

TOWARDS A CRITICAL RACE DISCOURSE FRAMEWORK FOR ADDRESSING
DISCIPLINE DISPARITIES FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Dena K. Keeling

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Approved by:

Eric Houck

Dana Thompson-Dorsey

Gwen Roulhac

Jocelyn Glazier

Tony Watlington

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ABSTRACT

Dena K. Keeling: Towards a Critical Race Discourse Framework for Addressing Discipline
Disparities for African American Students
(Under the direction of Eric A. Houck and Dana N. Thompson-Dorsey)

Across the nation, African American students are suspended at rates well above those of Caucasian students and disproportionate to their representation in the total school population (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009). The pattern of disproportionate suspension rates for African American students has persisted despite over 40 years of research. Although researchers have examined other factors, race is consistently correlated with disproportionate discipline sanctions, particularly for African American students. Solórzano and Yasso (2002) stated that racism and other forms of subordination permeate school structures and processes and that discourse maintains the structures and processes of inequity. The purpose of this study was to explore subtle racial bias as an explanation for racial discipline disparities, through an examination of the discourse of educational leadership and policy in the context of school discipline, and to utilize the analysis towards the end of developing a framework to address the disproportionate suspension of African American students.

The participants in this study are from two middle schools, with disproportionate suspension rates for African American students, in one urban school district in North Carolina. Semi-structured interviews with seven teachers and two administrators, one from each school,

along with district discipline policy serve as the data sources for this critical race discourse analysis. A conceptual framework guides this qualitative study. The framework demonstrates the relationship between subtle racial bias, the discourse of educational leadership and discipline policy, and the enactment of racial discipline disparities for African American students. The study investigates subtle racial bias in discipline within four domains, based on the themes and tenets of critical race theory.

The researcher found that the discourse of the district discipline policy and the school administrators in this study, aligned with each of the domains of the conceptual framework, suggesting a relationship among subtle racial bias, racialized discourse and ideologies and the enactment of discipline disparities for African American students. The study adds to the educational research and the practice of educational leadership by presenting a framework for analyzing subtle racial bias in school discipline and addressing discipline disproportionality for African American students.

To the Lord God, my God. I Chronicles 28:20
You put this work in me and I could not have brought it forth without You, so first and foremost,
I thank you and dedicate this back to you.

To my children, Parker, Erin, and Brother
Thank you for the hugs and kisses and prayers when I felt overwhelmed. Thank for being
understanding when I needed to write. You three are the reason I did not give up.
I love you so much!

To my mother, Patricia Cauthen
110% I could not have done this without you. Thank you for all your help, your prayers, your
support, not just in the completion of this work, but throughout my life. It is because of
everything you've done that I can even be here. If I haven't said it enough, know now that I
appreciate you and I love you!

To my father, the good Reverend Dr. Terrence Keeling
Thank you for being a calm in my storm. Thank you for allowing the Lord to use you to talk me
through this journey. Thank you for introducing me to social justice before I even knew what
that meant. I believe that part of your calling has been to help me understand mine, and for that,
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me and keeping me. Thank for being a provider and for strengthening me. Thank you for showing me who You are. Joshua 1:5

PREFACE

The researcher first became interested in investigating racial discipline disparities 10 years ago while working as a school counselor at a middle school. The researcher was serving on a committee that was charged with overseeing a newly implemented school wide behavior program, Positive Behavior Intervention and Support, or PBIS for short. Every committee member had a role, mine was data coordinator, and the researcher was given the responsibility of entering, disaggregating, and presenting the suspension data to the faculty. The researcher handled this responsibility with all due diligence. She would go through her presentation slides, rattling off which grade level had the most suspensions, what time of day they occurred, where in the building most office referrals were generated, along with her speculations as to why the data looked as it did and suggestions for improvements. Her third year in this role, a new In School Suspension (ISS) coordinator was hired and joined the committee. The administrators at the school asked the researcher to work with him on some projects so, her time being more flexible than his, the researcher would travel down to ISS with data, pen, and paper in hand. As the researcher sat in his classroom, he began telling her about the students who were, “serving ISS.” Even though the researcher had been at the school for many years before the ISS coordinator, he began introducing her to the students, introducing her to their stories, their parents’ stories, and the story of their communities. Suddenly the discipline data was no longer just numbers. Instead it was hopes and dreams and educational experiences that weren’t always supportive of these visions. It was voices and faces and they were all African American.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Racial Discipline Gap

In 2014 the US Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights released findings that while African American children make up 19% of preschool enrollment, they account for 47% of children receiving more than one out-of-school suspension (US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014). What made this report shocking was the discovery that discipline disparities begin as early as preschool; however, the overrepresentation of African American students receiving suspensions is not a new finding. In 1975, the Children's Defense Fund issued a report that contained two key findings. The first finding was in the 1972-1973 school year, over one million students, or 3.7% of all students, were removed from their school district due to school suspensions. The second key finding in the Children's Defense Fund (1975) report was, in a sample of 2000 school districts in the United States during the 1972-1973 year, one out of every eight African American students was suspended at least once compared to one in every sixteen Caucasian students (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). The findings brought attention not only to the extensive use of suspensions among school districts, but also to a disparity in the use of suspensions for African American students. While African American students were suspended at about twice the rate of Caucasian students in the 1970's, today they are over three times as likely to be suspended (Bloomenthal, 2011). The disparity exists despite the finding that African American students show no greater propensity for disruptive behavior than their Caucasian peers (Butler, Lewis, Moore, & Scott, 2012).

Despite over 40 years of research, researchers continue to document the pattern of racial disparities in discipline. This study holds the position that in order to disrupt the over 40-year pattern of discipline disparities for African American students, researchers must place race and racial bias at the center of the research analysis. In this chapter, the researcher will illustrate the extent of discipline disparities with national data and detail the impact of disproportionate suspensions, not only for African American students, but also for an educational system which views itself as advancing equity. This chapter will also explain what the researcher sought to accomplish by engaging in this study and will conclude with a discussion of how the study may be relevant to research on discipline disparities and to educational leaders.

