcomes for our nation's youth. The report stated that while there had been some progress made towards decreasing the achievement and opportunity gaps, persistent disparities still needed to be addressed. Among these disparities were equitable school funding practices, access to high quality teachers, access to mental health services, and highly disproportionate discipline rates.

Inequities in academic opportunities contribute not only to negative academic outcomes, but also economic outcomes for African American students. Research has shown that poor academic outcomes are associated with a lack of employment opportunities, a higher likelihood of welfare dependency, and an increased chance of becoming involved in criminal activity (Fabelo et al., 2011; Howard, 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003). Poor academic outcomes are costly for both individual students and society. When students dropout or are pushed out of high school, the costs of lost earnings, unrealized tax revenue, and rendering social services, can exceed 200 billion dollars (Howard, 2014).

African American students are exposed to varying degrees of racial discrimination, microaggressions, and cultural stereotypes within the school environment. Students of color experience both explicit and implicit forms of racism and discrimination while at school. Often, many of these experiences are inherent parts of the system of the school as an institution. For example, African American students are more likely to attend schools that are poorly funded, and consequently provide less access to advanced courses and college preparatory work (Black, Giuliano, & Narayan, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Fuligini & Hardway, 2004; Howard, 2008). Further, many schools engage in academic tracking that systematically disadvantages African American students (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Hattie, 2009; Lee

& Smith, 2001; Oakes et al., 1993). Across their academic career, African American students are consistently required to adapt to the norms and standards of their academic institutions, which often implicitly represent the dominant hegemonic culture (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Continued exposure to systemic inequalities across development contributes to both psychological and academic difficulties for African American students (Wong, Eccles, & Samerfoff, 2003). Qualitative studies examining student perspectives of equity and race in schools show that African American students are highly aware of the negative racial stereotypes that are attributed to them by both their peers and their teachers (Howard, 2008; Steele, 1997). Research has shown that positive school climates that promote equity for all students are tied to increased school bonding and engagement (Debnam, Johnson, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2014). Alternatively, students who experience less equity and more racial discrimination are at risk for poor academic outcomes (Benner & Graham, 2013; Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009; Seaton & Yip, 2009; Steele, 1997; Wong, Eccles, & Samerfoff, 2003).

It is within this context of sustained academic disparities and racial discrimination that African American students are being disproportionately disciplined. The reasons that disparities in discipline continue to exist cannot be explained away by a simple explanation often proposed: What if African American students act out more and have more severe behaviors? Several studies have shown that African American students do not have higher levels of misbehavior in school (Bonehefski & Runge, 2014; Skiba, Micheal, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011). Instead, it is important for scholars to examine how disproportionate discipline practices may be related to systems and structure level factors, teacher's perception of support, and student-teacher interactions within the racialized context of a school.

Statement of the Problem

Disproportionate discipline rates for African American students are a complex problem in our nation's schools (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Howard, 2014). Disparities in discipline practices contribute to the opportunity gap for African American students by pushing students out of the classroom and the school, and reducing the opportunity for students to learn along side their peers. Researchers have proposed a variety of theories for the cause of this disparity, such as the influence of poverty and "risky" neighborhoods (Brantlinger, 1991; Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008), low-resourced schools with under-qualified teachers (McLloyd, 1998), the targeting of certain groups of students based on racial stereotypes (Piquero, 2008; Skiba, 2008), and student-teacher relationship factors such as cultural mismatch, implicit biases, and lower teacher expectations for students of color (Ferguson, 2000; Irvine, 2002; Weinstein, Gregory & Strambler, 2004). Given that student-teacher interactions make up a large portion of a school day, researchers are starting to look more closely at how the components of these interactions may be influencing disproportionate discipline practices. In order to gather an accurate representation of how students and teachers perceive this relationship, qualitative studies that include both voices are needed in the research.

Over the last three decades, there has been an increased awareness of discipline disproportionality within schools. While there is an extensive amount of research on the existence of discipline disproportionality, interventions to reduce this practice are limited. Many schools implement school-wide positive intervention support (PBIS) models as a strategy to help increase positive school climate and reduce the number of overall discipline referrals. A related goal of the PBIS model was to help reduce disproportionate rates of discipline for African American students. Unfortunately, this goal of the model has not been fully realized. Research studies examining the effects of PBIS strategies on disproportionate discipline rates have been

mixed. Research by Skiba and colleagues (2011) showed that although overall discipline rates decreased under the PBIS framework, African American students continue to be disproportionately disciplined at all grades, and particularly high rates persist in middle and high school. A large scale study by McIntosh and colleagues (2018) revealed that when PBIS models were implemented with adequate fidelity, there was a 20% decrease in overall out of school suspensions, and discipline disparity numbers were also lowered. However, the authors point out that while there was a decrease in disproportionality, the discipline numbers still represented inequities in discipline practice. Hence, what was once considered a promising intervention to reduce discipline disparities is not producing the types of effects that practitioners had hoped.

One explanation for the persistence of disproportionate discipline practices within the framework of school-wide interventions may be that these interventions are not being implemented in a culturally relevant manner. Bal and Trainor (2016) describe culturally relevant interventions as those that consider the fundamental elements of cultural and linguistic diversity within the design of the intervention, incorporating individual and intergroup diversity. In discussing the creation of culturally relevant school-wide PBIS, Bal and colleagues (2014) point out that while the original conceptualization of this type of intervention did not consider culture as a key factor, culture *needs* to be considered in order to create meaningful and sustainable interventions within diverse communities. Researchers have recommend that further research be done on the different ways school-wide interventions can be implemented in a culturally responsive manner; as well as look at how this framework can be adaptive and supportive of the behavior of all students (Bal & Trainor, 2016; Comer, Joyner and Ben-Avie, 2004; Jones et al., 2006).

Scholars have recommended that school-wide intervention teams aim for culturally relevant design and implementation through collaboration, distributed control of power, and active participation by key stakeholders in the process (Comer, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 2004). This may be particularly important for interventions that have the goal of reducing systemic or institutionalized inequities, such as disproportionate discipline practices. Including the voices of those stakeholders who are consistently affected by disproportionate discipline practices, may generate transformative knowledge that can challenge and disrupt the inherent conditions of inequities within the school (Bal & Trainor, 2016). In order to authentically create culturally relevant school-wide interventions that will be meaningful to diverse students, the perspective of students and other key stakeholders may be a crucial component to this work.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how African American female students and White teachers interpret and make meaning around disproportionate discipline practices, and the effects of those practices, in their school. Further, this study examined why school-wide interventions aimed at reducing discipline disproportionality may not be effective or relevant for African American female students. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed.

1. To what extent does the student-teacher relationship contribute to patterns of disproportionate discipline practices?
2. How do student and teacher perspectives on discipline and disproportionate discipline practices vary, and in what ways are there commonalities?
 - a. In what ways may these variations and commonalities maintain disproportionate rates of discipline for African American students?

3. In what ways do teachers feelings of support and self-efficacy contribute to the maintenance of discipline disproportionality?
4. To what extent do African American students and teachers perceive the methods and goals of the existing school-wide interventions implemented in their school as culturally relevant (i.e., valued, acceptable, important)?

Significance of Study

Several quantitative studies have established evidence of disproportionate discipline practices across the U.S. (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Losen and Gillespie, 2012). Increasingly, educational scholars have proposed theories for why this complex problem continues to persist. As shown in Figure 1, researchers have hypothesized varying contributors to the maintenance of discipline disproportionality, such as individual student factors, student-teacher interactions (Gay, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 1997), and systemic level factors and systemic inequalities (Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

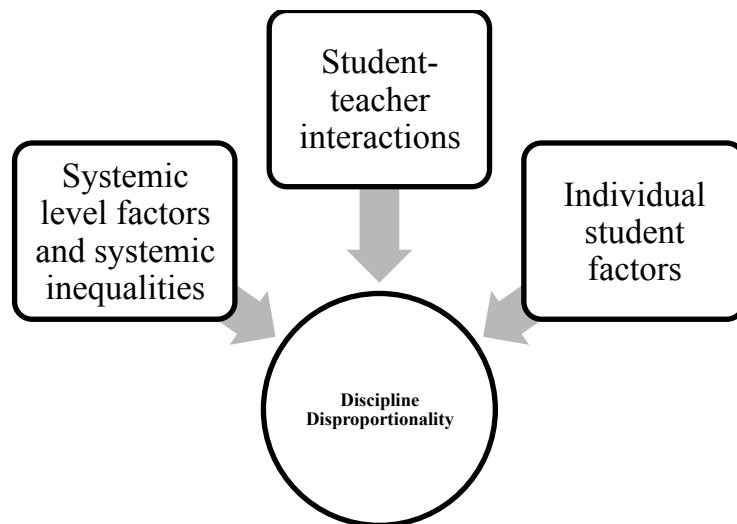


Figure 1. Hypothesized contributors to discipline disproportionality

Researchers have suggested that systems level factors and structural inequities may play a role in providing the context for disparities in discipline to flourish (Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Further, scholars have suggested that specific qualities and characteristics of student-teacher interactions may play an important role in the maintenance of discipline disproportionality in schools (Gay, 2002; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Howard, 2014; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). While it is assumed that discipline disproportionality is caused by several complex factors that are specific to each unique school environment (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014), very few qualitative studies have been done that specifically examine how systems level factors and relational factors may interact in the maintenance of unfair discipline practices. Even fewer studies have examined this relationship as perceived by the students and teachers in the school.

Despite the large amount of research devoted to discipline disparities for African American students, there is not a curriculum or intervention that can be adopted by all schools that will be guaranteed to address this problem (Boneshefski et al., 2014). While PBIS models were developed to address the overuse of exclusionary discipline practices in schools, researchers and practitioners are now coming to terms with the fact that the PBIS model on its own is not a simple fix to discipline disparities (Fallon, O’Keeffe, & Sugai, 2012; Martinez, McMahon, & Treger, 2016; Vincent & Tobin, 2011). Researchers have hypothesized that the reason for this is that PBIS strategies are often not implemented in an authentically culturally relevant way (Sugai, O’Keeffe, & Fallon, 2012). However, few studies gather data from students and teachers related to their perception of a school’s PBIS model in relation to its cultural responsiveness and its effect on discipline disparities (for an exception see Jones, Caravaca, Cizek, Horner, and Vincent, 2006). Gathering qualitative data from students and teachers based

on their own lived experiences within the school environment is essential for future work aimed at creating culturally relevant interventions that can reduce academic disparities for African American students.

Researcher Positionality

My identity as a White, female graduate student, with experience as a practicing school psychologist, informs my lens and perspective in this work. As a researcher, my positionality is rooted in a critical theory perspective of education. I believe that disproportionate discipline practices contribute to disparities in academic outcomes for African American students. Additionally, I posit that the persistence of these disparities for African American students may be maintained by implicit bias within explicit power hierarchies in the school system. Further, I believe that school-wide interventions are generally an innovative way for schools to implement systems level prevention and intervention efforts, *and* that these interventions can also illustrate how an explicit power hierarchy works within a school environment.

Review of the Literature

Discipline Disproportionality

African American students are disproportionately represented in a variety of school discipline outcomes such as classroom office referrals (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Rocque, 2010), out-of-school suspensions (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Hinojosa, 2008) and expulsions related to zero tolerance policies (Tailor & Detch, 1998). Disparities in discipline rates have been identified as early as preschool and persist within the educational experience for many African American students throughout their academic career, with the peak of these discipline actions occurring in the middle and high school years (Skiba et al., 2011). National suspension rates show that 17% of African American students (K-12) are suspended at least once (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). The rate is higher than that for Native Americans (8%), Latinos (7%), Whites (5%), or Asian Americans (2%) (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Furthermore, students who experience higher rates of academic discipline are often those who also have early involvement with the juvenile justice system (Simson, 2014; Skiba et al., 2014).

Exclusionary discipline practices and zero-tolerance policies disproportionately affect African American students, and lead to student disengagement and a negative school climate (Anderson, 2008). The National Association of School Psychologists (2012) has recommended that schools move away from the use of out-of-school suspensions and zero tolerance policies, and towards more effective school-wide positive discipline techniques, including learning supports to address social-emotional health, academic achievement, and positive behavior.

Discipline disproportionality occurs when one group of students is represented within the discipline data at a rate that is significantly higher or lower than the population percentage of that same group (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014). Researchers and school administrators can represent the concept of discipline disproportionality through the use of a risk index or a risk ratio. A risk

index represents the percentage of a group that is at risk for a specific outcome, and can be calculated by dividing the number of students in a particular group who have been disciplined by the number of total students in that same group (Boneshefski et al., 2014). A risk ratio represents the relative risk of one group being disciplined compared to another group's risk, and can be calculated by dividing the risk index of the first group by the risk index of the second group (Boneshefski et al., 2014). If a group has a risk ratio greater than 1.0, that group of students are considered to be overrepresented in the discipline data. Alternatively, if a group has a risk ratio less than 1.0, that group may be underrepresented in the discipline data.

In a review of discipline patterns across a large set of elementary and middle schools, Skiba et al., (2011) found that African American students experienced disproportionate discipline practices across development. African American elementary students were found to be 2.19 times more likely than White students to be referred to the office for misbehaviors, and African American middle school students were 3.78 times more likely than White students to be referred to the office (Skiba et al., 2011). Further, the authors found that African American students were more likely than White students to receive an out of school suspension or expulsion for the same behavioral infractions (Skiba et al., 2011). This study suggests that discipline disparities exist in elementary school and increase in the middle school years.

Skiba and colleagues (2014) examined the contribution of school-level characteristics on disparities in discipline practices. In this study, the authors concluded that systemic school-level factors were more influential than individual or behavior factors when considering the overrepresentation of African American students in discipline (Skiba et al., 2014). The study found that school principal orientation toward school discipline policies, and other school level factors were significant predictors of disproportionate suspension and expulsion practices. This

relationship remained significant even after school level factors such as SES and achievement level, and individual student factors such as gender and behavior severity, were accounted for (Skiba et al., 2014). The authors suggest that interventions aimed at reducing discipline disproportionality will need to address these systemic issues.

Zero-tolerance policies. Research has shown that zero-tolerance discipline procedures (Cartledge, Tillman, & Johnson, 2001; Morrison & D’Incau, 1997; Noguera, 1995, 2003; Skiba & Kresting, 2001) tend to have disparate outcomes for African American students. In response to the perception of increasing violence in schools, zero-tolerance discipline policies are a common strategy employed in school buildings across America (Cartledge, Tillman, & Johnson, 2001; Skiba & Kresting, 2001). Zero-tolerance policies were designed to create firm discipline procedures for specific offenses associated with weapons, drugs, alcohol, tobacco or violence (Cartledge et al., 2001). The extensive use of zero-tolerance policies is related to a dramatic increase in school suspensions and expulsions (Cartledge et al., 2001; Morrison & D’Incau, 1997), particularly for students in urban areas (Skiba & Kresting, 2001). Further, these suspensions based on zero-tolerance policies are often a result of subjective behaviors such as disrespect, attendance problems, and general classroom disruption.

A substantial amount of research indicates that marginalized youth are the most affected by zero-tolerance discipline policies (Blythe & Milner, 1993; Cartledge, Tillman, & Johnson, 2001, Skiba & Kresting, 2001). As a policy that directly increases school exclusion practices for African American students, zero-tolerance practices have consequently contributed to increasing the opportunity gap (Cartledge et al., 2001). Students who experience high levels of school exclusion also experience negative effects such as grade retention, high school dropout and academic failure (Cartledge et al., 2001). Researchers have found that the negative effects of

exclusionary discipline in middle and high school can also contribute to difficulties in adulthood. Wolf and Kupchik (2017) found that students who experienced at suspension in the secondary years of school were more likely to be criminally involved. Unfortunately, the negative consequences of zero-tolerance policies are not outweighed by the program's successes. In an examination of outcomes related to zero-tolerance policy implementation across ten years, Skiba and Kresting (2001) found that there was no evidence that the policy had increased school safety or contributed to the improvement of student behaviors.

Intersectionality of gender and race in discipline. Researchers have consistently demonstrated a relationship between gender, race, and discipline disproportionality (Howard, 2014; Morris, 2007, 2017). African American male students are consistently disciplined at a disproportionate rate (Martinez, McMahon, & Treger, 2016; Mizel et al., 2016), and African American male students who receive special education services are typically disciplined at an even higher rate (Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz & Chung, 2005; Sullivan, Klingbeil, & Van Norman, 2013). In a study by Martinez et al. (2016), African American males were more likely to receive an Office discipline referral (ODR) than African American female students. Further, African American male students were found to be at the highest risk for receiving an ODR for subjective behaviors such as disruption and insubordination (Martinez et al., 2016). In a study examining the risk of receiving multiple suspensions, Sullivan et al. (2013) found that African American males and students from low SES backgrounds were overrepresented in the suspension data. Further, African American male students who were receiving special education services were significantly more likely to experience multiple suspensions (Sullivan et al., 2013).

While much is known about the relationship between African American males and discipline disproportionality, research on discipline disparities for African American females is still in its beginning stages. This turn towards examining the intersectionality of race and gender in issues of educational inequality, allows for a more comprehensive assessment of the different levels of oppression at work (Crenshaw, 1993). National discipline disparities data for African American girls across the years 2000 to 2009 show a steady increase in the number of disciplines these girls are experiencing. Although African American girls made up approximately 16% of the student population across these years, they experienced disproportionate disciplinary actions. In 2000, African American girls represented 34% of the suspension data, and in 2006 they represented 43%. In 2009, the figure had risen to 52% (Morris, 2016).

Recent studies have begun to examine the different discipline experiences of African American female students (Blake, Keith, Lou, Le, & Salter, 2017; Morris, 2005, 2007; Morris & Perry, 2017) For example, Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, and Moore-Thomas (2012) found that female African American and multiracial students were more likely to be referred to school counselors for disruptive behaviors. Some researchers have found that African American female students are receiving more severe punishments than their White peers.

In a recent study by Morris and Perry (2017), African American female students were found to be three times more likely than White female students to receive an office referral. According to the author, this discipline gap is significantly wider than the disparity that is seen between African American male and White male students (Morris et al., 2017). Further, the authors found that African American females are more likely to be referred for discipline for behaviors that are subjective in nature and can be influenced by gendered interpretations, such as disruptive behavior, dress code violations, disobedience, and aggressive behavior (Morris et al.,

2017). The same pattern can be seen in a study done on elementary-age students. Smolkowski, Girvan, McIntosh, Nese, and Horner (2016) found that African American female students in elementary school, were more likely to be sent out of class for more subjectively defined behaviors than White female students. Another recent study points to the role of colorism to explain discipline disparities for female African American students (Blake, Keith, Lou, Le, & Salter, 2017). Blake and colleagues (2017) found that female African American adolescents with darker skin tones were two times more likely to receive an out of school suspension than White female students. This relationship was not found for African American students with lighter skin complexions.

Morris (2005) examined the role of gender on discipline, and found that African American female students are often perceived as exhibiting behavior that is not “lady-like”. Morris (2005) points out that schools often discipline African American female students for infractions that focus on dress code and manners. The author argues that this gendered approach to discipline is specific to African American females. In her book on how African American girls are pushed out of educational spaces, Morris (2016), discusses the theory that African American girls are often measures against a docile and “ideal” version of femininity that is based in White normative culture. Consequently, responses from teachers are often aimed at countering what is seen as overly assertive, challenging and confrontational (Morris, 2016). These responses from teachers and administrators contribute to the disproportionate discipline practices for African American girls, and can be particularly pertinent in subjective evaluations of behaviors. Morris (2016) points out that in the context of the student-teacher relationship, African American girls are often at a disadvantage. When a student speaks her mind in class, is this comment seen as part of the student’s learning, or is it seen as a willful challenge to the

teacher's authority? Further research on the intersection of gender and race in discipline disparities is needed to gain a better understanding of the unique experiences of African American females.

Outcomes related to discipline disproportionality. Research has shown that students who experience exclusionary academic discipline practices, such as suspension or expulsion, often have poor outcomes associated with school completion and stability in early adulthood. Students who experience high rates of academic discipline are more likely to struggle academically, become disconnected from school, and have poor academic attainment (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Disparities in discipline practices are associated with African American students perception of school equity, sense of belonging, and ability to adjust and cope (Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2017). Low academic achievement and early disengagement from school has been associated with early involvement with the juvenile justice system, and higher rates of incarceration in early adulthood (Fabelo et al., 2011; Wald & Losen, 2003; Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Specifically, this link from academic discipline to early disengagement from school, resulting in potential involvement with the juvenile justice system has been termed the "school-to-prison pipeline", and is well established in the research literature (Gonsoulin, Zablocki, & Leone, 2012; Heitzeg, 2009; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). The school-to-prison pipeline can be construed as the interaction of policies and practices within public schools, often related to school discipline, that lead to increased likelihood of involvement with the juvenile justice system. These policies and practices act to decrease opportunities of school success for students and increase the likelihood of negative outcomes in adulthood (Skiba et al., 2014). Research has shown that the school-to-prison pipeline

disproportionately affects students of color, particularly African American students (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Skiba, Rausch, & Ritter, 2004).

