Punished: Identity Development of Black Boys in a Figured World of Exclusion

By

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To the Black boys I had the privilege of teaching but who taught me so much more.

Love y'all.

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ABSTRACT

This study invokes the theory of self and identity to investigate how multiply marginalized students, namely Black boys subjected to exclusionary discipline, made sense of exclusionary discipline, as well as the ways in which it impacted their identity fashioning processes. An instrumental case study design was employed to understand the experiences of five Black boys who formed their practiced identities in and through their day-to-day engagement in and interactions with disciplinary moments within Cornel School District (CSD). Data sources included interviews, observations, and artifacts. Amidst a figured world of exclusion, the boys grappled with the social discourse and practices in order to accept, resist, or negotiate offered identities. Disciplinary moments and experiences were found to both mediate and constrain the boys self-making. Recommendations for research, practice, and policy are presented.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Since as far back as the institution of slavery, the U.S. has always been concerned with controlling and punishing Black bodies (Alexander, 2012; Fanon, 2008). Racially disproportionate school discipline, Jim Crow Laws, and mass incarceration demonstrate how such fixation on control and punishment is an ingrained and recursive feature in American society (Alexander, 2012; Schnyder, 2010; Simmons, 2017). Disciplinary power that allowed for racial control is the foundation on which many of our current policies, practices, and laws rest. The criminal injustice system serves as but one present day example that evidences the country's insatiable need to control and punish Blackness (Armour, 2020). Disparities in incarceration rates reveal that policing and sentencing efforts have not been equally applied to all people (Alexander, 2012). Black Americans continue to be disproportionately represented in the criminal injustice system at rates that far exceed their total population in the country and at a rate five times that of their white male peers (Alexander, 2012; Armour, 2020). Alarmingly, Black males represent over one third of the federal and state prison population despite only being slightly more than a tenth of the U.S. male population (Alexander, 2012; Hernández et al., 2015). The likelihood that these trends will change without widespread reform are dim at best. According to a study by The Sentencing Project (2017), one in every three black men born in 2001 can expect to be incarcerated in his lifetime, whereas only one in 17 white men can expect to be incarcerated in his lifetime.

Black people have historically been targeted by discriminatory laws and given harsher sentences for similar crimes (Alexander, 2012; Armour, 2020). These disparities cannot simply be written off as happenstance, and they undergird a much more complex problem in our society,

namely, an unrelenting need to control and punish Black bodies (Alexander, 2012; Schnyder, 2010). Such unequal policies and practices are a means to an end. In her text, *The New Jim Crow*, Alexander (2012) reminds, "It is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt." She continues by saying, "Rather than rely on race we use our criminal justice system to label people of color "criminals" and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind (p. 2)." In other words, despite arguments that the U.S. is a color-evasive and racially evolved society, many of the ills of yesterday remain persistent today.

The dehumanization of and violence against Black bodies is a normalized, often recursive, event in the life course for Black people in the U.S.'s racially stratified society (Alexander, 2012; Armour, 2020; Fanon, 2008; Simmons, 2017). The institution of U.S. schools offers no exception. Schools are a microcosm of the larger penal system and are implicated as a primary site of control and punishment targeted toward Black students (Simmon, 2017; Vaught, 2017). Exclusionary school discipline in the U.S., in fact, has emerged as a stunningly comprehensive and well disguised system of racial control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to mass incarceration (Alexander, 2012; Schnyder, 2010). Through various policies, procedures, and practices, Black students are relegated and confined to the margins of the school community and denied access to the mainstream classroom, curriculum, and much more (Schnyder, 2010; Simmons, 2017). Said differently, Black students whose behaviors have been criminalized are left traversing liminal spaces of school (Schnyder, 2010). Equally concerning is the fact that "with every disciplinary infraction a student receives, the probability of them being a product of the criminal justice system at some point increases" (Diem & Walton, 2021) (p. 116).

The most recent biennial report from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights provides evidence to the ways in which Black students are situated in the margins vying for an equitable schooling experience. For instance, at the time of this report, Black students made up 18.2% of the United States' pre-school enrollment but accounted for 43.3% of one or more out-of-school suspensions: a rate of nearly two and a half times that of their enrollment. Their white counterparts represented 43% of the total pre-school enrollment and 37% of one or more out-of-school suspensions. In sum, Black preschool students were expelled at rates that were twice their enrollment whereas white students were expelled at a rate less than one times their total enrollment. When the data are disaggregated across race and gender, it is revealed that boys were suspended and expelled more often than girls. Further, with such disaggregated analysis there is an even more alarming pattern of exclusion. Preschool Black boys made up 9.6% of the overall enrollment but experienced suspension at rates nearly four times their enrollment or 34.2%. Similar trends were also found within K-12 schools throughout the country. During the same period of time, Black students accounted for 15.1% percent of the total student enrollment and accounted for 38.8% of the expulsions where educational services were still provided. Black students were also two times more likely to be suspended in K-12 schools when compared to the white peers. As it concerns Black boys, they made up 7.7% of the overall student enrollment but represented 24.9% of the one or more out-of-school suspensions— a rate of three times their enrollment. White boys had an enrollment of 24.4% and consisted of 24.9% of the one or more out-of-school suspensions— a rate of only one times their enrollment.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights reported that at the time of this study the total number of days of missed school for all students due to out-of-school suspensions was equivalent to 11,205,797 days. The loss of instructional days and repeatedly

being subjected to suspensions have clear contributions to poor academic outcomes, lower

graduation rates, higher rates of unemployment, and a host of other societal ills. The statistics,

though informative in presenting the size and scope of the problem, dehumanize the children

represented. But behind every data point is a human life as illustrated in the following cases.

June 2019: Jaleel, a Black second grade male student with disabilities at View Ridge

Elementary School in northeast Seattle is confined to an outdoor cage as a means to respond to

his behavioral challenges, namely his propensity to flee the building according to a New York

Post article. While relegated to this outdoor enclosure Jaleel was barefoot and required to sit on

the ground to eat his lunch as there were no chairs or tables afforded him in the cage.

September 2019: According to a widely circulated Washington Post report, Immanuel, a

15-year-old boy without arms or legs is physically restrained by an armed deputy in Arizona

after a staff at the group home called law enforcement because Immanuel had knocked over the

garbage can and was disturbing the peace. Another student, C.J. who was 16 and living in the

group home as well attempted to intervene and record the interaction. He was subsequently

forced against a wall and handcuffed. Both boys were arrested for disorderly conduct and taken

into custody at the juvenile detention center.

December 2019: NBC news reported that in a Vance County Middle School in

Henderson, North Carolina, video footage captured a police officer assigned to the school lifting

an 11-year-old male student off the ground, slamming him, and dragging him repeatedly before

continuing down the hallway.

April 2014: Kalyb Wiley-Primm, a 7-year-old boy with a hearing impairment is

handcuffed and escorted out of his elementary school classroom for crying in response to being

teased about his impairment. Kalyb was left physically constrained by the handcuffs for at least

15 minutes according to Kansas City news. The court later ruled the officers' use of force was the "reasonable course of action."

Each of these violent and disheartening vignettes points to the ways in which Black boyhood is rendered unimaginable (Dumas & Nelson, 2016). The centrality of race to education leaves Black boys to occupy a unique space within our public education system. In particular, the language used to describe Black boys rarely centers their assets. Leaving them, all too often, to be seen and imagined through deficit-based and criminalizing narratives. In the cases above, the realities come to life wherein students are viewed as needing to be isolated and confined, as violent and dangerous, or even treated inhumanely. Jaleel, Immanuel, Kalyb, and the 11-year-old unnamed child's encounters evidence how each of them became positioned as behavioral problems. In other words, these four boys were unable to be imagined outside of public fears and narratives about who Black boys could be or become. It is precisely because of a long history of subjugation and societal disrespect of Black bodies that Black boyhood is unimaginable (Dumas & Nelson, 2016).

Exclusionary School Discipline

Teachers, administrators, and other school staff are charged with the critical responsibility of maintaining safe, positive, and welcoming schools. Since as early as the common school, educators have voiced concerns about student behavior (Martin & Nuzzi, 2001; Irby, 2009). Provided these concerns, educators identified and implemented various approaches to respond to student behavior. Such approaches ranged along a spectrum from contacting parents to the use of corporal punishment with other approaches such as detention and removal from the learning environment (Martin & Nuzzi, 2001). Many of these approaches remain prevalent in our contemporary society leaving students to navigate a relatively common

disciplinary pathway. The pathway begins when a behavioral concern is documented through the use of office discipline referrals and the assignment of a consequence based on the type referral (Sullivan, et al., 2013). Consequences may be punitive (e.g., detention) or exclusionary (e.g., suspension or expulsion). Two types of consequences that may be delivered by administrative staff are of particular concern due to the loss of academic, social, and emotional connections to school: suspension and expulsion. *Suspensions* are the short-term removal from the classroom (in-school suspension [ISS]) or school environment (out of school suspension [OSS]) as a form of punishment. Another more severe consequence that may be delivered is an *expulsion* which refers to taking away the students' rights of membership in access to the school environment usually for a prolonged period of time. Together suspensions, expulsions, and any other involuntary removal from the classroom or larger school environment will be referred to as *exclusionary discipline* throughout this document. Although a common approach, it is riddled with problems.

Despite evidence related to the negative outcomes of punitive and exclusionary disciplinary practices, many educational agencies continue to rely on the use of such practices. Research indicates that particular students based on membership within certain demographic groups (e.g. African Americans, Latinos, Native American, students with certain disability labels, etc.) are more at risk of being subjected to punitive and exclusionary discipline. The disproportionate representation of these students has a longstanding history. In 1975, the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), a U.S. based organization founded in the early 1970s with the goal of improving federal policies concerning child welfare and public education systems, shed light on the issue of racial disparities in school discipline. A seminal publication *School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children? A Report* found that Black students were suspended at

rates twice that of their white peers. Furthermore, the report argued that suspending children from schools is educationally ineffective and does a disservice to students (Fund, 1975).

Exclusionary disciplinary practices are concerning as they are costly and have been shown to contribute to poor student academic and social outcomes (Bal, 2016; Girvan et al., 2016). Skiba and colleagues (2006) articulate the irony of school discipline suggesting that while the goal of exclusionary and punitive disciplinary practices are to improve student behavior and school climate, these practices have produced the opposite results. Research, for example, has demonstrated that students who are more frequently subjected to exclusionary discipline practices have increased odds of receiving future disciplinary actions both in and out of school (Donovan & Cross, 2002). The short and long-term outcomes for students are considerably negative. Removal from classes and the school in general positions students to miss out on valuable instructional time thereby impacting their overall academic success negatively. Beyond this, other adverse outcomes have also been found to be associated with exclusionary practices. Research indicates students who are subjected to such practices have an increased likelihood of dropping out or becoming involved with the juvenile justice system (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Fabelo et al., 2011).

Statement of the Problem

It is generally accepted among educators, researchers, and community stakeholders that safe schools are a necessary condition for teaching and learning to occur. Yet, as the ideologies and practices of the criminal justice system have become further embedded in public schools and shape response to student behavior, there appears a concerning paradox. On the one hand schools readily engage in criminalizing student misbehavior. All too often, these students are Black boys (Simmons, 2017) with and without disabilities. On the other hand, through their disparate and

inequitable use of exclusionary practices, U.S. public schools perpetuate narratives that render Black boys who are multiply marginalized as dangerous, criminal, and in need of fixing. As a result of their overreliance on carceral ideologies and practices, schools effectively situate themselves as sites of Black suffering (Dumas, 2014) rather than safe spaces for many Black boys. Further, these Black boys are left to make sense of, accept, negotiate, or resist the various identities (i.e., criminal, dangerous, troublemaker, etc.) imposed upon them, but how this sense-making occurs and impacts Black boys' visions of themselves has received little attention by special education researchers.

Study Purpose and Theoretical Framework

Firstly, and arguably most importantly, this study seeks to render imaginable black boyhood through making visible a group that has failed to receive adequate attention in school discourse and education research. Dumas and Nelson (2016) state, "Unfortunately, our inability or unwillingness to see Black boys as children leads us to blame them rather than ask what we can do to address the pain and isolation they feel" (p. 35). My attempt with this research study is to ask that question and listen with intentionality.

Secondly, this study brings to the forefront the increasing narratives in the public sphere that views and positions Black boys as a "problem" and the ways in which it serves to legitimize the use of violent and exclusionary practices towards Black boys who are multiply marginalized. The ossified construction of Black boyhood may negatively impact their schooling experiences. Davis (2008) laments,

> For many of them, schools ignore their aspirations, disrespect their ability to learn, fail to access and cultivate their many talents, and impose a restrictive range of their options. Within this overwhelming oppressive schooling context, too many Black boys simply

give up--beaten by school systems that place little value on who they are and what they

offer (p. 533).

Therefore, this work seeks to critically investigate the first-hand narratives of Black boys as a conduit for the active pushing back against deficit-based perspectives and majoritarian stock stories that cast Black students as a problem.

Lastly, this work attempts to take up an intersectional approach to understanding the schooling experiences of a group of students who are considered to be multiply marginalized, namely, those who are situated at the cross sections of race and disability. Research has demonstrated that Black students and students with disabilities are more likely to experience exclusionary discipline in comparison to their white and non-disabled peers. Sojoyner (2016), suggested, "Rather than focus only on the effects of policy and legislation, it is even more important to study the people, communities, and movements that these policies are in reaction to" (p. xi). Therefore, I use this work as an opportunity to interrogate what happens within the context of schools that positions these students at the margins, while leveraging the stories of the participants to gain a nuanced understanding of the ways school exclusionary discipline impacts and influences how these students make sense of themselves. To do so, I rely on Holland et al.'s (1998) Figured Worlds framework. Figured worlds is a social practice theory of self and identity that operates under the assumption that people engage in identity (re)shaping processes through their participation in socially, culturally, and historically contingent activities (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). A more in-depth discussion and review of the literature with respect to Figured Worlds will be provided in Chapter 2. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the schooling experiences of Black boys (w/ disabilities) who have experienced exclusionary discipline?

2. What are their perceptions about exclusionary discipline?

3. How have their experiences with school discipline influenced their identity formation?

4. In what ways do they accept, negotiate, or resist institutional positioning that results from exclusionary discipline practices?

Organization of the Manuscript

This dissertation is organized around five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study while simultaneously describing the problem space and the purpose of the research. Additionally, it presents the theoretical framework that informs the work. Chapter 2 situates the current study within the relevant social, political, historical, economic, and research movements that have and continue to shape the realities of school for Black boys in the U.S. The review includes research at the intersection of race, disability, and exclusionary discipline. These bodies of literature worked together to inform the questions this dissertation poses and seeks to answer. In Chapter 3, I detail the methodological decisions made in the execution of this study and the analytical technique used to make sense of the narratives told by the student participants. This chapter also offers insight into the study context and participants. By leveraging the stories told by the young men in this study, Chapter 4 presents the findings, at times, providing narrative vignettes to center and prioritize their voices. Lastly, in Chapter 5, I discuss the contributions and implications of this study on policy, practice, and research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The goal of this study is to understand how multiply marginalized students, namely Black boys subjected to exclusionary discipline, made sense of exclusionary discipline and the ways in which it impacted how they fashioned a sense of self. The purpose of this literature review is to situate the current study within the relevant social, political, and historical movements that have and continue to shape the realities of school for Black boys in the U.S. Moreover, the review includes research at the intersection of race, disability, and exclusionary discipline. Therefore, the review of literature found in this chapter centers on several domains pertinent to the study including: (a) the disparate impacts of exclusionary discipline; (b) the interplay of race and school discipline; and (c) the relationship between race, disability and exclusionary discipline.

Exclusionary Discipline in U.S. Schools

Schools are a microcosm of larger U.S. carceral logics. Many schools today have turned to the criminal justice system as a model for discipline, adopting many of the same policies and practices that were intended to fight crime on the national stage (Simmons, 2017). As students enter schools across the nation, they find themselves face-to-face with metal detectors, barred windows, surveillance cameras, and armed police. Damien Sojoyner (2016) notes that, "the extent to which the daily structure of public education has become a very ordinary and grotesquely normalized site of hyper-criminalized surveillance and sheer repression is quite astounding" (p. 74).

Schools have increasingly become more like prisons and penitentiaries. The use of exclusionary practices and policies (e.g., zero-tolerance school policies) are justified on the

grounds of establishing safe and welcoming school environments that are conducive to all students receiving a quality education (Simmons, 2017, Vaught, 2017). Yet, it has been consistently found that schools are not equally intolerant of all students. Students of color, students with disabilities, and those at the intersection of these multiply marginalizing identities are at significant disadvantage (Annamma, 2017; Artiles, 2013). The disparate implementation of exclusionary discipline practices has become a normative feature of a disproportionate number of educational experiences (Ferguson, 2003, Simmons, 2017; Sojoyner, 2016). It was estimated that in the 2018 school year, more than 2.5 million public school children with and without disabilities were suspended from schools across the nation. Nearly half of those students were removed from school on multiple occasions. Moreover, Black boys represented 35.4% of the population of public-school male students with and without disabilities served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) who received one or more out-of-school suspensions. Boys with disabilities served under IDEA represented 27.5% of public-school male students who received one or more out of school suspension regardless of race. Exclusionary approaches to managing student conflict are concerning. The over-reliance on exclusionary discipline fosters poor academic and social/emotional outcomes (Artiles, 2013; Bal, 2016; Gordon & Fefer, 2018).

Impact on Academic Outcomes

Structural dynamics within the education sphere that draw on punitive and exclusionary logics leave students of color and those with disabilities most vulnerable and least likely to access academic achievement (Artiles, 2013). The detrimental impacts that exclusionary actions have on student achievement has long been investigated by scholars. Arcia (2006), using a longitudinal retrospective analysis, compared the pre- and post-suspension reading outcomes for

students who had been suspended against those students who had not. The results of the study suggest that across the 3-year period under investigation, students who had been suspended consistently performed worse in reading achievement than those students who had not been suspended. Moreover, it was found that increases in suspension days, which resulted in the loss of instructional minutes, were significantly associated with students' decreased likelihood of making academic gains across the study period. Finally, the study reports that at the high school level, a clear association between suspension and dropout was evident.

In their meta-analysis across a 26-year period, Noltemeyer and colleagues (2015) reported similar findings, calling attention to the inverse relationship between suspension and achievement and the positive relationship between suspension and dropout. These studies together call into question the practices of excluding students and make clear how doing so hinders academic progress.

Relatedly, Morris and Perry (2016) explored the relationship of exclusion and achievement; however, they extended their analysis to understand the contribution of suspension on racial differences in reading and mathematics achievement. The authors reported that by Black students being disproportionately relegated to exclusionary discipline, the gap in black-white achievement is reproduced. Most studies that work to understand the relationship between exclusionary discipline practices and academic achievement tend to focus on the most extreme forms of exclusion which remove the student from the building. However, Cholewa and colleagues (2018) draw attention to a more subtle form of exclusionary discipline (e.g., in-school suspension) which remove students from the classroom environment. In their study, they reveal that similar too more extreme exclusionary practices, students who receive in-school suspensions

are likely to have lower grade point averages and an increased likelihood of exiting school prior to graduation.

Impact on Social/Emotional/Behavior

Above and beyond the negative impact on student academic achievement, exclusionary school discipline also results deleterious effects on students' social-emotional well-being and behavioral health. In particular, experiences with school discipline have been shown to alter students' overall perception of school. For instance, Gage and colleagues (2021) examined rates of school connectedness for students who had been identified as having an emotional behavior disorder (EBD). The researchers found that students indicated more negative perceptions of school connectedness as compared to their peers without such disability designations. Similarly, Fan et al., (2011) found that higher disciplinary referrals predicted increased negative attitudes among students about the school's overall climate. Such trends are consistent with those across the extant literature (Gordon & Fefer, 2018; Skiba et al., 2011).

Exclusionary sanctions also hinder students' positive relationships with teachers and other school personnel who are expected to serve in the best interest of students. Repeated experiences with exclusionary discipline leave students with negative perceptions of their school's climate and with limited positive relationships with school staff. Given students' negative perceptions coupled with the lack of positive adult relationships, the pathways that push students into more restrictive learning environments becomes clear. In their review of legislation and policy on alternative schools and programs, Lehr et al., (2009) revealed that alternative schools in many states serve as a disciplinary consequence for students.