Statement of the Problem

Across the nation, African American students are suspended at rates well above students of other racial/ethnic groups and disproportionate to their representation in the total school population (Skiba et al., 2009). Discipline disproportionality exists for African American students even when socioeconomic indicators are held constant (Skiba et al., 2009). Butler et al. (2012), in their study of discipline sanctions, tested for positive correlations between race and socioeconomics and the number of days students are assigned out-of-school suspension (OSS). They found at the elementary school level the number of days students were assigned OSS was significantly correlated to race and not to socioeconomic status. Raffaele Mendez and Knoff (2003) found that while 72% of Hispanic students and 78% of African American students in their study were on free and reduced lunch, far fewer Hispanic students were suspended than African American students, leading them to conclude that socioeconomic status alone could not account for disproportionate suspension rates. This disparity also transcends grade level and the gender of students. Skiba et al. (2009) found that African American elementary school students were two

to three times more likely to be suspended than Caucasian students, while Bloomenthal (2011) found that among middle school students across the country, 28.3% of African American males and 18% of African American females were suspended in 2006 compared to 10% of Caucasian males and 4% of Caucasian females. Blake, Butler, Lewis, and Darensbourg (2011) noted that African American females are more likely to be suspended than Caucasian and Hispanic female students and Raffaele Mendez and Knoff (2003) pointed out that across grade levels, 26% of African American males and 14% of African American females experienced at least one suspension compared to 12% of Caucasian males and 5% of Caucasian females. The disparity cannot be attributed to school size or urban setting (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011) and it exists despite a school climate of high academic expectations and support.

The impact of discipline disproportionality. Skiba et al. (2009) stated it's important for school personnel to understand the impact that expulsions and suspension have on African American students. The research shows students who have been suspended are at an increased risk of repeating a grade. Raffaele Mendez (2003) found having more than one suspension in the sixth grade makes students less likely to graduate with their peers, while Bloomenthal (2011) found suspensions are a predictor of dropping out of school later. Being suspended at disproportionate rates thereby excludes African American students from access to educational opportunities and to achieving academic excellence compared to their peers.

Higher suspension rates also directly correlate to higher juvenile prison rates for African American students. This finding has led researchers to coin the term 'school-to-prison pipeline.' The examination of the link between school discipline and what is now termed the school-to-prison pipeline is not a new research concept. Fenning and Rose (2007) discussed the concept of the school-to-prison pipeline and the need for equity in schoolwide discipline policies. Cobb

(2009) pointed to an increase in the presence of School Resource Officers (SROs) as leading to increased referrals to the juvenile court system and a rise in juveniles being arrested for nonviolent offenses in schools.

Discipline disproportionality has implications not only for African American students, but also for the entire educational system. According to Skiba et al. (2009), the main purposes of school discipline are to ensure the safety of those in the school, to maintain an environment conducive to learning, to reduce future misbehavior, and to teach students the skills they need to successfully function within the school and a democratic society. Many believe suspensions are reserved for more severe behaviors and rule violations. In actuality, school suspensions are utilized for a wide range of behaviors, not just those that jeopardize school safety. Losen and Skiba (2010), in a review of studies on discipline, found 5% of out-of-school suspensions were for serious and dangerous infractions, such as weapons and drugs. The other 95% fell into one of two categories, disruption or other. Students who scored below the 50th percentile in reading achievement were suspended at higher rates than those who scored above the 50th percentile (Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012). Thus, those students in need of the greatest academic interventions become the very students with decreased instructional time. Schools with higher suspension rates also tend to have lower test scores than schools with lower suspension rates (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba et al., 2009). Overall, high suspension rates lead to increased dropout rates (Raffaele Mendez, 2003), grade retentions, and academic failure (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003), school disengagement (Bryan et al., 2012), negative school climate (Bryan et al., 2012), and negative attitudes towards school by students (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Finally, there is a lack of evidence to support the assumption that suspensions lead to a reduction in future misbehavior. Skiba et al.

(2009) found students suspended in elementary school are more likely to receive office referrals and to be suspended in secondary school. Despite the findings that suspensions appear to be ineffective at achieving the intended goals, the use of suspensions continues to be the primary method of dealing with African American students whose behaviors have been deemed as failing to meet expectations.

Although schools are seen as transmitters of egalitarian principles and education as a means of overcoming inequities, schools are not immune to the reinforcement of racial disparities. Skiba et al. (2009) pointed out that there tends to be inconsistencies in how suspensions are used in schools, even within the same district. Some of the variations can be attributed to the types of behaviors students who attend different schools engage in, yet an equally strong factor lies not within the students themselves, but within school and classroom characteristics. Skiba et al. (2009) went on to conclude school suspensions are better predicted by school culture than student behavior and attitude, and they stated, “one could argue from this finding that if students are interested in reducing their chances of being suspended, they will be better off by transferring to a school with a lower suspension rate than by improving their attitudes or reducing their misbehavior” (p.3). Education leaders should have a vested interest in examining the role that discipline policies and practices play in creating an environment that contributes to racially disproportionate discipline knowing the negative effects suspensions have on the learning process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore subtle racial bias as an explanation for racial discipline disparities through an examination of the discourse of educational leadership and policy in the context of school discipline, towards the end of developing a framework to address

the disproportionate suspension of African American students. Although much of the research and literature has examined discipline disparities from the perspective of teachers, discipline disproportionality does not rest solely in African American students being more likely to receive an office referral at the classroom level. It is also that those discipline referrals are more likely to result in suspensions. A number of researchers have acknowledged the lack of focus on school administrators and the effects of unconscious racial bias as gaps in the research on discipline disproportionality. Butler et al. (2012) stated few researcher have conducted empirical research to study unconscious racial bias as the explanation for discipline disparities and Losen (2011) stated unconscious racial bias may affect the choice of discipline policy and practice. Although teachers make disciplinary referrals, school administrators ultimately have the discretion to decide what consequences students receive. African American students are underrepresented in the use of all administrative consequences, except suspensions and expulsions (Skiba et al., 2009). It is the measure of discipline school administrators utilize when they receive office discipline referrals that directly impacts racial discipline disparities. Skiba, Honer, Chung, Rausch, May, and Tobin (2011) pointed out that placing attention on the role of administrative consequences and observing administrative interactions were essential to understanding the variables that contribute to racial disparities in school discipline. This study shifts the focus of the research on discipline disproportionality to school administrators and the subtle racial bias in the structures of school discipline.