Teacher- Student Interactions

Interactions between students and teachers within a school context are theorized to contribute to discipline disproportionality for African American students. The contribution of the following factors on academic disparities has been examined in the research literature: student-teacher relationships, teacher expectations, teacher subjectivity in using discipline, and cultural mismatch of student and teachers.

School belonging and student-teacher relationships. A student's connection with school and their relationship with teachers within that school are key contributors to academic success. A student's sense of belonging within a school context is often related to their relationship with teachers or other adults in that environment (Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort, 2011; Wentzel, 1999). In general, negative student-teacher relationships are associated with low levels of belonging, more behavioral problems, and academic underachievement (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). For African American students, these relationships may take on an added significance, in that school belonging and strong student-teacher relationships can contribute to the development of social capital (Arriaza, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

For the purposes of this study, social capital will be defined as capital that is developed through contextualized social networks and relationships with agents of power (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In turn, the value of social capital is most prominent in social contexts, and can assist with the navigation of social boundaries and systemic and institutional barriers. In the context of school, African American youth build social capital as they are able to learn how to establish their own position within their cultural group, as well as across other groups, while

interacting with mainstream, dominant practices within the institution (Arriaza, 2003). In doing so, African American youth must develop skills that allow them to participate in multiple worlds, while also coping with the presence of oppressive institutional forces (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Unfortunately, this process can be difficult and alienating for many African American youth, and so the presence of caring and supportive teachers within the school environment is often crucial for students to successfully navigate this process (Gay, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Studies have shown that African American youth often have poor relationships with teachers within the school context. African American youth often perceive teachers as insensitive and uncaring (Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2016; Lee, 1999; Polite, 1994). There are structural and systemic factors that are thought to contribute to the lack of positive student-teacher relationships for African American youth. Student-teacher conflict can arise when there is a mismatch between a student's expression of behavior and a teacher's cultural norm (Arriaza, 2003), or when there is a perceived lack of caring on the part of the teacher coupled with a sense of powerlessness in the student (Lee, 1999). The presence of implicit bias and stereotype-based assumptions also contributes to the way that teachers treat African American students (Howard, 2014).

Positive student-teacher relationships for African American youth are associated with positive academic outcomes. Studies examining student perspectives of student-teacher relationships have shown that when students have a positive and caring relationship with a teacher, this relationship influences that student's academic motivation, investment, and self-confidence (Lee, 1999). Further, positive engagement with teachers can contribute to a stronger sense of school belonging for African American youth (Booker, 2004), and that this sense of belonging can predict more positive academic outcomes (Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008).

Teacher expectations. Teacher perceptions and expectations of student academic ability are tied to academic performance and behavior (Wentzel, 1997; Wood, Kaplan, & McLoyd, 2007). This relationship is particularly salient for students of color (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Ferguson, 2003; Jussim & Harber, 2005), and can be especially prevalent for African American male students (Wood, Kaplan, & McLoyd, 2007). Teachers often hold low academic expectations for students of color, and these low expectations often translate into differential treatment by teachers (Ferguson, 2003). Research, particularly qualitative studies of student perspectives, shows that African American students are aware of teachers' low academic expectations, and have experienced unfair treatment or cultural misunderstandings as a result of teacher perceptions (Howard, 2008, 2014; Lee, 1999).

Teachers often form expectations of students' academic ability based on preconceived notions of motivation and skills that are based in cultural stereotypes (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Teachers who develop beliefs about student academic ability based on implicit or explicit racial biases often engage in less supportive teaching styles with those students. Further, teachers who underestimate the ability of African American students often act with less urgency to find strategies to help these students improve academically (Ferguson, 2003). These instances of differential treatment lead to differential outcomes for African American students. Eccles and Roeser (2011) found that for students from stigmatized groups, low teacher expectations had a negative effect on student motivation and academic achievement that was cumulative across time.

Cultural differences in teacher expectations. Teacher perceptions of students' behaviors can be influenced by cultural differences between the teacher and the student (Sugai & Maleady, 1988). These differing perceptions are often related to differences in expectations of

appropriate classroom behaviors. Teachers' perceptions of how students are able to conform to expectations in the classroom are related to how that teacher also views the students' academic skills and motivation, which can result in differential treatment of that student by the teacher (Howard, 2014). In a study examining teacher perception of student behavior problems in a sample of African American, Hispanic, and Non-Hispanic White students, Zimmerman and colleagues (1995) found that teachers gave significantly higher behavior problem scores to African American students than to Hispanic or Non-Hispanic White students.

Teacher subjectivity in behavioral referrals. Several researchers have examined the role of teacher subjectivity in disproportionate discipline practices (Forsyth, Biggar, Forsyth, & Howat, 2015; Girvan, Gion, McIntosh, & Smolkowski, 2017; Skiba, Micheal, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Smolkowski, Girvan, McIntosh, Nese, & Horner, 2016). Skiba, Micheal, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) found that when comparing types of behaviors associated with office referrals for African American students and White students, there was no significant difference in the severity of behaviors between the two groups. However, differential perceptions of students' behaviors by teachers can lead to students of color being referred for disciplinary actions at higher rates, and for substantially different reasons than White students. Skiba and colleagues (2002) found that while White students were more likely to be referred to the office for highly objective events (e.g., smoking and vandalism), African American students were more often referred for events that required a subjective judgment on the part of the teacher, such as disrespect, excessive noise, threats or loitering. Forsyth, Biggar, Forsyth, and Howat, (2015) compared the number of objective and subjective discipline infractions for African American and White students, and found that African American students were consistently over disciplined for subjectively defined behaviors. Finally, in a comparison of the effect of subjective versus

objective office referrals on discipline disproportionalities, Girvan, Gion, McIntosh, and Smolkowski (2017) found that subjective discipline explained significantly more of the variance in disproportionality. Thus, it is possible that teacher perceptions of students' behaviors may be implicitly or explicitly biased, leading to more severe and consistent punishment, and this may play a role in disproportionate rates of discipline for students of color.

School-Wide Interventions

American public schools are charged with the task of providing a quality education that includes not only rigorous academic instruction, but also social-emotional and behavioral supports. Schools often seek out strategies to build a social climate within the school environment that will promote positive academic and social outcomes. In order to increase positive school climate, and decrease levels of student misbehavior, schools are increasingly adopting school-wide strategies such as positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS). PBIS is a systems level preventative approach to school discipline that incorporates the teaching of desired behaviors, consistent reinforcement of these behaviors, predictable consequences for inappropriate behaviors, and the use of data-based decision making (Bal, 2018; Jones, Caravaca, Cizek, Horner, and Vincent, 2006). As part of this framework, students within a school are taught a set of positive behavior expectations (e.g., "Be safe, Be respectful") and associated behavior examples that apply to different environments in the school (e.g., classrooms, hallways, etc.).

Studies examining the effectiveness of these types of frameworks have shown mixed results. In a study assessing the relationship between PBIS implementation and disproportionate disciplinary exclusion rates across a sample of 77 schools, Vincent and Tobin (2011) found that PBIS implemented with high fidelity resulted in overall reductions in disciplinary exclusions in

elementary school and high school. However, these overall reductions did not generalize to all students. African American students remained overrepresented in both general and long-term disciplinary exclusions (removal from school lasting more than 10 days). This study suggests that PBIS implementation may not have the desired effect on the persistent national issue of disproportionate discipline rates for African American students. The authors recommend that further research be done on the different ways PBIS can be implemented in a culturally responsive manner in order to make this framework adaptive and supportive of the behavior of all students (Vincent et al., 2011).

Implementation of PBIS is done through school teams that are typically composed of administrators, teachers, families and students. This team works together to build commitment amongst all the teachers and administrators of the school. After commitment has been established, the team works to define and teach behavioral expectations, establish consistent and predictable consequences for inappropriate behaviors, create systems for data collection and data based decision-making, and structure administrative supports for implementation sustainability (Bal, 2018; Jones, 2006). Throughout the implementation process it is critical to determine strategies and consequences that are culturally representative of all students. It is recommended that PBIS teams aim for culturally relevant implementation through collaboration, distributed control/power, and active participation by key stakeholders in the process (Bal, Thorius, & Kozleski, 2016, Bal, 2018; Comer, Joyner, & Ben- Avie, 2004). This is of particular importance when taking the step of defining behavioral expectations. The inclusion of students and families in the conceptualization of positive behavior expectations will help insure a cultural fit between these expectations and the social values of the school community (Jones, 2006). Culturally

relevant implementation of PBIS requires not just the intention of cultural considerations, but a purposeful and deliberate focus.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed a theoretical framework that includes critical race theory (CRT), intersectionality, and a social psychological perspective of transactional relationships (Appendix A). The use of these theories show how race and systemic influences interact with the intersectional nature of gendered-race to contribute to the transactional relationships between students and teachers within the racialized context of schools. It is through the consideration of these theories that the mechanisms that maintain discipline disproportionality are revealed.

Critical race theory. Adopting a CRT lens allows researchers to approach complex problems of inequity within the field of education by recognizing the normative presence of racism and discrimination within the power structures of educational systems (Howard, 2008; Tate, 1997). By centering race within this research, this study was able to challenge dominant paradigms related to academic disparities, and center marginalized voices and lived experiences (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Further, through an understanding of the role of race and racism in the educational experiences of African American students, this study was able to gain a more comprehensive picture of the complex issue of discipline disparities (Howard, 2008).

Critical race scholars propose that racism is historically and currently embedded in daily life, the legal system, and culture in the US (Howard, 2008; Tate, 1997). Consequently, the inequalities experienced by marginalized groups are expected and congruent with living in a racialized society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Scholars of CRT recognize that the hegemonic structure of American society determines the way that the social construction of race is used (Tate, 1997). Within the context of schools, race has been used as an explanatory factor

for challenging behaviors, miscommunications between teachers and students, and differences in resource and funding levels. Educational researchers have adopted CRT as a way to contextualize their research in the historical context of race and systems of power. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) have critiqued some education research as incomplete due to its lack of consideration of race. The authors have argued that within the field of educational research, race has not been sufficiently theorized in such a way that allows for a systematic analysis of inequities in education. Further, the authors suggest that the analysis of class and gender alone does not adequately explain the educational disparities seen in educational systems and structures (Ladson-Billings et al., 1995). As such, using CRT as a theoretical lens may allow this study to be more valid and comprehensive.

A CRT lens is often used in partnership with participatory action research (PAR), the framework to be used for this study, to examine problems of practice within oppressive systems (Torre, 2009). Through a critical race perspective, the use of PAR can redefine who is capable of holding expert knowledge, make allowances for individuals to have intersectionality and multiplicity within groups, conduct research that highlights and appreciates the value of differences and outliers, and recognize the political nature of knowledge production (Torre, 2009).

Intersectionality. Within CRT, the theory of intersectionality was posed by Crenshaw (1993). Crenshaw proposes that the analysis of gender or race in isolation is insufficient for understanding the interacting identities that may contribute to experiences of oppression. This is particularly important for researchers who are interested in understanding the unique experiences of African American girls in school as it related to discipline disparities. According to Crenshaw (1993), women of color are “vulnerable” to the oppression and discrimination experienced by

women (based on gender) and African Americans (based on race). It is important to understand how these two experiences of oppression interact in order to address the related inequities (Crenshaw, 1993).

It is hypothesized that student-teacher interactions play an important role in the persistence of discipline disproportionality for African American students. To understand the complex nature of student-teacher relationships, a critical examination of race and gender must be included. A CRT perspective on student-teacher interactions requires an examination of how student-teacher relationships are affected by oppressive systemic influences and how the transactional nature of the relationship can contribute to the hegemonic power structure implicit in schools. Further, through an intersectionality perspective, the influence of the intersecting student identities of race and gender on student-teacher relationships can be examined. This blending of CRT and intersectionality is helpful in illustrating both the contextual and individual contributors to the student-teacher relationship. However, in order to understand why student-teacher interactions may play such an integral role in unfair discipline practices, it is important to consider the transactional nature of these relationships.

Social psychological theories. Social psychological theories on stereotyping (Duncan, 1976; Sager & Schofield, 1980) and social identity threat (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002) have contributed to the literature on racial disparities in education. In the face of classroom management needs, and individual student behaviors, teachers are often required to make discipline decisions with unclear or limited information (Duncan, 1976). Further, teachers are exposed to common stereotypes about marginalized groups of students, which may contribute to unfair discipline practices in ambiguous situations (Okonofua, Walton, and Eberhardt, 2016). Often, the stereotyping of African American students as dangerous, loud, or defiant contributes

to teachers' perceptions of student behaviors and the way that those teachers then interact with these students (Okonofua, Walton, and Eberhardt, 2016). Teachers' perceptions and actions related to student behaviors do not occur in isolation. Students' perceptions of how teachers treat them based on their race also play an important role. To understand this interaction better, this study employed social identity threat theory (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002), in order to highlight the role of how students perceive and internalize stereotypes and bias in their ability to connect with teachers in positive ways.

Methods

Research Design

This study used qualitative methods and frameworks. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note that qualitative research is a methodology that allows researchers to understand the different ways that individuals make sense of their lives and experiences. In order to better understand the meaning and interpretation of student perspectives of discipline disproportionality within the context of school-wide interventions, this study utilized interviews as its primary data collection method.

This study's methodology was informed by the philosophies of Participatory action research (PAR) and critical ethnography. Consequently, this study employed a participatory ethnography methodology. Participatory action research (PAR) is considered to be both a type of research methodology and an epistemology for working towards social justice (Cahill, 2007; Lather, 1986; Torre, 2009). PAR based work is done with the epistemological assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and deeply contextual (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2007). As such, PAR is a type of action research that highlights the role of participation and the engagement of participants in all parts of the research process (Cahill, 2007; Pain & Francis, 2003; Torre, 2009). PAR strives to interrupt traditional forms of research relationships and engages in research that is done *with* individuals, not *on* them (McTaggart, 1991; Savin-Baden et al., 2007). A basic assumption of PAR is the acknowledgement that individuals hold deep knowledge about their lived experiences, and should therefore be involved in the research (Cahill, 2007; Torre, 2009). Using an individual's lived experience as the starting point for the research process, PAR places a strong value on knowledge from the margins, and can work to challenge hegemonic paradigms of power (Cahill, 2007). Overall, PAR aims to produce

knowledge and action that can be locally useful to participating communities, while also empowering individuals through critical praxis (Freire, 2000; Savin-Baden et al., 2007).

The theoretical foundations of PAR are rooted in critical theory (Brydon-Miller, 2001; Lorenzetti & Walsh, 2014). Critical theory originates out of a desire to promote social action through the creation of emancipatory knowledge (Habermas, 1972; Torre, 2009). Critical epistemologies acknowledge that knowledge production is a political and value-laden process. Critical approaches to research begin with a critique of power relations, and work to consider the contributions of factors such as class and race to better understand the causes of social inequality (Lorenzetti & Walsh, 2014).

Research that is done without the participation of community members runs the risk of producing knowledge that perpetuates negative cultural stereotypes (Smith, 2012). The tendency of traditional empirical research to reproduce stories that make communities and individuals vulnerable has been labeled as epistemological violence (Teo, 2010). PAR challenges the way that traditional research has excluded certain communities, and instead promotes the idea of consciously creating spaces of “radical inclusivity” (Torre, 2005). By redistributing power within the research process, individuals and communities are able to take back the power of self-representation and self-definition (Smith, 2012).

PAR problematizes who has the right to create knowledge. PAR challenges the idea that knowledge is created only in the academy, and suggests that without participation of community members, important issues will remain unaddressed and un-interrogated within the research process (Bautista, Bertrand, Morrell, Scorza, & Matthews, 2013; Hall, 1975). PAR recognizes that for too long, academic research has been a closed community discussion *amongst* those in academia *about* those that are being researched (Cahill, 2007). PAR promotes collectively

produced knowledge through a transactional research process (Cahill, 2007). Collectively produced knowledge is one important way to redistribute the power in the researcher-participant relationship. Historically, marginalized communities have not played a role in the framing of their own stories, which results in a lack of control over how those stories may effect policy and practice changes in their community. Pratt (1999) refers to this as the “struggle for interpretative power”.

This study is particularly focused on exploring and challenging the conditions of oppression that may contribute to disparities in discipline rates for historically marginalized students. Consequently, this study employed a youth driven Participatory Action Research (YPAR) framework. Within this framework, a participatory ethnographic design was employed. YPAR is an appropriate framework for studies that aim to challenge systemic power relations (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). YPAR was used in this study to promote the value of marginalized voices and stakeholders, encouraging social transformation within the context of the school environment.

Ethnography is an appropriate method for studying the role of culture through the interaction and collaboration with those who identify as being part of the examined culture (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The use of critical ethnography allows for this study to examine empowerment and social justice while engaging in research that aims to be transformative and challenging of accepted hegemonic norms within the system of education (Pizarro, 1998). The epistemological frameworks of social constructivism and critical theory inform the ethnographic process used in this study by highlighting the importance of knowledge generation as an active process based in context. Critical ethnography promotes the acknowledgement that knowledge creation is done through an active consideration of the “values, histories, and practices” of both

the culture under study and the researcher conducting the study (Atwater, 1996). Critical ethnography is inherently political in that it is based in an ideology that requires the examination and challenging of inequalities (based in race, gender and class) as fundamental to the outcome of the research being done (Barton, 2001).

Through my role as a participant observer, ethnography allowed an in-depth analysis of both the cultural context of American schools and the culture of African American students within these schools. Participatory ethnographic methods was used to ensure that marginalized voices were privileged in the interpretation of cultural realities, and in the creation of the ethnographic product based on this study (Glesne, 2016).

Engaging in PAR within academic settings can allow for student involvement in the research process. Youth led participatory action research (YPAR) is a variation of PAR that combines research with pedagogical processes, and allows students to recognize and act on oppressive forces found in educational institutions (Cahill, 2007; Cammarota, 2016; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Kirshner, 2007; McIntyre, 2000; Torre, 2009). YPAR is a methodology that can be used in by researchers who wish to center marginalized voices, create stronger community commitments, and promote youth social justice activism (Cammarotta, 2016). YPAR is unique in that it creates space for students to become informed researchers and practitioners about the issues affecting them within their school (McIntyre, 2006). The use of YPAR in an educational setting allows students to act as co-researchers and apply their own deep knowledge of inequities to making change in their school (Cammarota & Romero, 2011). Creating student-centered knowledge through the use of YPAR methods can be beneficial for the conceptualization of education problems and solutions (Bautista, Bertrand, Morrell, Scorza, & Matthews, 2013). If the goal of educational research is to create educational reforms that will be ecologically valid and

produce positive outcomes, the inclusion of student voice will increase the likelihood that the proposed interventions would be more readily accepted (Hughes, 2003). Further, the YPAR process allows students to actively reclaim their political voice within an oppressive space that typically silences marginalized voices (Cammarota et al., 2011). This reclaiming of voice can help researchers reframe issues of inequity and tell a truth that hasn't been told, challenging deficit perspectives and cultural stereotypes in the school environment (Cammarota et al., 2011).

Setting

This study was conducted in one high school within the Pacific Northwest of the United States. To gain understanding of how disproportionate discipline practices are experienced within a school context, it was important to do this work within a public high school where discipline disproportionality is an existing concern. Further, rates of discipline disproportionality have been shown to increase in the secondary school years (Skiba et al., 2011), and an investigation of the meaning making around this phenomenon should be done in an environment in which the phenomenon occurs at high rate. School selection was based on existence of disproportionate discipline practices in the school, and the presence of a school-wide intervention implemented at the school for at least two years. At the time of this study, the schools within the district were experiencing high rates of discipline disproportionality for African American students. Within this district, African American students were two times more likely to be suspended or expelled than White students in the 2016 academic year (State of Washington OSPI, 2016).