Black Students and School Discipline

Across literature exploring exclusionary school discipline practices, race remains the most investigated sociodemographic feature for its potential influence on suspension or expulsion patterns. Researchers consistently report findings that suggest Black students are more likely to be suspended or expelled compared to their white peers. Through the use of multinomial logit regression, Skiba and colleagues (2011) were able to test whether a student's race predicted the disciplinary response chosen by the administrator at the individual level. The results of this analysis revealed that African Americans in elementary grades were 3.75 times more likely than their white peers to receive out-of-school suspension or expulsion for minor misbehaviors. For disruption and noncompliance at the same grade level, African Americans were 1.54 and 1.22 times more likely to be suspended or expelled when compared to their white counterparts respectively. Although less extreme, these patterns were evident at the middle school level as well. This study investigated various administrative decisions (e.g., detention, in school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion) and uncovered an interesting finding. African American students, regardless of grade level and infraction, had significantly lower odds than their white peers who engaged in similar behaviors of receiving detention, a less exclusionary alternative.

Although these finding are already deeply concerning, (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Butler, Lewis, Moore III, & Scott, 2012), another study unpacks the disparities even further revealing Black students, when compared to White and Hispanic students, are also more likely to receive harsher punishments as measured in number of days suspended. Sullivan et al. (2013) compared students who had been suspended once versus those who had multiple suspensions. When controlling for all other variable, what they call an "unsurprising picture" is revealed: only being black and or receiving special education services was significantly associated with risk of

receiving multiple suspensions. The findings from these studies might suggest that implicit and explicit racial/ethnic biases are in fact influencing administrative decisions. Moreover, these studies evidence the ways in which schools view Black students as a threat, thereby subjecting them to increased surveillance and leaving them to be marked deviant.

Race continues to be the strongest sociodemographic characteristic contributing to the disproportionality in school discipline. Black students are significantly more likely to be disciplined at all levels (e.g. office disciplinary referrals, suspension, and expulsion). Even when considered alongside other sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., socio-economic status, gender, & age) Black students are still more likely to be disciplined as compared to all other racial groups (Martinez et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2014; 2002). This occurs despite evidence driven assertions that suggest that such disciplinary practices (i.e., suspension and expulsion) are educationally ineffective and do a disservice to students academically and emotionally. What becomes clear then is that schools are complicit in removing Black bodies from regular classrooms via exclusionary disciplinary practices (Erevelles, 2014).

Black Students and Special Education

The nation's special education law (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004); IDEA) necessitates that for students to receive appropriate disability related supports and services, they must be identified as having one of 13 disabilities under the IDEA. In addition to the receipt of supports or services tied to disability, additional safeguards are afforded to the student. Safeguards as outlined in Part B of the law informs local education agencies of the authority they have as it concerns the removal of students from school:

> School personnel under this subsection may remove a child with a disability who violates a code of student conduct from their current placement to an appropriate interim

alternative educational setting, another setting, or suspension, for not more than 10 school

days (to the extent such alternatives are applied to children without disabilities).

Despite the provision of this safeguard, students with disabilities continue to be subjected to

exclusionary discipline practices that restrict their access to a free, appropriate public education.

This concern has been explored in the relevant literature. For example, Sullivan et al. (2013;

2014) reported that nearly 20% of all students with disabilities were suspended, though only

7.6% of the overall population was suspended. Additionally, these studies revealed that disability

status consistent with IDEA is a strong predictor of suspension. When controlling for all other

variables, Sullivan et al. (2013) found that students receiving special education services were

70% more likely to have multiple suspensions. In a later work Sullivan et al. (2014) found

variability in suspension risk across disability categories, revealing that students with emotional

disturbance (ED) were 9 times as likely to be suspended as students with speech language

impairments or low incidence disabilities (e.g. those disabilities such as Autism, visual

impairment, hearing impairment). Furthermore, the analysis provides evidence that

approximately one third of students with a label of ED have been suspended multiple times

(Sullivan et al., 2014).

Similar patterns were ascertained in the work of Bowman-Perrott and colleagues (2013).

This study drew on data provided by the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study

(SEELS), which is nationwide study concerned with the characteristics, experiences, and

outcomes of elementary and middle school aged students with disabilities. In examining patterns

and predictors of exclusionary discipline decisions over time for students receiving special

education services, these scholars did comparisons across the various disability categories and

found that students with EBD were at the greatest risk of initial disciplinary exclusion. Students

with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and specific learning disability (SLD) followed.

Each of these studies are aligned with the finding from Skiba's (1997) work in which he finds

that students labeled as "emotionally handicapped" were more likely to be suspended than their

peers regardless of having a disability label or not. The findings revealed from these studies are

highly concerning as research has shown that Black students are overrepresented in the disability

category of EBD (Gibson, Wilson, Haight, Kayama, & Marshall, 2014; Sullivan & Bal, 2013). If

students in the disability category in which Black students are overrepresented (i.e., EBD) are

more likely to be suspended or expelled compared to all other disability categories, a clear

picture begins to form— one that alludes to what critical disability scholars have termed the

racialization of disability (Artiles, 2011). The referral and subsequent placement of Black

students into special education, in largely subjective disability categories (e.g., EBD, other health

impairment (OHI), SLD,) has been criticized as a new tool used for resegregation post Brown

(Artiles, 2011; Blanchett, 2009).

Black male students simultaneously find that their race positions them for continued

interaction with a cycle of discipline and punishment, as well as placement in special education.

Empirical studies have reported that race is a consistent predictor of disability identification. For

example, Bal and colleagues (2014) employed a mixed-method collaborative case analysis in

which quantitative data were used to explore temporal patterns (e.g., risk indices or local

prevalence) of disproportionality in an urban school district. Additionally, qualitative data were

used to assess the school district's leadership team's perceptions of the issue of

disproportionality. Bal and colleagues (2014) found that the risk of overrepresentation was

greatest for Black students. In examining three time periods (2006, 2008, 2010), these scholars

found that Black students were consistently two times as likely as White student to be identified

for special education as indicated by a relative risk ratio of 2.1. Beyond the increased likelihood of simply being placed in special education, this study revealed that compared to White students, Black students had an elevated risk of being referred and placement for high-incidence disability categories (e.g., EBD, SLD, OHI). Similar findings were revealed in an earlier study by Skiba and colleagues (2006) that explored how Black students were labeled.

Despite rhetoric and federal policies of American public schools mandating a free appropriate public education, the net output of schools has been an unequal distribution of negative social value to Black male students with and without disabilities. Hegemonic constructions of race and disability strongly influence the educational experiences of Black students. Such ideologies suffocate their opportunity to learn, relegating them to poorer education and social outcomes. Other negative outcomes have also been reported including restricted or limited access to quality education programs in inclusive settings, dropping out of school, and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Erevelles, 2014; Skiba et. al., 2006). Black students with disabilities also suffer from inadequate pedagogical practices coupled with lowered expectations that fundamentally decrease students' post-school opportunities (Blanchett, 2009).

The outcomes associated with crippling disciplinary and special education placement decisions are well documented across the extant literature. However, the ways in which such practices contribute to students' sense of self and identity presents a significant gap in the larger problem space. Holland and colleagues (1998) note that, "Selves are socially constructed through the mediation of powerful discourses and their artifacts - tax forms, census categories, curriculum vitae, and the like" (p. 26). Yet, how these powerful discourses and artifacts influence

identity formation has gone unexplored as it pertains to Black boys generally and those who are the intersection of multiple marginalizing identities (e.g., race and disability) specifically.

Theoretical Framework

As a processual understanding of self and identity, Holland et al.'s (1998) theory of self and identity is theoretically and methodologically grounded in sociocultural theory. Dually informed by a Vygotskian-Median perspective, this theory gives recognition to the socially mediated nature of self and identity. Both theorists, Vygotsky and Mead, were interested in the ways that social interactions, mediated by tools and symbols, provided the resources or constraints for self-making (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). Despite some theoretical alignment, Vygotsky and Mead also diverged in what they gave analytic primacy. As Holland and Lachiocotte (2007) note, "Mead gave analytic primacy to the outcomes of sociogenesis, the resulting linkages formed between self and society though the dynamic "I-me" system, while Vygotsky emphasized how mind and personality, as sociogenetic products, develop over time" (p. 105). It is situated in this divergence and an attempt to convene each theorist's separate interest that Holland and colleagues' (1998) theory of self and identity takes shape. Central to their theory is the belief that people engage in identity (re)shaping processes through their participation in socially, culturally, and historically contingent activity systems (Bal & Arzubiaga, 2014; Holland & Lachiocotte, 2007). Provided this centrality, this framework becomes useful to this present study. In what follows, I provide an overview of the four interconnected interactional contexts of Holland et al.'s, (1998) social practice theory of self and identity (i.e., figured worlds, positionality, space of authoring, and making worlds)

Figured Worlds

The first context of identity formation is defined as *figured worlds*. A figured world is "socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (Holland et al., 1998, p.52).

People engage in the process of figuration, that is, fashion a sense of who they are in relation to the cultural scripts, discourses, artifacts, and interactions with others who inhabit the figured world. Holland and colleagues (1998) note that conceptually,

> Figured worlds provide the contexts of meaning and action in which social positions and social relationships are named and conducted. They also provide the loci in which people fashion senses of self-that is, develop identities (p. 60).

In the figured world, human action is negotiated and identities are formed. Holland et al. share that "people tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are" (p.3). Looking through a social practice of self and identity lens, I begin to see how Black boys who are subjected to exclusionary discipline are in a state of constant flux as they iteratively fashion their practiced identities and navigate the activity systems of the figured world of their schools.

Overwhelmingly, American schools have relegated Black students and those with disabilities to categories of failure, deviance, and troublemaker. Ferguson's (2003) ethnography, *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity* provides an example of a school where spaces of deviance were routinely created for Black boys to occupy. Ferguson demonstrates the ways in which the teachers, staff, and administrators at Rosa Parks elementary sought to position these students. She also makes clear how the "punishing room," constructed as an as-if realm with particular discourses and activities had the power to influence students' sense

of themselves. It is in the context of the figured worlds that individuals are positioned, charged

with authoring themselves and envisioning new worlds.

Positionality

The social practice theory of self and identity posits identity is continually constructed by

others' perceptions of oneself. Analysis of the social positioning at play provides necessary and

useful information regarding an individual's figuration within a given figured world. The ways in

which one becomes positioned by others and how such roles are negotiated is the essence to the

second interrelated context of identity formation referred to as *positionality.* Inextricably tied to

power, status, and rank, positionality signifies one's understanding of his or her position relative

to socially identified others, their sense of social place and entitlement (Holland et al., 1998).

According to Holland et al., "social position has to do with entitlement to social and material

resources and so to the higher deference, respect, and legitimacy accorded to those genders,

races, ethnic groups, castes, and sexualities privileged by society" (p. 271). Positionality, then, is

what Gee (2000) refers to as being recognized as a "certain kind of person" (p. 99). To explicate

further, positioning becomes an act of using the social, cultural, and historically available

artifacts to construct individuals as types of people in a way that others and the individuals

themselves recognize and treat them as though they were such people (Bal, 2009).

Schools work across time and space to sustain positional identities that they have

recruited or offered to students. However, despite the institutional power of schools, these

underwritten identities are negotiable. As Bal (2009) suggests, "They do not become dispositions

for individuals in deterministic ways without their disruption" (p. 60). Students are not merely

left with a dichotomous choice of acceptance or rejection of the positional identities. Instead,

within the context of the figured world students enact agency that allows them to accept, reject,

negotiate, or author new possible identities. The possibilities, however, are informed and constrained by the social, cultural and historical artifacts (e.g., norms, traditions, rules, etc.) of the figured world and the larger context in which the figured world is situated.

Space of Authoring and Making Worlds

Holland and colleagues build on Bhaktin's vision of self-fashioning as they explicate one significant process of identity formation: *space of authoring*. Space of authoring refers to the complex, "conflictual, continuing dialogic of an inner speech where active identities are ever forming" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 169). This process of identity formation is largely concerned with how individuals answer the world. Holland et al. (1998) describe this process of answering the world sharing that, "authorship is a matter of orchestration: of arranging the identifiable social discourse/practices that are one's resources in order to craft a response in a time and space defined by others' standpoints in activity…" (p. 272). By responding to both the strictly authoritative and relatively open discourses/practices, individuals engage in authoring themselves. Through this orchestration, agency is enacted. Using agency, however, does not imply that the ways in which an individual responds to the discourses/practices is without influence or that the individual is a free willing agent (Bal, 2009). I turn to Holland et al. (1998) for further explication of this notion. They state,

> In the making of meaning, we "author" the world. But the "I" is by no means a
> freewheeling agent, authoring worlds from creative springs within...In authoring the
> world, in putting words to the world that addresses her, the "I" draws upon the languages,
> the dialects, the words of others to which she has been exposed (p. 170).

Understanding the historical context of the figured world, then, becomes a necessary prerequisite for understanding individual authorship within any given world. The final context of identity

development, *making worlds*, offers liberatory possibilities. Making worlds signals the development of new social competencies for participation in the newly imagined communities (Holland et al., 1998). It is in this context that one recognizes the capacity to formulate other social scenes in imagination. "These new 'imaginaries' build in their rehearsal a structure of disposition, a habitus, that comes to imbue the cultural media, the means of expression, that are their legacy" (Holland et al., 1998, pp. 272-273). The process of making worlds provides the expansive possibilities of individuals' identity formation in that through collective action and engagement with social others they can imagine new figured worlds that enable them to transform their sense of self.

Figured Worlds in Education

Figured worlds, or rather Holland and colleagues' (1998) social practice theory of self and identity, has grown as a useful framework for scholars whose analysis in the social/cultural realms. Often scholars apply singular aspects of the larger theory (e.g., figured worlds, positionality, etc.) to satisfy the needs of their respective scholarship. Despite this fragmented use of the theoretical framework, the body of literature examining figured worlds in education reveals its usefulness for studying identity production in education, sociocultural constructs in education, local education contexts, as well as shaping worlds of possibility (Urietta, 2007). Guided by these thematic domains, I provide a brief review of the literature on figured worlds in education to demonstrate how it becomes a useful looking glass through which I make sense of the lives of the youth in the present study.

A social practice theory of self and identity enables scholars to grapple with various sociocultural constructs in education. In Hatt's (2007) ethnographic work, we are invited into the figured world of smartness, providing us an opportunity to gain insight into the figuring process

of her participants in relation to the sociocultural construct of smartness. In particular, Hatt (2007) demonstrates how the students relied on artifacts to evoke figured worlds. For instance, the participants leverage artifacts such as grades, papers, diplomas, and labels (i.e., gifted or honors) among various others to draw distinctions between "Book Smart" and "Street Smart." In doing so, two things become clear in the figured world of smartness. First, the ways in which students, as active participants, in the figured world are able to enact agency to speak back against institutional conceptualizations of smartness. One such example of this is noted when the interviewer asks Jeremy "Why is it that you don't define smart as book smart?" To which he responds, "Because anybody can learn that. You can sit down and read a book and say, oh, I know this and that. You got to get that experience. You have to have had a hungry mouth to be street smart" (p. 160). Again, this demonstrates how agency was enacted to resist dominant discourses of smartness while also opening the world up to additional possibilities, or the second thing that became clear in the figured world. In resisting dominant understandings of smartness, the students were able to "author" the world for themselves. In other words, they were not limited to rigid definitions of smartness. When the students were unable to use the institutional artifacts in traditional ways that would deem them smart, they were able to reinterpret smartness or construct street-smartness to satisfy their own identities.

Similar in their goal to make sense of a particular construct, Allen's (2017) ethnographic study sought to explore how Black male youth make meaning of the pathologizing practices of the school. Relying on positional theories, inclusive of the work of Holland and colleagues (1998), this work aims to understand the participants' meaning making of "pathologizing practices of the school." In doing so Allen (2017) takes us into the lives of four participants to reveal how they resist and take-up dominant positionings about black masculinity. Furthermore,

light is shed on the ways in which the students' performance of particular masculinities (i.e., those of resistance) are met with disciplining events. For example, Andre and Dontay shared examples of how they are positioned because of how they appear and how such positioning led to increased surveillance and a loss in opportunity to learn. Despite the students' ability to speak to instances of positioning and the associated outcomes, Allen (2017) also demonstrated how these same students internalized the dominant positioning citing personal effort for their struggles in school. For instance, one student explained that he was not disciplined enough to earn As in school. This study, like others, revealed instances in which students attempted to enact agency to resist imposed positions. Returning to the student Dontay, he explained how he used misbehavior (i.e., talking out in class, defying teacher control strategies) as acts of resistance to escape the classroom context and be sent to on-campus suspension where the expectations are less academically focused. Although Dontay's behavior can be understood as resistance, Allen (2017) allows us to later see how the student took-up a dominant positioning of Black males in the particular school context as "failure" as indicated in his sharing of the expectations in on-campus suspension. He states, "The teacher is supposed to give you class work, but if you're going to OCS, you're the type who says, 'Give me my D minus and I'll be happy, I'm expecting to fail anyway' (p.278). Allen's (2017) work provides a timely example of how one aspect of a larger practice theory of identity (e.g., positionality) can be leveraged to explore a contemporary sociocultural issue in education, namely, school discipline.

Holland et al.'s (1998) self and identity framework has also afforded scholars the theoretical apparatus necessary to make sense of youth identity production in education. Wortham (2004) provides a notable example of how this process takes shape by studying the identity production of Tyisha within the context of one classroom over the course of an academic

year. In the ethnographic account, the author reveals how multiple resources including sociohistorical models of identity, local appropriations of these models, curriculum, interactions with institutional others (i.e., peers and teachers) and the student herself are used in ways that take her from being identified as a good student to being identified as a disruptive outcast. In other words, the use of multiple resources over time contributed to the thickening of this new identity in the particular context.

Understanding educational contexts and how they offer and restrict various identities for students has been another line of inquiry for which the social practice theory of self and identity has proven useful for exploring. Michael and colleagues (2007) invoke Holland et al.'s (1998) theory of figured worlds in their qualitative ethnographic study to explore how success was figured for newly arrived Spanish-speaking immigrant youth within the context of Luperón, a bilingual high school. By attending to the social interaction among students, teachers, and staff, Michael et al., (2007) were able to demonstrate the figuration that occurred. In short, the authors attended to the way in which the school centered Spanish as a resource while simultaneously fostering strong, positive, and caring student-teacher relationships that empowered students in their use of the language and advocating for staff who also spoke the language. Lastly, the study demonstrated how the high school students used the cultural artifact of opportunity narratives, optimistic self-reports that reflect opportunity as the immigrant students' reason for coming to the U.S., to manage feelings of being in a new place. Coupled together, the practices of centering Spanish resources and the use of students' opportunity narratives, yielded an educational context that enabled students to be recruited to the figured world of success and position themselves within that world.

Finally, studying how individuals shape new possibilities within the realms of various figured worlds is another affordance of this theoretical framework. For instance, Jurow (2005) chronicled how students' engagement shifted in the context of a middle school mathematics classroom. Accessing the imaginary world of *The Antarctica Project*, Jurow's ethnographic account highlights the value of play and imagination (i.e. making worlds) that provides the expansive possibilities of individuals' identity formation. By using project-based curricula that require students to engage with the imaginary premises forwarded by the curriculum the author demonstrates the ways in which worlds of possibility were shaped via students' continuous shifting between the roles required of the multiple worlds.

Limitations

Although Holland and colleague's theory of self and identity was useful for making sense of Black boys' identity in relation to time and space it was not without its limitations. For instance, when used as a standalone theoretical frame it treats issues of space as neutral failing to account for the ways in which power and privilege have the potential to complicate how individuals are able to engage in identity fashioning processes. Along these lines the theory was limited in the ability theorize a pluralized society or issues of race and racism. Said differently, although the theory gave analytical care and attention to cultural and social interactions less attention was given to how all interactions are undergirded by racial, gendered, and patriarchal materiality that then inform how individuals make sense of who they are across time and space. For example, as this study is concerned, the theory of self and identity helps elucidate the context in and process by which exclusionary discipline policies and practices were implemented. However, on its own, understanding how Black boys' made sense of these policies and practices as racialized beings has the potential to be left uncovered. To further explicate the point, relying

singularly on the theory of self and identity as the looking glass through which to make sense of Black boys' self-making processes, despite its inattention to issues of race, has the potential to muddle the findings. In other words, without the deliberate re-centering of race into the analysis one might present finding that imply that self-making happens in color-evasive ways. See section on theoretical implications for a more robust approach to explore identity in a racialized society.