Losen (2011) stated if we work from the premise that subtle racial bias plays a role in the disproportionate disciplining of African American students, it is unlikely it would manifest as blatant different treatment. Instead, we might expect to see “subtle bias reflected in sizeable disparities (Losen, 2011, p. 391).” Solórzano and Yasso (2002) asserted that racism and other

forms of subtle subordination permeate school structures and processes and that discourse maintains these inequity. Often the discourse is not overt; instead it is unconscious, subtle, and although pervasive, it is seldom investigated (Solórzano, 1997). Van Dijk (1993a) urged researchers engaged in the study of racism to take a closer look at discourse data and discursive aspects to gain more insight into the subtle structures and processes of racism. A conceptual framework guides the study. The framework fuses elements of aversive racism and the themes and tenets of critical race theory with discursive strategies utilized in the critical discourse analysis of racism to demonstrate the relationship between subtle racial bias, educational discourse, and racial discipline disparities for African American students

The research questions for this study seek to explore the discourse of school administrators and gain an understanding of how this discourse influences disciplinary practices.

The research questions are as follows:

1. What shared ideologies, assumptions, and associations about African American students, in the context school discipline, are reflected in the discourse of educational leadership and discipline policy?
2. How might this discourse be linked to the enactment of racial discipline disparities for African American students?
3. What contribution can an analysis of the discourse of educational leadership make towards the creation of an analytic framework for addressing racial discipline disparities?

Definition of Terms

African American students: African American students refer to Black students of American descent. Ogbu and Simons (1998) makes the distinction between voluntary and

involuntary minorities. They classified Black Americans as involuntary minorities because slave owners brought them to America unwillingly. While the use of the term and focus on African American students does not discount the educational inequities faced by other students who may identify as Black, such as those of Caribbean or African descent, I do believe because of a history that has resulted in persistent discrimination against involuntary minorities for generations (Ogbu & Simons, 1998), the experiences of African American students are different from the experiences of other Black students.

Ahistoricism: Critical race theory insists that an analysis of race and racism in education be placed in historical context (Solórzano, 1997).

Aversive racism theory: The fundamental premise of aversive racism theory is many people consciously support egalitarian principles and do not view themselves as prejudiced, yet harbor unconscious negative feelings and beliefs about African Americans. This conflict in conscious values and unconscious feelings presents in subtle, discriminatory behavior (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005).

Colorblind, race neutral, objectivity: Colorblind, race neutral, and objectivity are terms utilized in critical race theory which speak to the nonrecognition of race. According to Gotanda (1991), nonrecognition is a technique which appears to be strictly procedural and suggests that a neutral and objective method of decision making is being utilized.

Critical discourse analysis: Critical discourse analysis places the role of discourse at the center of the analysis and seeks to reveal the association between discourse and power (van Dijk, 1993a).

Critical race discourse analysis: Critical race discourse analysis is a methodology created by Briscoe and Khalifa. Briscoe and Khalifa (2013) described their use of a critical race

discourse analysis as incorporating aspects of critical race methodology and being informed by a discourse analysis of power.

Critical race theory: Critical race theory is a framework for the analysis of race and racism (Lynn & Parker, 2006). First initiated in the legal realm, Ladson-Billings and Tate expanded this theory to examine the role of race and racism in education.

Dominant discourse: The dominant discourse is discourse that is given privileged status over the voice of people of color. The dominant discourse is used to subordinate people of color by advancing shared norms and values and neutrality but that implicitly makes assumptions about people of color based on negative stereotypes (Solórzano & Yasso, 2002).

Enactment: To exercise and reproduce racial inequities. Racial inequities are enacted when discourse is directed against racial minorities and social cognitions support discriminatory practice (van Dijk, 1993a).

Exclusionary discipline: Exclusionary discipline is the removal of students from the educational environment as a consequence for behaving in a manner that breaks school and/or district conduct standards (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010). Exclusionary discipline includes in-school suspensions (ISS), out-of-school suspensions (OSS), and expulsions. For this study, exclusionary discipline is limited to in-school and out-of-school suspensions.

Ideologies: Ideologies are a set of beliefs that justify social arrangements. Critical race theorists hold that ideologies are used to justify the dominance of one race over another and to camouflage power and privilege (Solórzano, 1997).

Power: In critical discourse analysis, power is defined in terms of control, not as it relates to the individual, but as it relates to groups and institutions. Those groups and institutions with power have privileged access to and control of resources, including discourse and

communication (van Dijk, 2001).

Relative rate ratio: Compares the proportion of African American students suspended to the proportion of Caucasian students suspended (Porowski, O’Conner, & Pasa, 2014). In this study, a relative rate ratio greater than 1 will indicate discipline disproportionality:

$$\text{Relative rate ratio for Black students} = \frac{(\text{Number of out-of-school suspensions} + \text{expulsions for Black students}) / \text{Total number of Black students}}{(\text{Number of out-of-school suspensions} + \text{expulsions for White students}) / \text{Total number of White students}}$$

Subtle racial bias: Subtle racial bias may be used interchangeable with implicit bias. Implicit bias refers to the unconscious biases that people hold that influence their perception, decision-making and behaviors (Staats, 2014). Implicit biases are defined as being unconscious and outside of the individual’s awareness and control. This researcher utilizes the term subtle racial bias, instead of implicit bias, to denote that racial bias does not occur on a completely unconscious level. Instead, there exists a conscious awareness to make the outward expressions of racial bias subtle.

The absolute right to exclude: A central premise of whiteness as property that gives Whites exclusive rights of possession and use and disposition, as well as the right to exclude those who are not White from these rights and privileges (Harris, 1993).

Whiteness as property: A central tenet of critical race theory that views those who possess white racial identity as beneficiaries of privileges and rights, much like the rights of property ownership (Harris, 1993).

Whiteness as the standard: The notion of whiteness as the norm. It is this standard which is set by the dominant White culture and against minorities that are assessed and measured

(Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

Assumptions and Delimitations

This study draws from the assumption that if educational leaders and researchers are going to interrupt the pattern of racial discipline disparities, not only must issues of race not be avoided, they must be put at the forefront of the examination. The second assumption is that subtle racial bias exists in the disciplining of African American students and that these subtle racial processes produce, justify, and maintain racial discipline disparities. Although aversive racism theory focuses on the unconscious racial bias of Caucasians, the theory of implicit bias states that no one is immune to unconscious bias. Therefore, the researcher based the study on the assumption that the concepts of aversive racism theory can be extended beyond Caucasians to educational leaders of any racial identity. The study also assumes that an examination of the discourse of school administrators can reveal how subtle racial bias is manifested in the exclusionary discipline of African American students. Finally, it is assumed that focusing on school administrators and the discourse of exclusionary discipline will provide new insights into both the research on racial discipline disproportionality for African American students and the practice of educational leaders by providing a framework for assessing subtle racial bias as an element of the disciplinary process and challenging the association, assumptions, and ideologies that perpetuate racial discipline inequities.