This study was conducted at Marble high school, a mid-size public school in the Pacific Northwest. Marble high school has a diverse student population, with students of color making

up approximately 69% of the student population (State of Washington OSPI, 2016). At the time of this study, the student population was 31.3% White, 28% Asian American, 17.4% African American, 17.3% Latinx, 4.2% two or more races, 0.9% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native. Female students made up 48.8% of the student population. The teaching staff at Marble high school was predominantly White, with 81% of teachers identifying as White. During the year this study was conducted, there were 32 female teachers and 27 male teachers on the staff. At Marble high school, African American students are two times more likely to experience exclusionary discipline practices than White students (State of Washington OSPI, 2016). At the time of this study, Marble high school was currently engaged in several efforts to reduce their disproportionate discipline practices. The school had created an equity team of teachers and administrators that worked towards developing a culturally competent and responsive school climate. As part of this effort, Marble high school implemented a Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) in 2013.

Data for this study were gathered during the final quarter of the 2016-2017 academic school year and during the first quarter of the 2017-2018 year. This time frame was appropriate to measure student discipline and school-wide interventions for several reasons. By the final quarter of the school year, the students had developed relationships with the teachers, peers, and the school. These relationships informed their meaning making around student discipline within the school climate. Additionally, by this time in the year, the students and teachers had gathered experience with the school-wide interventions at the school.

Participants

Student co-researchers. Due to the collaborative nature of YPAR and participatory ethnography, this study sought to recruit students who were engaged in the work as full

participants and co-researchers. Consequently, student co-researchers were recruited from the tenth and eleventh grade population at Marble high school in order to ensure that they had the developmental capacity to engage in the cognitive work of the research project. Recruitment was done in collaboration with a White male teacher who ran the Pro-Justice Union afterschool club, and was familiar with African American students who may be interested in participating in the study. Students were recruited through word-of-mouth efforts done by this collaborating teacher. Interested students were asked to attend a an individual meeting with the initial researcher to get more information about the study requirements, determine eligibility, and obtain information regarding confidentiality and informed consent. The original recruitment plan was to gather a group of male and female African American students. The final group of student co-researchers for the study ended up being 100% female students. The student co-researcher team was made up of nine female students ($N = 9$) who identified as African American, from the 10th and 11th grade.

The students on the co-researcher team had all experienced the consequences of the school's discipline policies in the years that they had attended Marble high school. Their experiences varied in severity and frequency, with some students experiencing out of school suspension, and some students experiencing other exclusionary discipline practices such as being sent out of class for "disrespect" or dress-code violations. Several of the students on the co-researcher team were involved in extracurricular activities and clubs during the school year such as drum line, drill team, Pro-Justice Union club, and participating in the monthly Black and Brown student meetings. This group of nine African American female student co-researchers made up the group for the focus group interview conducted at the start of the study. Engaging collaboratively in this work with African American female students allowed for the centering of

the voices and perspectives of students who have had the most experience with discipline disproportionality, and who are key stakeholders in the intervention process.

Teachers and administrators. In order to gain their perspective on discipline disproportionality and school-wide intervention efforts, I recruited a sample of seven teachers and one administrator. Student co-researchers assisted in the initial recruitment of teachers and administrators interviewed for this study by providing a list of recommended teachers. Students were asked to provide recommendations of teacher that were perceived as being fair with the discipline policy and teachers that were perceived as being unfair. Overall, student recommendations yielded a list of eighteen teachers to contact for recruitment into this study. The students provided names of eight teachers they perceived as being fair with the discipline practices, and ten teachers that were perceived as being unfair in their discipline practices. Across these two lists, several teachers were nominated by more than one student. Teachers on this list were contacted by the initial researcher to determine if they were interested in participating in the interview process. The response rate across teachers differed in important ways. A greater number of teachers from the fair list responded to the request for participation in this study (four out of eight) than teachers from the unfair list (three out of ten). Using homogenous and snowball sampling, the final recruitment of teachers were those who met the following criteria: (1) must currently be a tenth or eleventh grade teacher, (2) must have worked in the school for the full academic year, (3) must have a working knowledge of the school-wide intervention efforts. The final sample of teachers included three White male teachers and four White female teachers. One administrator agreed to be interviewed for this study. This administrator was the Dean of Students at Marble high school and was the only African American female teacher/administrator on staff at the time of the study (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Demographics Of Participating Teachers and Administrators

Pseudonym	Race	Gender	Number Of Years As A Teacher	Number Of Years Teaching At Marble High School	Primary Subject Taught	Grades Taught
Ron	White	Male	18	16	ESL	Mixed
Tim	White	Male	23	22	U.S. History	11 th
Tonya	White	Female	16	8	Language Arts	9 th and 10 th
Barron	White	Male	13	2	Yearbook	Mixed
Erica	White	Female	22	11	Science	9 th and 10 th
Ramona	White	Female	14	14	Health	Mixed
Donna	White	Female	14	11	Language Arts	10 th and 11 th
Maria	African American	Female	7	3	Administrator	N/A

Data Collection

In line with a YPAR framework and participatory ethnography methodology, I used data collection methods that allowed for collaboration, collective action, empowerment and mutual learning (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995). I collected data through participant observation, a focus-group interview, individual interviews with teachers and one administrator, review of research team field notes, and document review.

Procedure. In order to gain a better understanding of how students, teachers, and administrators interpret discipline disproportionality and school-wide interventions, the majority of the data for this study was collected via interviews. Interviewing is an appropriate method for collecting data that is not easily observable, such as individual feelings and interpretations about a phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All of the interviews took place on the campus of Marble high school.

Focus group. The nine African American female student co-researchers participated in one focus group interview at the start of the study, with the goal of gathering their perspective on the discipline policies at Marble high school. Focus group interviews allow for communal discussions that are generative, and allow for the construction of unique data based on the interactive structure of the group (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The focus group took place after school, and was held in a classroom. During this two-hour focus group interview, students were asked to talk about their general knowledge of the discipline policy in their school (see Figure 2 for examples), and answer questions related to their view of discipline disproportionality and school-wide intervention efforts within their school (Appendix B). The interview was audio recorded, and then transcribed for data analysis purposes. Data gathered from this focus group were used in future research team meetings to inform the creation of the teacher and administrator interview protocols.

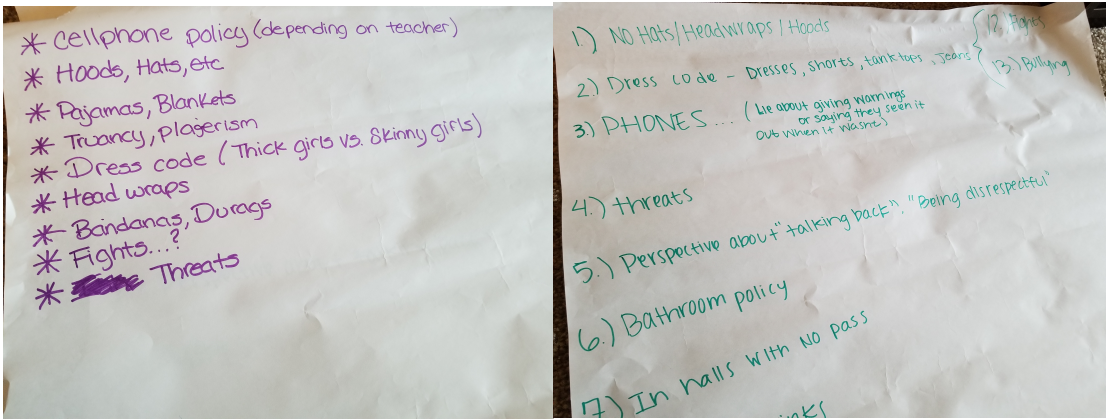


Figure 2. Student generated lists of key discipline concerns at Marble high school.

Interviews. The student co-researchers worked collaboratively with the initial researcher to create the interview protocol for the teachers and the administrators. The interviews were scheduled during teachers or administrators’ free periods during the school day, and were typically held in the teachers’ classroom. These thirty-minute interviews focused on teachers’

and administrator meaning making around discipline disproportionality and school-wide interventions (Appendix C and D). All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed for data coding purposes.

The collaborative creation of the interview protocols was done over the course of two meetings, and included instruction on how to create interview questions, a recruitment of question ideas from the student-researchers, and a final consensus vote of the which questions to ask in the teacher and administrator interviews. Student co-researchers were asked to work in groups of two or three to collaboratively come up with a number of questions that they would like to have included in the teacher or administrator interview (see Figure 3). The various questions were then read aloud to the group in order to find commonalities and differences across the questions, and to hear other team member reactions to themes that were being brought to the interview protocol. Once the final set of questions had been agreed upon, the initial researcher edited some questions for clarity and created the final protocol. The final version of the interview protocol was then submitted to the entire research team for approval in order to ensure that their perspectives and ideas remained salient. This researcher acknowledges that it is problematic and reinforcing of the White normative language structure to change the student's original wording in the interview questions. This step was taken for the following reasons.

Due to ethical considerations and the protection of student co-researcher identities, the initial researcher conducted the individual, semi-structured interviews with the selected teachers and one administrator at the school. The various ways that my positionality as a female White graduate student contributed to the interview process and the outcomes of these interviews is an important consideration. As a White woman, it would have been problematic for me to present the student's questions using their language, as this would have been an appropriation of the

students' language, a right that this initial researcher does not have. Further, it must be acknowledged that the teachers that were interviewed for this study were 99% white, and that it is possible that these teachers felt more comfortable talking to me because of my positionality as a White female graduate student. When being questioned about race, discipline, and teaching practices, White teachers may have felt less comfortable if the interviewer were an African American male or female, or even a White male. The implicit power structure within these different interview scenarios could contribute to disparate outcomes in the interview data. As such, it is important to acknowledge that my positionality as a White female graduate student may have had an effect on the interview conducted with the African American female Dean of Students.

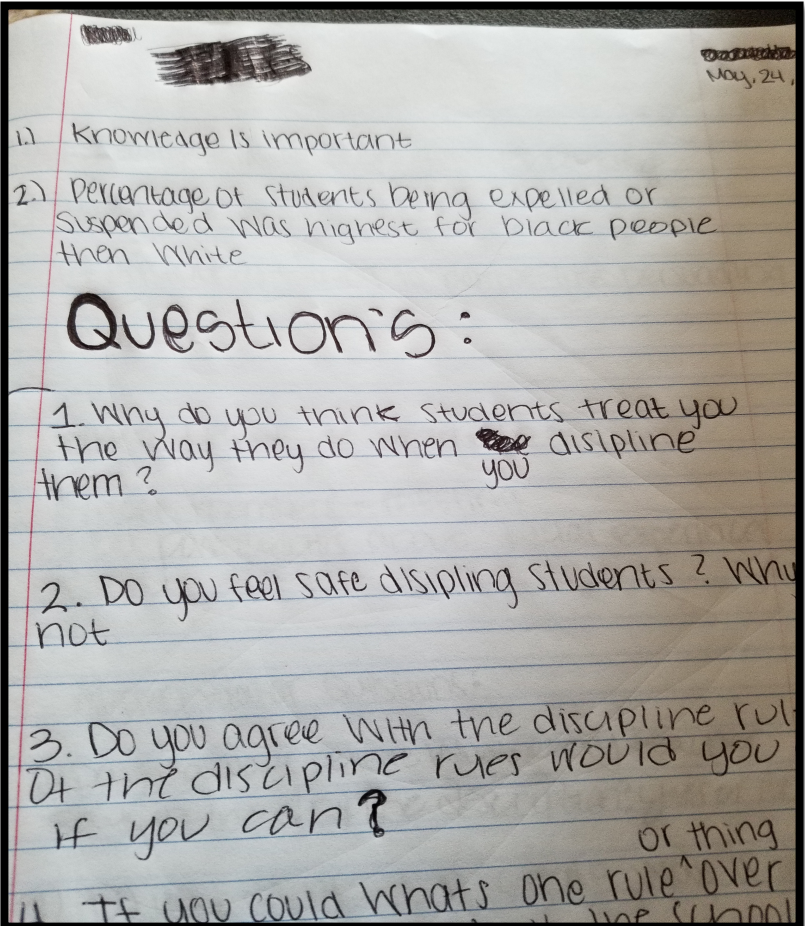


Figure 3. Example of teacher interview questions generated by student co-researcher.

Research team meetings. Students who participated as co-researchers on the study were asked to attend seven weekly research team meetings in order to facilitate the iterative and reflexive action research process integral to YPAR and ethnographic work. These two-hour long research team meetings were held after school, and located in a classroom. During these meetings, students engaged with the initial researcher in collaborative research efforts aimed at defining, collecting, and analyzing data. At the initial meetings, the research team worked to better understand the discipline disproportionality at the school, and to learn more about the design of this study. Information about local and national discipline disparity rates were shared with the student co-researchers, and a discussion of participatory research methods and philosophy was had.

Additionally, this initial researcher devoted time during the initial meeting to talk explicitly about my researcher positionality and the idea of trust within the research team. As an introduction to the study and myself, I shared with the student co-researchers how my positionality as a white female graduate student informed my perspective on school discipline and disproportionate discipline practices. I spoke about my own history with discipline when I was in high school, and my current interactions, as a school psychologist in training, with students experiencing unfair discipline. I talked about how these current experiences had driven me to study the causes of discipline disproportionality through the perspective of students who were experiencing it.

I informed students that I viewed much of research methodology as oppressive and reinforcing of current racial and social power hierarchies. I proposed that I was engaging in this participatory ethnographic research study as a way to attempt to disrupt these power hierarchies

and center student voices and lived experiences as expertise, taking a step back in order to learn from the students. In this vein, students were encouraged to call out my assumptions and biases during the research process. Finally, this researcher spoke with the students about levels of trust within a research team, and how trust is a helpful component in collaborative efforts, but is not expected given the implicit power structure of working with a White female researcher. Across the research meetings, a moderate level of trust between the student co-researcher team and this initial researcher was developed.

Subsequent meetings involved collaborative efforts to create questions for the teacher and administrator interviews, and as a time to engage in collaborative coding of these interviews. These meetings created a space in which student co-researchers could participate in story telling and meaning making related to emerging data from the study. A full description of this coding process can be found in the data analysis section below. Student co-researchers were encouraged to take field notes across the research process, and were asked to engage in guided writing of field notes during the weekly research team meeting. Because field notes were not required, limited data were gathered from this process. The guided writing opportunities focused on students' reflections on group discussions and emerging data from the analysis of teacher and administrator interviews. For example, students were asked to write about how the results of this study may be different if the story of discipline disparities was told by only one stakeholder, such as White teachers or the African American female students. Students were also asked to write about how receptive they perceived the school to be to hearing student lead recommendations, and how their leadership in this area may change their perception of the school climate. Information from the guided writing samples were coded by the initial researcher at the end of the coding phase.

Document review. Review of school and district level documents related to discipline statistics, policy, and intervention implementation was included in the data collection plan. Documents related to the following topics were reviewed to inform the emerging research design: (1) current discipline disproportionality rates for the district and the individual high school, disaggregated by race and discipline infraction (2) school-wide intervention implementation (description of intervention and any data available on implementation fidelity).

Data Analysis

The iterative process of YPAR and participatory ethnography requires that data analyses focus not only on the cumulative findings in the study, but also on how the process unfolds over the stages of the study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). In order to gain a better understanding of how differing perspectives affect meaning making and practice related to discipline disproportionality and school-wide intervention efforts, a thematic analysis of the interview data was conducted. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) have noted, qualitative analysis is both inductive and comparative, and therefore is informed by the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Additionally, data was analyzed in an ongoing fashion, and in collaboration with the student co-researchers during the initial stages of the research study.

Data obtained through interviews and field notes was analyzed through strategic open coding that allowed for the researchers to gain an understanding of the perceptions, values and beliefs around school discipline practices. The initial researcher did a preliminary coding of the focus-group interview directly after the interview was completed with the students. This was done in order to engage in a member checking of the data with the students at the subsequent research meeting. In Vivo coding was used during this preliminary stage in order to pull out emerging themes, using students' own words. In Vivo coding is a useful analytic tool for

ethnographic studies that aim to center marginalized voices (Saladana, 2016). In order to increase internal validity, and reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation of the students' perspective, this initial researcher reviewed with the students the preliminary themes that emerged from the focus group interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The coding of the teacher and administrator interviews was done both collaboratively as a research team and independently. Early in the research process, student co-researchers were provided a short training on how to use various coding strategies for analyzing the content of interview transcripts. The initial researcher provided the training during one of the early weekly research team meetings. Once the research team felt comfortable with the coding process, student co-researchers were asked to code teacher and administrator interview transcripts as they became available across the time of the study. Student co-researchers were asked to use In Vivo coding to pull out key themes within the teacher and administrator interview data. Student co-researchers were then asked to work in pairs to talk about the themes that had emerged, and then to report out to the larger group the consensus on which themes appeared salient. The initial researcher recorded these discussions through analytic memos and field notes as the coding process evolved. Coding done by the student co-researchers helped provide a sort of member check in the interpretation process, allowing the African American female student perspective to be used in the analysis. Select student co-researchers volunteered to independently do more extensive In Vivo coding of the teacher interviews (see Figure 4). The coding of these interviews along with the analytic memos produced by these select students were incorporated into the secondary coding that that was completed by the initial researcher at the end of the study timeline.

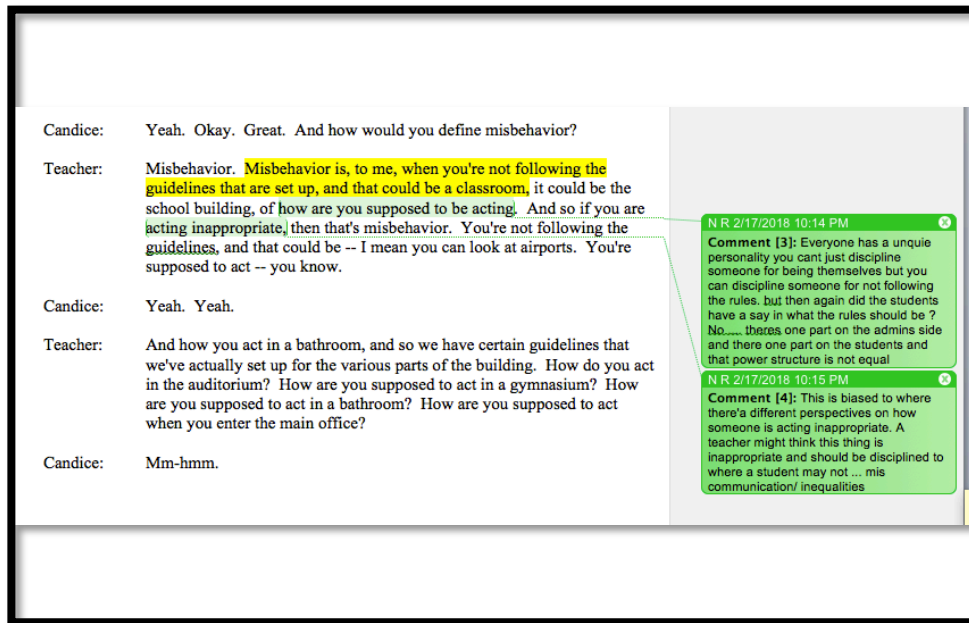


Figure 4. Example of student coding of teacher interview with analytic memos.

The initial researcher conducted the secondary coding of the interview data (focus group and teacher and administrator interviews). Using an inductive approach, the data was coded line-by-line to pull out common concepts. Codes were then further analyzed into sub codes, and then divided into emergent themes and categories that led to new understandings of the data. Both pattern coding and theoretical coding strategies drove this process. By pulling together the emergent meta-codes from the initial coding process, pattern coding allows for an analysis of emergent themes and patterns within the data. Further, in order to gain a better understanding of how these patterns were related to theory, theoretical coding was used to group the patterns and themes revealed in the codes into theoretical categories. This process was repeated until a level of data saturation emerged.

A primary goal of qualitative research is to present credible findings that come close to representing the lived experiences of the participants in the real world (Wolcott, 2005, as cited by Merriam and Tisdell). This goal is often met through the use of triangulating methods, data

sources, investigators, or theories to confirm emerging findings (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I included data from different methods (focus group interview, individual interviews, and document review) and from different informants (students, teachers, and administrators). Further, this study utilized investigator triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) by having a collaborative approach to collecting and analyzing the data in this study. By utilizing data from both teacher and student interviews and document review, this study was able to confirm respondent reports of intervention implementation strategies, and existing equity efforts in the school. The use of these triangulating strategies increases the credibility or internal validity of these research findings. Further, this study engaged in member checks with the student co-researcher group at key points of the data analysis process to ensure that the data was being analyzed and reported in ways that was authentic and appropriate.