Conclusion

Disparities in school discipline are documented across the literature. This literature review revealed students who are Black, male, or have a disability are most likely to be disciplined across all discipline levels (e.g., referral, suspension, expulsion). These findings point to a need for continued research that is invested in not merely understanding the disparities but disrupting and re-imagining systems, policies, and practices that yield school environments in which both Black boys generally and those with disabilities will thrive. Disproportionality and equity-oriented scholars should consider reimagining their approach to research. Many scholars have relied on quantitative designs to explore the magnitude of the problem; however, this has led to a significant gap in the literature as numbers only capture a partial picture. For example, much of the discussion about racialized education outcomes have often been reduced to simple and futile explanations (e.g., implicit bias), failing to account for the larger structural and racial tensions undergirding the evident inequity. Employing critical qualitative approaches may not only help to unpack the issue further but also identify ethically responsible and socially just responses. For example, moving from doing *research on* to *research with*. In other words, researchers' aims should be to prioritize the voices and experiences of those we seek to understand as they work to resist, dismantle, and change systems that have traditionally excluded them. Robinson (2013) posits,

If researchers continue to "count the bodies" without understanding how systemic

policies and practices have been interpreted through African American males affected by

the system and how their choices have been constricted by these policies and practices no

real solutions can be developed to improve the system that has impacted generations of

boys and men. Attempting to solve a problem without consulting the people who are

directly impacted is futile.

Such an approach might afford scholars an understanding of the qualitatively different

experiences these students face. Therefore, this study attempts to answer the call to action by

exploring the phenomenon of exclusionary discipline through the first-hand accounts of Black

boys. Furthermore, this study moves away from quantitative understandings of school discipline

using a critical qualitative approach to inquiry. Although both quantitative and qualitative

approaches are valuable and necessary, this review of literature revealed that much of the

research on school discipline is reduced to statistics, thereby failing to understand how such

policies and practice take shape in the lives of people. This study is concerned with

understanding how exclusionary policies and practices impact the ways Black boys fashion their

identities. At its core the study aims to center their realities. By centering participants' voices,

we may gain the necessary insights to inform the designing and implementing of culturally

responsive practices while also informing future policy and research.

Chapter 3

METHOD

This qualitative case study investigated the educational experiences of Black boys in relationship to exclusionary discipline practices in Cornell School District. More specifically, utilizing an instrumental case study approach (Stake, 1995; 2003) this study examined how multiply marginalized students made sense of exclusionary discipline and how it impacted their futures and sense of self. Stake (2003) shares that an instrumental case study is one that "is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw generalizations (p.137)." He continues, "the case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and facilitates our understanding of something else" (p. 137). In this study, the case, though of interest, becomes secondary to a desire to understand the phenomenon of exclusionary discipline in schools and the effects of such practices on the lives of Black boys above and beyond a singular context. This case, then, serves as a looking glass through which I make assertions about the larger problem space.

The study centers the experiences, conceptualizations, and perceptions of Black boys with disabilities. The following research questions guided this study: (1) What are the schooling experiences of Black boys who have been subjected to exclusionary discipline? (2) What are their perceptions about exclusionary discipline? (3) How have their experiences with school discipline influenced their identity formation? (4) In what ways do they accept, negotiate, or resist institutional positioning that results from exclusionary discipline practices?

In this chapter, I will discuss the research design employed, participant selection, collection of data and instrumentation and approach to data analysis. Additionally, I will discuss

my positionality as researcher and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and credibility in this study.

To make sense of the figured world in which the Black male participants entered and interacted, I interviewed students and staff, observed focus groups centered around shifts in the behavior education plan/code of conduct, attended relevant board meetings, and reviewed exclusionary discipline policies and students' individualized education programs (IEPs).

Critical Qualitative Research

To answer the questions guiding the dissertation I leverage a critical qualitative approach to inquiry. To conceptualize critical qualitative research, I drew on Creswell's (2013) description of traditional qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the researcher in the world to make it visible in an attempt to make sense of or interpret phenomena and the meaning people bring to them. In other words, qualitative research is an inductive process that affords researchers the ability to dig deeply and unpack the experiences of the participants. Critical qualitative research, however, diverges from traditional qualitative approaches in the nature of the questions asked, the intentionality of methodological and theoretical choices, participants, and analysis. Critical qualitative research attempts to ask questions and interrogate issues that are related to power imbalances and social justice concerns (Canella et al., 2015; Pasque et al., 2012). More specifically, critical qualitative methodologies enable researchers to "address historical, economic, and sociopolitical issues of oppression and disparities across race, gender, class, sexual orientation, dis/ability, and the intersectionality of diverse identities" (Pasque & Perez, 2015, p.140). Maintaining a commitment to social justice, critical inquiry works to advance agendas grounded in efforts to disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions regarding power while also revealing sites for change, activism, and reflection (Denzin, 2015). In keeping with this

commitment, critical qualitative inquiry necessitates bringing the voices of oppressed and silenced communities to focus and iteratively seeking solutions (Pasque & Perez, 2015).

The epistemological stance that researchers subscribe to informs their assumptions and beliefs and ultimately the questions they ask. Unlike a theoretical perspective that is a philosophical stance that informs the methodology and provides context for its grounding, logic, and criteria, epistemology is understood as the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspectives and methodology. Largely, epistemology answers the question, "how do you know what you know" (Pasque et al., 2012, p.22)? In this study I used a constructivist epistemology. Constructivism is grounded in the belief that through human interaction meaning is constructed (Pasque et al., 2012). Additionally, constructivists recognize that multiple realities can exist and that things are defined within one's consciousness or mind. Stake (1995) offers a similar conceptualization of constructivism noting "Most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. The world we know is particularly human construction" (p.99). He later continues "No aspects of knowledge are purely of the external world, devoid of human construction" (p.100).

Subscribing to this epistemological stance I recognize that the truths of my participants may be continuously constructed before, during, and after engaging in the interviews. Moreover, I am aware that as a researcher, I enter the world of the case not as expert but co-creator of knowledge. To further articulate this notion, I quote Pink (2009) who writes, "In interviews, researchers participate or collaborate with research participants in the process of defining and representing their (past, present, or imagined) emplacement and their sensory embodied experiences" (p.85). Stated differently, the researcher is not a passive gatherer and interpreter of knowledge. The theoretical framework of my study is well situated within the constructivist

paradigm. First, as the researcher I approach my data generation as a process through which knowledge and truths are being constructed rather than discovered. Additionally, I enter into this work with the belief that the participants' truths may be complex and multiple. Lastly, I understand that the meaning the participants give to their experiences are theirs alone and are not meant to make gross generalizations but rather to more fully understand their individual experiences. Approaching the work via constructivism will aid me in justifying the participants' truth in the final report (Stake, 1995).

Positionality

Smith (2016) speaks of research sharing it is "not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions" (p. 5). I recognize the need to acknowledge the ways in which this study is not innocent nor distant activity but rather one that is deeply personal and intimate. How I understand and narrate my own personal and scholarly identity has potential to inform how I engage in and make sense of this work from design to analysis. How I exist in the world and the experiences that shape my truths have potential to surface. I share these forms of truth and lived experiences to elucidate how I am situated in this study and with confidence that it will better position my readers to form their own nuanced understandings of the data and analysis.

As a Black boy growing up in the inner city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin I was often described as fortunate to attend some of the "better" schools in Milwaukee Public School (MPS) District, the largest school district in the state. Often the schools I attended held designations as "gifted and talented" or "International Baccalaureate" or were self-proclaimed "the best of the best in MPS." Largely, my performance in school suggested that these were indeed the schools for me. Mostly, I maintained good grades, was well-behaved, and was an active and responsible

student according to teachers and old report cards. I can count on one hand the number of times I had to visit the principal's office or received a consequence as a result of misbehavior. Although some would say my experiences were largely positive there was also so much that was problematic about my formative schooling years.

The first 7 years of my educational journey I never encountered a teacher who looked like me. My experience as a student in an urban school district shaped my perception of the socio-political inequities present in U.S. public education. As a Black student, educated primarily by white women, there were times I yearned for a deeper connection with the person charged with my formal education, but this connection was often nonexistent. Because of the shortage of teachers and staff of color, I did not receive support that could have helped normalize or legitimize my existence. I was compelled to believe that having a Black teacher would benefit me. I believed they would be a mirror into the collective joys, struggles, and possibilities of what it meant to be Black in the U.S. Despite having other identity markers, my blackness was surely the most salient during my early years and was the lens through which I attempted to make sense of the world. As a young person, though not yet having the academic language to describe it, I could clearly see the social stratification that was happening. Black students were more often disciplined than my white peers. White peers had designations as "Pre-IB" or "Full IB" whereas Black students were on traditional/general or vocational tracks. Also, Black students overpopulated the special education classrooms. As a result of these distinctions and others, I opted to believe the myth that credentials equated wealth and was unable to view myself outside of a white gaze. Although my desire wasn't to be white, whiteness became the standard for which I measured my success and value in schools. Largely, "acting white" (Steele, 1990) became a means of survival and escaping the ongoing surveillance of Black boys.

Even though my parents were not formally educated beyond high school, I still desired to attend the university. Unsure of what I wanted to do, the need to pursue higher education was likely linked to the structural white standard of success I had set for myself. Once I enrolled at the university, I had the opportunity to volunteer in various capacities in which I worked with youth, primarily Black boys, who had been labeled as "at-risk" or "delinquent." When I listened to their stories and forms of truth, I realized the issue surrounding Black youth circumstances was more complex than just notions of race. It was through these experiences that my beliefs about what was valuable, or worthy were challenged. I subsequently came to realize how damaging my own perspective had the potential to be. I no longer wished to measure my value by a white standard. Having reflected and realized the conspicuous nature of schooling, I questioned how many other Black boys had been adversely impacted by the racial stratification that happens in schools.

After graduating from the university, the first time, and feeling ill-equipped to affect change for those who looked like me, I knew that I needed to return for graduate school. Once I began to consider my future more deliberately, I discovered a certain compassion for youth and a desire to pursue a degree in a field that would afford me the opportunity to make a significant contribution to humanity. This discovery led to my decision to pursue a degree in education. I believe that the education of young people in a society that prizes education as currency for mobility is the epitome of contributing to humanity. Moreover, my lived experiences have made clear the significant need for improved systems and approaches that respond to how PK-12 schools serve Black students. After having studied special education at the graduate level my passion to serve, advocate, and create reformed structures for historically marginalized populations has been reinforced.

As a former special educator, behavior interventionist and now principal, I have worked closely with Black students who have felt marginalized and whose academic achievement and access to opportunities have been constantly threatened by social and cultural factors. Many of their stories are riddled with experiences similar to mine. They find themselves in racially stratified schools with institutional norms and procedures that govern who they can be, what learning they are afforded, and how they are expected to navigate schools. Schools are institutions that ideologically offer equality of opportunity for all; however, the reality is that while maintaining such an ideology schools often funnel opportunities to students in unequal ways (Collins, 2009; Weis, Jenkins, & Stich, 2006). This recognition compels me to action as I am deeply committed to improving the educational and life outcomes of Black boys, and I desire that my research may be one mechanism in doing so.

As it pertains to the current study, I am keenly aware that I have not had the same experiences with school discipline as my participants. Although I am unable to relate to their forms of truth as victims of exclusionary discipline, I do carry both racial and gendered identities similar to theirs that allow me to approach a more nuanced understanding of these truths. Not sharing their full experience, however, proves beneficial in that I am able to "at least temporarily subordinate other curiosities so that the stories of those 'living the case' will be teased out" (Stake, 2003, p. 136). On the other hand, as an administrator and agent in a larger system of control and punishment, I have been on the other side of these experiences as someone who has been responsible for responding to disciplinary actions and making decisions about what happens to kids because of their actions or behaviors. Furthermore, I recognize that I maintain a dual identity as an individual and agent of the district. Resultantly, there are times in which I have my own ideas about the use of exclusionary discipline that are in direct opposition of the beliefs,

rules, and policies that govern how I must respond. My institutional identity as administrator along with the experiences and tensions will certainly offer a lens through which I interpret the findings and how my participants see me and make decisions about the ways in which they share their truths. Humbly, I acknowledge that as a result of my institutional identities I have contributed, though unintentionally, to the problem. In these ways, I situate myself, too, as a participant in this study.

Certainly, the identities, assumptions, and experiences that I carry have the potential to pose limits on my research if we are to rely on Western notions of objectivity (Smith, 2016). Otherwise, they might make the data collection, analysis, and dissemination more expansive.

The Case

Case study is one of the most widely used approaches to qualitative research (Stake, 2003). Stake (2003) suggests that "case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied" (p.134). In considering the choice of what to study, Stake (2003) contends that there are certain parameters or boundaries that give the case shape and make it purposive. In other words, the case is a bounded system (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2003). With respect to this current study, it is bounded in several ways. First, as the study explores the experiences of Black boys the study is bounded, therefore, around a particular group of participants who has a shared racial and gender identity. Additionally, the study takes place in a specific school district which ensures that it is contextually bound. Lastly, each of the participants in the study have also experienced exclusionary discipline ensuring, also, that the study is bounded around phenomenon. Therefore, as this study is concerned, the case was defined as the collective experiences of participants who formed their practiced identities in and

through their day-to-day engagement in and interactions with disciplinary moments within

Cornel School District (CSD), a pseudonym.

Research Site

Monroe County, rich in resources and recognized as progressively minded, is often

considered one of the best places to live and raise a family in America. Nestled in a large

Midwestern state, it is also the home to a world class institution of higher education that is

known for its collaborative efforts in improving the educational experiences and outcomes for all

Monroe County students while simultaneously aiming to reduce gaps in opportunity and

achievement (Madison Education Partnership, 2021). Despite these positive attributes, Monroe

County continues to have some of the highest racial disparities in the country (Lee, 2014). The

total population of Monroe County, as reported in the 2020 Census, was just over 561,500.

African Americans comprised just under 31,000 of the total population or roughly 5.5%. Monroe

County is situated in a state that is known to be among the nations most segregated for students

(Lee, 2014).

Although being acclaimed as one of the best places to live, some Black residents of Monroe

County, are relegated to a much different reality. Particularly, the documented experiences of

Black boys and youth present concern. Monroe County's juvenile justice system is reflective of

the persistent disparities that Black residents experience. For example, according to the county's

2020 annual report, of the 143 individuals admitted to detention, Black youth accounted for

nearly 70% of all admissions. Furthermore, in the same year, Black youth accounted for over 500

juvenile court referrals whereas white youth accounted for only 175 referrals. These trends were

consistent across a 9-year period with Black youth being two times more likely to be referred to

juvenile court. Although such data only offer a limited picture, they suggest that the distance

between Black and white residents as it pertains to well-being, condition, and outcomes are vast and wider than almost any other jurisdiction.

Cornel School District (CSD) is the largest urban school district in Monroe County with a student enrollment of nearly 27,000. The demographics by race/ethnicity are reported as 17.9% Black; 21.7% Hispanic; and White students making up the largest population of students at 42.2%. All other racial or ethnic groups are reported at rates below 10%. Similar patterns of discipline and exclusion that the city at-large experience are also well documented within CSD. The school district's handbook on student conduct and discipline describes its approach and response to student misbehavior as a "restorative and progressive approach, one that aims to keep students in school and build stronger school communities." The handbook continues on identify several guiding principles some of which are listed below:

1. We believe in teaching and intervention over consequences and punishment

2. We believe that every child, when provided with appropriate support, can learn and succeed.

3. Whenever possible we avoid exclusionary discipline

4. We support progressive discipline, not "zero tolerance"

Despite the shift towards restorative and progressive approaches to discipline and the espoused principles guiding the district's behavior education and response plan, many of the disparities that these shifts were intended to respond to continue to persist. In CSD, demographic breakdowns reveal that although Black/African American students account for less than a fifth of the student population in the 2018-2019 school year, this same subgroup of students had an out-of-school suspension rate of 30.8%. The pervasiveness of these trends both at the state, county, and school level make a focus on the experiences of Black boys in CSD timely and necessary in

order to forward more socially and racially just schooling experiences for Black students. Such a fact contributes to why I chose to explore this particular context for this study.

Participants

The participants in this study were Black boys who had experiences with exclusionary discipline, as well as district staff who were, by sake of their position, familiar with the district's approach to exclusionary discipline. All participants are identified using pseudonyms. In the following section I outline my approach to recruitment and sampling. Additionally, demographic data for the participants are provided.

Student recruitment. To recruit students for participation in this study, I employed multiple efforts. First, I designed a recruitment flyer that was shared via social media. Given my dual identity of researcher and administrator, many of my social media friends/followers also share such identities and are connected with students in various capacities. Several of these individuals reshared my initial post allowing it to be more visible to potential participants. As a result of these efforts, three participants were identified. Moreover, I leveraged my experiences as a former classroom teacher and directly contacted students who were of 18 years of age or older, consistent with directives from the university's institutional review board (IRB). I reached out to seven students directly of which two students consented and one actually participated in the study. Lastly, in partnership with central office staff a message was sent to the families of students who attended the district's behavior based alternative school (e.g., an exclusionary environment away from the home school for students who were repeatedly suspended or facing an expulsion). This communication resulted in one additional participant in the study.

My original aim was to include only students with disabilities to more intentionally explore the intersectional experiences of these students. However, given the challenges of

recruiting participants from an already limited sample population I expanded the criteria to widen the sample.

Student participants.

In total there were five Black boys who participated in the study. Demographic information about age/grade, a range of the number of suspensions received, and the student's disability category, if they had an IEP, were collected and are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Description of Student Participants

Name	Age	# of Suspensions	IDEA Disability
Isaiah	19	5 - 10	Emotional/Behavior Disability
Antwon	14	20 - 25	Emotional/Behavior Disability
Marquise (Quise)	15	30 - 35	Emotional/Behavior Disability
Machi	13	15 - 20	Learning Disability
Brandon	13	5 - 10	None

Staff recruitment. Staff recruitment happened by employing a purposeful sampling technique. Leveraging my insider positionality, I contacted various school administrators and central office staff who were known to have institutional authority to suspend students or recommend them for expulsion (e.g., building principals). Additionally, central office staff who were involved in work around exclusionary discipline policies were also asked to participate. A general email explaining the purpose of the study and why they were asked to participate was sent. This email was sent to 12 staff of which five agreed to participate and one declined to participate. The administrator who opted out did so as a result of already having too many

commitments but expressed interest in the study, sharing that it was necessary and timely. The

other six teachers and administrators simply did not respond to the request for participation.

Staff participants.

Demographic information about the staff participants was collected. Additionally, the role in

which each individual works and years in the district were collected. See Table 2 for a

description of staff participants.

Table 2

Description of Staff Participants

Name	Demographics	Years of Experience	Role
Taryn Winn	Black Female	20$^+$	Director of Social Emotional Learning
Maisha Fraiser	Black Female	10	Assistant Principal
Aaron Coates	Black Male	7	Special Education Teacher
Rodney Stone-Truth	Black Male	5	Assistant Principal
Tori Simmons	White Female	3	Associate Director of Discipline, Safety, and compliance

Procedure

Data Collection

The primary method of generating data for this study was the use of one-to-one semi-

structured interviews. However, in an effort to generate a more precise explanation of the

participants' experiences, several other data generating methods were used as well. In this

section, I will discuss the rationale and approach to using interviews, observations, and document

collection. Table 3 provides the scope of the data sources for this study.

Table 3

Scope of Data Sources

Data Source	Scope of Data
Audio Recordings of Interview	7 hours, 39 minutes
Field Observations	8 hours
Transcribed Interviews	252 pages
Documents	337 pages

Interviews. Interviews were utilized to collect data from student participants and school staff. Seidman (2006) informs that "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p.9). Interviews are characterized by a dialogical exchange between researcher and participant, guided by questions that allow the researcher to gain insight around a particular phenomenon. Interviews provide the researcher the opportunity to probe the cognitive and emotional responses of participants as they "select constitutive details of experience, reflect on them, give them order, and thereby make sense of them" (Seidman, 2006, p.7). Interviews then, as Seidman (2006) explains, are an effective way to obtain insights into educational and social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues.