This study is limited to an examination of school discipline in two middle schools in one urban school district in North Carolina. There is a historical context that may be considered as a limitation when race is placed at the center of the investigation of a study conducted in the South. As such, the results from the research may not be applicable to all school districts and all school administrators. However, as the theoretical framework and methodology demonstrate, racial bias

exists regardless of geographic region. The study limits the term ‘exclusionary discipline’ to in-school and out-of-school suspensions and does not include expulsions. Although racial discipline disparities exist in expulsion rates, discipline disproportionality is more evident in the use of suspensions (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010).

Significance of the Study

Lamber (1985) pointed out that educational leaders have a duty to recognize that disproportionate consequences occur due to “structural, historical, or societal racial barriers that have impeded equal achievement” (p. 870). The current research has fallen short of providing educational leaders with an understanding that it is necessary to examine both the racially biased ideologies that may be embedded in the exclusionary disciplinary process, and the role they play in producing, justifying, and maintaining barriers to academic achievement and opportunity access for African American students. Van Dijk (2002) described educational discourse as one of the most influential in society and the discourse of those in educational leadership as playing an integral role in the discursive reproduction of racial inequities. If this is the case, then conducting a study that critically analyzes the discourse of educational leaders could provide a pertinent perspective into the research on racial discipline disparities and new insights on dismantling the over 40-year pattern of discipline disproportionality.

While educators often view the educational system as egalitarian, racial inequity permeates the underpinnings of the educational system. Although school administrators may believe they are sanctioning students equally, no one is immune to unconscious racial bias. Even when educational leaders do acknowledge subtle racial bias exists, researchers have not provided them with a means of assessing and addressing racial bias as the central factor to discipline disproportionality for African American students. By conducting this study, the researcher

sought to provide educational leaders with a framework for analyzing disciplinary structures by challenging assumptions, changing associations, and disrupting the discourse that produces, justifies, and maintains racial discipline disparities for African American students.

Roadmap to the Research

Racial discipline disparities have an impact on both African American students and on the educational system. Despite years of research, discipline disproportionality is still prevalent and persistent for African American students. Although racial bias in the educational disciplinary process has recently begun to receive attention, further research is needed in order to gain a better understanding of the subtle racial processes that may be involved in the discipline disproportionality for African American students. This study seeks to bring a new direction to the research on racial bias in the context of school discipline by shifting the focus to the discourse of educational leaders and policies and creating a framework for assessing and addressing racial discipline disparities. In Chapter Two, the researcher will further discuss the discourse of educational leadership and review the literature on discipline disproportionality through the lens of the conceptual framework. In Chapter Three, the researcher will explain the methodology for engaging in a critical race discourse analysis. In Chapter Four, the researcher will explore subtle racial bias as an explanation for racial discipline disparities and address the first two research questions by presenting the findings of the study. Finally, in Chapter Five, the researcher provides an overview of the study and discusses the findings. In Chapter Five, the researcher will also address research question three by presenting a framework for assessing and addressing discipline disparities for African American students. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and some of the researchers' concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“Behold! human beings living in a underground den...here they have been from their childhood...being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads...how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?...would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?...the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images...”

(Plato, 360B.C)

The conceptual framework for the study serves as the organizational structure for the literature review. The framework fuses elements of aversive racism and the themes and tenets of critical race theory with discursive strategies utilized in the critical discourse analysis of racism to demonstrate the relationship between subtle racial bias, educational discourse, and racial discipline disparities for African American students. The researcher will begin with a discussion of a prominent theme in the research and literature on racial discipline disproportionality, then follow with a review of the literature through the lens of the framework.

The Increasing Significance of the Recognition of Race

Researchers have centered the focus of the research on discipline disproportionality quantitative factors and methodologies and the analysis of interaction between teachers and students from a predominantly cultural lens. Just as in Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*, we focus so heavily on these shadows of quantitative data and cultural differences that we become

completely unaware of the reality of the existence of that which casts the shadows. While research recommendations and educational interventions suppose they are addressing what is before them, they are actually overlooking the more pervasive issue, the relevance of race in education. Stevenson (2008) stated that a fear exists about discussing racial matters that is reflected in the dodging of racial interpretations in the analysis of social phenomena such as discipline disproportionality. This is not to imply research that espouses quantitative data and cultural differences is not relevant or valid, however the recognition or nonrecognition of racial dynamics affect not only the interpretation of findings, but also the questions that are asked and the research approach that is taken in the examination of processes and outcomes. When there is a refusal or denial of the need to recognize race, issues related to race persist (Davis, Gooden, & Micheaux, 2015). This study is about breaking the chains that stop the breach of the racial discipline gap and disrupting the over 40-year pattern of racial discipline disproportionality by placing race at the center of the discussion on the disciplinary structures and processes of the educational organization.

The Cultural Lens

There are two definitions of discipline disproportionality researchers utilize in the research. The composition index for discipline disproportionality compares the proportion of African American students in the total school population to the proportion of African American students who were suspended in the total population of students who were suspended (Porowski et al., 2014). As an example, if African American students account for 17% of the student population it should be expected that African American students account for no more than about 17% of the total population of suspended students (Bryan et al., 2013). In the year 2000, African American students represented 17% of the public school population nationwide, yet accounted

for 34% of school suspensions (Archer, 2010). Another definition of discipline disproportionality, the relative rate ratio, compares the suspension rate for African American students to the suspension rate for students in other racial/ethnic groups (Porowski et al., 2014). Most often researchers compare the suspension rates for African American students and Caucasian students. In a study of thirty-five school districts with African American and Caucasian students representing about equal percentages of the population, 44% and 46% respectively, 71% of suspended students were African American compared to 25% of Caucasian students. African American students were suspended or expelled at a rate 250% higher than the Caucasian students (Skiba et al., 2009). Regardless of how researchers define discipline disproportionality or to which racial/ethnic groups they compare the suspension rates of African American students, African American students continue to experience discipline disparities.