Design Limitations

There are some limitations to the design of this study. In collaborating with students who may have had negative experiences with the discipline policy, perceived discrimination, and poor relationships with teachers, it is expected that students' perspective on disparities in discipline rates may have been skewed in a negative direction. These potential biases on the part of the research team were addressed in the data analysis stage. During data analysis, researchers in this study were encouraged to examine alternative hypotheses, understandings, and conclusions within the data. Although this study gathered perspectives from students, teachers and administrators, data collection from other key stakeholders such as family and community members was not part of the data collection plan. Future studies should include this valuable perspective.

Results

In order to contextualize the findings of this study, a brief description of the setting is provided. This study was conducted within a single high school in a school district within the Pacific Northwest. At the time of this study, the schools within the district under study were experiencing high rates of discipline disproportionality for African American students. Within this district, African American students were two times more likely to be suspended or expelled than White students in the 2016 academic year (State of Washington OSPI, 2016).

This study was conducted at Marble High School, a mid-size public school in the Pacific Northwest. Marble High School has a diverse student population, with students of color making up approximately 69% of the student population (State of Washington OSPI, 2016). At Marble High School, African American students are two times more likely to experience exclusionary discipline practices than White students (State of Washington OSPI, 2016). At the time of this study, Marble High School was currently engaged in several efforts to reduce their disproportionate discipline practices. The school had created an equity team of teachers and administrators that worked towards developing a culturally competent and responsive school climate. As part of this effort, Marble high school implemented a Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) in 2013. The stated PBIS values for the school were Respect, Responsibility, Honesty, Effort, and Kindness.

The purpose of this study was to examine how White male and female teachers and African American female students interpret and make meaning around disproportionate discipline practices, and the effects of those practices within the context of a school-wide intervention in their school. The researcher anticipated that the results of this study would highlight the complex factors involved in disproportionate discipline policies as seen through the

perspective of critical stakeholders in the school (students and teachers). Through this study, it was thought that the findings obtained from those who are most effected by disproportionate discipline practices could inform the creation of culturally relevant school-wide interventions, and provide the context for systemic change within the school environment.

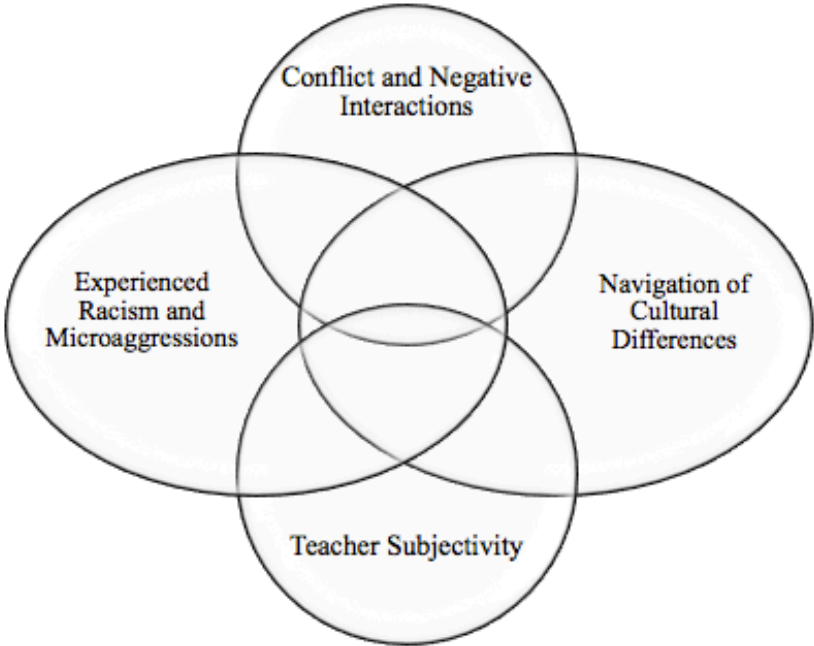
Data for this study were gathered through a focus group interview with the student co-researcher team, individual semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators, and a review of research team field notes and school related documents. The two-hour focus group interview with the student co-researcher team ($N = 9$) was conducted at the start of the study, and covered topics related to student perception of discipline practice and policy. Thirty-minute semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with seven long-term teachers ($N = 7$) and one administrator ($N = 1$) at the school. These interviews were conducted over the course of seven weeks, and addressed the teacher and administrator perspectives of discipline policy and practice, student behaviors, and feelings of support from administration. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for data coding purposes.

Seven weekly research team meetings were held across the duration of the study. During these meetings, the research team engaged in learning activities around discipline disproportionality, interview question creation, and data coding strategies. Further, the research team engaged in the creation of the interview protocol for the teachers and administrators, and worked collaboratively to do preliminary coding of these interviews. Preliminary strategies for data analysis involved In Vivo coding and analytic memos, done by both the student co-researchers and the initial researcher. The initial researcher engaged in secondary coding strategies, which included pattern and theoretical coding. Looking both within and across the data gathered from the students, teachers and administrator, several themes emerged. The themes

revealed patterns and these patterns contributed to the development of the findings presented in this study.

This chapter presents findings in the way of key themes obtained from the data collection processes reported above. A set of overarching, interrelated themes have emerged from these data (see Figure 5 and Table 2).

Racialization of School Climate



Promise of PBIS

Policy and Practice

Figure 5. Relationship of key themes from the data.

Table 2

List of Themes and Subthemes that Emerged from Data Coding.

Theme	Description
Discipline and School Climate	<p>This overarching theme covers how discipline is enacted and perceived within the specific school climate at Marble high school. It includes the racialization of school culture and the conflict and negative interactions that occur between African American female students and White male and female teachers.</p>
Racialization of school culture	<p>This theme incorporates students' and teachers' perception of the school climate as a racialized context. It includes students' experiences of racism and microaggressions within the school context.</p>
Conflict and negative interactions	<p>This theme centers on the defining characteristics of the student-teacher relationship as perceived by students and teachers at Marble high school. It includes the challenge of White teachers and African American female students navigating cultural differences in the school environment. Further it includes teachers' use of subjectivity in discipline administration and decision-making.</p>

Theme	Description
Policy and Practice	<p>This second overarching theme covers the ways that teachers at Marble high school externalized the problem of disproportionate discipline practices. It includes teachers' concerns around funding and resource levels, support from administrators, and macro-level systemic effects on discipline policy. Further, it includes how these external factors have consequences for teachers' practice and feelings of self-efficacy.</p>
Funding and resources	<p>This theme captures teachers' concerns about how lack of funding and low levels of resources affect their ability to handle discipline in the school and within their classroom.</p>
Systemic effects on policy	<p>This theme includes teacher and administrator perspectives on the macro-level systemic effects on the discipline policy at Marble high school. It centers on external systemic or institutional factors that affect policy and practice in public schools, and often replicate social inequalities found in American society.</p>

Theme	Description
Consequences for practice	This theme relates to the teachers’ perception of a lack of support from the administrators at Marble high school and how this level of support affects their feelings of teacher self-efficacy.
Promise of PBIS	This final theme includes teacher and student perceptions of the efficacy of PBIS at Marble high school, and its value as a culturally responsive school-wide intervention.

From these data, the high level theme of discipline and school climate was prevalent. Within this high level theme, several sub-themes were revealed that help contextualize school discipline within the local climate of Marble high school. These themes were the racialization of school culture, and the conflictual and negative interactions between African American female students and White male and female teachers. These sub-themes describe how African American students and White teachers navigate cultural differences, and the presence of subjectivity and power in the teacher-student relationship. Another high-level theme that emerged from the data was teacher and student concerns around policy and practice within the school, as it related to discipline. The interaction of the preceding contextual factors (racialized school climate, negative student-teacher interactions, and policy and practice considerations) contributed to the final theme that emerged: the unfulfilled promise of PBIS. While the promise of PBIS as a proactive solution to unfair discipline practices was great, the actual implementation of this

school-wide intervention was perceived to fall short due to the contextual issues highlighted in the above themes.

The following discussion is presented to allow the reader to understand these findings through the voices and words of the study participants. Quotations selected from the teacher and administrator interview transcripts, as well as from the transcript of the student focus group interview, are presented to show the differences and commonalities in perspectives between the major stakeholders in the school. Through the presentation of these perspectives, it is possible to see the complexity of the components in this study, and the importance of incorporating multiple viewpoints to understand the issue of discipline disproportionality.

Discipline and School Climate

An important theme within this study was how students and teachers perceived school discipline issues within the context of the school climate. School climate is often seen as a mixture of a school's norms, values, practices, and organizational structure. The cultural context of the school environment is often perceived differently by different key stakeholders in the school. Arguably, those most affected by the oppressive nature of a school culture are the ones who can see the dimensions most clearly.

Racialization of school culture. When asked to speak to their experiences with school discipline, the student co-researchers in this study tended to speak more of the cultural context in which these experiences took place. In fact, it became clear that students' experiences of discipline were enmeshed with the racialized context of this school. The students' perspective presented in their own words allows the reader to understand how African American female students engage in a culture in which they experience daily microaggressions and racism, while feeling overlooked, targeted, and misunderstood by teachers and administrators.

Experienced racism. During the focus group interview, students were asked if their experiences with the discipline policy at this school had influenced the way they feel about the school culture. In responding to this prompt, students spoke to their feelings of school disengagement and their experienced racism in the school. Monet responded as follows,

I don't like this school at all. I walked in here, I didn't like it... Yeah, because they just -
- I just -- I'm sticking to it. I think they're racist here... And it just makes me not want to come to this school. (Monet)

Several students mentioned that they felt like many of the teachers at the school were racist. In discussing whether or not the students felt that the discipline policy was equitable at the school, Lori discussed how the teachers were often unfair: "I think it depends on, like, the teacher. There are some teachers I feel like they're low key racist, but they don't want to, like, show it."

In describing their school culture, students also reported instances of peer racism and microaggressions. The following comment by Rochelle highlights the broader cultural context that this study was done in. After the presidential election of Donald Trump, students of color were experiencing heightened episodes of racial aggression both in and out of school, across the nation. Rochelle's comment illustrates this context and also shows how peers contributed to the culture of the school:

There is this boy in my choir class, right? So you know how Donald Trump was elected president or whatever. This boy gonna say, now all the niggers need to leave the school... And then he called me an ape in class. (Rochelle)

Microaggressions. The students also talked about the different microaggressions that they faced in the school environment from both their peers and their teachers. Microaggressions can be defined as everyday experiences, comments, and insults that can be both intentional and

unintentional, communicating hostile or negative messages to the individual based on their membership of a marginalized group (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso., 2000). Research done by Huber and Solorzano (2015) show how institutional and systemic racism, along with the dominance of White ideologies, allows for microaggressions to occur. Often, microaggressions are seen as individual occurrences; however, these authors argue that the cumulative daily experiences of microaggressions make up the context of larger systemic and institutional racism. Within the racialized climate of the school, the microaggressions that the students faced were based in stereotypes associated with African American female students having low academic abilities, which can be particularly harmful to a students' sense of school belonging, and their own academic expectations. The following quote by Kayla illustrates this:

That kind of happened to me in the beginning of the year when one of the teachers.... She was like, this is the honors class. And I was like, uh, yeah. I know. I was kind of embarrassed because everybody looked back like...she's here? Because, like, people know my reputation from last year, you know. I'm better this year. And like everybody was looking like, you're in this class.... Like what makes you think I'm stupid? I signed up for this class. (Kayla)

Other examples of microaggressions involved White male and female teachers and other adults making statements related to African American culture that were rooted in negative stereotypes, and criticizing a students' cultural presentation. Students gave several examples of White male and female teachers labeling them as "loud" and having an "attitude", which are often descriptors used to pathologize African American females for not being "lady-like" (Morris, 2016). These labels are based in racially gendered stereotypes of what proper femininity and "lady-like" behavior should be, often implicitly compared to a White normative standard of quiet

and passive (Collins, 2009; Morris, 2016). Further, the students reported experiences of teachers making negative statements about a student's cultural expression. Monet described an incident in which she was traveling to an off-site school event with a White female teacher, and the teacher's comment felt like a dismissal of her culture:

I was sitting in the front seat, and she was like, oh, yeah, you can play your music or whatever. So I put in... I played, like, some good songs, right? She goes, your guys' music is just so trash. Your guys' -- what do you mean? Your guys'. She was like, just black music. You guys don't like the N word, but you use it in every song. (Monet)

Other experiences that the students discussed highlight the implicit white normative standards within the school culture. Students discussed being told that their cultural presentation was out of line with the norms of the school, even as White female teachers tried to use the student's culture to identify with them. As Monet expresses in the following quote, students' cultural presentations were seen by some White teachers as "too black":

When you come into her classroom, she's listening to hood music and acting like she can dance. She's like, yeah, I used to dance like this. I used to dance like that. Right? So we was learning this dance for cheer, and then, like you know me, I be extra and stuff. I be giggling. I put in my own moves or whatever into it. And then she goes, oh, Monet, you can't do that at the assembly because, you know, it's too black for them, but we could do it together. (Monet)

The students commonly expressed that some White female teachers attempted to over identify with students and their culture in an attempt to forge relationships with the students. Students often reported that this practice was insulting, and seemed to be specific to the African American students. Monet stated, "And you were like, when you talk to certain white teachers about...--

about like what you go through as an African American, they be like, I understand what you go through... You don't understand." The following quote shows how White teachers who try to identify with African American female students in order to create a relationship, may inadvertently begin to engage in cultural appropriation:

...what makes me mad is when the teachers try to act like they're, like, they know you, or you know how -- like you know how we talk, well, how kids talk in general. They'd be like, yeah, you know, that's, like, what's up, or something. I'd be like, yo, don't be copying me. Because they only copy like the black kids, and I hate that. You know it's crazy. (Kayla)

Through the focus group interview with the student co-researchers, a picture of a racialized school culture emerged. These students experience school through the lens of the experienced racism, microaggressions, and teacher biases, and this contributes to these students feeling disconnected from this school. Further, these students are required to forge student-teacher relationships within an environment in which they feel less valued than their peers. This context acts as a barrier to creating authentic student-teacher relationships.

Student-Teacher Interactions.

An important theme of this study is that student-teacher relationships are perceived to be important, but are often conflictual and negative. This theme is significant in that student-teacher relationships were mentioned by 100% of the study participants. Both African American female students and White male and female teachers identified student-teacher relationships as an integral piece of the culture of the classroom and the school. Student-teacher relationships and administrator relationships with students was also identified as important by the African American female Dean of Students.

Teacher perceptions of the relationship. White male and female teachers conceptualized the importance of this relationship as a tool that can prevent the need for discipline. Donna stated “I have a mix of classes this year, and... you know the biggest issue in preventing discipline issues is relationship.” This focus on relationships with students was also emphasized by Tonya, “I mean so much of discipline is the relationships you build with your kids, and that's true, I think, for everything except for those high end Tier II and Tier III kids where very clear there's something more going on.”

Teachers pointed out that often the discipline policy at the school could get in the way of creating and maintaining a strong student-teacher relationship. As this teacher states, the enforcement of certain policies may contribute to a rupture in the relationship.

I mean if you see the discipline policy as being about creating a better environment for student learning, to the degree that the discipline policy then becomes disruptive of that goal, I'm not interested in enforcing the discipline policy.... Every time I get in a fight with a student, you know, an argument over something in class it hurts my relationship with that student. (Tim)

Part of the utility of the teacher-student relationship is using it as a context for navigating conflict, by promoting authentic listening and understanding between the student and the teacher.

I think definitely teachers need more de-escalation training. That is huge. It's been so helpful in my teaching practice of at risk youth because almost all of the confrontations, when they come to me upset, it's always been about they weren't listening to me... Every time, that's almost the first thing that they say is, I wasn't being heard. I wasn't being understood. (Ramona)

The Dean of students also emphasized this importance of teachers creating strong relationships with students in order to prevent discipline issues:

This is a common thread that runs through a lot of discipline that happens...the teacher disrespected me, so I didn't respect them, or this teacher wasn't respecting me, so I wasn't respectful to them.... Generally, a student who may have argued with me at the beginning or be unhappy with me at the beginning often will change that because they realize that, regardless of what they do [behaviors], I do not change how I treat them. (Maria)

In discussing the foundational reasons for disproportionate discipline practices in school, White teachers that were interviewed for this study universally cited factors related to the student-teacher relationship. All of the teachers interviewed for this study stated that they saw value in creating positive relationships with all students in the school. Across these findings, several themes emerged around the interactions that occur between African American students and White teachers on a daily basis. The themes that emerged can all be considered factors that may be barriers to creating authentic student-teacher relationships. These factors are the navigation of cultural differences, teachers' struggles with implicit biases and subjectivity, and the inherent power dynamics within the student-teacher relationship. All of these factors contribute to the racialized culture of the school.

Navigating cultural differences. As is the case with many schools across the nation, the teaching staff at Marble high school is predominantly white (98%), and female (55%). Several teachers who were interviewed explicitly brought up the Whiteness of the staff as a contributing factor to the discipline disproportionality at the school. Within the interview data, several teachers unpacked this by discussing the challenges in navigating cultural differences between African American students and White teachers. Teachers most often spoke of the challenges

related to cultural differences in learning styles and self-expression. Erica spoke directly to the fact that the teaching staff did not match the student population, “I think it's cultural... Our expectations, and all the teachers are white, and not very many of our students are.” The need to address the cultural pieces of discipline was brought up by Ramona:

We're struggling with discipline, and I don't know what the -- I don't know if there's a main root of what it is. I think there are cultural pieces of discipline that need to be addressed. I think that there are consistency issues that need to be addressed. (Ramona)

In an interview with Ron, he began discussing how different students express their culture in the classroom, and how these behaviors can be seen as disruptive by some teachers and may lead to discipline issues:

But I approached it differently than giving them detentions and stuff because I knew where they were coming from because it's just the Latino culture, and especially among men and young men... Why are the black kids always the loudest ones? That's an over-generalization. But there is some cultural weight to that, or there is some cultural truth, I guess, to that. And so just understanding, you know... Some years ago a teacher said, well, the kids are just being black, you know, in a sense. And so they're just expressing their home culture and their family culture, you know, yelling down the hall and insulting each other and stuff. It's just part of it, and so appreciating that for what it is and just accepting it for what it is in terms of just people being people is something to learn. (Ron)

This teacher advocates for learning to accept students' cultural presentation in order to reduce the chance of disciplining a student's cultural expression. In using cultural stereotypes to essentialize a student's behavior, the teacher pathologizes behaviors that are different than White normative expectations of behavior. Within this quote, the reader can see how the teacher implicitly

compares students' behaviors to White normative standards of behavior (loud versus quiet, insulting versus non-insulting), and in doing so he is upholding the dominance of that standard and the White normative power structure.

Importantly, there was a difference between White teachers who recognized that culture could play a role in learning styles and behaviors in the classroom, and those teachers who automatically pathologized behaviors that differed from the White normative standards of the school. As seen in the student focus group interview, several African American female students spoke to experiences in which their ways of learning and behaving in class were pathologized as "loud" or "disruptive". However, as can be seen in the passage below, this teacher highlighted how a student's behavior may be adaptive in order to get their needs met:

I think, culturally, people get their needs met different ways... And if your need is to interact with somebody or that's the way you learn or whatever you need for attention, whatever... Here's what I know works. Raise my hand quietly sometimes doesn't work... Or sitting quietly and asking, you know, so I think that they learn these tricks... And then, again, they have to navigate. (Erica)

It was acknowledged by some teachers that many African American students were being required to adhere to behavioral norms that were based on the White normative standards that are prevalent in many public school settings.

I think a large part of the disproportionality comes from what is cultural and societal norms that have not been integrated into a very white factory-based school setting. The question is, short of blowing up the model, how do you redesign so that it values those, or -- and this is the part that is the tension I always feel is, how do you teach students to sort of code switch between this is what it looks like in my professional and academic life

versus this is what it looks like in my social and home life... Which feels so unfair to tell a student that, "I'm sorry. For the sake of your education, we need you to look at this set of social norms." (Tonya)

Through this quote, the reader can see the challenging premise of code switching, and how teachers feel unequipped to disrupt this practice. In the quote above, Tonya laments her role in this process, and suggests that “blowing up the model” may be the only way to fix this problem. If challenging the White normative standards of the school require such a drastic strategy (“blowing up the model”), finding the motivation for teachers to take on this challenge may be difficult.