A semi-structured protocol was used given its numerous advantages to elicit rich data (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Patton (1990), noted that using such an approach allows the researcher to be responsive to each participant, whereas more structured interviews lack this level of flexibility. Morrow & Smith (2000), posit that adjusting as you go is a normal and expected part of qualitative inquiry. The interview protocol was structured with broad and surface level questions at the opening of the interview then moving to questions that are more deductive and likely to generate themes (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Broad and surface level questions included things such as: (1) Tell me your name, age, and grade (2) Tell me about yourself including things

such as your strengths, interests, and weaknesses. As the rapport was established questions shifted with a goal of getting a more nuanced understanding of the student's experiences. Questions included: (1) What are some messages you hear about Black boys and where do you hear these messages? (2) How does it feel to be you in school? (3) Can you describe in detail a time you were suspended or expelled? Similarly, staff interviews moved from broad and surface level questions to more in-depth questions that would support the development of themes connected to the research questions. Staff interviews included the following types of questions: (1) What types of shift have you seen or experienced during your time as (insert role) in the district as it pertains to exclusionary discipline? (2) What is the narrative about Black boys in this district? (3) Can you describe your schools or the district's position pertaining to exclusionary discipline?

The decision about what questions to ask during the participants' interviews were made based on my review of the extant literature, personal experiences, the overarching research questions, and through consultation with my advisor. The complete interview protocols are provided in Appendices H & I.

Individual interviews were conducted with students and staff in a location of their choosing or via a web-based platform (e.g., WebEx) to ensure privacy and comfortability. The average interview time was 46 minutes with a range of 29 – 62 minutes and total of 7 hours, 39 minutes across all participants. Interviews were audio recorded, and I took handwritten notes during the interviews. Following each interview, recorded data were immediately transcribed to maximize the reliability of the transcription. Memos were also created that allowed me to reflect on the interviews and generate additional questions or topics that were yet unclear. Based on insights gleaned from focus groups, observations, or review of student files, subsequent

interviews were scheduled. These follow up interviews allowed me to gain more clarity around particular topics.

       Observations/ethnographic field notes. Observations have long played a central role for data generation in social science research (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Observations provide a way for researchers to demystify the research setting to become more familiar with the everyday occurrences and meanings of participants. Such an approach to data generation as Morrow and Smith (2000) note is that it allows the researcher to "understand their [participants] tacit knowledge, as well as to gather explicit information that will serve as data for the investigation" (p. 210). Along the same lines, Floden (1984) also notes the importance and value of observations as he explains, "a major strength of participant observation is the opportunity to learn through active participation-- one can test one's theory of the organization of an event by trying out various kinds of participation in it" (p. 85).

       I engaged in participant observations in various ways. I attended a district board meeting for which one of the agenda items was recommended changes to the district's behavior plan for the 2021-2022 school year. This meeting was in excess of 120 minutes although the particular agenda item was discussed for approximately 30 minutes. Additionally, I attended four classroom/Boys group observations each being a 45-minute period. I also attended three ad hoc planning meetings with a focus on school discipline and the behavior plan. Each of these meetings lasted 60 minutes. The average observation time was 60 minutes with a range of 45 – 60 minutes and total of 8 hours across all observations. Given the school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of my observations were conducted virtually via the Zoom web-based conferencing platform.

During each observation I recorded field notes paying particular attention to questions being asked and the responses given. In most of the observations, I took the role as an onlooker as not to disrupt the natural happenings of the space. However, in instances where the facilitator of the discussion may have asked me to introduce myself and share a little about my work, I obliged. I discussed my work in terms that students as young as 12 years old could understand. Additionally, if students directed questions to me, I would also answer those in a way that allowed me to shift the question back to the student. This was important in developing trusting relationships with students so that they would not feel inhibited in what they shared while I was present. Unfortunately, in the spaces where students were present video recording was not an option per the university's IRB. Other observations took place in the context of board meetings or district ad-hoc committee meetings. Similar to my observations in spaces with students, I relied heavily on the use of field notes. Many of these meetings were recorded, however, the recordings were not always available to me as the researcher unless they were made available to the general public (e.g., board meetings). In these instances, I was able to return to the video recordings to resituate my field notes and assertions that were being made.

Documents and artifacts. Stake (1995) asserts that almost every qualitative study finds some need for examining documents and artifacts. Documents and artifacts can be a valuable source of data. The use of documents and artifacts played a significant role in this research in several ways. First, it lends itself to the formalizing of a more complete understanding of context and experience. Said another way, the documents aid to contextualize the data collected during interviews or observations. Stake (1995) describes this usefulness suggesting, "quite often, documents serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly. Sometimes, of course, the recorder is a more expert observer than the researcher" (p.

68). Second, the use of documents and artifacts support the trustworthiness and credibility of the research. Stake (1995) discusses this as data source triangulation which I discuss further in the section on promoting trustworthiness and credibility.

In this study three primary documents were utilized, namely, incident referrals, IEPs, and the district behavior education plan. Analyzing these documents was helpful in numerous ways. First, incorporating the students' IEPs and incident referrals in the analysis alongside their interviews served as a means to gain a more expansive understanding of the participants' experience related to the phenomenon of exclusionary discipline. Additionally, such documents enabled me to uncover the ways in which teachers and school-based teams, both in subtle and not so subtle ways, positioned the boys. The behavior education plan yielded insights into what behaviors or actions lend themselves to suspension or other exclusionary consequences. Taken together, each of the documents were instrumental also in engaging in data source triangulation.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. In doing so, I was able to reflect on the data that I had already collected and determine if I was gaining data rich enough to make assertions pertaining to the phenomenon of interest. When the data were limited in some ways, I was able to pivot in subsequent interviews to ensure that I was generating richer data. To support analysis, I had all interview data transcribed using an IRB approved transcription service. To sustain my engagement with the data beyond my departure from the field, become more immersed, and to gain a more holistic read of the data corpus, I read each transcript and observational notes "by hand." Floden (1984) suggests that reading through the actual notes page by page provides the researcher with a more holistic conception of the content of the fieldnotes than would be possible with the more partial view provided by computerized data retrieval.

Reading the notes "by hand" provides more opportunity to encounter unexpected disconfirming evidence and to discover unanticipated side issues that can be pursued in subsequent readings (p. 101). Following this step, I listened to all audio recorded data. My purpose in inserting this step was to allow me to cognitively re-enter the research site.

Following the transcribing and review of the interview data and field notes, I began a more sophisticated analysis of the data. The analytical technique that was used, *meaning field reconstruction*, is a multi-step and iterative approach (Carspecken, 1996). Although the steps may be presented in a linear fashion, at times later steps may reveal new insights or challenge assumptions that may have come about in earlier steps. Through multiple readings of the data corpus, I was able to identify frequent and rare events as well as identify chunks of data to analyze. The particular chunks of data were selected because they raised questions or concerns or revealed tensions or contradictions. The set of themes revealed in the early coding stages aided in the development of higher-level codes. Throughout this process analytical memos were drafted as a sense-making process and to strengthen the trustworthiness of the research and analysis (Saldana, 2013). The steps of the analytical process included:

1. Low-Level/ In-vivo Coding: I began my coding first by explicating in vivo codes from the pieces of data. Here it was important to stay as close as possible to the participants' words in order to maintain the essence of their statements without introducing inferences and interpretations at this point. These in vivo codes would subsequently be used to develop low-level coding categories to more efficiently and accurately chunk the data. I followed this step by performing a reconstructive horizon as introduced by Carspecken (1996).

2. Meaning Field Reconstructive Horizon: Carspecken (1996) speaks of this as a position-taking with a primary goal to become more aware of what you may be missing in the data (e.g., what was implied). This step provides the opportunity to examine the range of possible meanings of what the participant is communicating. By interrogating the participants' words in nuanced ways, it provides an opportunity to also access what may be unspoken or implied.

3. High-Level Coding – Involves high-level inferences and/or a descriptive interpretation of the quote or text from the data. These interpretations become particularly useful when doing the second phase of analysis, within case analysis.

Following the multi-step coding technique of the individual interview data and observational notes, a second phase of analysis was conducted. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic many of my observation notes consisted of direct quotations and paraphrased thoughts of the speakers. For analytical purposes, direct quotes that surfaced during observations were treated similarly to interview data (see Appendix J for observation protocol). The second phase was a case analysis that consisted of comparing and synthesizing inferential codes and emerging themes across participants. The codes that were identified as a result of the case analysis were then grouped in relation to the guiding research questions. To conclude this phase representative quotes were selected. The results of this second phase of analysis form the basis of the findings that are discussed in the subsequent chapter.

Promoting Trustworthiness and Credibility

Researchers of integrity recognizes that along the journey to develop and disseminate assertions or generalizations about a group or phenomenon, they must maintain credibility and trustworthiness throughout the research process (Stake, 1995). Qualitative researchers posit that

employing steps to ensure credibility and trustworthiness adds strength and value to the study (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). In this study, I make assertions about Black boys' experiences with exclusionary discipline moments in school and how they influence the ways in which the boys see themselves. In order to develop and maintain a credible and trustworthy study, I employed several approaches.

Triangulation. One approach to establish trustworthiness and credibility in a case study is through triangulation. Creswell (2013) notes that triangulation involves researchers making use of multiple and different sources of data, methods, investigators, and theories. In the current study data source and investigator triangulation were used. Data source triangulation relies on corroborating evidence from multiple sources of data. Stake (1995) informs that "for data source triangulation, we look to see if the phenomenon or case remains the same at other times, in other spaces, or as persons interact differently" (p.112). I used interviews, observations, and documents and artifacts to establish the assertions that I offer.

Member checks. Another approach to increasing the trustworthiness and credibility of a study is the use of member checks. "In member checking, the researcher solicits participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Soliciting the voices of the participants offers the researcher the most reliable way to know that they are accurately representing the truths, stories, or experiences of the participant. Furthermore, member checks allow you to gain "critical observations or interpretations" (Stake, 1995, p.115). In engaging in member checks with students I would ask clarifying questions such as "When you said…I heard…is that how you meant that? Can you say more?" Much of the member checking was done in informal ways such that they were not recorded, nor did they follow a set protocol. With the staff participants, I also relied on email and phone communications if this was a means

that was acceptable to the participant. In some cases, member checking did not happen. For example, one student participant was incarcerated at the time I attempted to follow up.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is another way to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of a study. Peer debriefing is often likened to interrater reliability in quantitative research (Creswell, 2013) and involves an external check of the research with the aim of keeping the researcher honest by asking the hard questions about the research process. The peer may offer alternative interpretations and feedback to support the researcher in strengthening their assertions (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Gouba, 1985). I engaged in this process by discussing with and seeking feedback from colleagues working within the field of public education or who had experience with and interest in the phenomenon of interest. This included staff participants in the study. Additionally, debriefing sessions took place with my advisor throughout my data analysis and writing in order to test assumptions and hypotheses as well as discuss preliminary codes and interpretations of the data.

Prolonged engagement. Creswell (2013) posits that prolonged engagement in the field allows for building trust between the researcher and participants, gain nuanced insights about the context, and also check for misinformation. Together these things increased the trustworthiness of my analysis. Data collection for this study initially began in January 2021 and concluded in April 2022. Additionally, given my insider positionality, I have been afforded prolonged access to the district at large, as well as individual schools in intimate ways. My time in the district and schools has situated me to form trusting relationships with students in various buildings and staff at nearly every level of the institution. Beyond the opportunity to form trusting relationships, I have been able to gain a more in depth understanding of the overall culture of the district especially as it relates to exclusionary discipline and the ways Black students have experienced

the district. My engagement in the field in some capacity or another before, during, and after the process of data collection is likely to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of this study.

Disconfirming evidence. Reporting on disconfirming evidence is another effective way to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the research. By reporting disconfirming evidence, the researcher presents a more realistic assessment of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). Throughout my analysis I was attentive to the evidence that did not fit the established codes and themes and was transparent in sharing it as equally important evidence for understanding the experiences of the Black boys as it pertained to them being subjected to exclusionary discipline.

Researcher reflexivity. Reflexivity is concerned with the researcher's level of self-awareness (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By recognizing the moments that their biases begin to distort the research process and taking care to be responsive to those moments can help increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the research. Patton (2002) recommends that the researcher be explicit about their own dispositions and biases. Consistent with the recommendation, I include a statement of positionality that speaks to the ways in which my biases are reflected in the work. For example, the phenomenon and population of interest are one such way that my biases have informed my work.

Another way I demonstrated reflexivity in the research process was using memo writing. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), engaging in memo writing or journaling provides the researcher an opportunity to engage in reflexive thinking. In particular, this approach enables the researcher to continually grapple with how their own biases and dispositions may be creeping into the study in ways that might distort aspects of the study (i.e., data generation and analysis). I

was able to use memo writing as an approach to "at least temporarily subordinate other

curiosities so that the stories of those 'living the case' will be teased out" (Stake, 2005, p. 136).

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Can you remember who you were, before the world told you who you should be? - Charles Bukowski

The purpose of this chapter is to provide insights into the case of CSD. Drawing from the collected data, I will discuss the school experiences of the Black Boys as they made sense of disciplinary moments that influenced their identities in both subtle and not so subtle ways. In sharing the lived experiences of these students, I will also highlight the ways in which the students accepted, negotiated, or resisted institutional positioning that resulted from the use of exclusionary discipline practices. The interpretations of the data that make up the findings of this dissertation stem from individual student interviews as the primary data source. These interpretations were further supported through interviews with district staff, review of district disciplinary policy, and student records inclusive of IEPs and behavior incident referrals.

The case study of CSD reveals that the figured world of the Black boys is one of exclusion. This exclusion can be explained by several factors that include being situated within a larger context of racism and discrimination that emit cultural scripts that depict Black boys as problems needing to be fixed or what I refer to as a *narrative of dehumanization*. Furthermore, the case study gives insights into how the Black boys are left to navigate restrictive school environments that fail to affirm their identity. The *lack of affirming school environments and relationships* further contribute to the boys' experiences with moments of exclusion. Beyond not being affirmed, findings reveal that the boys find themselves traversing schools in which various *policies and procedures recruit Black boys into exclusion* in both subtle and not so subtle ways. The ways in which the boys answer the world is never predictable and is intricately linked to the social discourse and practices of the figured world. In the following sections I present data and evidence that support these findings.

Setting the Context: A Narrative of Dehumanization

The case of CSD cannot be completely understood apart from the larger global context in which it is nested. Holland et al., (1998) posits that people fashion a sense of who they are in relation to the cultural scripts, discourses, artifacts, and their interactions with social others who inhabit the figured world. Participants recognize this and talk about these scripts and how they take shape in CSD.

Several of the boys shared their own personal experiences with the various scripts, discourses, and institutional others to illustrate the ways in which they see themselves and other Black boys being perceived through deficit-based narratives. When reflecting on how Black boys are perceived in their schools Isaiah (Zay) shared,

> They [school staff] look at us as like a juvenile delinquent. Based on my experiences, I
> have been looked at like that in some schools. It's not like easy going into that type of
> environment because it's like an easy target for you like -- even if you're just having a bad
> day and have an attitude, and you get in trouble just like -- it's not like they'll try to help
> you. It's like they see that you like this, juvenile delinquent. So they're like it's probably
> not parents that are involved that care. So they're just going to push you to the side to
> help the ones that they feel they want to help. It should be always helping everybody and
> helping others. It should be always somebody helping somebody.

Field notes from my observation of a classroom conversation around current issues facing education students engaged at length discussing exclusionary discipline. One student shared sentiments akin to those of focal participants in the study stating, "We're seen as the fuck ups and they look at all of us the same like we are all bad. Their bias already made." Brandon's experiences did not deviate much noting that from his experiences, Black boys are seen and

treated like "gang members, rappers, bad people and as looking suspicious." Together the boys'

personal experiences being framed as a "juvenile delinquent," "gang member," or even a "fuck

up" begins to reveal the ways that Black boys in schools may be viewed and discussed through

criminalizing and damaging rhetoric that begins to set the necessary conditions for excluding

them. Beyond sentiments of being reflected in criminalizing ways, other participants' reflections

on how Black boys are viewed in schools left them questioning if schools even recognized their

humanity. Quise shared,

> Like I do feel like in certain situations when there's a Black young man and a different
>
> race -- I won't just say specifically white -- that nine times out of ten, they try to label the
>
> Black man as the aggressor. And that's not always the case.

He went on to share other ways he has heard people speak about Black boys and people,

> How anybody else describes Black people. Rude, probably loud, just childish, things like
>
> that. They think of us as we're not human

Antwon's perception also aligns with the other boys. He explains, "they think we're a danger to

the community or to the school, I guess. He goes further suggesting that this is the reason Black

boys find themselves excluded from the school environment at much higher rates.

Machi's take on how Black boys were seen at school also reveals that by virtue of their

racial and gendered identities that Black boys are or can be stripped of the fullness of humanity.

When asked the same question pertaining to how Black boys are seen and discussed in school

Machi shared, "Like they are n…humans."

Hearing the sound of another word first, I probed Antwon to see if I could reveal what he

truly wanted to express. I asked, "Why'd you pick that word?" Machi shared that he initially was

not going to pick the word "human" and revealed that "Because some people call them niggers.

That's the word I was going to use. So, then I just said human." He explained that he was going to use the N word "because that's what the people know us as." Machi's explanation as to why Black boys might be viewed in this way was intricately tied to "how we act." However, he shares an awareness that students of various racial, gendered and ability backgrounds also misbehave causing me to probe, "Why do you think Black boys are seen differently than other students if there are all kinds of students who misbehave?" He used an example of a shooting downtown in a neighboring city to articulate his point.

> Okay. Say like this, the shooting downtown, like that. You see how the boy got let free? But if it was a Black person, he would have died. They would have sent him to jail for the rest of his life. Like that. He wasn't going to go home to see his family, none of that. Because they just be showing favoritism. Because they look at their skin, as if they better than us.

Machi's reflection demonstrated his awareness of how Black bodies have been and continue to be marked as disposable through favoritism or more adequately understood in this context as racism.

The contributions of district staff, when asked the same question, supported the experiences that the boys lifted during the interviews. In fact, Mrs. Taryn Winn, Director of Social Emotional Learning, spoke about how damaging societal views about Black boys become ordinary in their schools. She offered,

> I think that's a very, very -- it's a good question and I'm kind of like, yeah, why is that? It's also -- I think it's just very complex and I think it has a lot to do also to how society sees like boys and how that's carried over into our educational system and how people, through racism, bias in their own lives come to view black boys growing up. So, I think

it's this piece of, you know, the media plays a large part. Family systems play a large part in how we *other* and see people. And we bring that then -- or, I shouldn't say we. Folks bring that into their classroom spaces, and those beliefs and values, whether implicit or even explicit. I mean, the explicit things, -- you know the implicit things for me, often times for me, are the most disturbing, because the explicit stuff you can see it, you know it, and you name it. I think it's the implicit idea black boys are bad and how that shows up, you know, subconsciously. And it's very insidious and it's not outright. Those are the things that are really kind of cutting and disturbing because you know it's there, but you can't name it, you know? And people can often hide behind it with this whole that wasn't my intent. And so, I think a lot of it just comes from over how society sees black boys.

She continued,

They see them as a threat. They see them as dangerous. And I think -- I think our media plays a huge role in that. And so, you know, people being who they are and having biases, then carry that over and perpetuate that narrative of the dangerous black boy, the dangerous black boy in the hoodie. So, I mean, I think that's a big piece. It's not the only piece of it, but I think that's a very large piece of it. And people not willing to be challenged on their assumptions or see things differently because it makes them uncomfortable to know that a narrative that they have been fed for so long is false. You know, it just kind of gets back to that whole myth of meritocracy and how people, you know, rise to, you know, to powers if it's just purely merit. And when you realize that's not the case, people really do get in their feelings because that's the lies that they've been told. That's the story that they've been told. And anything that challenges that just kind of

-- kind of throws their whole belief system out of balance and causes some real, I guess,

cognitive dissonance for them.

As evidenced, Black boys are largely understood through monolithic constructions that are largely damaging and deficit based. Although it is likely that all students are viewed one way or another, these accounts illustrate that Black boys are left navigating abrasive environments and by virtue of their very being find themselves grappling with imposed identities as "fuck ups", "delinquents" "gang members" or even "bad people." If history has demonstrated anything, it is clear that how we come to view individuals is intricately connected to the ways in which we treat them. The narratives collectively demonstrate the establishing of conditions under which the use of exclusionary practices aimed at Black boys manifest and persist.