Suspension statistics reported by school districts across the nation give evidence to the argument race plays a role in suspension disproportionately. In Iowa in 2007, African American students received 22% of the suspensions, yet made up only 5% of the state's student population. The Iowa City Community School District reported that while African American students made up 16% of the district's student population, they accounted for 59% of the district's suspensions in the 2010-2011 school year, a rate increase of 49.7% from the year prior. Conversely, Caucasian students make up 67% of the student population, but accounted for 30% of the suspensions (Daniel, 2011). Twenty percent of the Oakland Unified School District's African American males were suspended at least once in 2011; a rate six times that of Caucasian males. In Oakland middle schools, one out every three African American males were suspended at least once (Tucker, 2012).

Much of the research and literature that does examine the link between race and the

disproportionate suspension of African American students tends to analyze the interaction between teachers and students and does so from a predominantly cultural lens. Sheets (1996) studied the interaction of students and teachers from a culture conflict theoretical framework and focused on the conflict that occurs between culturally different teachers and students who have dissimilar goals, behavior patterns, cultural codes, and perceptions. Sheets also discussed how the dissimilarities in both beliefs and attitudes can lead to conflict in the classroom as well as how the tendency to favor those with similar beliefs and attitudes can lead to disparities in discipline for one subgroup over another.

Cultural mismatch theory and the cultural differences model speak to the cultural disconnect between the norms of African American students and the culture of schools which leads to cultural misunderstandings being defined as misbehavior (Best, 2011; Bryan et al., 2012). Sixty-eight percent of the students in the nation's 100 largest school districts are students of color, while 87% of all teachers are white (Monroe, 2005). Behavioral expectations of the Caucasian middle class culture tend to stand in contrast to the behavior norms of the African American culture. African American students seem to prefer learning environments that encourage collaboration and cooperation (Wingfield, Reese, & West-Olatanji, 2010) and tend to exhibit Afrocentric cultural behaviors, such as communalism and verve (Bryan et al., 2012). Many teachers do not view these behaviors and learning orientations as positively as the European American values and norms of independence, competition, individualism, future orientation, and ambition (Bryan et al., 2012). As a result, those teachers who align their behavioral expectations with the norms of the Caucasian culture and, as Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran (2004) pointed out, do not have both an understanding of their own ethnocentrism and knowledge of their students' cultural backgrounds may misinterpret the

behavior of their African American students.

However, the culture of Hispanic students is different than the Caucasian middle class culture of most teachers, yet African American students are twice as likely to be suspended as Hispanic students (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). The Southeast Asian culture of Hmong students is vastly different than the Caucasian middle class culture, yet African American students are three times more likely to be suspended than Asian students (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Members of these and other ethnic and racial minorities groups do not consistently experience the disparities, both in academic achievement and discipline, to a degree equal to African American students. These cultural theories, while relevant, do not account for these systematic variations in disparate outcomes. Instead, the research and literature seems to suggest a racial bias exists in the educational settings against African American students that might be overlooked or explained away when a strictly cultural lens is utilized.

The Discourse of Educational Leadership

Van Dijk (2002) referred to educational discourse as one of the most influential in society. Because of this influence, educators can be viewed as a dominant in-group. There is a tendency to categorize people into groups and to distinguish one's own group, referred to as the in-group, from the group of others, called the out-group. The in-group/out-group boundary is created based on the perception that in-group members are more closely related to the self (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005) and identification with the in-group can occur within minutes of being separated into groups (Ahmed, 2007). This identification with the in-group is so salient that even racial identity can seemingly "disappear" or become hidden to adopt the in-group identity (Lumby & English, 2009). Although it is a normal cognitive progress to categorize people and oneself into groups, it is also within this process of categorization that bias is initiated

and discrimination enacted. Bias can either be demonstrated as a tendency to express actions, evaluations, and attitudes more positively toward the in-group or more negatively toward the out-group (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). Ahmed (2007) pointed out, however, that regardless of whether there is bias in favor of the in-group or against the out-group, the outcome of differential treatment is the same. If educators are a part of the in-group, who then are members of the out-group?

Cultural capital are those attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics that are highly valued in the educational system (Lareau & Horvat, 2013). Since the educational system is based on Caucasian middle class values, those attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics that coincide with this value system are deemed as cultural capital. Glass (2013) explained that students are sorted into in-group and out-group based on their possession of cultural capital. Lareau and Horvat (1999) indicated that in the education setting, Whiteness is cultural capital and being White is a resource which African American students do not have available to them. As such, African American students become classified as members of the out-group.

While it can be said that all educators are members of the dominant in-group, van Dijk (1993b) pointed out that it is those in leadership within the dominant in-group, whom he refers to as the elites, who play an integral role in the discursive reproduction of racism. Van Dijk (1993b) went on to state an analysis of their discourse provides a pertinent perspective on how racial disparities are maintained. One way racial disparities in education are maintained is through the myths of the educational organization. According to Lumby and English (2009), myths are “unquestionable assumptions” within the organizations that tell the story of how and why things are the way they are. The myths advance the interests and ideologies of the organization and can be used to justify policies and practices that exclude and oppress members

of the out-group (Lumby & English, 2009). As creators of the myths, it is incumbent upon educational leaders to present the myths with veracity, and to conceal the interests of the organization in maintaining the myths. This presentation of the myths and concealment of the underlying truths is the “dark secret” of educational leadership (Lumby & English, 2009).

There is a discourse that accompanies the dark secret. The purpose of the discourse is to present the desired image of an organization grounded in positive, egalitarian intentions while concealing the intentions of exclusion, power, and self-interests that actually underlie the organizational myths (Lumby & English, 2009). The discourse is often characterized by the use of repetitive, abstract, quotidian mantras of education, such as “every student succeeds,” or “students who aren’t in the classroom aren’t learning” (Glass, 2013). Educational leaders become so accustomed to saying these mantras, that the discourse and the intentions of the myths become unconscious. The use of mantras by educational leaders become particularly evident when confronted with a view of the organization that is incompatible with the desired image, such as the persistent disproportionate suspension of African American students.

The Discourse of Education: We Must Create Safe Schools

Educational leaders, researchers, and policy makers often link school safety and discipline. There is an unquestionable assumption that the purpose of suspensions is to preserve safety and order. Students who cannot abide by behavior norms and standards are a danger and must be removed because they pose a risk to the order of the learning environment. This discourse advances that suspensions are necessary to maintain school safety and to dismantle the use of suspensions is to dismantle school safety. By positing the association between discipline policies and school safety, the assumption that follows is if African American students are disproportionately suspended, punished more severely for longer periods of time, and disciplined

more often than Caucasian students (Bazron, Osher, & Fleischman, 2005; Monroe, 2005), it must be because they pose a disproportionate threat to that safety.