Implicit bias and subjectivity in discipline. Several teachers acknowledged the contribution of implicit biases when interacting with students of color. In particular, the role of implicit or unconscious biases in disproportionate discipline practices can be seen through several sub-themes within these findings, such as subjective enforcement of discipline policies, viewing students’ culture through a deficit lens, and having different expectations for African American students. Across the teacher interviews, it seemed evident that these White teachers were aware of much of the current thinking around implicit biases and subjectivity. Teachers were able to see how implicit biases could effect subjective interpretations of behavior in African American students. This point was highlighted by the African American female Dean of Students in the following quote:

If you look at the research now that's coming out about that disproportionality, it's not about the cut and dry things like the fight. It's about the subjective kind of referrals. And so when people talk about it, they talk about it as this big, huge thing. It actually is not. It's actually about these really subjective referrals. (Maria)

In discussing the subjectivity of the dress code policy at the school, this White male teacher talks about how subjective misinterpretations contribute to African American students' perception of bias in the school.

Also, there's a bunch of stuff in -- not just with -- well, with dress code and head covering stuff, but also more broadly that are so subjective, you know, and it's sort of these that are open to misinterpretation on the part of the teacher or leaves it open for students to potentially feel singled out and picked on and, therefore, creates more bias... I would advocate for reexamining and streamlining our discipline policy so that we eliminate those things that bring more bias and that aren't really necessary. (Tim)

As can be seen in the following passage, some teachers were able to show a deep understanding of specific examples of subjectivity in discipline as it applied to African American students. This passage illustrated a key example of how subjective interpretation, informed by implicit biases, can lead to disproportionate discipline practices:

The other thing that we're having a huge issue with in terms of discipline is kind of around the insubordination and what exactly is insubordination because insubordination could mean something to me that is not maybe the same as what it could mean to another teacher... And so we're seeing a lot of referrals that are saying insubordination, but why was it insubordination... So if a kid that is black talks too loudly and they get insubordination whereas, you know, to have a white kid that doesn't talk loudly, but is talking maybe rudely, does that kid not get written up? (Ramona)

Across the teacher interviews, teachers talked about the differences between a students' family or home culture, and that of the school. Often, teachers spoke about these differences in a way that compared the students' expression of their home culture to that of standard, White

normative culture within the school. In doing so, White male and female teachers implied a deficit perspective of the student's culture. Additionally, these perspectives were often played out in statements made by the teachers regarding their expectations of African American student academic performance and behaviors.

Power dynamics. In the interviews done with both the students and the teachers, there was an acknowledgment of the power dynamics that exist between a student and a teacher in the school environment. Both the students and the teachers suggested that this power dynamic is expected and should be negotiated with care due to the authority role of teachers in the school environment. In order to effectively teach and manage their classrooms, teachers are required to have an element of power over students. It can be argued that teachers wield this power in both fair and unfair ways, and both teachers and students stated as much in the interviews. This discussion of power will center on the influence of this power dynamic on student-teacher relationships and discipline disproportionality at this school.

An example of how some teachers perceive the power dynamic between students and teachers can be seen in the following quote:

I think the students want to have a voice, and they want to know what their rights are and that their rights are not being compromised... There's, again, this sense of entitlement to them... I think sometimes that gets in the way of them understanding that I'm the one that has the degree. I'm your teacher. And this is somewhat of a dictatorship, you know.

(Ramona)

This White female teacher seems to understand that African American students are concerned about their rights within a school system, but then falls back on the traditional power dynamic created by higher education and positions of authority. Other teachers that were interviewed

pointed out some of the challenges that can occur in the power dynamic between students and teachers. As pointed out in the following passage, conflict can arise within this relationship and those with the most power end up deciding the outcome of disagreement, often resulting in unnecessary discipline for the student. The cumulative effect of these types of interactions can be damaging to a student's academic self-esteem and sense of school engagement.

I think there's often some kind of conflict, but -- and a student maybe isn't completely innocent, but neither is the teacher... You know the teacher snapped at somebody or the teacher, you know, only saw one kid on a cell phone but missed the three others over here... So the student legitimately feels mistreated in that case, or the teacher overreacted, or the teacher is trying too hard to save face. The teacher has all of the power, and so, you know, writes a discipline referral that isn't really warranted. I think those happen all the time, and the students feel them. (Tim)

Within the power dynamic of the student-teacher relationship taking place in the racialized context of the school, White male and female teachers acknowledge that there is often a need for students of color to code switch in order to successfully adapt to the requirements of the school. Code switching is the act of changing or adapting one's behavior or expression of self in order to fit in with dominant cultural norms. In discussing the value of certain behaviors over others, White male and female teachers that were interviewed for this study tended to lament that African American students were required to change their cultural presentation of self in order to successfully engage in school; however, many teachers reported engaging students in conversations about how this was required in their classrooms. The idea of situational code switching was originally based in the research literature related to linguistics and language usage, and centers on how speakers may shift their patterns of speech and tone in order to accommodate

certain contexts or individuals (Gumperz, 1982; Goffman, 1981). For this study, the term code switching refers to this language-based definition, and also incorporates the idea of behavioral code switching. Behavioral code switching occurs when students of color are expected to adapt their behavior to White normative standards when in the school environment. An important element of behavioral and language based code switching is that the premise of code switching is based in a deficit assumption of cultures that differ from the White normative standard. Orzulak (2015) points out that this deficit view of language and behavior further inequities for marginalized groups. Ideas about what is “proper” language or behavior are based in power dynamics (Eagleton, 1991). Further, by requiring students of color to code switch in order to succeed in school, the dominance of White normative standards and cultural norms are upheld in academic environments. As seen in the following passage, teachers used the student-teacher relationship to inform students of the need to change their behaviors in the school environment:

Well, like those guys that were, you know, just laughing and joking and stuff. And it just came naturally too them, and so I had to explain to them. Look, you know, and I know this is what you would do at home. These guys are your buddies, and outside of school you do that, but you’ve got to look at school as school and home as home, and turn it on and turn it off. (Ron)

Student perceptions of the relationship. African American female students see teacher-student relationships as parts of the school culture that influence their sense of belonging and academic motivation. As pointed out by student co-researcher, Lindsey, having strong, authentic relationships with teachers who offered support, increased her academic investment, “It motivated me in my personal experience to work harder ten times more...[due to] the overall moral support of teachers and the relationship between the student and the teacher.” Other

students pointed out that students crave relationships with teachers, but often find that White teachers do not authentically engage in building this relationship with students. Student co-researcher, Kayla, explained this in the following way, “Students can’t build relationship with no communication.... Teachers don't explicitly say that they want to be closer with students and [work to] build a bond.... Students will hide emotions and not communicate, but they want to tell people.”

Conflict and negative interactions. On the whole, African American female students described poor relationships with White male and female teachers that were often antagonistic and based in conflict. When student co-researchers were asked to talk about their experiences with discipline at the school, a large portion of the responses contained examples of negative interactions and relationships with teachers. As student co-researcher Rochelle highlights in the following statement, these interactions with teachers are both normalized *and* unexpected, “When they told us -- they told us I’m getting paid regardless. Like, we don’t need to know that.... Like okay, but you’re a teacher. You’re supposed to teach us. Don’t be rude to us.” In describing interactions with teachers, students talked about how student-teacher relationships are often centered on ideas of respect and power. Student co-researcher, Lori, points out that the assumption of automatic respect based on power dynamics is not always possible in the context of a negative student-teacher relationship:

Some teachers like automatically think that you should respect them, and that’s not how it works sometimes. I feel like...But it’s like if they’re disrespectful to you, I feel like we have the right to say something back. It’s not like we’re always talking back... we just have something to say. (Lori)

Given that students and teachers both see the value and importance of positive student-teacher relationships, it is important to consider what factors may be contributing to this being more of the exception than the rule for the students interviewed in this study. Through the student focus group interview data, it was possible to gather information about the lived experiences of the students in our study. These data can explain how African American female students perceive the school culture in which these student-teacher relationships are so important, and the potential barriers they experience in making these relationships.

Student perceptions of teacher subjectivity. Overwhelmingly, the students in the focus group talked about experiences in which they felt either overlooked or explicitly targeted and treated unfairly by White male and female teachers in the school. These experiences contributed to an overall feeling of the school being an unwelcoming place. In this conversation between Monet and Lori, the students illuminate a common feeling of being overlooked or ignored by White teachers in the classroom.

Then they ask you a question. Every time your hand is up, they don't call on you.

(Monet)

Oh, my teacher does that...I've raised my hand and I'll say the answer or we're just saying the answers out. I'll say the answer and then somebody else will say it. She's

like, yeah, you're right. I'm like, I just said that. (Lori)

The students pointed out several instances in which they felt as if the teachers would selectively notice certain behaviors in African American students, while ignoring the same behaviors of the other students in the classroom. This feeling of being targeted influenced the students overall perspective of the teachers in the school, and made them question the reasons behind this

targeting. Lindsey talked about how she perceived teachers as ignoring behaviors in students who were not African American:

So, like, I don't like -- like some -- like some teachers would be sneaky just so you won't, like, cuss them out or do anything like towards certain students, like, but if this other student would do it, you won't do nothing about it. That's what I really hate about teachers. (Lindsey)

Lori also spoke up, indicating that she often felt that she was selectively targeted for talking, "But, okay, so there'll be everybody talking, and I guess I'm louder than everybody. I don't know. They're like, Lori, stop talking. And then I'll stop talking. Everybody still be talking. I'm like, really?"

Often the students spoke to the idea that White teachers seemed to have a preconceived idea of African American female students, and this idea would influence future interactions and expectations between the student and the teacher. In the following passage, Monet talks about how her past behaviors in middle school followed her into high school, and that this history was used by her teacher to label her:

I got in trouble all the time. My mom would be at the school all the time. Anyway, I got to high school and I changed my ways, and I haven't got in trouble all three years. And then one teacher decides to look up my records and go, oh, Monet, you were a problem child, but you're so good now. You don't know me. Like you don't know the story behind all those referrals...She's going to say, oh, you were a problem child. You don't know me. (Monet)

Policy and Practice

When asked to speak about the discipline policy in general at Marble high school, or to speak about why discipline disproportionality exists, teachers frequently mentioned the influence of systemic and structural issues. A major theme emerged within these data of how these systemic and structural issues affect policy and practice at Marble high school. White male and female teachers identified system-level issues that interfere with their ability to teach and manage their classrooms to the best of their ability, often contributing to challenges with discipline policy and practice. Within the theme of policy and practice, teachers spoke to critical structures within the school such as funding, resource levels, intervention supports, and staff consistency in implementing policies. Further, teachers talked about how levels of support and self-efficacy contribute to their practice within their classrooms.

Funding and resources. Across the teacher interviews, teachers most often talked about the problem of low funding and a lack of resources or supports needed to help the students and teachers succeed in the school. As can be seen in the following quote from Barron, some teachers felt that lack of funding and resources could explain the entirety of the discipline problem, “It’s very simple...it all comes back to money. Education ... [for] generations and generations is underfunded ... poverty, of operations poverty hangs over everything that we do... All of this, 100%, is resources, lack of resources.” Teachers discussed the different ways that lack of funding and lack of supports contribute specifically to lack of staffing, lack of interventions for high need students, and poor discipline policies. Teachers talked about how discipline practices could be more supportive for students if the school had the funding needed to increase staffing:

If the state ever funds us adequately so we have enough staff to do that, I think there should be an in-house detention for kids who get suspended, you know, for fighting or for drug use or whatever it is...And so having an in-house discipline where they’re in contact

with a social worker and a teacher, and they're getting their homework done and they're getting caught up on stuff they've missed. Personally, I don't think in-house detention is bad. It's just that I don't think it's as productive as it could be, always, simply because we don't have the staff to really man it. (Ron)

Consequences for practice. Several teachers talked about the lack of resources to address students who are not responding to more universal interventions practices. Teachers who were interviewed had been working in Marble high school for several years, and were familiar with, and used the PBIS terminology of needing interventions for their tier two and tier three students. White male and female teachers reported feeling frustrated about having to deal with high levels of problem behaviors in their classrooms without any intervention supports provided by the school. The teachers saw this lack of intervention support as a systemic and structural issue related to poor funding of the school and of education in general:

I think the biggest problem we have is we don't have any true Tier three interventions. We don't have a way to deal with those kids that are consistently problematic in the classroom, in the hallways. And until we find some way to actually address their needs, they're going to continue to disrupt the learning environment, disrupt the school environment. (Tonya)

Some teachers focused more on the lack of academic interventions (rather than behavioral interventions) being a root cause for misbehavior in the classroom, and the need for schools to prioritize supports for better academic interventions for students of color:

I think if we talked about academics and we dealt with the academic issues, we would be having a vastly different conversation. I can talk with you about your reading level in a very different way than I can talk with you about your, you know, yelling across the room

or turning around, you know, all the little nonsense that kids do to avoid dealing with a skill problem or a deficit. I think so many kids of color come to us with skill deficits.... It's difficult for me sitting in this particular school to separate a student of color from a student of color who is also from an economically challenged family. I think being a student of color is one thing. I think being a student of color facing serious economic challenges is overwhelming. I think it's that crossover that we have to figure out.

(Donna)

In speaking about their perception of a lack of supports for students within Marble high school, teachers were addressing their need and desire for alternatives to typical discipline practices for students who presented as more challenging than others. In these statements, teachers did acknowledge the existing interventions in place at Marble high school. However, more often than not, teachers suggested that they felt that the interventions often fell short of their promise, or, alternatively, that they were feeling oversaturated with the number of different interventions in the school's history:

I think that one of the biggest problems we have is that we have tried so many initiatives, one on top of the other on top of the other on top of the other, that I don't think we have a clear discipline plan.... There used to be that old TV or that old movie *Any Which Way but Loose*. That's kind of how our discipline plan feels to me is like, and so much of it for me is, so we adopted PBIS as a district.... But to me, at Marble, we do PBS. We've lost sight of that intervention piece, and that for me is where the biggest struggle is we have kids that are Tier two and Tier three kids that are still completely off the rails, and we give them a cookie when they're good, but we never take the time to intervene when they're doing things that are consistently damaging to other students' education. (Tonya)

I don't think we have enough support measures in place to help our minorities.... So the thing that I'm struggling with is we seem to get on kind of a bandwagon, and we never ride it for a long time to make a difference. And so then you jump off of it. You get on a new one, and so I really think that there is a problem with -- like right now we're doing PBIS. Great, so we've been doing that for two or three years. Then what? (Ramona)

Systemic effects on policy. In talking about system and structural contributions to discipline issues at Marble high school, a few teachers spoke very directly about the more global systemic contributions that they saw as influential. Within this category, the Dean of Students talked about school as a system that often reproduces the social inequalities present in American society as a whole:

[The issue of discipline disparities] lies in the history of how America is structured.

That's number one. I think that having a school system where you have students of such variety, but you have a single class for the most part running that system is a problem too.... It's not just one thing. There are all these different factors that are going into it. Students will walk into this building. They know nothing about this building. But yet they walk in already thinking that this is going to be a place that's not going to help me. (Maria)

This comment illuminates several of the systemic issues that this African American female administrator believes contributes to disparities in discipline practices. She simultaneously talks about the presence of historical oppression for African Americans within the structure of America, the need for more diverse teachers and administrators, and the culminating effect of students being exposed to unwelcoming school environments. Several of the same themes are echoed in the following teacher quote:

It exists everywhere and it matches, like, the criminal justice system. We're a microcosm of this much bigger societal problem that exists. I mean I think the causes of that range from structural issues that are baked into how the system works to, you know, people's unconscious bias that favor certain students and disadvantages others to the fact that, at Marble, 98% of our teaching staff is white... So is our administrative staff. Yet we have one of the most diverse [student bodies]... in the country. And so we have a situation where we're sort of white middle class people trying to connect with people from various backgrounds and not doing that super successfully always. (Tim)

Supports and self-efficacy. In speaking with teachers about the causes and potential solutions to discipline disproportionality at Marble high school, a large portion of these teachers talked about feelings of disconnect, and low levels of support from the administrators in the school. As the teachers described these perceptions of support, a theme emerged from these data that began to explain how teacher's feelings of efficacy in addressing the discipline policies of the school might develop over time. Many of the teachers at Marble high school feel that they are unable to truly address discipline disproportionality in their school, and this is often because there is a lack of perceived support from the administration of the school to do so effectively.

Within a school environment, a certain level of disconnect between the teachers and the school administration is somewhat expected. Across the teacher-administration relationship, there are levels of power to negotiate. Teachers and administrators are not only partners or colleagues working toward a common goal, but the administrators are responsible for the evaluation of teachers, and for creating the overall work environment for the teachers to do their job within. As noted earlier, the teaching staff at Marble high school is predominately White, and over half of the teachers are female. On the administration team, there is the principal (White

male), two assistant principals (one White male and one White female), and one Dean of Students (African American female). Theories of intersectionality suggest that gender and race would play a role in the power dynamics that exist across the teacher administrator relationships, as well as within relationships amongst the administrators. Therefore, these power dynamics would not only be hierarchical or vertical, but also horizontal. For example, the power dynamic that exists between White male teachers and the White male principal may be structurally different than the power dynamic between White male teachers and the White female assistant principal. This power dynamic would be further complicated for the African American female Dean of Students. In her role as an administrator, she is required to negotiate overlapping levels of oppression (e.g., gender and race) within her relationships with teachers and other administrators, which may have contributed to a more complicated power dynamic.

Several teachers that were interviewed for this study spoke to how administrators' decision-making and lack of consistency effect how teachers perceive their role in the decisions related to discipline policies and classroom management.

The other piece of it that's so incredibly frustrating for me is administratively and on the part of the dean. There are so many times where my attempts to create and maintain some sort of management in my building is being undermined by their efforts without working in concert with me. It makes you want to tear your hair out because, you know, a kid will flip out in your classroom, and you'll send them to admin, and they come back with a cookie.... I don't feel like the support is there for when a kid really just is keeping people from learning. It's demoralizing as a teacher. (Tonya)

Through this quote, we see this teachers desire for the administration to work in a more aligned fashion to support her efforts to manage her classroom. This teacher points out that when she

feels a lack of support dealing with challenging behaviors in her classroom, it leaves her feeling “demoralized”. In the next quote, this same teacher elaborated on this perception that when her actions within the classroom are not validated by the administration, it undermines her authority with the students and contributes to the teacher’s sense of apathy in addressing these types of situations:

When I send a kid out, if admin doesn't address it and I'm not a teacher that's consistently sending kids to you, it makes me feel like they're undermining my -- and then that's the other piece of it is so often you'll send them for something that feels grievous and that you've taken every single step on, and then, well... No discipline assigned. Then why do I take my time to write up a referral? I mean to me that feels so disheartening, and it feels like if I felt like it was bad enough that that kid needed to be removed from my room and then you don't address it, then you're undermining my authority in my classroom because, when that kid comes back and says, "Oh, yeah, I got nothing," then it creates a scenario where the rest of the kids, "Well, why can't I do that too?" And so, to me, it feels at times like admin doesn't do a very good job of partnering with us as teachers. They just hand out consequences, if they hand them out at all, without communicating with me. (Tonya)

The following quote illustrates how this teacher perceives the administration of the school as always taking the side of the student when making discipline decisions. This teacher points out that when they are not supported by the administration, it leads them to back away from their obligations within the classroom.

Our current administrators, I don't think, take a very friendly, proactive approach to supporting teachers. They always side with the student - always - always side with the

student.... If you're just going to question it, and you're not going to back me up on something that is so blatantly obvious, then I'm not going to waste my time... Fine. Then that kid just gets away with doing that. I'm just going to turn my eye because I don't want to be questioned... I want to be supported. (Ramona)

Across these quotes, the reader can see how teachers' perception of support is directly related to their level of motivation and their beliefs about their own ability to handle discipline within the classroom. Teachers spoke directly about feeling low levels of self-efficacy, and how this affects their discipline practices.

How do you change kids' behaviors, especially in high school? I think you can do it in middle school, but once they get past ninth grade, there's very little. I feel very defeated, like there's very little hope. They already have made up their mind, and they're just going to continue to do what they're going to do. (Ramona)

A smaller selection of the teachers that were interviewed exhibited a sense of fear and pushback in response to the issue of discipline disproportionality in their school. In naming this sense of fear, teachers may also be highlighting a feeling of a lack of control over discipline within their classroom and the school overall.