Lack of Affirming School Environments & Relationships

Interview data with the Black boys indicate their experiences with exclusionary discipline may be connected to the lack of an affirming school environment and minimal relationships with school staff. Several of the boys discussed the challenges they faced with being unseen, unwanted, and unheard in their respective schools. Machi shared his experience,

Like for other students, they will say school fun, but for us, it's like when you come here, the teachers don't be trying to listen to what you have to say. Like what happened some days, like they just don't be listening to us. It's like they came here just to get paid and go back home, like we do. Go to school and go back home.

He continued on sharing how one of his friends also experienced feelings of being unwanted that resulted in him not wanting to go to school. He stated,

> Like some teachers, they will say like, "I wish you didn't go to this school." Like, but I ain't never heard no teacher -- no teacher say it to me, but a person like one of my friends told me a teacher said and he didn't want to go to school.

When Machi was asked specifically about how his teachers and other school staff might describe him if asked he offered sentiments that reflected highly racialized and negative beliefs about how they would see him. Simultaneously, he was clear in sharing also how the same teachers don't know him contributing to feelings of being unseen and unheard. He expressed,

> They [teachers] would -- some of them would describe me by my name, and some of them like talking probably don't even know me.

He later added that they might also refer to him as "a nigger or a Black male."

> Machi's belief that he would be described in the aforementioned ways contributes to the belief that his school does not reflect an environment that affirms who he is. Further, given strained or non-existent relationships he finds himself not even wanting to be at school.

> Isaiah articulated feelings of not being able to be himself and having his real identity affirmed. He expressed,

> Well I felt like I couldn't be myself because I was already being viewed different. So, I had to like -- going up to the school you had to like put on a different character so it wouldn't make it seem like you were such a bad guy. So, it was like you were trying to hide your identity to not get in trouble basically.

Isaiah further shares how in an effort to save himself from being suspended he had to take on an identity that he believed school staff to interpret more favorably. Said differently, Isaiah opted to take on an identity that the school affirmed. He articulated,

I felt like at some point people were running over me and I feel like I just had to allow it because it was like -- after so long you get tired getting suspended and stuff like that. So, it's like you just got to kind of let go. And I feel like I had to act white, you know, like that feeling.

Quise offered similar sentiments, primarily speaking to the ways in which he found himself silenced and ultimately unable to advocate for himself. He shared,

I feel like they should be a little more accurate with how they do it instead of just going off of what the teacher said, and they just assume that a grown woman or man is not going to lie on a student and not believe what the student says at all. But that's how I felt in a lot of situations. They just chose the teacher's side because they felt like it's a grown adult; they're not going to lie on a student. And they always say that to me. Nobody's going to just lie, and so they always proved my point because they never believed what I said. And if anything, if you don't -- if the teacher that responded to the call wasn't there, I feel like there shouldn't be no consequences made until the full story is got instead of just being one side of the story and then going off of that.

Quise continued on by sharing how the process would feel more affirming to the students while still getting to a place of resolution. He noted,

If I could, I'd like -- I'd want the whole story. I'd ask the teacher what happened like separately. I wouldn't even have the student and the teacher together. I'd ask them separately. And if whatever they said ain't adding up there's all type of classmates that can support the teacher or the student. But they don't think about all that. They just okay, a teacher just called on the student, this student has been suspended multiple times before, so we know he can be angry over little things, and then this teacher's not just

going to just lie on the student that more than likely did it. Like that's how I just felt in a

lot of situations. They picked the side of -- they picked an adult over me just because I

wasn't an adult.

Quise's experience effectively silenced him leaving him to grapple with the question of whose

voice is valued?

Isaiah reflected on his experience noting that despite him vying for help to get on track

those pleads were largely left unanswered because of how he was already perceived. Isaiah, with

a quavering voice, expressed,

Like hearing that -- hearing something like that, when you want help to get away from

that (i.e., skipping class or being with the wrong crowd) is like very heart-breaking. It's

like, dang. Everybody just thinks so low of me. You don't too much think about it but

then when you're in a dark place and you just like thinking back, somebody telling you

you're a troublemaker, you know what I'm saying, it's heart-breaking. Like why'd it have

to be me type of thing.

He continued by sharing how he'd rather be seen noting,

I wanted them to see me as a different person, a person that like really wanted to get

somewhere in the school. Someone who wanted to do what's right. I didn't want to be

viewed as a troublemaker or somebody who didn't listen. But I needed help and I felt like

I wasn't getting the help that I needed. One class I can say that the teacher like really sat

there and helped me and cared. But out of like the seven or eight classes we had, one

teacher doing that it was like, what's the point of going?

Isaiah's reflection reveals how as a result of not having strong supportive and caring

relationships in an environment that affirmed who he wanted to be and that ignored his needs he

began to question the purpose of being in select classes or school altogether. His reflection offers a window into one way the cycle of exclusion may begin and progress.

Field notes from my time with the boys' group on May 26th, 2021 offered similar sentiments pertaining to the lack of an affirming school environment. Following the students engaging in their usual routines and affirmations, the group facilitator continued with the topic from the previous month's session that centered Black boys and education asking the boys, "have there ever been times where you felt like you could not be your full self?" Immediately and almost synchronously the 4 boys responded, "all the time!" One student explained,

> You have to be at their standard or you fail. I didn't want to ask for help because they make it seem like it's my fault I don't understand. They try to make it seem like your slow or something, so I just give up.

A peer added,

> Instead of helping they put you on the spot trying to embarrass you like you're not smart enough so you shouldn't be in this class. They're like would you like a pass to work in the library or to see your [special education] case manager to get help when really, they just don't want us in there.

As the discussion progressed the first boy agrees with his peer and then connects this to how, in some cases, they start to take on these un-affirming messages:

> Facts! You keep getting suspended you start to think what they think of you. Like damn I am a fuck up. Maybe I don't belong here. I'm barely at school and when I am the teachers treating me weird. It gets to a point the only reason you come is to keep up with friends and talk to girls. Shit's really weird!

The first two boys in the group shared sentiments of being belittled and unwanted in various educational spaces; a third student discusses his limited relationships and how that in turn leads to him being silenced. He explains, "I have a good relationship with some, but I think there are a lot of teachers who do not like me. When I'm trying to talk about an issue and understand why they do what they're doing they think I'm being aggressive. I've even had teachers start crying when all I did was ask a simple question but like I said last time, that's just how they see us."

Brandon, another focal participant, also expressed how the lack of strong relationships in his school has, too, left him feeling silenced and unwanted. After sharing some of the negative ways Black boys are seen in school he offered,

> It just feels like teachers just assume things they don't know anything, just assume you're a bad kid. They don't know anything. They don't try to talk to you or anything. They just assume!

He also shared moments where he has felt as though he were not wanted in the classroom.

> If I get in-school suspension or something, when I go back to class, it's like every time I go back to class or if I get in-school suspension or something, they're like, "Aren't you supposed to be in in-school or something?" It's like they want me gone out of the classroom.

Despite often feeling unseen within their respective school environments an interesting paradox was uncovered from their stories. Although these boys articulated feelings of being unseen they were simultaneously sharing stories of being hyper-visible as a result of the identities that school staff imposed on them. For example, Quise attempts to share why he believes Black boys are suspended at disproportionate rates arguing that the more a student is suspended the likelihood of being suspended again increases. He suggests "they only look at oh, this dude has been

suspended six times and this one's only been suspended once, and stuff like that." He goes on to share a personal experience as to how being suspended also has left him being watched.

> There's always been two or more staff members that either will pull me out of class, or they will just sit there. And I know that they're watching me, because like I know how to like to look around my surroundings without letting nobody know I'm looking around my surroundings. Like the slick things I do, I can look around the hall and know who's where and what -- yeah.

He went on to explain why he believed he was being watched. He posited,

> Just my past and I guess trying to see how I'm doing or if I'm doing any --finna burst out into—if I'm finna get mad, they're going to be the first ones to go put me in the office.

He further explained,

> If I see a teacher is all cool and whatnot before I get in the area, then I get over there and they're alright, hurry up and get to class, don't do this, don't do that, then I'll feel like oh, okay, so I'm on yall radar. Y'all waiting for me to slip up so y'all can put me in ISS or whatever y'all want to do. High school, that ain't going to be that case though, it might be jail.

Quise felt strongly that the school staff are purposeful in their surveillance with hopes of issuing consequences. Curious as to how any Black boy who has had experiences with exclusionary discipline might be successful in such an environment I probed, "What advice would you give to a Black boy coming to your school on how to be successful?" To which he, with an indescribable conviction, responded, "Don't give these people no more reason than they already have to look at you!"

The feeling of being watched was not one that was unique to Quise. In fact, students during the class discussion that was observed shared similar experiences. The exchange between student and teacher revealed how he connected being watched to his racial identity. During the class discussion students were asked to think about the inequity existent in school suspension data. Specifically, they were responding to the question of why Black boys might have a higher rate of suspension. One student responded,

> Probably because we're targeted, you know, like I don't know it's really probably like the race thing, like other than not. A lot like... yeah, it's really a race thing, I ain't even gon' cap with you.

The boy went on to explain what he meant by being targeted.

> It's kind of like that. I mean, they probably are, you know, keep a third eye open for us.
>
> It's not really another way to explain it other than calling it a race thing.

Another student in the group chimed in attempting to offer help with explaining what was meant by "targeted" explaining, "They focus on that student that got suspended more than others".

Brandon spoke of this feeling of being watched being linked to technology and individual staff whose primary purpose was surveillance. He begins by noting, "They're always on the cameras. They are always on the cameras in the security guard's office, watching, and walking around." Curious about what impact such technology and individuals had on the school environment I asked Brandon, "How does that make you feel when you're in the building?" Brandon responded,

> I don't know. Just, it's like I'm being watched 24…eight hours a day. I'm being watched the whole day. If we were in the bathroom, we can be sitting there and we're talking or just sitting there because the classes or something is just not going right or we're not

doing anything in them that's worth learning about, then if we go sit in there and they come right in there, they assume that we're doing something bad and we have no business.

While Brandon's perception of being watched, similar to most other Black boys, was viewed negatively one student, Antwon, offered a more positive attitude related to the notion of being watched. Antwon suggested,

"Well, they probably were watching me to just stay on top of me, like to make sure I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing as a reminder, but other than that, no [I don't feel watched]."

He also shares sentiments about the presence of surveillance technology (e.g., cameras) in his school. He first named the purpose being,

"So they know what's going on when the teachers are not, like, in the hallways, watching the kids, and so people won't steal out of other people's things.

He then explained how the presence of such technology contributes to his feelings of safety.

I felt kind of safe, because I know, like, if something was to end up missing out of my personal belongings, that they'll find who it was.

Being that Antwon's perception differed greatly from his peers I wanted to further unpack this, recognizing that at time students will offer responses that they may believe align with my institutional positioning. Given this, I asked Antwon more about his experiences with exclusionary discipline.

LL: About how many times would you say you've been suspended over the course of your entire school career? Would you say one to five, five to 10, or more than 10?

A: Less than 20.

LL: Less than 20? Why do you think you get suspended?

A: Tend to make bad choices or have bad behavior.

LL: Do Black students misbehave more than other groups of students?

A: No.

LL: So, if Black students don't misbehave more than other groups of students, why isn't the rate at which all students getting suspended the same?

A: Not really sure.

LL: Were you aware that black students got suspended more at your school?

A: I never thought about that.

Antwon later reveals that he believes that Black boys are suspended more because "Teachers just want to make sure everyone else in the school and the community is safe." Furthermore, though he perceived being watched more positively and as a means to "stay on top of me and to make sure I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing" other data, such as his behavior record which reveals that he had more than 50 behavioral referrals spanning a 3 year period, might suggest him being watched was less about the proactive supports he names and more connected to reactive and often exclusionary responses.

The ways the boys discussed their experiences with navigating unaffirming schools and poor relationships with the majority of teachers and staff with whom they interacted were reified by the staff participants. Assistant Principal, Maisha Fraiser reflected,

I also think about how our black students, and especially black boys, are so relational. And it's like who do they trust in the building? Who do they respond well to? Who don't they respond well to? I can think of so many times where I've had students that will get in, you know, like their -- a principal is trying to get him to come to their office, and they

won't. Like the kid won't respond to them. And I can come and talk to them and they will

come with me. And it's because I've taken the time to build that relationship with the

student and to hear them and to listen to them and acknowledge them. And so, I think that

a lot of times, we don't do that good front work to, and provide students with that safe --

those safe adults and that safe space to be heard and be listened to. And also doing that on

that back end too of like when something is going on really listening and hearing what

the student is saying and what they need.

She added,

I also think that we just have to take like part of -- like one of those big things is just

really like what is happening in the classroom day in and day out. And where students see

themselves and where they don't see themselves. And if we're not spending enough time

acknowledging that like our curriculum a lot of times it's harmful to students, it's not

going to -- that's not going -- like they're not going to come into class. Like we're not

going to welcome them in. And then we treat it like it's a student problem, rather than a

system problem.

Ms. Fraiser goes on to give one example of how students might also receive messages that they

are not wanted at school. She explained,

I think that people also find creative ways to do exclusionary practices, but not actually

like have it listed like that. Like if you call a family and say, hey like so and so's just

struggling today, maybe it'd be best if they go home for safety reasons, or something like

that. And then you don't have to call it a suspension. But you get that student out of your

hair. And essentially you're still -- if it -- most families if they hear that and their school is

telling them that they -- the kid needs to go home, they assume that they don't have the

right to say, no, this kid has -- this kid can stay. My child can stay in the building. And

so, I think that sometimes part of it is like find -- people are finding more creative ways

to still get at the same solution which is problematic. I feel like a lot of staff are first

looking to correct when they're interacting with a Black boy, instead of like maybe like

even inquiring, or learning more about what's going on. Like their first response is to be

like don't do this, don't do that. Like all those things. And they're looking for something

to be wrong rather than like, just oh like there students -- like you are my students,

period.

Aaron Coates, former special education teacher, discussed his beliefs about why so many Black boys are left maneuvering through school feeling unseen and as though their identities are unaffirmed. He argued,

Part of that has to do with the lack of black educators we have in Cornel School District.

Most of it has to do with the lack of Black educators in Cornel School District. I think

that seeing somebody in a role of a teacher, Black kids can automatically see themselves

within the classroom community. Having somebody of color who can relate to being on

the other side of the children, of the other side of the seat, so to speak, and have that

experience and knowing how to connect with the students would be just more of a deeper

concept, I feel, I feel like. I think there's a study that says that if an African American has

a black teacher, he's more likely to have more success in school, so it's kind of goes

along the lines of that

Taryn Winn posited that it all begins with a simple, yet fundamental question, "Are there opportunities for students to meaningfully and authentically engage in their school

environment?" She continued, speaking at length sharing an in-depth explanation of the mindset necessary to see, hear, and affirm Black students.

I think it really does start, too, with just beliefs in the classroom. That all students belong here. All students, you know, want to learn. And I think, by far, one of the most disturbing things I've heard people say from time to time is that I'm here to teach the kids that are here to learn. All children are here to learn! Children are showing up to learn. There are things that sometimes are barriers and children have trouble to access their learning because of things that are going on. But I think we have to move away from this belief that some kids are here to learn, and some children are not here to learn, and that learning extends beyond just academics. I'm going to be honest, and there's some kids who really, at times, who are triggered by certain classrooms, are triggered by certain teachers, and it's to the point where because, you know, whatever that lack of relationship may be and maybe harm that has been caused by the adult, they don't want to be in that space, so they're like I'd rather be at home at this point than be around this person. And it's not getting at then what is harming our children in these classroom environments that we need to address, that we need to fix so that all children feel like they're welcomed and that they belong. And I can tell you, all the observations I did, I would say a good proportion of the time has been a black child of where it's that, you know, calling that student's name and it's almost like [sigh], like again, you know? Or even before the child does something, it's this reminder of now don't do this even before the child can even walk into the space, you know? It's not a good morning. How are you? It's like, hey, remember, you had a rough day. So, it's not even this acknowledgment or this warmth or this I'm so glad you're here. It's automatically this do not do this. And so, and that's, you

know, very early on that message is sent. And yeah, it is, it's almost a -- it's almost a pol -

- it is a policing, you know, of that assumption that you are going to do something wrong,

so let me just, you know, foreshadow for you not to do this thing. Versus just thanking

kids for showing up that day and in that space and giving them this welcome and greeting

and that you are truly happy that they are there.

Mrs. Winn continued, though shifting to think of how the creation of school rules and

expectations may exacerbate feelings of being unseen, unwanted, or silenced.

Another piece of it is, too, about who sets the values and the rules for school to begin

with? We are asking children to adhere to norms that have not been developed -- that

have not had their own social political identities in mind. So, the people making these

rules about what is appropriate ways to express yourself, what are appropriate ways to

express your emotions are often people who do not look like our Black children and who

have not experienced systems of oppression, of racism, of exclusion that has caused

generations and generations of trauma and generations and generations of pain. And so,

we are asking our students to assimilate to systems and manage -- emotionally manage

systems that have been designed to harm them, and that is not acceptable.

The individual stories and experiences of the students and staff work collectively to reveal the

ways in which the Black boys are left navigating school environments that fail to affirm their

identities, center their voices, or truly see them for all that they bring. It was clear from the boys'

stories that being unaffirmed or lacking strong positive relationships with staff left them more

susceptible to exclusion.

Policies and Practices That Recruit Black Boys into Exclusion

Positionality is what Gee (2000) refers to as being recognized as a "certain kind of person." Positioning becomes an act of using the social, cultural, and historically available artifacts to construct individuals as types of people in a way that others and the individuals themselves recognize and treat them as though they were such people (Bal, 2009). Leveraging various policies and practices schools work across time and space to sustain positional identities that they have recruited or offered to students. However, the students are not merely left with a dichotomous choice of acceptance or rejection of the positional identities but rather within the context of the figured world students enact agency that allows them to accept, reject, negotiate or author new possible identities. The possibilities are yet informed and constrained by the social, cultural and historical artifacts (e.g., norms, traditions, rules) of the figured world and the larger context in which the figured world is situated. In this section data reveal the ways in which various policies and practices are employed to sustain positional identities that they have recruited or offered to students. Further, at times the data illuminate the ways in which the Black boys who are focal to this study enact agency within the figured world to reject, accept, negotiate or author new possibilities.

The stories that the boys told offered insight into how, despite the best intentions, various formal and informal policies and practices were exercised in ways that sought to sustain the positional identities that the school had recruited or offered them. Additionally, the data demonstrate how such policies and practices were used to further exclude the boys and relegating them to a figured world of exclusion. For instance, some of the boys talked about this notion of being unable to escape their past wrongdoings and mistakes. In their narratives what becomes clear is how the practice of information sharing through school records or staff conversations hinders the ability to have a "fresh start". The exchange between Antwan and I support this

notion. Antwon begins by sharing that he is relatively well regarded in his community despite having moments where he was subjected to punitive discipline. He then explained that the mistakes he made in the community found their way into his school. He said,

> I guess when I got in trouble in the community, I guess they told my -- I guess they knew one of my teachers, and they just told them that I wasn't making smart decisions in the community. So they wanted to reach out to my teachers to have them give me a talk, or just, like, help me focus on school more, to keep me in house.

He continued by sharing his feelings about the information sharing between school and community.

> I think it should've stayed separate, but at the same time, I think they should've told my teacher. Because them telling my teacher made me stay focused on school, and not get in trouble in the community. But I feel like if they -- if it would've stayed in the community, I would've just been good. I could've moved on, and still focused on school without having extra people know what was going on outside of school. But I don't think that they would judge the student off what happens in the community.

Despite Antwan's optimism that he or other students would not be judged by what happens in the community, his historical documents (e.g., behavioral record notes, IEPs) reveal that these community-based behaviors did inform the development of his IEP. For example, action steps outline things such as speaking to the community officer and connecting with his previous school to gain insights about his behaviors there. The sharing of historical documents demonstrate why Antwan believes his ability to have a fresh start and "just move on" has been impeded.

The exchange between Isaiah and I also revealed similar beliefs regarding the inability to escape the institutional positioning of troublemaker. Isaiah explains the effect he perceived this informal informational sharing to have on him.

> I can say it probably affected, like. Me being into like other outside community groups. And yea just such as the groups throughout the community, even volunteer work because who I viewed as. It all started from the community. So, it was like I traveled it into school almost.

He later shared how as a result of the informal information sharing, he believed the labels that were affixed to him were stable and enduring because of his mistakes in both the community and school environments. He expressed,

> I feel like the label that they had already labeled me wasn't going to leave. I felt like it almost followed me. Because of the history.