Among the stated purposes of school discipline is to ensure the safety of those in the school (Skiba et al., 2009). The notion of school safety as a pressing issue received national attention when the National Institute of Education released its 1977 report, *Violent Schools-Safe Schools*. The problem of violent crimes in schools was further exemplified by the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, which pointed to inadequate discipline in schools as contributing to the problem (Sullivan, Larke, & Webb-Hasan, 2010). Zero tolerance policies were initiated in the late 1980s and 1990s as part of the “War on Drugs” (Bloomenthal, 2011). These policies sought to deter drugs, fighting, gang activity, and weapons in schools by imposing mandatory expulsion for these offenses as well as automatic punishment, usually suspension, for other student behaviors that were seen as a threat to the learning environment.

While educational leaders have led many to believe that suspensions are reserved for more severe behaviors and rule violations, in actuality school suspensions are utilized for a wide range of behaviors, the majority of which do not jeopardize school safety. Losen and Skiba (2010) found that 5% of out-of-school suspensions were for serious and dangerous infractions such as weapons and drugs. The other 95% fell into one of two categories, disruption or other. Caucasian students are more likely to engage in more higher level behaviors and severe rule violations (Gregory et al., 2010), while African American students are more often referred for non-violent behavior, such as disrespect and excessive noise (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Further, African American students show no greater propensity for disruptive behavior than their Caucasian peers (Butler et al., 2012; Bloomenthal, 2011).

Bloomenthal (2011) pointed out that research has also shown zero tolerance policies have

not made schools safer and there was not an increase in school violence as was professed when zero tolerance policies were initiated. Instead, researchers have found schools that utilized more of a locked facility approach with metal detectors, police officers, security guards, and locked doors foster the violence and disorder they are supposed to reduce (Bloomenthal, 2011). Despite the findings that suspensions and punishment focused approaches seem to be counterproductive, or at the very least ineffective at maintaining school safety, exclusionary discipline is the primary consequence utilized with African American students. African American students are underrepresented in the use of all administrative consequences except suspensions and expulsions (Skiba et al., 2009). It would seem that suspension and discipline policies have less to do with school safety and more to do with the removal of those who are perceived as violent, criminal, or simply failing to meet the norms of the educational organization.

A Critical Race Discourse Analysis Challenges Whiteness as the Standard

In the analysis of racism, there is a discourse of excuse, which recognizes a negative act has occurred, but attention is placed on circumstances that allow for the diverting of blame from the discriminator to the racial minority group. Critical race theorists draw attention to the varying ways that minority groups are racialized under certain conditions to meet the needs of the dominant society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) and seek to critique “the standard.” The mantra of school safety is supported in the educational discourse when stereotypical perceptions and negative associations about African American students are provided as reasoning for disciplinary action. In this discourse, distinctions are made between “Us” and “Them” with subtle, negative representations of “Them” (van Dijk, 2002). While blatant expressions of stereotypical perceptions are rarely evident (Solórzano, 1997), more subtle forms of stereotyping are displayed.

One subtle form of expression is through the use of code words in education and in educational research. In the research, teachers sometimes discuss differences in communication styles as a factor in disproportionate office referrals for African American students, but “communication” may be a code word in a discourse of excuse. Bryant et al. (2012) in their study of student referrals to high school counselors for disruptive behavior, pointed out that the communication styles of African American students are often characterized as rude, loud, and confrontational by teachers, often resulting in disciplinary action. Glass (2013) examined ethnographic accounts of interactions between faculty and students as a way to understand decision-making and to determine the role of cultural capital in the disciplinary process. Glass (2013) made a connection between communication and what is viewed as cultural capital in an educational setting. Glass (2013) discussed how students communicate often led to their being labelled as noncompliant and that miscommunication in the interactions between students and educators resulted in students being viewed as lacking cultural capital. Glass then stated that the question “What do you do with a student like that?” (2013) should be raised when educators are faced with a student who lacks cultural capital. Lareau and Horvat (1999), in their investigation of the influence of race and social class in shaping family-school relationships, explained that in the educational setting, whiteness is a form of cultural capital. What seems to underlie the question, “What do you do with a student like that,” is “What do educators do with a student who lacks whiteness?”

Wynn (1971), studied perceived communication problems between African American teachers and Caucasian students and Caucasian teachers and African American students following desegregation. Wynn, a Caucasian former Assistant Superintendent, did not present an operationalized definition of “communication issues” in his study. Yet, both the researcher as

well as the Caucasian teachers demonstrated a shared understanding that “communication” had little to do with actual language and more to do with the perceptions of Caucasian teachers about African American students. Based on the discourse of the Caucasian teachers, “communication” seemed to be one of the code words for not possessing the cultural capital of whiteness or behaving in a way that demonstrates possessing it. When asked about communication problems, the Caucasian teachers referred to the African American students as “culturally deprived” (Wynn, 1971, p.13) and stated that because of the communication issues they preferred to teach White students only. Fifty eight percent of those Caucasian teachers who reported behavior issues with African American students perceived that it was linked to communication. None of the African American teachers in Wynn’s study reported that communication issues existed between African American teachers and Caucasian students.

Another subtle form of expression is through the use of “code words for blackness,” (Hyland, 2005, p. 445) such as “dangerous,” “violent,” and “poverty.” Fenning and Rose (2007) explained that African American students are viewed as dangerous even when they have not exhibited violent behavior, and they are often removed from the classroom or suspended based on a perceived potential for being dangerous. Gregory and Mosely (2010) found that 45% of teachers linked African American students with poverty and viewed cultural deficits as contributing to discipline problems. Poverty is often associated with increased exposure to violence and substance abuse and increases the likelihood of receiving disciplinary sanctions (Gregory et al., 2010). Caucasian teachers in Wynn’s (1971) study commented that African American students had a lack of respect for authority unless “it is imposed by brute force” and one teacher stated that, “Children had no respect for me once they found they could not be whipped” (Wynn, 1971, p. 13). Continued assertions of “Them” is not “Us” and “Them” as a

threat, combined with denials of White or “Us” deficiencies, reinforces the myth that there is an increased need for disciplinary action towards African American students.

Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) stated racial stereotypes can heighten sensitivity to behavioral patterns over time and teachers are more likely to punish students who they perceive as repeatedly failing to reach their behavioral expectations. African American students are commonly perceived as being defiant, disruptive, troublemakers, and having negative demeanors; teachers tend to associate African American students with a history of misbehavior (Gregory & Mosely, 2010; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Best (2011) found behaviors of African American students are often scrutinized because teachers and administrators believe African American students must be controlled. Similarly, Monroe (2005) found that there is an implicit stereotypical perception that African American students, particularly males, are unlikely to respond to non-punitive measures and require greater control than other students.

There are also gender-based behavioral expectations which are imposed on African American students. African American females are commonly perceived as loud and defiant, while African Americans males are perceived as violent, criminal, and aggressive. The White middle class culture implies that females must be silent, passive, and selfless, putting the desire for harmony in relationships over their own personal interests (West, 2008). African American females tend to defy these culture-based behavioral norms by being assertive and independent and tend to express their emotions without fear of retribution (Morris, 2007). Research has found teachers are more likely to sanction the behavior of African American female students more frequently than Caucasian and Hispanic students for their lack of compliance to these dominant cultural norms of femininity (Blake et al., 2011; Morris, 2007). While all of these studies demonstrated the role of stereotypical perceptions and associations held about African

American students by teachers, none of the studies investigated the perspective of educational leaders or examined the presence of stereotypical associations in discipline policies.

Educational researchers also have to be cognizant of how their use of discourse may further the assumption of stereotypes as truth. Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2005), in an article that sought to provide school counselors with an understanding of the behaviors of urban African American young males, described the African American male subculture as “the antithesis of healthy prosocial functioning,” which makes “unreasonable and coercive demands on its members,” and that this subculture “promotes physical and sexual prowess and aggression” (p. 238). They went on to state that “school counselors can best assist African American males by providing this information to those who make disciplinary decisions” (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005, p. 238). Researchers and educators must also be aware of what effect continually witnessing the removal and exclusion of African American students from the learning environment has on how Caucasian students and students of other racial/ethnic groups then perceive African American students.

A critical race discourse analysis attends not only to how stereotypical perceptions about African American students affect disciplinary decisions, but also to the image that administrators create about African American students when they are continually suspended disproportionately. The discourse of excuse can present assertions of not just differences, but threat. The discourse of school discipline is laced with terminology from the criminal justice system and the continual disproportionate suspension of African American students advances a criminalized image of African American students. Harris (1993) pointed out that the beneficiaries of racial privilege have the right to establish norms and to hold oppressed groups to those norms. There is an assumption that whiteness is the standard and any deviation from this standard is deemed as

deviant. Students who do not fit this standard are labelled as dangerous and targeted for removal (Fenning & Rose, 2007).

Brown and Beckett (2006) pointed out that there are two trains of thought in the research on student discipline. One is an instructional view, which the researchers see as encompassing a positive preventative approach, and the other is a legal approach. They found discipline policies are often categorized under this second approach and are seen as punitive and reactive.

Mandatory sentencing in the criminal justice system inspired zero tolerance policies. Cobb (2009) cited an increase in SROs, and the discretion school administrators and SROs have in deciding which behavior offenses they refer to the juvenile court system, as reasons for the disproportionate number of African American students being suspended out-of-school. Cobb (2009) went on to state that the increased presence of SROs, who do not receive the training to work in educational settings, has also led to a rise in juveniles being arrested for nonviolent offenses in schools. Bloomenthal (2011) referred to these measures of police officers, metal detectors, and zero tolerance policies that schools use to manage student behavior as a “law-and-order approach” and stated that schools have become intolerant of even minor student behaviors. Perceptions of African American students and associations of “Blackness” become a legitimate reason to punish African American students for not being “White” and school discipline becomes a vehicle of maintaining and protecting Whiteness. When whiteness is viewed as “normal, natural, and fair,” this ideology operates in the background of policy construction, interpretation, and implementation (Davis et al., 2015).

**The Discourse of Education:
Policies are Created and Implemented with Consistency and Uniformity**

This discourse advances the assumption of consistency, uniformity, and race neutrality in the development and implementation of discipline policies and the decision making of

educational leaders. Anyone who violates the policies is suspended, regardless of race, and the decision making of school administrators is consistent and objective. However, there tends to be inconsistencies in how administrators use suspensions in schools, even within the same district (Skiba et al, 2009). Although zero tolerance policies purported to be fair and equitable because of the mandatory enforcement of consequences and the implied colorblind consistency, this consistency did not equate to the same punishment for all students (Sullivan et al., 2010). Zero tolerance has been used with even minor nonviolent offenses (Bloomenthal, 2011) and since its inception, the suspension rate for African American students rose from 6% in 1973 to 15% in 2006. The suspension gap between African American and Caucasian students grew from three percentage points in the 1970's to ten percentage points in the 2000's (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Gregory and Mosely (2010) interviewed teachers on their understanding of the causes of discipline issues and whether students of racial groups had certain disciplinary problems. They found that the majority of teachers provided race neutral responses. Over 80% of teachers linked discipline issues to adolescent development, stating that students were in a normal phase of rebellion. Gregory and Mosely (2010) pointed out that this is a colorblind explanation because it implied that all student behaviors are grouped under “a normal part of adolescent development” and failed to account for racial differences such as the disproportionate suspension rates for African American students and the underrepresentation of other racial groups in suspension data. They also found that teachers believed it was in the best interest of students to not consider race as a factor in discipline.

Davis, Gooden, and Micheaux (2015) analyzed the language of two national educational leadership standards, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the Educational Leaders Constituent Council (ELCC) standards, for their consideration of race and

their potential for addressing issues of race in schools. The ISLLC standards have been adopted in over 40 states, yet make no specific mention of race (Davis et al., 2015). Davis et al. (2015) found that, despite the research which shows that race affects the work of educational leaders, the presumption based on the leadership standards is that equitable school leadership could be achieved without the recognitions of race. They pointed out that this is relevant because by failing to recognize race in the discourse of education, educational leaders will be unable to critically confront racist educational policies (Davis et al., 2015).