But the other piece of it for me is this. I wonder at times -- and again I feel so racist when I say this, but I wonder if at times we have students of color that exploit -- exploit teacher's fear of being labeled racist. And so they will push the limits to the absolute tenth degree knowing that that teacher isn't going to push back because of fear. I know personally that for me that there is a tension in that too because, for a teacher to be labeled racist, it's the end of your career. I mean you're really -- you're running up against a brick wall for your rest of your career at that point. (Tonya)

One teacher that was interviewed expressed a sense of frustration at being blamed for the racial disparities that were occurring in the school. In referencing the work being done by the equity team at the school, this teacher spoke about the utility of this blame.

[There is this] constant, steady drumbeat that all racial problems are because of teachers. That's getting really tiresome. It's the most ridiculous thing in the world... For them to be wasting their hours and hours of our time... session after session after session, berating us.... It's ridiculous. It's a complete and utter waste of time. (Barron)

Alternatively, one teacher that was interviewed rejected this sense of helplessness, while also embracing individual responsibility for the discipline disparities in the school. In this quote, the reader can see that this teacher sees many of his colleagues struggle with how to effect change at Marble high school. While he expressed some frustration with these individual teachers, his is a call for hope and action.

Well, we've been working on this for two years and, sad to say, though I think we've done some great stuff, we haven't eliminated or even really made any progress on disproportionality. We have decreased the number of discipline referrals written, but we still have the same amount of disproportionality. So it is progress to have fewer referrals and fewer disciplinary actions resulting from those referrals. That's progress. But to me I think we have a moral obligation to try to fix this problem, and what just really frustrates me is, you know, the problem of disproportionality in the criminal justice system or something is a real problem, but it seems so far beyond my ability to have any control over disproportionality.... [talking about school discipline disproportionality] It's you and I. We sit here and it's us. If we want to, we can fix this, and yet we're not... some teachers really care about it and are willing to take personal responsibility for it...

But there's a number of teachers who really won't take personal responsibility for it. They aren't willing to sort of say, in what way am I personally contributing to this, or is our system and our structure here kind of contributing to this? I mean the good thing is I think the majority of teachers in our school are willing to change and take personal responsibility, but there's a number who won't, and they're even kind of pushing back against it... Because they feel blame. They feel like they're being called racist or something. It's like, no. Yeah, it's kind of. We all are. I mean that's the point. We all need to sort of step back and say, "What am I doing that's contributing here?" (Tim)

Promise of Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS)

In both the student focus group interview and the teacher/administrator interviews, the topic of PBIS was the least explicitly mentioned theme by both students and staff. However, as can be seen by the quotes presented so far, the ideas and structures inherent in PBIS (i.e., tiered intervention systems, positive discipline practices, and the importance of student-teacher relationships) are the background of many of the themes discussed. The PBIS model is integral to the culture of discipline at Marble high school; however, based on these interviews, it is not currently at the forefront of the conversation of race and discipline at the school. Therefore, the theme that emerged related to PBIS was one of a promise unfulfilled.

Across the students and the teachers, a common perspective of PBIS was that it is currently implemented in an inconsistent and fragmented nature at Marble high school. In the focus group interview with the student co-researchers, this researcher asked the students about a visual representation of the school's PBIS values within the classroom we were in:

Candice: Do you guys know about this thing over here?

Student: Oh, the core values or something...?

Student: Not really.

Student: It's on the sky bridge.

Student: It is?

Student: Respect....

Student: None of them work. Oh, yeah. Respect.

Student: ...that word, nobody would be disrespected at this school. Like they just have those words, but nobody even knows.

Student: ...responsibility. You should have it. You know you're responsible.

As this conversation continued, the student co-researchers began to have a discussion around the meaning of respect and how there is an expectation of respect for White teachers within the student-teacher relationship. Further, students spoke about how the PBIS values were implemented inconsistently across their different teachers. Students exhibited a working knowledge of the PBIS model in the school, but the utility of the model was secondary to their concerns related to daily, individual interactions with teachers and administrators at the school.

Overall, teachers interviewed for this study stated that they viewed the PBIS model as a step towards more positive discipline practices, and had high expectations for its use in the school.

I think, overall, the PBIS is a positive step... Well, it is more positive. I mean just trying to catch the, or focus on the, positive things that kids do and just acknowledging that they do those things kind of shifts the argument from what they do wrong to what they do right. (Ron)

The following quote illustrates that teachers saw PBIS as a systematic approach to discipline practices that could replace ineffective policies that have been historically used in the school.

To me, we've been doing a ton of staff development on these issues trying to understand it better, learn the language of this, understand systematically where the problems lie to try to look at other, different ways of doing discipline that don't involve discipline referrals that I think are even more effective. I mean really a discipline referral is the least effective way of correcting student behavior. (Tim)

Teachers, who mentioned PBIS within the interviews, often suggested that they had high expectations for the model working within Marble high school. Several teachers lamented that the model was not fully realized in the school, citing inconsistencies in implementation. As can be seen by the following quote, problems with implementation were seen as key contributors to the model not working at its full potential:

I like what they're doing with the discipline policy in terms of what they're doing with PBIS because I think the goal is not to have a set of rules, but to honestly bring about a change in student behavior. The things I don't like is that people aren't sure what that means, and teachers, in their training, don't receive enough background in classroom management, conflict resolution, understanding different people's cultures or perspectives.... What happens is you don't get that implementation that you would want to see.... The reason I think it doesn't work for all students, is not the PBIS in itself. It is like anything. Once you add the humans in the mixture, then you see how it actually turns out.... The most well meaning things change once you have individuals applying them... To me, it's not the PBIS itself. It is the application. It is how that is applied. (Maria)

This quote illustrates how the PBIS model at Marble high school is a major contextual factor at play in the background of the school, and is very much a part of the discipline disparities picture.

In discussing why proper implementation of the PBIS model is the crucial part that allows success of the model, this administrator highlights the human factor that is constant throughout this discussion of inequities in discipline practice. How discipline policy is applied across different teachers and administrators within the specific culture of the school is a crucial factor in this discussion.

Summary

This chapter presented the major themes and findings from this study of student and teacher/administrator perspectives on discipline disproportionality within the context of this particular school. Data from a student-centered focus group interview and individual semi-structured interviews with seven teachers and one administrator contributed to these findings. Additional data from research team meetings, and student field notes gathered across the study, also informed these results. These data revealed that there are commonalities and differences between how African American female students and White male and female teachers perceive the challenges of discipline disproportionality at Marble high school. Both students and teachers are key stakeholders in the school and are invested in finding a solution to the problem of disparities in discipline practices. Through the use of extensive quotes, this chapter has been able to provide the reader the opportunity to understand the challenges at play through the voices of those individuals with the most at stake.

The major themes that emerged from the data in this study illustrate the complex nature of discipline within the school climate. Through an analysis of these themes, the reader can see that students and teachers perceive the school culture as racialized, and that student-teacher interactions within this climate can often be difficult to navigate. Sub-themes within the data indicate that this difficulty in navigation stems from negative interactions, the navigation of

cultural differences between African American female students and White teachers, and teacher subjectivity and biases. In discussing their personal experiences with discipline in the school, African American female students reported feeling overlooked, targeted, and misunderstood. Further, students reported feeling this way in the context of a school culture that exposed them to daily microaggressions and racism from both peers and teachers. Many of the students felt that teacher's racism contributed to the negative interactions that they experienced with White teachers on a daily basis. Students felt that teachers often had lower expectations for African American female students, and preconceived ideas about students based on negative stereotypes. Consequently, students reported feeling disengaged from school.

Students reported regularly experiencing microaggressions from White male and female teachers at Marble high school. From perceiving unfair treatment by teachers in the classroom to teachers explicitly pathologizing a student's culture, students reported a culminating effect of being exposed to this type of unwelcoming school culture. African American female students reported feeling less valued than other students in the school, and this may have been a barrier when attempting to create authentic student-teacher relationships.

White male and female teachers viewed the student-teacher relationship as critical for preventing discipline issues within the classroom. Further, teachers reported being protective of this relationship, in such that any strict adherence of a discipline policy that might threaten a rupture in the student-teacher relationship was often abandoned in favor of keeping a positive relationship. Given that the vast majority of the teachers and administrators are White at Marble high school, teachers reported that they found it challenging to navigate cultural difference in learning styles and self-expression of students of color. Understanding which part of a behavior was determined by culture, and which part was simply misbehavior was difficult for many of

these teachers. Further, many teachers recognized the role of implicit biases and subjectivity in the disproportional discipline practices at the school. Teacher judgments and inconsistencies in enforcing the discipline policy were commonly cited in the context of treating students fairly when interactions occur in the classroom.

Several teachers recognized the role of power in the student-teacher relationship. It was recognized that the power differential between the student and the teacher can lead to unfair discipline practices when a teacher unjustly uses their power to punish a student. Teachers also recognized that the power dynamic within the student-teacher relationship could get in the way when trying to negotiate conflicts with students. Several teachers recognized that within this power dynamic, students of color are often required to engage in code switching, and that White teachers have the power to require that African American students do this to succeed in the school. White male and female teachers reported having the power in their classrooms to decide what are the appropriate social norms and what behaviors will be valued or expected in that environment.

African American female students perceived the student-teacher relationship as an important factor contributing to their sense of school belonging and academic motivation. Several students expressed the desire to have strong relationships with White teachers within the school building. Unfortunately, the students in this study reported that many of their relationships with White male and female teachers were poor. Students perceived these relationships to be based in negative interactions, and were often conflictual and antagonistic in nature. As much as students saw the value in creating and maintaining positive student-teacher relationships, these types of relationships appeared to be more of the exception than the rule.

Teachers' references towards systemic and structural contributions to discipline issues, indicate a key theme related to policy and practice. Teachers reported that a lack of funding and low levels of resources for intervention and staffing interfered with their ability to teach and manage their classrooms. Teachers reported a desire for more funding in order to create more efficient discipline practices in the school. Structurally, teachers wanted more behavioral and academic intervention supports to assist them with challenging students. Teachers talked about the frustrations with the inconsistency of interventions within the school, and felt as though there was a lack of full support for implementation of the interventions that existed within the school. Teachers also viewed school as a large systemic force that needed to become more aware of its inherent biases and assumptions in order to become more welcoming for students of color.

Teachers reported feeling a lack of support from the school administrators in their daily practice with discipline in their classrooms. Teachers stated that they often disagreed with the decisions made by the administration, and found administrators' lack of consistent enforcement around discipline policies to be problematic. Often, teachers connected this lack of support with a feeling of being undermined and questioned by the administrators. Consequently, teachers reported feeling a lack of motivation and ability to handle discipline in their classroom, and to address the issue of discipline disproportionality. The extreme of this perception of low levels of support can be seen in the White male and female teachers who expressed fear and frustration, pushing back against the blame for the perceived role they might play in the inequities around discipline practices.

Finally, the themes related to PBIS within these data indicate that the school-wide intervention is a promise unfulfilled. While PBIS as a school wide intervention came out as part of the school culture within this study, students and teachers rarely explicitly talked about it as

such. African American female students found it difficult to understand the utility and purpose of PBIS within the school. They reported that teachers implemented it inconsistently across their classrooms. Teachers reported a higher set of expectations around PBIS as a systemic approach to discipline issues in the school. However, teachers also saw PBIS as an intervention that was not living up to its potential due to inconsistencies with implementation. How interventions and policy are implemented is a crucial component to how change happens in the school environment.

Discussion

The purpose of this participatory ethnographic study was to examine how African American female students and White male and female teachers interpret and make meaning around disproportionate discipline practices, and the effects of those practices, in their school. An additional aim of this study was to examine why school-wide interventions aimed at reducing discipline disproportionality may not be effective or relevant for African American students. By using student and teacher voice, it was hoped that this study would highlight the complex factors involved in disproportionate discipline policies as seen through the perspective of critical stakeholders in the school.

This study used participatory ethnography to gather qualitative data through in-depth semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, and one administrator at the school under study. Data was also collected through seven weekly research meetings with the student co-researcher team, and through the field notes written by students throughout the study. The participants in this study were a team of nine female tenth and eleventh grade students who identified as African American, seven long-term male and female teachers from the school who identified as White, and one African American female administrator. Both the primary researcher and select students from the student co-researcher group coded the data from these sources. A member check of early codes from the student focus group interview was done with the student co-researchers. Codes from both of those processes were used to create themes that addressed each of the research questions. The study was based on the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the student-teacher relationship contribute to patterns of disproportionate discipline practices?

2. How do student and teacher perspectives on discipline and disproportionate discipline practices vary, and in what ways are there commonalities?
 - a. In what ways may these variations and commonalities maintain disproportionate rates of discipline for African American students?
3. In what ways do teachers feelings of support and self-efficacy contribute to the maintenance of discipline disproportionality?
4. To what extent do African American students and teachers perceive the methods and goals of the existing school-wide interventions implemented in their school as culturally relevant (i.e., valued, acceptable, important)?

In the previous chapter, the results of this study were presented. These results emerged from organizing the data across themes in order to tell a story of the research. This chapter will contain a more holistic analysis of what the data means when it is integrated and synthesized. Within this discussion, a consideration of the relevant literature and research on discipline disproportionality and school equity will be used. Implications of the major findings of this study will be presented in order to further the understanding of the challenge under study, and to create opportunities for growth from this understanding.

The themes that came out of this study reveal that the challenge of discipline disproportionality is complex for several interrelated reasons. School discipline practices and policies are couched in the cultural context of the school and the local school climate. Within this dynamic school context, the role of student-teacher interactions is highlighted as a key factor in the maintenance of unfair discipline practices. It is important to note that this theme emerged from data gathered by both students and teachers. The commonality between the two stakeholders is important; however, to gain a better understanding of the strength of this

relationship in the discussion of discipline disproportionality, it is important to consider the differences in how it is perceived by African American female students and White teachers. It is through this analysis of differences and commonalities that the transactional nature of these relationships is revealed.

The effect of systemic and structural factors on teacher's policy and practice is a theme that emerged within the data gathered from the teacher interviews. When faced with a complex problem like disproportionate discipline practices, teachers perceived the lack of support within the systems and structures of the school as a major contributor to the maintenance of unfair discipline practices. In externalizing the source of problem to funding levels, lack of resources, and low levels of support, teachers began to develop lower levels of self-efficacy related to handling discipline, and addressing disproportionate discipline as a whole. Students also engaged in some externalizing of the problem when talking about discipline challenges in their school. Students consistently attributed the cause of negative interactions with teachers to teachers' racism. The initial researcher does not question the perception of the students, but it is interesting to consider how these perceptions interact with the way that teachers externalize the problem, and may contribute to the transactional nature of their relationship.

Finally, there was high expectations and promise in the ideas and concepts of the PBIS model at Marble high school. The implementation of PBIS as a systemic approach to discipline was present in the cultural context of the school. Teachers and administrators reported having high expectations for the utility of PBIS, and were often disappointed by the less than ideal version in the school. Alternatively, students did not value the PBIS model in the school and were unsure of its purpose. An analysis of the other contextual factors at this school (racialized school context, transactional nature of student-teacher relationships, and systemic and structural

affects on policy and practice) can help frame why this PBIS model did not live up to its potential.

Student-Teacher Relationship – A Transactional Relationship

The student-teacher relationship is a dynamic that is valued and seen as important by both teachers and students. The importance of this relationship in regards to discipline inequities can only be fully understood by understanding its complex transactional nature within the racialized context of the school. African American female students described their lived experience of school as one that contained racism, microaggressions, and negative interactions with teachers and peers. It is within this context that African American female students negotiate relationships with White teachers.

White male and female teachers in the study cite difficulties with the navigation of cultural differences when making decisions about the behaviors of African American students in the classroom. Teachers acknowledge that their interactions with African American students might be informed by implicit biases and the dominant social norms of the school. From the perspective of CRT in education, teacher's practices, assumptions, and interactions with students are rarely challenged or questioned because they uphold the hegemonic structure of the school (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Within the dyad of the student-teacher relationship, this gives the teacher a greater amount of power. This power may interact with other characteristics within the teacher's environment and increase the probability of unfair discipline practices.

Student-teacher interactions through a critical race theory lens. The first research question in this study examined the role of student-teacher relationships in disproportionate discipline patterns at this particular school. The findings of this study revealed that student-teacher relationships are an important component in the maintenance of discipline

disproportionality in the school. Teachers, administrators and students all revealed that they perceived this relationship as valued and important. These findings are in line with other studies that have found student-teacher relationships to be an influential factor in modifying discipline policies (Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). White teachers and the African American administrator interviewed for this study viewed this relationship as a key tool for creating a positive classroom environment and reducing the use of discipline overall within the school. African American female students perceived this relationship as critical for maintaining academic motivation and increasing levels of school engagement.

As has been seen in other research focusing on African American student relationships with teachers, students in this study reported that although they would like to have strong relationships with teachers and administrators at the school, students described having mostly negative and antagonistic interactions with teachers (Hamre & Pianta, 2001, Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2016; Lee, 1999; Polite, 1994). While students and teachers both value the student-teacher relationship, students may have the most to lose if they lack authentic positive relationships with their teachers. Without positive connections to teachers or other institutional figures, African American students feel less welcome at the school and may be at risk for disengaging from academics (Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort, 2011; Wentzel, 1999). Research has shown that positive student-teacher relationships are particularly salient for African American students, and are associated with the acquisition of social capital (Arriaza, 2003; Gay, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Social capital is a critical acquisition for students of color and can help these students navigate oppressive practices and structures within a school environment. Social capital can provide connections within the cultural context of the school that allow

students to get their needs met, and find successful paths when institutional or systemic barriers present themselves (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

Several research studies have found that the relationship between students and teachers is an important factor in increasing student engagement and academic motivation, and can decrease the need for exclusionary discipline when behaviors happen in the classroom (Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort, 2011; Wentzel, 1999). Given the strength of this finding, why does it remain difficult for African American students to have positive relationships with teachers and administrators? If both students and teachers value a strong relationship within the context of school, what are the barriers preventing these relationships from being built? One potential reason for this disconnect may lie in the interaction of African American female students' perception of self within the context of the school, and White teacher's role of conforming to the White normative standards implicit in many academic institutions.

Student perception of self. How do African American female students perceive themselves and their place within the culture of schools? The theoretical framework of this study, intersectionality and critical race theory (CRT), requires that the analyses of these questions are done by contextualizing the work in the historical context of race and the systems of power that are inherent in the American education system, while also analyzing the intersecting oppressions of race and gender (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). Scholars of CRT advocate for centering race when discussing the existence of inequities for marginalized groups in American society (Tate, 1997). Within the field of education research, CRT illuminates that schools are a racialized context in which it is logical and expected that students of color experience academic inequities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In order to gain a better understanding of the inequities that African American female students experience, theories of

intersectionality suggest that researchers need to also understand how gender and race interact within the racialized context of schools. A clear finding within this study was that African American female students perceived their high school as a racialized context in which experiences of racism, unfair treatment, and microaggressions occurred daily. Within the student focus-group interview, students' experience of discipline and student-teacher relationships could not be untangled from this context. For the students in this study, their sense of self within their high school may have been influenced by the cumulative experiences of having to adapt to oppressive norms of race and gender in the school.

Research has suggested that African American students are acutely aware of how teachers and administrators perceive their behaviors and academic abilities based on negative cultural stereotypes (Howard, 2008, 2014; Lee, 1999). Adolescents may be particularly apt at recognizing this because of the cumulative experiences they have acquired interacting with teachers across their school career (Tyson, 2003). This phenomenon is expanded when the intersection of race and gender is considered. The intersecting nature of being African American and female contributes to some of the specific difficulties students have with White male and female teachers. African American girls are often perceived by teachers as loud and confrontational when their behaviors are compared to White gendered standards (Morris, 2016). Historically, in American society an "ideal" form of femininity has emerged that incorporates passivity, quietness, and "lady-like" behaviors. Academic institutions have set up discipline policies to reinforce this type of behavior. Further, studies have shown that in the face of behaviors that do not meet gendered expectations, teachers focus more on modifying African American female students' behaviors and social skills over intervening for their academic needs (Grant, 1984; Morris, 2007) It is within this context that African American female students must

define their own version of femininity (Morris, 2007). Across time, African American women have been negatively portrayed as dominating and aggressive. African American female students are often seen as “too assertive” when asking questions in class. These negative stereotypes allow teachers to preemptively sanction African American female students for behaviors of assertiveness and inquisitiveness in the classroom. Does a student’s perception of self include reflections of how White teachers view them? It can be assumed that some of these gendered and racial interactions with teachers have been internalized by students, and may contribute to how students perceive the potential for authentic relationships with teachers or administrators (Ladson-Billing and Tate, 1995; Okonofua, Walton, and Eberhardt, 2016).