Along the same lines, Quise also described feelings of being judged by his past and as a result finds himself questioning how he responds to the institutional positioning being offered. Quise eloquently shared, "They judge you by your past and people -- let people live, learn, and move on."

He explained how being judged by his past affects him.

> Like it'll make me like -- like this is really -- like that's where really everything comes in. Like when I feel like you're just judging me off of my past and you're not trying to get to know how I am now, I feel like why should I even try to change when this is what you expect me to do already. And I know proving them wrong can be better sometimes, but like that's not always the case. Like, I don't know.

During my observation with the boys' group, the theme of being judged by one's past was also

surfaced. Following an affirmation and welcoming to the day's group, the conversation picked

up seemingly where it had left off from the previous session. The teacher opened the discussion

asking, "if you know what to do to change it [getting in trouble] what's stopping you?" The first

boy, almost instantly, responded,

> "I've had a bad rap from the moment I started school. I could tell by how I was treated.
>
> I've been suspended at every school."

A second student argued,

> "It follows you up. Your record follows you, so then you're treated how you were. You
>
> don't get a second chance."

Another peer stated, in agreement,

> "New schools don't mean a clean slate. I went out of state and they still knew everything
>
> from my other schools and I still got suspended."

The teacher at this point asked the group of four boys to raise their hand if they agreed that their

records followed them. All four of them raised their hands. The teacher continued with a stream

of questions and eventually asked "Does this mean you can't do anything about it?" The fourth

boy who up until this point had his head resting on his desk sat up to contribute to the earlier

conversation rather than offer a response to the question just posed. In what felt like a whisper,

he said, "Just think about the PTI (pre-trial investigation). The school records can be used."

Student two asserted, "This is exactly what I meant that it all follows you. All the bad but none

of the good." Being less familiar with the intricacies of the juvenile justice system I asked the

group facilitator what was meant by "PTI". The facilitator turned the question back to the group

asking if anyone could explain. The same boy who introduced the concept responded explaining that,

> It's basically like being on probation while the DA (district attorney) team does their investigation. You get a social worker who checks in and you're given all these rules to follow like go to school, don't get suspended, you might have a curfew, but you're not in detention while they do whatever it is they want to do. But if you fuck up then that becomes part of what they tell the judge plus the rest of the school record even if it's old stuff.

CSD asserts that behavioral "responses are confined to the current school year. This means at the beginning of each new school year, the lowest assigned Response Level for a first occurrence of the behavior within the school year should be used for every student." Despite this assertion, the narratives the boys shared demonstrated how they perceived the practice of information sharing across context and grade bands, though maybe well-intended, kept them stuck within a figured world of exclusion. Some participating staff noted the consequence of this practice as well. Rodney Stone-Truth, a school administrator, shared how Black boys are disproportionately recruited and offered into the figured world of exclusion. He suggested,

> It happens early. That happens before some of them even get in our building, like when there's transition meetings, and like yeah, you got to watch out for these guys, they always do this, they always do that. They do -- like, it's just presumed and it's like preconceived if that's the correct term.

He expounded,

> They aren't given an opportunity to have a fresh start. A lot of things are being based off of, a lot of the notes are being based off of what happened in elementary school, or what

happened in middle school and that just follows them like, without us being able to give

them a fresh start. Like, a kid could've been having a bad day, and one thing happened

and now that sticks with them their entire time that they're in our district. And I know that

for a fact because I've been in those meetings, those transition meetings where we're

talking about kids coming from middle school, or kids coming from even from

elementary school coming to middle school and they have that label.

Taryn Winn also discussed the ways in which seemingly harmless information sharing might

quickly shift leaving some students positioned for exclusion.

I think it's also just, too, the subtleties we all know. We've been in meetings where, you

know, it's like, oh, I had this student last year, watch out for this. And that information

just kind of goes through that, you know, that grapevine of like, you know, this is the

student to watch out for. First, it's like a real authentic sharing of information of like, you

know, this is what the struggles are. Here are, you know, the strengths of this student.

Then it becomes, you know, if you get this kid, and then even before that child steps

through the door, they already have a mark on their name.

Maisha Fraiser echoed,

I think about when we do transition meetings with the middle school and they're like, oh

like how is this student? And like you look at their behavior file -- their behavior tab in

the district wide information system and they've had -- they had like 60 behavior referrals

their eighth-grade year. And like people are immediately like making an assumption

about who that student is and who they -- And like what their behavior is. When you

could think I'm sure probably a ton of other students in particular like white boys who are

doing the same behaviors, but it's seen as different. Or because they maybe are more

compliant with stopping right away, or not have -- needing to like share what was going

on, or like their side of things like they -- then it doesn't go to that level or that extreme.

Taken together the data help illustrate how the social, cultural and historical artifacts (e.g.,

documents, information sharing practices) have constrained these boys to a figured world of

exclusion.

One of CSD's central policies that informs how teachers and administrators respond to

student behavior is the Behavior Education and Response Plan (BERP). This policy informs the

district stakeholders of the philosophy that undergirds the approach to exclusionary discipline.

For example, the BERP reads,

> Our priority and focus on addressing racial inequities drives this work and provides the
>
> basis for three overarching goals: increase a sense of safety and belonging in school,
>
> implement successful systems of support and intervention, and reduce disproportionality
>
> in the use of exclusionary practices. Each of these goals and metrics will be
>
> disaggregated so that we can hold ourselves accountable for progress.

Given the racial disparities that exist in the district disciplinary data the goals appear timely and

relevant. However, to understand how the policy comes to life and has real consequences on the

lives of Black boys it was important to gain insight about the context in which the policy is

implemented. Interview data from staff participants helped gain a more nuanced understanding

of the policy generally, as well as responses and resistance to the policy that might in turn

contribute to how Black boys are recruited into the figured world of exclusion. Taryn Winn

expressed,

> I think while it's the intent of the Behavior Education and Response Plan to, you know,
>
> move away from exclusionary practices, I mean, it's still happening. And there has been

significant backlash against the Behavior Education and Response Plan. You know, a lot of people with this mindset of like we're letting kids get away, you know, I've even heard get away with murder and, you know, things along those lines. So, it has not been without its resistance. And there's still a lot of resistance around the Behavior Education and Response Plan, because there is a school of thought of like in order to, you know, address harm we must harm other people so that they understand. So, you know, it's not in its perfect state. There're still exclusionary practices, you know, that happen, but I see it as the ideal state and what we aspire to be. So, we continue to grow in identifying, you know, practices that move and shift us away from exclusionary practices. So, once again, right now the big one being restorative justice, and so how are we examining all the different alternatives to suspensions or, you know, alternatives to students receiving tickets from police. And, you know, are there opportunities for students to, you know, meaningfully, authentically engage in their school, you know, environments to, you know, to continue to not face some of these harsh consequences? And often, consequences for behavior that is also a normal part of, you know, especially like adolescent development. And so, I feel like we've moved to such a punitive thing, that things that even sometimes we have done, you know, as children are now -- are now criminalized and are, you know, referred to, you know, the police or referred to security or whatever it may be. So, I think we have to continue to grow to identify other alternatives to exclusionary discipline.

Mr. Stone-Truth also noted similarities as he reflected on a staff meeting discussing the BERP. He shared,

Well, teachers and staff really, when they hear the words Behavior Education and

Response Plan, I think that -- the word that they are zooming in on or emphasizing is

behavior, and they're not really thinking the word that comes after that, which is the most

important word, which is education. Like, we had a welcome back meeting this week

with our staff members, and our dean was talking about our Behavior Education and

Response Plan, and the staff really just wanted to know, like, what was going to happen

when certain rules were broken. It's just -- they just want to know the consequences,

really. They're not really concerned about what's in place to help our students be

successful. It's more about what do those consequences look like? How can I -- when do I

reach out when certain behaviors are happening? So, it's really just an emphasis on

behavior. Heavy emphasis on behavior and less on education.

The urge for consequences was also noticed by Ms. Fraiser,

I'll just start with like a lot of teachers I hear often that we're not holding kids accountable

and that nothing is done. And that like kids can do whatever they want like this kind of

idea.

She further expressed,

To me, it's just like really problematic because when people say like nothing is done,

what they really -- it feels like coded language and what they really mean is like this kid

is still in my class or they weren't gone for a week or something like that. And so that's

been hard to hear.

The distinction between consequence and accountability prompted Taryn Winn to add,

So, looking at practices such as, you know, restorative justice, as, you know, alternatives

to suspension, other ways that students can be held accountable, you know, for harm.

Because, you know, we also want to say that there is this piece when there's harm to the community, how are we, as humans, you know, accountable? But I think often times people confuse accountability with consequences and that it should be punitive. Whereas accountability is really acknowledging that there was harm caused and then lifting up what are the needs to repair this harm so that we can continue to center each other's humanity? And it's also, you know, just the accountability for the person who's done harm to understand in what ways have they perhaps been harmed and then they're perpetuating it on to other people. So, that is overall intent of the Behavior Education and Response Plan, to reduce that.

Tori Simmons, during a follow up conversation, reminded that the concerns around what is being touted as accountability but really meaning consequence and punishment is not exclusive to school staff. She explained that numerous Op-Ed pieces have been written that express how the larger Monroe County community has also contributed to the skepticism of the BERP. Referencing the February 1st, 2021 board meeting, she further argued that even some school board members have not embraced the intent of the BERP wanting to maintain largely punitive responses as well as having school resources officers stationed in school.

Having attended and observed the February 1st, 2021 board of education meeting, I placed particular emphasis on the discussion around the BERP. One board member spoke of feeling as though the district has not gotten to the root causes of the disparities. They further suggested that the BERP presents a culture shift and the district has been trying to adjust to the new culture for 8 years but largely still struggling. The board member eventually asked, "what are we going to do at the point in time that the behavior is so out of control because we haven't equipped our staff to deal with behavior (e.g., battery, disorderly conduct)?"

During a subsequent one-on-one interview with Tori Simmons, she expressed her greatest frustration being, similar to Mr. Stone-Truth's, how so many bypass the word education. It is explicitly written in the policy that "an intervention must be put in place before progressing to the next Response Level for a repeat of the same behavior." According to Tori, this critical aspect of the policy is overlooked or lacks any real fidelity. She shared,

God, I could look back through my notes and get really specific examples, but here's one that's sort of a combination of like say a student has sworn at a staff person for the second time, you know and someone could be calling to consult to say, well, should I code this again as a level three or should I code it as a level four? And I'll say, you know, well, what did you do the first time this happened? They'll say, well, we offered a circle, but the student just wouldn't participate. And it's like on paper you could say, well, we offered a restorative circle and the student refused, right, but if you ask more questions like, well, how long did you get to talk to a student, you know did you give them a chance to sort of calm down and reflect, did you bring in family, did you bring in other people who they trust in the building? You know, did you have time to sort of explain to them what a circle would be like? Did you -- do you have people who regularly lead circles? Do you have, you know, is a student comfortable with that process to begin with? You know, all that stuff that kind of peels back what systems people have in place and like their mindsets around restorative justice, you know as something that's really like woven into the fabric versus like you know this kind of like throw a circle at it kind of mentality. And so then it's kind of like it happens again and now it's like, well, we tried everything we could and now it's just, it's clearly I think I definitely hear that mindset of it reveals like not a deep belief in restorative practices or not a deep belief in the strength

of the student or the ability of the student to have a voice in what they might want to do

to restore, you know restore relationships, repair harm.

Students and staff both reveal that in CSD there exist a reliance on punishment and all too often

that punishment is disseminated in the form of exclusion. Moreover, district policies and

practices provide the necessary backing that gives way to the pervasive exclusion of Black boys.

In particular, the subjective nature of related policies and a lack of any true system of checks and

balance send messages to the boys that the school is not equally tolerant of their mistakes. The

boys, then, are confined to the figured world of exclusion left to accept, resist, or negotiate the

imposition.

The Interplay of Factors: Answering the Call

There remains the question of how, amidst this figured world of exclusion, did the boys

respond. This section will provide analysis of the ways in which the boys answered the call.

Within whatever *world* there are spaces of authoring (Urietta, 2011). This process of identity

formation is largely concerned with how individuals answer the world. Holland et al., (1998)

describe this process of answering the world as a sort of orchestration in which individuals

leverage the social discourses and practices of the figured world in order to craft a response in a

given time and space defined by others. It is in the responding to the strictly authoritative and

relatively open discourses and practices that individuals enact agency and author themselves.

Using agency, however, does not imply that the ways in which an individual responds to the

discourses/practices is without influence or that the individual is a free willing agent (Bal, 2009).

Holland et al., (1998) argues, "In authoring the world, in putting words to the world that

addresses her, the "I" draws upon the languages, the dialects, the words of others to which she

has been exposed" (p. 170). The boys' stories reveal how they drew upon the discourses of the

social world of their schools to answer the world. Further, their narratives evidence that despite attempts to act as agentive beings their efforts to self-author, at times, were unsuccessful.

Isaiah's story demonstrates how he relied on the social discourses and practices to answer the world. He begins describing his journey as academically challenging because he was often enrolled in classes that required a greater deal of independent learning (e.g., read the book and get the answers). However, his learning style was such that he needed more modeling and hands-on learning. These needs were consistent with what his parent/guardian and classroom teachers noted in a referral for special education. The referral read,

> The parent/guardian indicated Isaiah also demonstrates difficulty with processing information and with academic tasks. Current staff members have reported concerns with Isaiah's receptive and expressive language, specifically in times of heightened emotion.

Isaiah also shared his attempts to advocate for himself.

> Going to school where I went to school at it was always like -- it wasn't like a teacher on the board type of demonstration. It was like a packet, a book, and you get the answers yourself. It was never like no interacting with the teacher. So then, in my situation I just kind of like seeking -- I tried to seek out help. I was talking to a counselor at the school, but it was like that wasn't working. It was still like the paper and the book. And I'm a hands-on type of guy so I like --you show me how to do it and we can work on it so I can get every step instead of just here and just do it. That kind of made me like lose interest in school because I can't get that type of teacher.

He went on to express how as a result of his self-advocacy being left unanswered, he found himself contemplating a critical question.

> I felt like I wasn't getting the help that I needed in the classroom, so I just like stopped going. One class I can say that the teacher like really sat there and helped me. But out of like the seven or eight classes we had, one teacher doing that it was like, what's the point of going?

Throughout Isaiah's interview he consistently shared that he was viewed as a troublemaker leading me to ask, "Is that how you wanted to be viewed? Or how would you have rather been seen?" Isaiah responded,

> Absolutely not! I wanted them to see me as a different person, a person that like really wanted to get somewhere in the schools. Someone who wanted to do what's right. I didn't want to be viewed as a troublemaker or somebody who didn't listen.

What was interesting about Isaiah's story was that it revealed that the ways in which we answer the world are truly situational. As mentioned, Isaiah was adamant that he did not wish to be perceived as a troublemaker. However, as he desired to be in relationship and community with others while also being affirmed his story demonstrates how in a different situation, one that would grant him access to community, he accepted the identity of troublemaker. He explained why he befriended those who were also deemed troublemakers:

> It was like being with the troublemakers, they were the only ones that accepted you at the school. So, it was like you wanted to feel comfortable. You ain't want to feel like an outsider, so you were like, cool. You would just be quick to just be around whoever just accept you the fastest type thing.

It becomes clear to see that which Isaiah hoped to find in the larger school community he could only access in liminal spaces with other students who, too, had been relegated to the margins of the school community.

Similarly, Antwon spoke to a desire of having access to a community and feeling as if he belonged. It became evident that as he spoke of this desire to be in community that he, like Isaiah, used the liminal space to reject an identity that was imposed on him, and his friends, and self-author. Antwon shared why those peers who had been largely considered troublemakers or bad students by the overall school community were his friends. He shared, "They made me feel safe around them. Like, they made me feel like I could trust them with anything I tell them or do with them." Unlike the school, he described himself and his friends as "intelligent, self-caring, caring about others." We went on to unpack this notion of badness, a label that was imposed on him. Antwon explained why he believed students were subjected to suspensions and other forms of exclusionary discipline.

> **LL**: how would you describe students who get suspended?
>
> **A**: They tend to make bad choices or have had bad behavior.
>
> **LL**: So would you say you make bad choices and have bad behavior, or had -- that you've made bad choices in the past, and had bad behavior in the past?
>
> **A**: Yes.
>
> **LL**: Does that make you a bad student?
>
> **A**: No.
>
> **LL**: How would you describe it?
>
> **A**: I would just say, like, I had a bad day type stuff, so it would make me do something that I would regret,

Antwon went on to add,

> **A**: I just think there's students who make not-smart choices, but I wouldn't use the word bad.

LL: What word would you use?

A: I would say, like, there's people in the world that are not smart about their choices

Through the conversation with Antwon it was clear that he was intentional in separating one's actions from identity. Said differently, just because a student makes a mistake they should not come to be known as a particular type of person or student. It reifies Quise's plea to, "Let people live, learn, and move on."

Contrary to most of the boys, Machi, actually openly accepted the identity of "bad." On a visit to the school I was walking the building with one of the administrators and noticed Machi in the hallway a few minutes after passing time. I left the administrator and after some pleasantries and stating my desire to ask him a question, Machi and I talked. During our conversation I wanted to get a better sense of why Machi embraced this duality of being "half good and half bad" and what might be the affordances of that. Machi explained,

> So peep, you know how some kids like (names omitted) get bullied or beat up? Or the girls don't want to be around them? Like when you don't care about getting in trouble then people don't really mess with you. They be cool with you and be yo' friend. But if you a lame people gon' try to mess with you. When people saw like how my big brother was everybody would be like don't mess with Machi, (name omitted) is his brother. So people know me at school and in the hood and they mess with me like, "that's lil bro" you feel me.

Although Machi was clear in our initial one-on-one interview that he would prefer to be seen as "a good student" his willingness to accept, or rather, embrace being seen as a bad student appeared to be more about status and protection. He leveraged the identity in similar ways of the other boys which was to forge community and relationships with peers both in school and in his

community. Furthermore, Machi through collective action and engagement with social others was able to imagine new figured worlds that enabled him to transform his sense of self. Said differently, Machi, whether knowingly or otherwise, was able to see the expansive possibilities of his positioning as "bad" rather than be limited by it.

The individual student interviews and the boys group classroom observations also demonstrated that for the boys it was not always about accepting, resisting, or negotiating the offered identity, but at times, they found it important to also respond in similar ways to being subjected to exclusion. For instance, one of the students in the boys' group in response to the teacher talking about alternatives to out of school suspension stated,

> Then they want you sitting in a little room all day because your late so I'm like fuck the
> bullshit just send me home.

Brandon shared that his response when being subjected to exclusionary discipline unjustly is to seek the support of his parent to advocate. He shared,

> You can try to explain but they won't listen. Just call your mom or something to explain
> to your mom what they tried to make you do and you didn't want to do it.

Another student in the boys group shared that he often felt like he could not be his true and authentic self which led to issues with him and members of the school's administration. He explained,

> That's when I stopped going to school. I was having problems with one of the principals.
> He would see me in the hall, and I'd get suspended for something as simple as being two
> minutes late. Another staff member emailed my mom saying she could see how I'm
> being targeted. So, in order to keep it from escalating and getting out of control I stopped
> going.

Along those same lines Isaiah confessed,

> The more I got suspended, the more it just made me not even try to go no more. So it was to the point I was like going to school -- it was to the point I was just getting suspended so much I just didn't like school. I was just going to meet up with my friends and we would go off and do something totally different.

Together the stories the boys told yielded an interesting paradox. The paradox being that in order to avoid various exclusionary discipline practices the boys chose to enact a form of protective refusal in which they self-excluded themselves to as a means to protect or preserve their own dignity.

Interview data and classrooms observations collectively give insight into the ways in which the Black boys are left to answer the figured world of exclusion. Although the students' responses may vary in terms of accepting, resisting, or negotiating, it is abundantly clear that the boys find themselves in a constant state of flux. On one hand they are receiving messages that do not affirm aspects of their identity while on the other hand being positioned in deficit-based ways. Always, these boys are having to grapple with how they are seen, who they truly are, and how to protect themselves while preserving their sense of self and dignity within a context that espouses to hold that responsibility on their behalf.