The findings of this study support the ideas found in social-identity threat theory (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Research on social-identity theory shows that as African American students go through school, they are burdened with the realization that teachers may be judging them based on negative stereotypes and biases related to their race (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Looking at social-identity theory through an intersectionality lens allows for an understanding of how biases related to gender and race may interact for African American female students. In addition to negative stereotypes and biases related to race, African American females are also aware of racially gendered biases such as being “loud”, “ghetto”, and having “an attitude”. Consequently, African American students may begin to internalize these biases and believe that they are not able to meet expectations of those in power, and succeed in school. When students are primed to believe that they are being assessed and judged based on race and gender, negative interactions with teachers may confirm this expectation of racially gendered bias and undermine any sense of trust in the student-teacher relationship (Okonofua, Walton, and Eberhardt, 2016).

The role of teachers and the White normative standard. The field of teaching is predominantly White. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) reported that 82% of teachers identify as White, a figure that has not changed much over the last several decades. The population of American public school students has become increasingly diverse, and it is expected that students of color will make up 56% of the student population by 2024 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These numbers portray a picture in which there is a high likelihood for cultural mismatch between students and White teachers within schools. Within this White teaching force, several teachers actively work to become culturally responsive teachers in order to minimize the negative effects that can result from this mismatch of cultures (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billing, 1995; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran, 2004). However, those who do not recognize this need, often interact with students in ways that reinforce dominant ideologies of white normative standards in the school.

From the perspective of the White teachers and the African American female Dean of Students in this study, the navigation of cultural differences between students of color and teachers, was the primary barrier to positive student-teacher interactions. This finding is in line with research that shows cultural discontinuity between a student's home or neighborhood environment, and the school environment is often seen as a contributing factor to educational disparities for students of color (Tyson, 2003). When a student's cultural or gendered presentation of behaviors or learning styles is different than those that are expected or valued by the norms of the school, teacher reactions can vary. The hegemonic structure of school environments is based on the ideology of Whiteness as rightness. As part of this structure, teachers engage in acts and decision making that reinforces this ideology, even while superficially recognizing the limitations of this ideology for students. Further, racial and gender

expectations intersect when teachers perceive student behavior in the classroom. Research by Morris and Perry (2017) show that teachers more often interpret African American female behaviors as misbehavior. The authors point out the behavioral infractions that African American female students are targeted for are often behaviors that violate White normative expectations of femininity. As seen in this study, some teachers actively tried to recognize the role of culture in particular behaviors, and took steps to adapt to that behavior. Other teachers pathologized the behaviors or targeted it as something in need of an intervention in order for the student to conform to the school norms. The difference between these two reactions could explain some of the challenges White teachers have in creating strong relationships with African American female students.

Theories from social psychology related to stereotyping have shown that individuals will be more apt to use race or culture as an explanatory factor in situations that are unclear or ambiguous (Duncan, 1976; Sager & Schofield, 1980). African American female students are subjected to both racial and gendered stereotypes. The intersection of race and gender contributes to specific stereotypes that are often applied to African American female students' behaviors in the school environment. Through media exposure, White male and female teachers are exposed to racially gendered stereotypes that portray African American women as unruly, academically unmotivated, loud, and hypersexualized (Morris, 2016). Implicitly, these views may fill in unknown information about a student when teachers are making a decision about discipline. This tendency coupled with the power that teachers hold, may directly contribute to subjectivity in discipline practices, a key contributor to discipline disproportionality (Girvan, Gion, McIntosh, & Smolkowski, 2017).

From a CRT perspective, the influence of race in education is often oversimplified by individuals with power (e.g., White teachers) in the school (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As in this study, White teachers recognized that race and culture are contributing factors to discipline disproportionality, but these factors are seen as more of a superficial static factor, rather than dynamic and interactive. Bal (2018) describes this as the difference between a cultural deterministic view and a cultural instrumentalist view. The cultural deterministic approach suggests that culture determines and explains the behavior challenges in a school (Bal, 2018). Therefore, cultural characteristics are seen as contributing to the cultural mismatch and miscommunication between students and teachers. This simplifies culture and race, and suggests that if one simply removes the cultural influence from the behavior, teachers will be able to identify behaviors that are free from the influence of race. Alternatively, the use of a cultural instrumentalist view allows for the recognition of the dynamic and interactive elements of culture, and poses that culture can be used as a tool for change (Bal, 2018). This approach argues for authentic collaboration with key stakeholders in order to center lived experience and expertise in decision-making processes.

Within a school environment, the oversimplification of the role of race, gender, and culture contributes to the naturalization of White normative standards (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). It is possible that this muting of race and gender allows teachers to interact with African American female students in ways that further dominant cultural and gendered ideologies in the school, and suppress cultural expressions in the student (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Tyson, 2003). Historically, schools have been structured and organized according to White normative standards, with the goal of cultural socialization and the education of its

students (Tyson, 2003). White teachers are an intricate part of this system, and therefore often act in ways that implicitly hold up these goals, according to these standards.

Several of the teachers in this study discussed the need for African American students to engage in code switching in order to conform to the standards implicit in school as a system. White teachers appeared to hold an expectation that students be able to adapt to these standards, and learn how to “act appropriately” in the school. In doing so, it may be that White teachers are conveying to African American students a message that their culture or gender presentation is deviant. When a teacher’s expectations of proper behavior are not met, many teachers automatically resort to sanctioning the student for their cultural expressions. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) recognize that within education, African American students are often only rewarded for “conformity to perceived White norms”, and are disciplined when they are unable or unwilling to meet these standards. Further, African American female students’ behaviors are measured against historically White gendered norms associated with purity, passivity, and domestication (Collins, 2009). When African American female students are required to code switch in order to meet these racial and gendered expectations of those with power, the naturalization of their oppression is reinforced. In terms of the student-teacher relationship, how does this context contribute to the challenges that African American female students have when connecting with White teachers?

The interaction between student sense of self and teachers’ role. Both African American students and White teachers have to navigate the racialized context of school environments. Arguably, students of color are more aware of this context because they are most affected by it, and they have less power than others in this institutional hierarchy. It is interesting to consider what power and privilege affords those going through this navigation process. An

African American female student may have a sense of self within her school that is informed by this low sense of power. She is required to adapt to a system that rarely accepts and adapts back. In fact, this system actively sanctions her expression of self because she does not conform to the social racial and gendered norms of the school. In an effort to seek help with this navigation process, African American female students can see White teachers as guides, and as valuable partners in the process. A teacher holds both power and privilege in the school environment, which allows them to navigate the cultural context of a school with a different purpose than that of students. African American female students must navigate in order to obtain an education. White teachers must navigate to do their job and meet the goal of educating and socializing their students. The stakes are high in both cases, but the students may have less power to successfully navigate. When students and teachers are unsuccessful in this navigation of context and power, it can be argued that the result is disproportionate discipline practices.

Discipline disproportionality can be seen as the result of negative interactions between students and teachers within the racialized context of power dynamics. If this is true, then a solution to the complex problem of discipline disparities is to have more positive interactions between students and teachers. However, there are systemic and institutionalized barriers that are consistently present, and perhaps explain why this problem of unfair discipline practices remains unsolved. The strength of these systemic and institutionalized barriers is rooted in the implicitness of institutional racism, and the fact that one person within the power dynamic of the student and the teacher has the power to rationalize the oppression of the other (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). It is not thought that White teachers are purposefully acting in ways that are meant to oppress African American students. In discussing the effects of unconscious racism, Charles Lawrence (1987) highlights this by stating “most oppression does not feel like

oppression to the perpetrator.” Teachers are often socialized by the school environment in which they work, and their practices for dealing with behaviors and culture have been influenced both explicitly and implicitly by the White hegemonic norms of the school. The key point to remember is that the universality of White experience and judgment is rarely questioned due to the power structure in many schools; therefore daily oppressive practices by teachers often go largely unnoticed and unexamined (Tyson, 2003). The White way is coded as the right way, and this code rarely challenged. However, it can be assumed that these practices act as barriers to creating authentic student-teacher relationships. And, while the choice may be more implicit than explicit, White teachers may choose cultural conformity over authentic student-teacher relationships when working with students of color.

The findings from this study support the social-psychological theories of Morrison and Skiba (2001) and Okonofua, Walton, and Eberhardt (2016). The theories presented by these scholars highlight the complex interaction between students and teachers in the maintenance of discipline disproportionality. These scholars suggest that disproportionate discipline practices cannot be understood by looking at either the student or the teacher contribution in isolation (see Figure 6 and Figure 7), and must be viewed within the context of the transactional nature of student-teacher interactions over time (Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhardt, 2016).

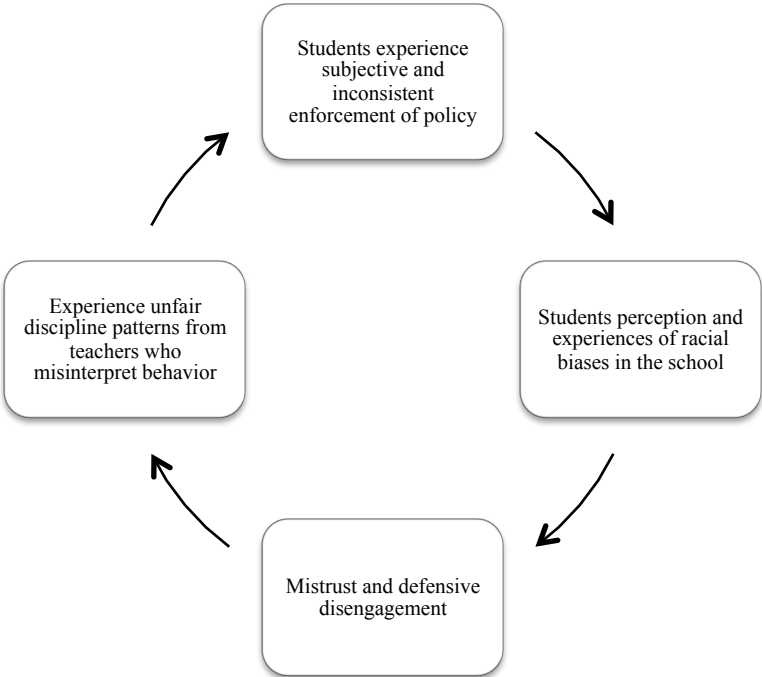


Figure 6. Student portion of transactional cycle.

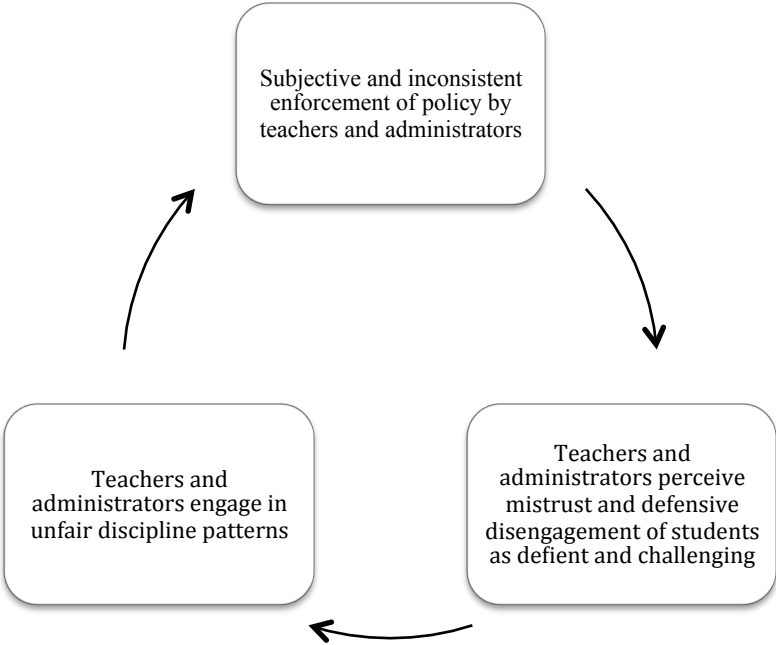


Figure 7. Teacher portion of transactional cycle.

Morrison and Skiba (2001) see these interactions as being between the factors of the student-teacher environment: (1) type of behavioral infraction (subjective vs. objective), (2) student characteristics (race, gender, disability status), and (3) school and classroom climate characteristics. How teachers and students are able to navigate these elements of their environment determines outcomes related to unfair discipline practices. For example, students in this study spoke about interactions with teachers that were difficult to navigate, leading to unfair discipline. African American female students reported that they were often singled out for dress code violations (subjective infraction) based on their race and gender (e.g., head coverings, sweatshirt hoods). Within the racialized context of the school, the students experienced this as racism, and this affected their future interactions with the teacher.

As was seen in the current study, teacher's biases and the student's expectation of these biases interacted on a daily basis in the racialized context of the school. White teachers' subjective and inconsistent enforcement of the school's discipline policies contributed to African American students' perception and experience of racial biases in the school. Across time, these student-teacher interactions built up a context in which African American female students mistrust White male and female teachers and defensively disengage from them. In this unclear dynamic, White teachers may begin to misinterpret student behaviors as defiant and challenging, ultimately contributing to unfair discipline practices (see Figure 8). By also considering this complex relationship within the context the inherent racial and power dynamic present in academic institutions, this study contributes a new way of understanding how the student-teacher relationship contributes to discipline disproportionality.

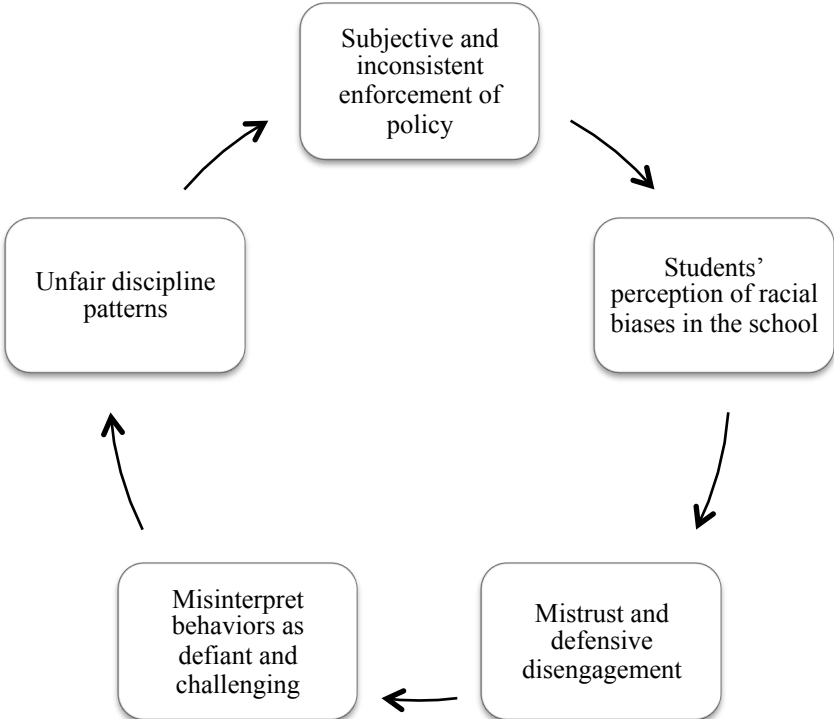


Figure 8. Cyclical transactional relationship between teachers and students, leading to disproportionate discipline practices.

Externalizing the Problem

A second research question that this study sought to answer was how teachers’ self-efficacy and perception of support contributed to the maintenance of discipline disproportionality in the school. The findings of this study revealed that White teachers’ feelings of self-efficacy in handling discipline and confronting the issue of discipline disproportionality were related to their view of several systems level factors in the school. Teachers in this study reported that systems level factors, such as resource levels, lack of funding, inconsistent implementation of interventions and policies, and staff shortages, interfered with their ability to manage challenging behaviors in their classroom. At a school-wide level, several teachers posed ideas for improving existing discipline policies, such as reducing exclusionary discipline practices, increasing student

supports such as mental health counselors and social workers in the school, and increasing administration staff in order to focus on discipline. However, as suggested by the teachers in this study, all of these improvements would require increased funding and resources.

These findings provide some support for theories that posit that macro-level contributions play a part in unfair discipline practices (Eamon, 2001). However, this study does not support that these system level factors are operating in isolation. Through the deep analysis of context and stakeholder perspectives, the current study shows that resource level and teacher efficacy contribute to discipline disproportionality through their effect on teacher practice, policy implementation, and student-teacher interactions.

Funding and resources to work with challenging students. Teachers in this study attribute systemic and structural inadequacies as contributing factors to inequities in discipline practices. Among the factors cited, funding and resource levels were the most commonly discussed. White male and female teachers felt that these system-level factors contributed to difficulties with teaching and supporting students with challenging behaviors. It is assumed that if teachers had an adequate level of funding and supports for interventions, there would be less of a need to remove students from the classroom, and disproportionate discipline numbers would be reduced.

It is well known that the U.S. education system is severely underfunded (Leachman, Masterson, & Figueroa, 2017). The school district in which Marble high school resides, receives state and federal funding, as well as monies from local levies and bonds (Leland, 2016). However, as the school populations increase each year, many schools in the district find it difficult to be adequately funded for all of the specific needs of the school. Consequently, the concerns reported by teachers in this study are valid. Teachers at Marble high school feel as

though they lack the proper supports to appropriately help the students who are struggling academically or behaviorally in their classrooms.

Further, when White teachers were asked to consider why discipline disproportionality exists in Marble high school, several teachers stated that the lack of funding and supports for challenging students might be a contributing factor. If teachers are unable to deal with challenging behaviors in the classroom, students are often sent out of class and are subjected to discipline policies from the administration. In order for this to truly contribute to disproportionate discipline practices in the school, more often than not, the students that teachers are identifying as having challenging behaviors would have to be African American students. As seen in the research literature, teachers often identify African American students as behaviorally challenging, which contributes to the disproportionate amount of office referrals for these students (Howard, 2014; Zimmerman et al., 1995). In fact, at Marble high school, African American students are two times more likely to receive an office referral than White students (School data, 2017).

One explanation for why White teachers may be identifying more African American students as challenging is subjectivity in the assessment of student behaviors. Research has shown that teachers' perception of African American student's behaviors and academic skills are often informed by implicit biases and negative stereotypes associated with students of color (Forsyth, Biggar, Forsyth, & Howat, 2015; Girvan, Gion, McIntosh, & Smolkowski, 2017; Skiba, Micheal, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Smolkowski, Girvan, McIntosh, Nese, & Horner, 2016). White male and female teachers interviewed for this study reported that subjectivity and implicit biases played a role in the discipline practices at the school. It is possible that White teachers felt that they could better address the behaviors of African American students within the

classroom if there were more systemic supports that helped them do so. If this were the case, one can assume that discipline disproportionality would decrease.

Teacher support and self-efficacy. White teachers in this study also reported feeling a lack of support from the administration at Marble high school. Teachers stated that the administration inconsistently enforced the policies of the school and often communicated poorly with the teachers. This lack of communication and consistency directly contributed to teachers feeling undermined and unsupported in their abilities to handle discipline in their classrooms. Further, teachers reported that the administration in the school would often question the teacher's discipline decisions, which contributed to some teachers losing the motivation to handle discipline in the classroom. This disconnect between teachers and administrators is a large one, and could be considered a barrier to the stated school goal of decreasing the amount of students who are sent out of class for discipline purposes.

The culminating effect of teachers feeling a lack of systemic supports for dealing with discipline at Marble high school is that the teachers interviewed for this study were beginning to feel lower levels of self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy, or a teachers' belief in their ability to do what is required of them, is related to various school and teacher factors. Higher levels of teacher self-efficacy are associated with student academic adjustment and teacher well being (Zee and Koomen, 2016). Further, teachers who have high self-efficacy are shown to be better at coping with negative student behaviors, more likely to use proactive classroom behavior strategies, and often have better relationships with students (Zee and Koomen, 2016). Based on these findings, it appears that creating an environment in which teachers have high levels of self-efficacy may help to increase practices that are related to lower discipline rates.

Teachers in this study spoke specifically about craving more support from the administration at Marble high school. The lack of support often left teachers feeling “demoralized” and contributed to the teachers’ lack of motivation for handling discipline in the classroom. Feeling unsupported by the administration in the school, White teachers may have also begun to question the capacity of the school team as a whole in being able to address the complex problem of discipline disproportionality. In a study by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010), they found that levels of support from school administration were related to collective teacher efficacy. Collective teacher efficacy is the belief that a team of teachers and administrators can work towards a goal of executing change within the school. Consequently, if the teachers at Marble high school were feeling low levels of collective efficacy, they may have less motivation to work at solving the problem of unfair discipline practices within the school.