This chapter presents the findings of a year-long case study on how the influence of social interactions, namely disciplinary moments and experiences, mediated or constrained self-making. Though the findings are presented individually they are interconnected and mutually support an understanding of the figured world of exclusion for Black boys in CSD. The findings suggest that the: (a) framing of Black boys is likely to begin well before they enter into schools, (b) qualitatively different schooling experiences that Black boys have limit their ability to have

social interactions with their institutional others that result in affirming cultural scripts, and (c)

policies and procedures of CSD, despite their espoused good intentions, are influenced by human

action, therefore, yielding the inequitable exclusion of Black boys. Regardless of how Black

boys who have experienced exclusion in CSD respond to the figured world, they are always in

proximity to exclusion.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

"I am an invisible man. No I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe: Nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids, and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, simply because people refuse to see me" -Ralph Waldo Emerson

"I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination, indeed, everything and anything except me." -Ralph Waldo Emerson

This qualitative case study investigated the educational experiences of Black boys in relationship to exclusionary discipline practices in Cornell School District. More specifically, this study examined how multiply marginalized students made sense of exclusionary discipline and how it impacted the ways in which they fashioned a sense of self. In many educational spaces exclusionary disciplinary practices have become the norm rather than the exception (Simmons, 2017; Winn, 2018). Exclusionary discipline policies, both past and current iterations, have served as a conduit through which Black boys are rendered both invisible and damaged (Noltemeyer et.al, 2015; Simmons, 2017; Sojoyner, 2016). Moreover, as a result of such rendering the social and cultural assets that Black boys bring into their school environment are ignored, left unaffirmed, and ultimately stripped away (Paris, 2012; Profitt, 2022). Yet, this dissertation study is concerned with the ways in which Black boys, often at the margins of school, make sense of the disciplinary moments to which they are subjected and more importantly, how they are left to accept, negotiate, or resist the various identities to which they are recruited. Exclusionary discipline policies complicated the Black boys' self-making processes while hardening the promise of emancipatory schooling.

In this chapter the major themes that emerged from the realities of the Black boys are examined and discussed in relation to the extant literature. In particular, the depiction of Black

boys as problems needing to be fixed, or what I refer to as a narrative of dehumanization;

restrictive school environments that fail to affirm Black boy's identity; and the policies and

procedures that recruit Black boys into exclusion are discussed. The chapter then offers

limitations of the study alongside recommendations for research, policy, and practice. Lastly, the

chapter concludes with final thoughts and conclusions related to this study.

Narrative of Dehumanization

This study illuminates the ways in which anti-Blackness informed and shaped how Black

boys experienced school and ultimately the freedom with which they had to imagine themselves.

Coles (2019) defines antiblackness as

> the legacy of U.S. chattel and plantation style slavery, which represents the human races
>
> structurally embedded degradation of Black people and communities through imagining
>
> Blackness as inherently negative, needing to be policed and/or neutralized, and as outside
>
> the realms of humanity" (p.2)

The participants' narratives suggest that their subjugation to exclusionary discipline are informed

largely by the socially constructed imaginings that frame Black boys as a Du Boisian "problem"

and by a pervasive belief that marks Black bodies synonymous with the ultimate threat to

authority (Muhammad, 2019). The extant literature supports these findings evidencing the ways

in which Black boys are framed through a host of dehumanizing narratives. Howard (2013) for

example describes that many of the most frequently occurring terms during a literature search of

Black males and education consisted of phrases such as "at-risk", "endangered", and "remedial",

among other deficit driven terms. Additionally, empirical works have revealed the cost of Black

boys being framed through dehumanizing narratives has resulted in their temporary or permanent

removal from schools (Simmons, 2017; Sojoyner, 2016; Vaught, 2017). Related scholarship

reveals that the differential treatment of Black and white children who exhibit similar behaviors and attend relatively similar schools significantly contributes to the racial gap and school discipline (Owens & McLanahan, 2020).

Furthermore, the boys' narratives demonstrate the inability of teachers and staff to imagine each of the Black boys outside of the larger societal sphere that has too often reflected Black boys through cultural images as deviant and dangerous is fundamentally blocked (Dumas, 2016). As such, many of the Black boys' chances for success and self-authoring were limited even before they entered their respective schools. Again, the larger literature base that explores the schooling experiences of Black boys substantiates these findings noting that Black boys are left to face ideologies and narratives about who they can be and the potential they have (Ferguson, 2003; Goings et al., 2015; Howard, 2013). Additionally, other related literature documents the manner in which teacher perceptions tend to adversely impact Black boys more than any other group of students (Howard, 2008; Rios, 2011).

The boys' narratives disrupt presumptions "that racism is no longer a barrier to equal opportunity" (Dumas & Ross, 2016, p.431), revealing how the embedded structural regime of antiblackness indeed suffocated their opportunities, humanity, and self-authoring.

Lack of Affirming School Environments and Relationships

Findings from this study demonstrate how the participants encountered school environments that were unaffirming of the social and cultural assets that they brought with them each day. In many instances, students were left unseen, unheard, and unwanted. The boys' experiences are consistent with the larger body of literature that interrogates the purpose of schooling in a pluralistic society. Paris (2012) argues

It is brutally clear that current policies are not interested in sustaining the languages and

cultures of longstanding and newcomer communities of color in the United States.

English-only policies; narrow, decontextualized language and literacy programs in poor

communities of color; and even one state's explicit ban on studying the histories,

literatures, and struggles of particular ethnic groups (see Arizona House Bill 2281) are

examples of the return of ever more explicit deficit perspectives, polices, and pedagogies

(p. 95).

It is within this restrictive context that Black boys are given the message that their racial,

cultural, and linguistic identities are not valued. The boys' narratives give insight into how, as a

result of them being outside the realm of whiteness, they are subjected to exclusion and further

relegated to the margins of school. Yet, within these contexts the boys are still expected to draw

on various resources, though largely negative, to engage in the process of authoring themselves.

Related to this notion of cultural disregard, the boys' stories illuminated a paradox of visibility,

suggesting that they are simultaneously invisible yet hypervisible. In particular, Black boys were

largely invisible as it pertained to their social, cultural, and historical assets and ways of

knowing. In contrast, however, Black boys spoke to racialized patterns of surveillance that left

them constantly under the gaze of school staff. Such experiences were more often the norm

rather than the exception. This paradox of visibility has been explored by Black feminist scholars

and points to similar trends as those identified by the Black boys in this study. For example,

Carter-Andrews and colleagues (2019), spoke of the ways in which Black girls are often blamed

for and unsupported with issues of sexual violence. Furthermore, their assaults are minimized. In

other words, Black girls are left largely invisible during critical moments of need. However,

when these same girls take matters into their own hands to protect themselves, they move from a

realm of invisibility to visibility as their perceived wrongdoings are readily visible and subject to punishment. Prior research further corroborates the findings noting that teachers' perceptions of Black boys' behavior are shaped by racial biases and are generally treated more harshly than their peers (Hill, 2016). Given this, Black boys are once again placed at a unique disadvantage as they engage in self-fashioning processes. That is, regardless of what strategy the boys used (e.g., resist or negotiate) in their self-fashioning processes, they were not successful. The boys' self-authored identities were always at odds with the imposed identities. Gee (2000) notes, "Institutions (not just people's "everyday rationality" or "common sense") come to ensure (and sometimes enforce) that the child and his or her behaviors are recognized in a certain way, and not others" (p.103). By failing to affirm or foster positive relationships with them, schools, whether knowingly or otherwise, ensure that Black boys come to be recognized and positioned as a problem in schools.

Policies and Procedures that Recruit Black Boys into Exclusion

Participant narratives also demonstrated how well-intentioned policies and practices also impeded Black boys' identity fashioning. For instance, even at times when the boys would naturally get a clean slate (e.g., moving between schools or grade bands) information sharing practices served to ensure the boys were recognized as particular types of individuals across time and space. Although the impact of data sharing policies and procedures in relation to exclusionary school discipline have been less explored in the larger literature, Peters (2021) explains what they term "dirty data" having a disproportionate and negative impact on Black students. Consistent with much of the literature on exclusionary school discipline the boys' stories illuminate how yet again their race becomes a salient factor for the implementation of exclusionary discipline (Martinez et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2014; 2002). Resultantly, the Black

boys in this study draw connections between their race and larger identity leaving them grappling with questions of self-worth and decisions to leave school. Related scholarship has shown that students who are repeatedly subjected to exclusionary discipline have an increased propensity towards prematurely exiting school (Cholewa et al., 2018). It is abundantly clear that despite their best intentions, these policies are riddled with both unintended and intended consequences that systematically harm Black boys and stifle their self-fashioning processes.

Limitations

Although it is always the researcher's desire to develop a rigorous study, to suggest that one's study is without limitations would be naïve. There are several limitations to note with this current study. First, the sample size of the focal participants was relatively small (N=5). However, the small sample size was the result of purposeful and snowball sampling technique given the specificity of the study. Additionally, the staff participants do not represent the range of roles within the district. For example, classroom teachers, resource officers, social workers, or counselors' perspectives are not reflected in this study. This limitation is a result of parameters enacted by the university's IRB and the school district's research evaluation committee. An additional limitation of this study was that it was confined to a single geographic area that is predominantly white. Therefore, the study might not reflect the experiences of Black boys and staff in more racially and ethnically diverse areas. Furthermore, at times my positionality may have served as a limitation. Given my insider position as a district administrator, at times students may have become reluctant to share details of their experiences or attempted to answer questions in ways they believed aligned with my expectations. Lastly, though Patton (2002) recommends allowing sensitizing concepts to guide observations, this was challenging to do. Given a reliance on video conferencing for meetings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic,

much of the happenings in the context were not as readily observable as they might have been in person (e.g., who was in attendance, materials). Taken together the limitations of this study point to fruitful directions for future research which are discussed in the next section.

Implications

Implications for Research

Future research should further examine the ways in which exclusionary discipline has and continues to shape and inform the identities of Black boys across other contexts (e.g., regions, schools and districts that are predominantly black). Such a cross-case analysis of boys from varying contexts might provide a more nuanced understanding of the boys' experience with hopes of generating recommendations for policy and practice on the national stage. Additionally, future research might attempt to explore this study leveraging a researcher without the same insider positioning to ascertain whether the ways the Black boys narrate their story in different ways. Lastly, future research would benefit from replicating this study to include the voices of more boys as well as staff that reflect the range of individuals who interface with the boys each day. Heretofore, much of the literature surrounding the Black boys' experiences with exclusionary discipline has been quantitative in nature. This current study reveals an urgency to unpack those stories by bringing the voices of those whose lives have been impacted to the center of analysis. These added perspectives, too, have the potential to inform policy and practice.

Implications for Practice and Policy

This study offers implications for practice. First, it calls for the need to revisit teacher and administrator preparation programs. The extant literature has consistently shown that the current U.S. teaching force is largely white while the students they serve are quickly becoming more and

more diverse (Howard, 2019). It is probable to assume then, that conversations of race and equity will continue to have relevance in the field. Given this, teachers and administrators need to engage in more in-depth equity work, beyond superficial ethnic study requirements that treat issues of race and equity as add-ons or afterthoughts (McDonald, 2005). While in teacher education programs, pre-service teachers and aspiring leaders need to have extensive opportunities to engage in deep and ongoing examinations of their positioning that includes reflecting on and interrogating the taken-for-granted beliefs that they hold about themselves and others (Allard & Santoro, 2004) but more specifically about Black individuals. This is a necessary first step prior to being released into the field to interface with Black students and educators if we truly hope to improve education.

Forwarding racial equity work extends beyond any one actor thus requiring a collaborative approach to problem-solving that critically examines the cultural and historical institutional norms and practices. To this end school districts need to identify methods and resources to actually support schools' engagement in racial equity work. Merely having a stance for racial equity (e.g., an equity vision) without being backed with programmatic guidance and resources does little to help envision more equitable and emancipatory schools. This study provides evidence that conversations and professional learning opportunities around issues of race, racism, and equity are still warranted. Specifically, these conversations and professional learning need to move beyond surface level discussions about equity and move into the examination of both implicit and explicit bias while also offering actionable steps to disrupt the marginalization of Black students. Additionally, this work should be focused on naming, disrupting, and transforming systems rooted in antiblackness that heretofore have reproduced negative academic and social outcomes for Black.

Furthermore, this study points to the need to recognize students as valuable contributors to conversations about policies and practices that have the potential to directly impact their lives. Youth have a long history of advocating for racial justice and are generally thought to be more inclined to speak out against racial injustices (Welton & Diem, 2020). By including students' voice, educational leaders and practitioners are positioned to gain their unique perspective that have the potential to disrupt mindsets, systems, practices, and beliefs that further create inequities and thus enriching educational decision making overall (González et al., 2017; Irizarry & Welton, 2014). Fine (2008) argues, "those who have been most systematically excluded, oppressed, or denied carry specifically revealing wisdoms about the history, structure, consequences, and the fracture points in unjust social arrangements" (p. 215). Thus, to continue to exclude the voice and contributions of youth from such critical conversations is a deliberate failure on the part of those who profess to favor racial justice and equity.

This study offers additional implications for policy and practice. It has been well documented that the history of schooling has been particularly harmful for some subgroups of individuals namely those who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and individuals with disabilities. Such a fact warrants a paradigm shift in P-12 education that reexamines how we center race and difference in our work so that we may engage and educate all students, but more specifically, those who have been historically and systematically left at the margins (Winn, 2018). While many educational institutions today recognize how systems have and continue to disparately impact certain students and are charged with disrupting such practices all too often, they are left without new alternatives leaving them to operate business as usual. Winn (2018) suggest that the necessary paradigm shift would be the implementation of restorative justice in schools. Davis (2016) describes restorative justice as being

Founded on a worldview that affirms our participation in a vast web of interrelatedness. It

sees crimes as acts that rupture the web, damaging the relationship not only between the

individuals directly involved but also vibrating out to injure relationships with families

and communities. The purpose of RJ is to repair harm caused to the whole of the web,

restoring relationships to move into a brighter future (p.4).

At the core of restorative justice is a commitment to and recognition of the humanity and

relationships of all individuals which offers great promise. However, despite the promise

research has demonstrated that many schools and districts have attempted to implement

restorative justice in schools in piecemeal ways. Winn (2018) explains, "restorative justice, as

being practiced in schools, is generally closer to the caboose than to the engine driver controlling

the destination" (p.22). Therefore, beyond schools merely being implicated to engage in a

paradigm shift rooted in restorative justice, they are equally implicated to invest monetarily and

through extensive professional development. One such way to do this would be to reallocate

funds that have been traditionally linked to positions that have been designed to uphold

exclusionary approaches to support professional learning. Furthermore, as school administrators

are usually the ones to decide if a student is excluded from school, districts should require that all

school administrators have been extensively trained in restorative justice as a condition of their

employment. Finally, in an effort to train classroom teachers and other staff, districts might

borrow from their approaches they use to train teachers in new curriculum. The caveat here, is

that districts have to see restorative justice or said differently, students' sense of belonging,

engagement, and safety as equally worth the investment.

One would be remiss to ask a group of Black boys to share their stories related to

exclusion and hear the ways in which these experiences have and continue to harm them and not

advocate for bringing an immediate end to school exclusion. As mentioned previously, offering a commitment to restorative justice through which all institutional actors are able to develop a restorative impulse (Winn, 2018) is one promising way to bring about an end to exclusionary discipline. As Winn (2018) argues

> If suspensions and exclusions are an option, they will be exercised, because they do not require anyone to change or challenge established views or practices. No one is required to sit in the difficult space of revisiting something that they have always seen done. The option of suspensions and expulsions compromises and even corrupts the restorative process (p.16)

The time is now to sit in the difficult space and dismantle the practice of excluding students!

Although this study urges for the eradication of exclusionary responses to student behavior, history has repeatedly revealed that progress and change are often slow processes. However, to stand idle in wait of change would be immoral. Rather, practitioners and policy makers must contend with the "meantime in between time" (Ross, 2021, p. 232) or what are the actions that can be taken right now to ameliorate Black suffering in schools while simultaneously improving the educational experiences of Black boys. To provide a more immediate redress we might borrow from higher education scholars who have already begun to critically attend to what it means to create safe spaces within institutions of higher education that attend to Black students' well-being despite the fact that anti-Black racism is prevalent in the larger society and individual institutions (Brooms et al., 2021; Ross, 2021). In other words, PK-12 institutions should be intentional in their efforts to develop counterspaces. Brooms and colleagues (2021) name that counterspaces are "often considered safe spaces" (p.278). By developing such spaces Black boys are able to cognitively engage with what it means to be Black in an anti-Black world

alongside peers and staff who identify in similar ways while simultaneously fostering affirming relationships. Moreover, these spaces might offer a sense of protection against the dehumanizing narratives and restrictive policies that have heretofore stifled Black boys' ability to make sense of themselves.

Extant literature has continuously shown that schools have not been safe spaces for Black boys. Time and time again schools and the actors within them have worked to position Black boys as deficient through dehumanizing narratives as this study demonstrates. Although a deficit does exist, it is not inherent within Black boys; rather the deficit is located within the schools they attend. Provided this fact, Black practitioners and policy makers are implicated to consider more liberatory solutions that make schooling for Black boys more survivable vis-à-vis anti-Black racism in the larger society and their schools. More specifically, Black practitioners and policy makers should consider what it might mean for Black educators and students to engage in a mass exodus from mainstreams institutions of U.S. schooling (Ross, 2021). Ross (2021) offers,

> This may look like an optional pre-K-12 alternative system of public schooling for students and educators racialized as Black, or a collective of independent cadres where groups of students and educators enact radically different forms of education (p.232).

Considering the initial intent of compulsory schooling was established without consideration for Black bodies it is difficult to offer solutions other than dismantle the U.S. schooling system as it is and start over. However, Black educational fugitive spaces offer a temporary fix *in the meantime in between time*.

Finally, there is much to learn from other fields of scholarship that can inform the ways by which to make schools more survivable in the meantime. For instance, this study points to a deliberate need to implement strategies that counterbalance school administrators' sole power

and autonomy to employ exclusionary responses to discipline. Expressed differently, schools must have a system of checks and balances to ensure that disciplinary power is not concentrated in the hands of one individual with potential to yield mistakes, inequities, and perpetuation of racist ideologies or motives. Literature from the medical discipline, for example, supports the recommendation of a system of checks and balance naming, "What accounts for these errors in physicians' reasoning? It's not incompetence or inadequate knowledge. It's the fact that physicians have a tendency to get stuck in particular modes of thinking" (Price, 2010, p. 50). School leaders and teachers, like medical providers, have the same potential to get stuck in particular modes of thinking or hold on to particular narratives about Black boys that would allow bias to creep into decision making (Bell McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Love et al., 2017). Therefore, implementing a system of checks and balance provides opportunity for school leaders to garner differing perspectives as a means to getting unstuck, uncovering mistakes, and considering possible alternatives. Additionally, it allows others to raise concerns as they surface.

Implications for Theory

This study offers a theoretical implication. Central to the practice theory of self and identity, namely Figured Worlds, is the understanding that people engage in identity (re)shaping processes through their participation in socially, culturally, and historically contingent activity systems (Bal & Arzubiaga, 2014; Holland & Lachiocotte, 2007). Although the theory recognizes the importance of these three dimensions: the social, cultural, and historical, by and large the theory alone is not able to interrogate "the specificity of the Black" (Dumas & Ross, 2016, p. 417). Given this shortcoming, it urges for a theoretical coupling with a theory that concerns itself with addressing "how antiblackness informs and facilitates racist ideology and institutional practice (Dumas & Ross, 2016, p. 417). One such theory might be BlackCrit (Dumas & Ross,

2016). Taken together, BlackCrit and Figured Worlds can be used to investigate the racial

ideologies and policies that target and recruit Black boys to a world of exclusion and inform their

identity. Finally, through a theoretical centering of Blackness, we are situated to analyze the

disparate outcomes in school discipline in more robust ways through the lenses of Blackness and

antiblackness (Hines et al., 2020). Dumas and Ross (2016) acknowledge for example, "Referring

to the current state of affairs as a "discipline gap" or as "disproportionate rates of discipline" may

serve to obfuscate the egregiousness and exact substance of antiblackness" (p.435).

Conclusion

This study examined the educational experiences of Black boys with particular interest in

the way in which these boys fashioned a sense of self within a figured world of exclusion. The

findings revealed that Black boys are often forced to make sense of their identities in the face of

pervasive and damaging societal scripts that position them as problems to be fixed or controlled.