According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007), teacher self-efficacy determines how different opportunities and barriers within the school environment are perceived. Lower levels of self-efficacy can cause teachers to perceive potential threats as more severe than they would if they had higher self-efficacy. An example of this was seen in how a few of the White teachers at Marble high school talked about feeling fear of being perceived as racist, and pushing back against the idea of personal responsibility for the disparities in discipline. Overall, it seems important to increase teachers’ feelings of self-efficacy in order to create a school climate in which teachers have the drive and the motivation to tackle large systemic problems. Without this, teachers may externalize the problem, which often results in teachers feeling less in control of the process, and thus taking less ownership in making change.

The Hope of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS)

The final question that this study aimed to answer was: To what extent do African American students and teachers perceive the methods and goals of the current PBIS model as culturally relevant? This study found that the students recognized the PBIS model as part of the school culture, but reported that they were unaware of the utility and purpose of the intervention. There was a strong disconnect between the school's implementation of PBIS and the racialized school climate that existed at Marble high school.

The school values for the PBIS model implemented at Marble high school are respect, responsibility, effort, kindness, and honesty. In talking about the universality of these terms, several students focused in on the meaning of respect. Within this discussion, the African American female students described how teachers and students both deserve respect, but that White teachers expect to be respected without showing the student respect. Out of all of the values, respect seemed to have the most valence because it was often situated within the student-teacher relationship. This finding suggests that implementation of PBIS models within schools, must take into account school cultural factors such as school climate, student-teacher interactions, and structural and systemic factors in order to be effective.

The PBIS model at Marble high school struggled to be effective because it was implemented without direct consideration of the racialized nature of the school climate. A major goal of PBIS models is to increase positive interactions and behaviors within the school climate. In order to authentically do this, it is important for schools to truly understand how students perceive the existing climate and their capacity to form relationships with those who hold power within this context. Further, it is important to consider how teachers perceive their levels of supports both from within the school and from outside sources, and how this may affect their perception of student-teacher relationships.

It is interesting to compare the differences in the student and teacher perceptions of PBIS. While the students barely mentioned the model during our discussions, the teachers often discussed discipline practices solely within the context of the PBIS model. Teachers reported having high expectations for the value and utility of the model, but did express that the intervention was not working as well as they expected. Teachers and the administrator cited issues with implementation and consistency as the factors needing to be improved in the model. Throughout all of the discussions with the teachers and the administrator, no one talked about whether they felt the model was culturally responsive. A reason for this may lay in the way that PBIS models have been historically implemented in schools. As originally developed, PBIS principles and implementation strategies were meant to be culturally neutral (Bal, Thorius, & Kozleski, 2016, Bal, 2018).

The idea of cultural neutrality in school-wide intervention models has recently been criticized by scholars working towards creating culturally responsive interventions in schools (Bal, Thorius, & Kozleski, 2016, Bal, 2018). Scholars point out that without an explicit consideration of culture, implementation teams may forget that there are dominant cultural norms within a school, and that these norms are often tied to views of behavior and development that may not apply to all students (Bal, Thorius, & Kozleski, 2016, Bal, 2018). In fact, although PBIS models are widely implemented in schools across the nation, it is still relatively rare for schools to actively consider culture when making decisions around positive behavior supports in the school. If the PBIS model that was implemented at Marble high school was inclusive of the values and norms of all of the students, it is possible that the students would have found more value in it as a model for positive school climate and behaviors.

Summary of Interpretation of Findings

This chapter portrayed African American female student and White male and female teacher perspectives of discipline disproportionality in the context of their particular school. In summary, this analysis of the interactions of student and teacher perspectives illustrates the complexities involved in understanding disparities in discipline within the racialized context of a public school. This chapter offers an explanation for why students and teachers both value a strong relationship, and what it takes for each person to navigate through the school culture and the power hierarchy in order to make this connection happen. Further, this chapter explained how teachers externalize the problem of discipline disproportionality by citing systemic contributions to unfair discipline practices. Finally, this chapter analyzed some of the potential reasons that students did not value the PBIS model within their school.

Limitations

In presenting the findings of this study, some limitations need to be considered. Primarily, the sample for this study was small and restrictive in varying ways. This study gathered information from seven White teachers (three males and four females) and only one female administrator who identified as African American. While varying perspectives were gathered from these individuals, this sample is not representative of all of the teachers at Marble high school. Additionally, only one administrator agreed to meet with the initial researcher for this study. It is possible that the perspective of the other three White administrators (two male and one female) at the school would have provided alternative data that may have contributed something different to the findings reported here. The recruitment strategy for the student co-researcher team was designed to get a mixture of male and female African American students participating in the study. Due to the final nature of the recruitment strategy, the research team ended up being nine females. While the perspective of African American males at the school

would have brought in varying viewpoints and stories, the perspective of African American female students is less commonly privileged in research, allowing for this to be a strength for this study. However, it should be noted that this group of nine students is not meant to be representative of all African American female students in the school. Overall, it must be stated that the perspectives portrayed in this study and the implications of the findings, are representative of the experiences of only the sample under study.

Inherent in qualitative research, there is a tradition of using the researcher as the research instrument. While this allows for a deep interpretation of the findings, it also introduces potential bias. Other sources of biases are noted, and the steps taken to reduce these are described. In collaborating with students who may have had negative experiences with the discipline policy, experienced discrimination, and poor relationships with teachers, it is expected that these students' perspective on disparities in discipline rates may have been skewed in a negative direction. These potential biases on the part of the research team were addressed in the data analysis stage. During data analysis, researchers in this study were encouraged to examine alternative hypotheses, understandings, and conclusions within the data.

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this participatory ethnography study was to examine how African American female students and White male and female teachers differ in their perception of discipline disproportionality within the context of an existing school-wide intervention (PBIS). The conclusions of this study are the result of analyses of the proposed research questions and an integration of the key findings that emerged from the data. These conclusions address the synthesis of the themes revealed from the data across respondents. An important conclusion from this study is that the student-teacher relationship is a dynamic that is valued and seen as important by both White teachers and African American female students. The importance of this relationship in regards to discipline inequities can only be fully understood by understanding its complex transactional nature within the racialized context of the school. Through an analysis of the student perspective, it is revealed that African American female students experience school as a context with racism, microaggressions, and negative interactions with teachers and peers. It is within this context that students negotiate important relationships with teachers. White teachers cite difficulties with the navigation of cultural differences when making decisions about the behaviors of African American students in the classroom. Further, teachers acknowledge that their interactions with African American students might be informed by implicit biases and the dominant social norms of the school.

In the context of discipline practice, teachers felt a lack of support from administrators in the school. In response, White teachers reported feeling less effective in handling discipline issues within their classroom, which may have contributed to increased levels of negative interaction with African American students. Teachers in this study felt that their judgment of behaviors in the classroom was not trusted, and often questioned by the administrators. This lack

of support contributed to teachers feeling lower levels of self and collective efficacy, which contributed to a lack of motivation to confront discipline issues. The implications of these findings are that in order to create a school climate in which teachers are able to do the difficult work of confronting individual biases and systemic influences that contribute to discipline disproportionality, they need to feel supported by school leadership.

In the current study, both African American female students and White teachers felt that the school's PBIS model was not fully realized. While teachers saw potential in the PBIS framework, they perceived it as being implemented inconsistently and without the proper support for interventions. The African American female students that were interviewed for this study perceived the PBIS model as unimportant and unvalued within the context of the school. The promise of PBIS models in schools is to create a more positive school climate for all students, while reducing exclusionary discipline practices. While the students in this study barely spoke directly about the PBIS model, they did talk extensively about their perception of the school climate. For the African American female students in this study, PBIS has not lived up to its promise.

From a CRT perspective, the fact that PBIS models may fall short of substantially changing school climates for marginalized students is not surprising. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that school reform efforts, such as PBIS, are often informed by the ideologies of neoliberalism (neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness, and meritocracy), and are not created to make radical change or ensure justice for students of color. The culturally neutral implementation of PBIS in schools only serves to reinforce the status quo in social and cultural norms found in educational institutions. In order to overcome this barrier to true school change for all students, schools need to engage in culturally responsive PBIS that includes authentic

collaboration across students, families, school staff and community members (Bal, Thorius, & Kozleski, 2016, Bal, 2018). It is only in this way that PBIS can work for all students.

Future Steps

Through this analysis, several questions emerged that can be addressed by future researchers. The importance of student-teacher relationships in the prevention of discipline disproportionality emerged as a major theme in this study. Much of what was discussed in this study was the barriers to creating positive student-teacher interactions. Future studies should use students and teacher voices to examine the factors perceived to facilitate these relationships. Further, within these studies it will be important for researchers to use the lived experiences and voices of key stakeholders (students and teachers) to better understand the role of gender in student-teacher relationships. These types of studies could contribute to interventions designed to proactively increase student-teacher relationships within the context of schools.

Due to the limited scope of this study, family and community perspectives on discipline disproportionality were not gathered. Future researchers should incorporate these valuable perspectives in order to understand how unfair discipline practices may contribute to the disconnect that many marginalized families feel with academic institutions. Further, gaining these perspectives can inform intervention efforts around culturally responsive PBIS.

The findings of this study can inform practice considerations for schools and teachers working to reduce discipline disparities in their building. In light of the finding that student-teacher relationships are an important factor when considering discipline issues, it is recommended that schools work to take a proactive approach to nurturing positive student-teacher interactions early on in the academic year. By taking this type of proactive and early approach, schools may be able to prevent the cycle of negative interactions that tends to show

cumulative effects across the year. This work could be done in conjunction with teacher trainings on the role implicit bias and subjectivity in discipline practices. Researchers are beginning to acknowledge that individual teacher trainings on topics such as implicit bias and equity are not sufficient to make lasting change on teacher practice (Fixsen, Blasé, Naoom, & Wallace, 2009; Simonsen et al., 2014). In order to create real systems level change in schools, it is important to promote intervention strategies that focus change at multiple levels. Early interventions to increase teacher-student relationships will have a lasting effect on school connectedness and academic outcomes for African American female students.

To increase positive teacher interactions with African American students, teachers and administrators need to be offered professional development on how to be culturally responsive educators (Berkel et al, 2010). These trainings should be central, pervasive and consistently offered, rather than just once or twice a year. Included in these trainings should be an emphasis on teachers and administrators having explicit discussions about the relationship of race to discipline disparities. These discussions should include an acknowledgement of the automatic thoughts that teachers and administrators may have about certain groups or “types” of students, and how these thoughts inform their reaction to student behaviors (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2017). Further, it is important for school teams to use school-based data of discipline to comprehensively examine discipline disparities and the potential causes of these disparities. Through active progress monitoring, school teams can create interventions that are informed by the racial climate of the school (Carter et al., 2017).

As evidenced in this study, teachers who feel a lack of connection and support from administrators often develop lower self-efficacy in the face of discipline considerations. In order to reduce the effect of low teacher moral and low self-efficacy, it is recommended that schools

take a proactive approach at creating more authentic collaborations between teachers and administrators in the school environment. In order to strengthen these collaborations, it is recommended that teachers and administrators engage in critical reflection on discipline and classroom management using discussions of personal identity and implicit beliefs (Deckman, 2017). Further, researchers should gather qualitative data on teachers' perspective of collective efficacy in relation to working towards reducing disproportionate discipline practices in schools. These studies could inform school-level reforms aimed at increasing teachers' motivation to engage in systems-level change for social justice.

Finally, this research indicates a need for school practitioners to increase the use of culturally responsive PBIS practices. It is recommended that schools regularly engage in authentic inclusion and collaboration with marginalized students, families, and community members in order to inform school reform practices (Bal, 2018). This type of work can help promote a sense of collective agency and power for critical stakeholders in and outside of the school. It is recommended that schools apply culturally responsive pedagogy to their efforts with PBIS, adding this ideology to each tier in the positive discipline framework (Lustick, 2017).

The findings of this study have illuminated the complexity of factors that are involved in the creation and maintenance of disproportionate discipline practices. Importantly, this study allowed multiple stories to be told in the process of examining unfair discipline practices. The overwhelming benefit of including student voice and participation in this study is shown through the multifaceted nature of the findings presented. Allowing African American female students the space to tell their own story contributed to a reframing of the problem under study, and a shifting of how researchers can conceptualize this problem of disproportionate discipline practices by finding expertise in lived experiences.

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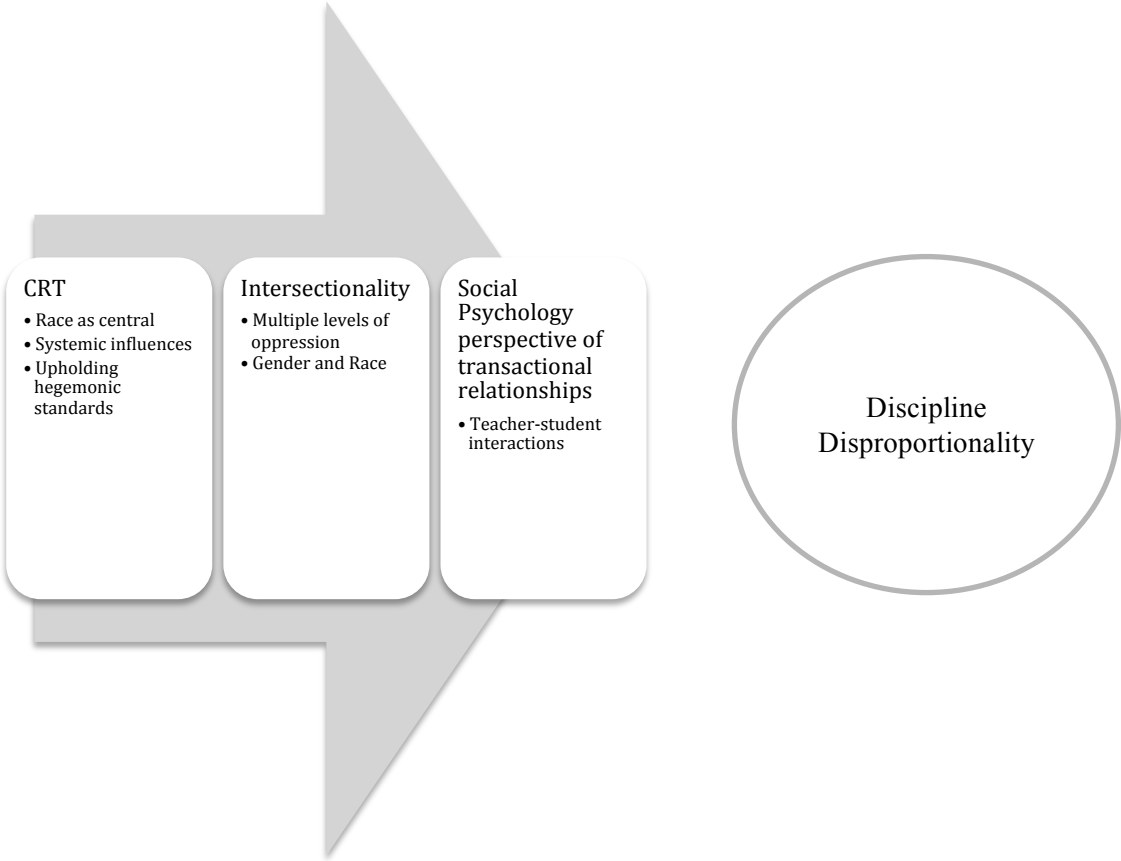
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Appendix A

Conceptual model of theoretical framework



Appendix B

Focus group interview

Introduction

Thank you all for agreeing to participate in this focus group. I would like to take a moment to remind you first that participation in this focus group is voluntary, and you can decide to stop participating at any point. As you know, the purpose of this study is to better understand how you as students feel about how discipline is handled at your school.

Activity 1

This first activity is to help you start thinking about discipline at your school so that you can answer the questions after the activity. I would like you to focus on what you already know about the discipline policy in your school. Working in teams of two or three, please use the paper and pens provided to write down everything you know about the discipline policy at this school. For example, what do you know about which types of behaviors will get you sent to the office vs. those that will get you suspended or expelled? Do all teachers follow the same rules?

Group Questions

1. Do you feel that the discipline policy at your school is fair? Why or why not?
2. What role do the teachers play in the discipline procedures at your school? Do you feel that your teachers treat you fairly?
3. What role do administrators play? Do you feel that the administrators at this school treat you fairly?

4. Sometimes teachers and students view problem behaviors differently. Tell me about a time where you and a teacher may have disagreed about whether or not a behavior was appropriate for the classroom or school environment.
5. What are your thoughts about what may have caused or contributed to this difference in opinion?
6. Tell me about a time that you were personally affected by the discipline policy at your school.
7. Has your experience with the discipline policy in this school contributed to the way you feel about your school in general? Has it affected your relationship with teachers? Administrators? Peers?
8. Are you aware of anything the school has done to address discipline problems throughout the school? If yes, what?
9. Some people argue that the interventions that schools put into place to address discipline problems do not address the experiences that African American students have. Do you agree? Why or why not?
10. How do you think teachers and administrators would react to your suggestions related to making these interventions more reflective of your experience? Why?

Thank you again for participating in this focus group. I would like to remind you that the discussions we have had are confidential. If you have any other comments or would like to talk with me further about today's discussion, please let me know. Thank you!

Appendix C

Teacher interview

Introduction questions

1. What subjects do you teach? What grades?
2. How long have you been teaching? How long have you been at Lindbergh?

Discipline policy questions

1. In your opinion, what is the purpose of discipline in a school?
2. How do you define misbehavior?
3. How do you feel about the school's discipline policy?
4. Which of the school discipline rules would you change if you could?
5. Explain a time in which you felt the school's discipline policy was too strict. Not strict enough?
6. Do you feel like you have the ability to be flexible with the discipline policy at your school? Tell me about a time in which you did not strictly follow the school's discipline policy when dealing with a student.
7. How often do you use student history as a guide for how you will work with a student?
Can you give me an example of how you might use student history to inform your intervention choices with a student?
8. How does student history affect your discipline choices?
9. Have you ever felt unsafe when disciplining a student? Why was that, and did that change the way you disciplined or interacted with the student?

10. Tell me about a time where you and the administration may have disagreed on a discipline decision. What, if any, steps did you take to change the decision?
11. Have you had an experience in which you felt that a student was given unfair punishment for violating school rules? (If yes) Can you tell me about that?

Discipline Disproportionality questions

Discipline disproportionality: African American students are disciplined at a higher rate than White students. They are disciplined at a rate that is disproportionate to the percentage of the school population they make up. This is a problem happening across the nation.

1. What are your thoughts about why discipline disproportionality exists?
2. Sometimes teachers and students view problem behaviors differently. Tell me about a time where you and a student may have disagreed about whether or not a behavior was appropriate for the classroom or school environment.
3. What are your thoughts about what may have caused or contributed to this difference in opinion?
4. Have you ever experienced a time in which you felt that another teacher was stricter with student discipline because of a student's racial identity?
5. Do you have any suggestions for how disproportionate discipline practices can be reduced at your school?

Appendix D

Administrator interview

Introduction questions

1. How long have you been an administrator?
2. How long have you been at Lindbergh?

Discipline Policy Questions

3. In your opinion, what is the purpose of discipline in a school?
4. How do you define misbehavior? Respect?
5. How do you feel about the discipline policy at Lindbergh?
6. What changes do you feel need to be made to the policy?
7. Do you ever feel as if certain discipline policies are hard to implement consistently within the school? For example, can you discuss either the dress code or the electronics policies, and the difficulties you may have when enforcing these policies?
8. Have you ever felt unsafe when disciplining a student? Why was that, and did it change the way you disciplined or interacted with the student?
9. Do you see any patterns in student misbehaviors? For example, do certain groups of students seem to be referred for particular behaviors? Why do you think this happens?
10. What are your thoughts about the PBIS system in this school? Do you think it works for all students? Would you change it in any way?

Discipline Disproportionality questions

Discipline disproportionality: African American students are disciplined at a higher rate than White students. They are disciplined at a rate that is disproportionate to the percentage of the school population they make up. This is a problem happening across the nation.

6. What are your thoughts about why discipline disproportionality exists?
7. Sometimes administrators and students view problem behaviors differently. Tell me about a time where you and a student may have disagreed about whether or not a behavior was appropriate for the classroom or school environment.
8. What are your thoughts about what may have caused or contributed to this difference in opinion?
9. Do you have any suggestions for how disproportionate discipline practices can be reduced at your school?