Additionally, their self-fashioning is impeded by restrictive school environments that fail to

affirm their racial identities while waging disciplinary policies against them as a result of their

race. Until schools are able to think more expansively about meeting the needs of *all* students

and dismantling oppressive and exclusionary systems and practices, we will continue to see the

results of years past in which Black students are never free to author their lives on their terms.

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APPENDIX A

E-mail Solicitation to School Staff Seeking Student Participants

Dear (Insert District Staff Name),

I hope you are doing well. For my dissertation, I am exploring the experiences of Black male students who have been suspended or expelled over the course of their educational careers. I am seeking Black male students (with and without IEPs) who have had experiences with exclusionary discipline during their secondary years (e.g., Middle School and high school).

In order to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of students I am seeking your support. Can you forward on the message (see below) to the parents/guardians of students who self-identify as African American/Black males as determined by the school's information system and are in grade 7 or beyond? Parents of students, or those eighteen (18) years of age, who are interested in participating can contact me directly.

My ultimate goal in doing this study is to gain a better and more in-depth understanding of these students' experiences in hopes of improving services and advocacy provided to them and envision more emancipatory and joyous educational experiences.

Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns that you may have.

Thank you for your assistance in this process.

Larry Love
Doctoral Candidate
Special Education
University of Wisconsin – Madison

APPENDIX B

E-mail Solicitation to Parent/Guardian Seeking Student Participants

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Larry Love, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin - Madison. Your student is invited to participate in a research study. If your child has experienced school exclusion such as suspension or expulsion, I am interested in learning about their experiences and perspectives of these moments in their educational career. Students with and without individualized education plans are strongly encouraged to participate if they so desire. **Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you say yes now, your child is free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision to let your child participate or not or withdrawing will have no effect on you or your child's current or former relationship with the district.**

For this study students will be asked to answer a series of questions related to their experience. Interviews will take place virtually using a UW-Madison approved platform given the current COVID-19 pandemic and my desire to keep participants safe. The interviews will last approximately 60 - 90 minutes. Students may be asked to participate in one follow-up interview to clarify any questions that I may have after reviewing the first interview. The follow up interviews should take no longer than 60 minutes. To prioritize confidentiality and comfort, the interviews will take place at a time that works best for the student so that they can be in an environment in which they feel they can speak freely. The student's name, school, as well as responses to questions will be confidential. Again, parents or student can choose to end participation at any time without penalty.

By participating in this study, your child will help education researchers gain a better understanding of disciplinary moments in hopes of improving services and advocacy provided to students and create more inclusive and joyous educational experiences.

If you are willing to have your student participate in this study or have any questions, please contact Larry Love via e-mail llove@wisc.edu or phone (608) 520-0601.

If your student is 18 years or older, you should pass along the information and the student should contact the researcher (Larry Love) directly if they are interested in participating in this study.

I look forward to hearing and learning from you,

Larry Love
Doctoral Candidate
Special Education
University of Wisconsin – Madison

APPENDIX C

E-mail Solicitation (Staff Participants)

Greetings,

My name is Larry Love and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Wisconsin – Madison. I am looking for participants for a study that seeks to explore the influence of exclusionary discipline policies and practices on the educational experiences of African American male students.

Eligible participants for this study will:
1. Be employed by the District
2. Able to discuss or have had experiences with school discipline policies and practices in the district.

To indicate interest or to ask any questions about the study please e-mail Larry Love at llove@wisc.edu or my academic advisor and the Principal Investigator Dr. Melinda Leko at leko@wisc.edu.

All my best,

Larry Love
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D

Research Participant Information and Consent Form (Staff)

Title of the Study: Hear my Cry: A Phenomenological Exploration of Black Boys Experiences with Exclusionary School Discipline.

Principal Investigator: Melinda Leko, PhD (e-mail: leko@wisc.edu)

Description of the Research
The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of Black male students experiences with school discipline. You have been asked to participate as a result of your role in the district and because you may have insights and experiences pertaining to exclusionary discipline policies and practices in this district.

WHO MAY PARTICIPATE (INCLUSION CRITERIA)?
Eligible participants for this study will:
1. Be employed by the Madison Metropolitan School District
2. Able to discuss or have had experiences with school discipline policies and practices in the district.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

INTERVIEWS
If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in one (1) or two (2) individual interviews. Each interview session will last between 60-90 minutes. The individual interviews will be audio recorded.

If you decide that you do not want specific detailed information pertaining to yourself obtained from an interview to be made public, you have the right to let the researchers know. At your request, we will remove such statements from our notes. They will not be used in publication.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. During the interview you may opt to skip questions for any reason. Even if you say yes now, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision to participate has no bearing on your employment status.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?
The only foreseeable risk may be in the form of confidentiality breach. However, we will minimize this risk by using secure data collection and storage.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?
Although there are no direct benefits to participation in this study, your contribution to this research may not only provide insight for you and your participating school or district but may also inform the experiences and practices of students and educators around the country striving for equitable schooling experiences for all.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?
Additionally, to maintain privacy and confidentiality of our records, we will not use participants' names or the names of the schools, the other participants, or students. The recordings and notes that will be taken in the study will be stored in secured places and computers in a locked office. Dr. Leko and the key personnel will be the only people who can access those places and information. If you were to reveal any personal, sensitive or identifiable information, it will be removed from research records. Per campus policy, transcripts of the interviews will be maintained for at least seven (7) years after conclusion of study.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator Melinda Leko at leko@wisc.edu.

If you are not satisfied with responses from the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education Research and Social & Behavior Science IRB office at (608) 263-2320.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print) _____

_____   _____
Signature   Date

_____ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications **without** using my name.

_____ I give my permission to be audio recorded.

APPENDIX E

Research Participant Information and Consent Form (Parent)

Title of the Study: Hear my Cry: A Phenomenological Exploration of Black Boys Experiences with Exclusionary School Discipline.

Principal Investigator: Melinda Leko, PhD (e-mail: leko@wisc.edu)

Description of the Research
The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of Black male students experiences with school discipline. Your child has been asked to participate because of their experiences as an African American student attending a school that uses exclusionary practices (e.g., suspension and expulsion).

WHO MAY PARTICIPATE (INCLUSION CRITERIA)?
Eligible participants for this study will:
      1. Identify as a Black or African American Male,
      2. Have had experiences with exclusionary discipline
      3. Currently or previously attended a school in the Madison Metropolitan School District and have completed at least the 6th grade.

WHAT WILL PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

INTERVIEWS
If you consent to your student participating in this research, they will be asked to participate in one (1) or two (2) individual interviews. Each interview session will last between 60-90 minutes. The individual interviews will be audio recorded.

If you decide that you do not want specific detailed information pertaining to your student obtained from an interview to be made public, you have the right to let the researchers know. At your request, we will remove such statements from our notes. They will not be used in publication.

During the interview the student may opt to skip questions for any reason.

Records Review
In addition to participating in interviews students records will be reviewed. In particular, the researcher will review each of the following (i) the students transcripts, (ii) attendance, (iii) behavior referrals and outcomes, and (iv) individualized education plan (IEP) if applicable. This information will be gathered one time and will be used in conjunction with the student's interview and observational data to develop a more complete understanding of the student's school experiences.

No information from the student's records will be used in a way that will allow for the student's identity to be determined.

Observations

Lastly, students may be observed in the school setting. While instruction is virtual, these observations will take place in the student's virtual classroom and will occur over a period of approximately 9 weeks (e.g., one quarter). Observations may occur in all virtual classes. These observations will allow us to more fully understand the student's experiences as described during the interview(s). We will pay particular attention to how teachers and staff as well as other students interact with your student.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO MY CHILD?

The following are the potential risk to participation in this study

- Confidentiality breach.
- Participants may be upset by aspects of the research.
- Participants may reveal personal, sensitive, or identifiable information when responding to open-ended questions.
- Participants may reveal illegal behaviors due to the nature of the questions.
- Participants may become fatigued or frustrated due to the length of the study.

HOW WILL RISKS BE MINIMIZED?

The following steps will be taken to minimize risk to participation in this study.

- Data will be stored securely according to campus policy; when necessary, identifiable or sensitive information will be stored separately from other study data and participant identities will be masked in publication.
- Participants will be informed about all aspects of the study during consent and have the option to skip or withdraw from any activities that make them upset or uncomfortable.
- Personal, sensitive, or identifiable information will be removed from the research record(s).
- If a participant reveals illegal behavior, it will be removed from the research record.
- Participants will be informed of the approximate length of study activities during the consent process and will be offered the opportunity to take breaks during the study activities if needed.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO MY CHILD?

Although there are no direct benefits to participation in this study, your student's contribution to this research may not only provide insight for you, the student, and your participating school or district but may also inform the experiences and practices of students and educators around the country striving for equitable schooling experiences for all.

HOW WILL MY CHILD'S CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

To maintain privacy and confidentiality of our records, we will not use participants' names or the names of the schools, the other participants, or students. The recordings and notes that will be taken in the study will be stored in secured places and computers in a locked office. Dr. Leko and the key personnel will be the only people who can access those places and information. If the child reveals anything where child abuse or harm to self or others is suspected, confidentiality

may be have to be broken and reported to appropriate officials. Per campus policy, transcripts of the interviews will be maintained for at least seven (7) years after conclusion of study.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you say yes now, your child is free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision to let your child participate or not, or withdrawing will have no effect on you or your child's current or former relationship with the district.

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research you should contact the Principal Investigator Melinda Leko at leko@wisc.edu.

If you are not satisfied with responses from the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education Research and Social & Behavior Science IRB office at (608) 263-2320.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your child's participation in this research and voluntarily consent to let your child participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of **STUDENT** (please print) _____
Name of **Parent** (please print) _____

_____   _____
Signature   Date
_____ I give my permission for my student to be quoted directly in publications **without** using their name.

_____ I give my permission for my student to be audio recorded.

APPENDIX F

Research Participant Information and Consent Form (Students over 18 years)

Title of the Study: Hear my Cry: An Exploration of Black Boys Experiences with Exclusionary School Discipline.

Principal Investigator: Melinda Leko, PhD (e-mail: Leko@wisc.edu)

Description of the Research
The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of Black male students experiences with school discipline. You have been asked to participate because of your experiences as an African American student attending a school that uses exclusionary practices (e.g., suspension and expulsion).

WHO MAY PARTICIPATE (INCLUSION CRITERIA)?
Eligible participants for this study will:
    1. Identify as a Black or African American Male,
    2. Have had experiences with exclusionary discipline
    3. Currently or previously attended a school in the Madison Metropolitan School District and have completed at least the 6th grade.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

INTERVIEWS
If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in one (1) or two (2) individual interviews. Each interview session will last between 60-90 minutes. The individual interviews will be audio recorded.

If you decide that you do not want specific detailed information pertaining to yourself obtained from an interview to be made public, you have the right to let the researchers know. At your request, we will remove such statements from our notes. They will not be used in publication.

During the interview you may opt to skip questions for any reason.

Records Review
In addition to participating in interviews students records will be reviewed. In particular, the researcher will review each of the following (i) the students transcripts, (ii) attendance, (iii) behavior referrals and outcomes, and (iv) individualized education plan (IEP) if applicable. This information will be gathered one time and will be used in conjunction with your interview and observational data to develop a more complete understanding of your school experiences.

No information from your records will be used in a way that will allow for your identity to be determined.

Observations

Lastly, students may be observed in the school setting, if applicable. While instruction is virtual, these observations will take place in the student's virtual classroom and will occur over a period of approximately 9 weeks (e.g., one quarter). Observations may occur in all virtual classes. These observations will allow us to more fully understand the student's experiences as described during the interview(s). We will pay particular attention to how teachers and staff as well as other students interact with you.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

The following are the potential risk to participation in this study

- Confidentiality breach.
- Participants may be upset by aspects of the research.
- Participants may reveal personal, sensitive, or identifiable information when responding to open-ended questions.
- Participants may reveal illegal behaviors due to the nature of the questions.
- Participants may become fatigued or frustrated due to the length of the study.

HOW WILL RISKS BE MINIMIZED?

The following steps will be taken to minimize risk to participation in this study.

- Data will be stored securely according to campus policy; when necessary, identifiable or sensitive information will be stored separately from other study data and participant identities will be masked in publication.
- Participants will be informed about all aspects of the study during consent and have the option to skip or withdraw from any activities that make them upset or uncomfortable.
- Personal, sensitive, or identifiable information will be removed from the research record(s).
- If a participant reveals illegal behavior, it will be removed from the research record.
- Participants will be informed of the approximate length of study activities during the consent process and will be offered the opportunity to take breaks during the study activities if needed.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

Although there are no direct benefits to participation in this study, your contribution to this research may not only provide insight for you and your participating school or district but may also inform the experiences and practices of students and educators around the country striving for equitable schooling experiences for all.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

Additionally, to maintain privacy and confidentiality of our records, we will not use participants' names or the names of the schools, the other participants, or students. The recordings and notes that will be taken in the study will be stored in secured places and computers in a locked office. Dr. Leko and the key personnel will be the only people who can access those places and information. If you reveal, or the study team suspects potential harm to self or others, confidentiality may be have to be broken and reported to appropriate officials. Per campus

policy, transcripts of the interviews will be maintained for at least seven (7) years after conclusion of study.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you say yes now, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision to participate or not, or withdrawing will have no effect on your current or former relationship with the district.

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research you should contact the Principal Investigator Melinda Leko at leko@wisc.edu.

If you are not satisfied with responses from the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education Research and Social & Behavior Science IRB office at (608) 263-2320.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print) _____

_____   _____
Signature   Date
_____ I give my permission to be quote directly in publications **without** using my name.

_____ I give my permission to be audio recorded.

APPENDIX G

Student Assent Form

Title of the Study: Hear my Cry: An Exploration of Black Boys Experiences with Exclusionary School Discipline.

You are being asked to be a part of a research study focusing on students in grade 7 or above. We are asking you to take part in this study to learn about African American boys thoughts, feelings, and experiences with school discipline issues such as suspension and expulsion.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be a part of our study, we will ask you some questions about your thoughts, feelings, and experiences about school and school discipline. After the first interview I may ask to chat with you again to get more details about some things you've shared. I will only need to interview you up to two times. The interviews will last between 60-90 minutes and we will take breaks if you need. Throughout the process we may visit your classrooms to see how things happen in your school. While instruction is virtual, these observations will take place in your virtual classroom and will occur over a period of approximately 9 weeks (e.g., one quarter). Observations may occur in all virtual classes (if you and your teacher agree). These observations will allow us to more fully understand your experiences as described during the interview(s). We will pay particular attention to how teachers and staff as well as other students interact with you. For example, I may want to understand the classroom rules and expectations. Finally, we will review each of the following (i) your transcripts, (ii) attendance, (iii) behavior referrals and outcomes, and (iv) individualized education plan (IEP) if applicable. This information will be gathered one time and will be used in conjunction with your interview and observational data to develop a more complete understanding of your school experiences.

What you will gain or lose from the study: There is nothing you will gain or lose from this study other than the time you take to help us. Your participation in this research study may help educators better support African American boys in school.

What are the risk in this study: There are a few potential risk, they are:
- Confidentiality breach.
- You may become upset or uncomfortable by some of the question.
- You may reveal personal, sensitive, or identifiable information when responding to open-ended questions.
- You may become tired or frustrated due to the length of the study.

How will we help with the risk? We will help minimize the risk by doing the following:
- Data will be stored securely and we won't use your name when we write about the study. You can choose a pseudonym (fake name) if you want or we will create one for you.
- You can skip questions and return to them later, or you can choose not to answer questions that make you feel too upset or uncomfortable. You may also ask to stop participation

- If you reveal personal information we will take it out of our notes.
- We will give you ask many breaks that you may need.

Your answers will be kept private: We will not share any information about whether or not you took part in this study. Also, no one outside of the research team will ever know how you answered any of the questions. However, given the questions being asked if child abuse or harm to self or others is suspected, I may have to tell someone.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is your choice, and you do not have to participate if you do not want to. You can also decide that you do not want to continue at any time, even if you have already started. Withdrawing or not participating will have no effect on their current or former relationship within the district.

If you have questions: If you have questions, you can talk to Larry Love (608) 520-0601 or llove@wisc.edu. If you want to talk to the person in charge of the study contact Dr. Melinda Leko (608) 263-5751 or leko@wisc.edu. After the study is over, if you still have questions or concerns about the study, you can talk to your parents or your principal, and they will either answer your questions or call Dr. Melinda Leko to get answers for you.

I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I agree to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

APPENDIX H

Sample Semi-Structured Student Interview Protocol

1) Can you tell me your name, age, and grade?
2) Tell me a little about yourself. [if needed: interest, strengths, weaknesses, how you view yourself, etc.]
3) Tell me about your early school years, what were they like? Did you enjoy school?
   a) How do feel about school now? What changed?
4) What does it mean to do school well?
   a) How do you know?
   b) Without using names can you give me examples of (groups of students) who do school well and who does not?
   c) What makes you think that?
5) What words would you use to describe yourself? (can be excluded depending on responses from Q2.)
6) What are some messages you hear about Black boys? Where do you hear these messages?
7) How are Black boys viewed in your school/district?
   a) How do you know this?
8) How does it feel to be you in school? (what does it feel like to go to this school?)
9) How do you think other students would describe you? Why?
   a) Is that how you would like to be seen?
   b) What do you do to make them see you in this way?
10) What words do your teachers use to describe you?
    a) Why do you think they see you this way?
    b) Is that how you would like to be seen?
11) Are there adults in the building with whom you have strong positive relationships with?
    a) Can you describe who these people are.
    b) Why do you think you have such positive relationships with them?
    c) What are their expectations for you…?
12) Do you or have you ever had an IEP? If so, can you explain what your IEP was for?
13) Have there been times that you felt like you could not be yourself at school?
    a) Why/what happened? Can you give me an example?
14) Tell me about a time when you were removed from the classroom to learn in another environment?
15) How do you know how you are expected to behave in school?
    a) How did you learn this?
16) What happens when rules are not followed?
    a) Is this true for all students?
17) Are there groups of students who are more likely to get in trouble at school?
    a) Why do you think that is?
18) Can you tell me about a time you were suspended or expelled from school? With detail tell me what happened and what the consequence was?
    a) How did this impact you?
       i) How were you treated when you returned?
       ii) Did anything change?

      iii) So what are your thoughts about Suspension or Expulsion

19) What advice would you give to a new Black student about being successful at school? Why would you give this advice?

20) What were some challenges you faced while in school?
    a)   How were you able to deal with these challenges?

21) In what ways, if any, is the experience of school different for a Black boy?

APPENDIX I

Sample Semi-Structured Staff Interview Protocol

Building Rapport
1) Can you tell me about yourself, including your name, roll, and how many years you've been in the district?
2) What inspired you to do this work?

Generating an Institutional Frame
3) Can you describe your schools or the district's position pertaining to exclusionary discipline?
4) Can you talk to me about the policies in place currently to respond to exclusionary discipline?
5) What types of shift have you seen or experienced during your time as (insert role) in the district as it pertains to exclusionary discipline
   a) What do you think were the affordances and constraints of those changes?
6) What is the narrative about Black boys in this district?
   a) What contributes to that narrative?
   b) In speaking with Black boys who are participating in this study, they share that they are often seen as "bad" or "trouble-makers", from your perspective, how do these labels become disproportionately affixed to Black boys?
7) Explain the process that occurs when a student get suspended? Expelled? In this district
   a) Are there any notable patterns in the data pertaining to who is suspended and expelled? If so, can you explain the patterns and what do you think contributes to those patterns?
8) In several interviews with students they forwarded this idea of "always being watched" can you talk to me about how schools might contribute to this feeling?
9) How do you approach your work with Black Boys or what informs your pedagogical stance as you engage with them?
   a) What made you choose such an approach?
   b) What was your school experience like?
10) What is the narrative around the BEP
11) What supports or accountability measures are in place for those who have demonstrated a over reliance on exclusionary practices?
12) How are school staff made aware of/trained on the policies in place regarding discipline?

Closing
13) Is there anything else you think I should know about the district and the work around exclusionary discipline?
14) Are there other staff with whom you think I should speak as it pertains to school discipline policies and procedures?
15) Would you be open to a follow up conversation if I have additional questions?

APPENDIX J

Observation Protocol

Date: Time: _____ to _____	Setting:
Descriptive Notes[1]	Reflective Notes

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[1] Most observations occurred via zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic; as a result, descriptive notes focused primarily on spoken language.