A Critical Race Discourse Analysis Challenges Race Neutrality

One of the most crucial properties of racism and in the reproduction of inequality is the denial of racism and discrimination; there is no inequality because all people are treated equally and have equal access to resources (van Dijk, 1992). Critical race theory challenges the notion of colorblindness in the decision making process. Colorblindness is a technique that appears to be strictly procedural and suggests administrators are utilizing a neutral and objective method of decision making, but what colorblindness actually does is provides a means of denying racial subordination and the existence of racism (Davis et al., 2015; Gotanda, 1991). Educational leaders that promote a race neutral discourse of school discipline deny the realities of the disparate experiences of African American students. A critical race discourse analysis investigates not only the stated intent of school discipline as found in the content of discipline codes, but also the unstated and implied intent of school discipline policies by examining such questions as who do the policies benefit and what are the outcomes of the policies, both intended and inadvertent.

A critical race discourse analysis investigates racial subordination in policy by examining who the policy benefits and how policies place African American students at a

disadvantage. There is an amount of discretion in the decision making of school administrators, as opposed to consistency and objectivity, and discipline policies are often ambiguous, as opposed to being uniform and structured. The decision making of school administrators consists of far more than the mechanical application of policy (Findlay, 2015). There are also ambiguities in the language of discipline policies that make administrative discretion not only necessary (Findlay, 2015), but also beneficial to school administrators. School administrators often use discipline policies as a way to simply justify their decisions (Brown & Beckett, 2006; Southern Regional Council, 1973). Thornton and Trent (1988) pointed out the increase in suspension and disproportionality rates for African American students following desegregation coincided with increased accountability, higher standards, and new educational policies set by the state of Louisiana. Bloomenthal (2011) also discussed this link between the push out of African American students and the increased emphasis on testing accountability. Fenning and Rose (2007) indicated that the increased pressure on educational leaders to ensure federal mandates are being met has fueled the removal of students who do not fit educational norms. The pushout of African American students serves not only to exclude them from equal access to educational resources, but also to provide a way for schools to maintain their academic standing by removing those they view as academically and socially inept.

Race neutrality hinders the discussion on inequitable outcomes and racial disparities (Davis et al., 2015), but a critical race discourse analysis places race at the center of the analysis on policy outcomes, both the intended as well as the inadvertent outcomes that have a disproportionately adverse effect on some racial/ethnic groups over others. Davis, Gooden, and Micheaux (2015) pointed out that race neutrality perpetuates disparities that lie at the root of disparate outcomes. Disparate impact reflects the notion that arbitrary and thoughtless policies,

as in the case of seemingly facially race neutral discipline policies, are as harmful as intentional discrimination (Lamber, 1985). Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 speaks to disparate treatment and disparate impact as a basis for claims of racially discriminatory discipline practices. Title VI was passed as an enforcement tool for the Fourteenth Amendment and allows federal agencies to deny federal funding to those who discriminate on the basis of race, color, and national origin by denying participation in or the benefits of any programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance (Alexander & Alexander, 2012). While disparate treatment requires a demonstration, with either direct or circumstantial evidence, that school officials intentionally created an inequitable environment, disparate impact only requires evidence that a seemingly neutral discipline policy has a negative impact on African American students. Disparate impact allows for a broader interpretation of the law and can be demonstrated without evidence of intent. In the case of discipline disproportionality, disparate impact is defined as policies and practices which seem racially neutral but which actually have a greater adverse impact on African American students than students of other races. As stated above, there have been an increase in complaints of Title VI violations to the Office of Civil Rights, making disparate impact a topic worth examining in an analysis of racial discipline disparities.

Losen (2013) offered a three prong approach to the application of disparate impact theory to the disproportionate suspension of African American students. The first prong, the determination of whether discipline policies have a racial negative impact on African American students, and the second prong, whether suspensions are educationally necessary, were discussed in Chapter One. In Chapter One, the researcher pointed to research that demonstrated being suspended at disproportionate rates puts African American students at an increased risk of repeating a grade and dropping out (Bloomenthal, 2011; Raffaele Mendez, 2003) and higher

suspension rates directly correlate to higher juvenile prison rates for African American students (Cobb, 2009). The researcher also discussed that although the stated purposes of school discipline includes maintaining an environment conducive to learning (Skiba et al., 2009), in actuality suspensions seem to be counterproductive to this goal. Schools with higher suspension rates tend to have lower test scores than schools with lower suspension rates (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba et al., 2009) and high suspension rates lead to increased dropout rates (Raffaele Mendez, 2003), grade retentions and academic failure (Gregory et al., 2010; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003), school disengagement (Bryan et al., 2012), negative school climate (Bryan et al., 2012), and negative attitudes towards school by students (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). The third prong examines whether there are equally effective and less discriminatory alternatives. This prong seems to suggest an investigation of whether discipline policies offer alternatives to suspensions and whether school administrators utilize these alternatives in their decision making.

Discretion generally implies the ability to choose from a variety of options, so if discipline policies allow school administrators discretion in their decision making, then there should be an array of options other than suspension available through the policy. Fenning and Rose (2007) stated that in a content analysis of codes of conduct from 64 secondary schools, very few proactive consequences were proposed. They defined proactive as those responses that taught alternative behaviors. Instead, the most common responses offered were reactive, or punitive in nature, with no direct teaching of alternative behaviors. They also found that suspension was the most commonly listed response for addressing all types of behaviors, including those that were minor and unrelated to safety, while Bloomenthal (2011) found the total number of suspendable infractions in the New York discipline code doubled from the year 2000 to 2011. Fenning and Rose (2007) concluded that there appears to be limited options in

discipline policies for a response other than suspension, and since few discipline policies require school administrators to utilize proactive responses and instead present the use of suspensions as a “one-size-fits-all” response to any behavior, school administrators have little incentive to temper their disproportionate use of suspensions as a consequence for African American students (Bloomenthal, 2011).

Educational leaders may want to be viewed as objective in their decision making, but background experiences and automatic associations will influence how administrators interpret the behavior of students and whether they identify the situation as one that necessitates discipline. Subjective judgment in decision making tends to be detrimental for African American students (Gregory et al., 2011). According to Gaertner and Dovidio (2005), the expression of subtle racial bias and discrimination will occur when the guidelines for behavior are vague and the normative structure is ambiguous. While the content of discipline policies may suggest consistency and race neutrality, the ambiguity of discipline policy and unguided discretion in decision making, intended or inadvertently, create a situation that allows for subtle racial bias and discrimination to easily be viewed as justified.

The Discourse of Education: We Need to Address Student Behaviors

In addition to preserving a safe learning environment, another stated purpose of school discipline is to teach students the skills they need to successfully function within school and society (Skiba et al., 2009). This discourse sets forth an image of African American students as having behavioral deficits and the use of educational policies and interventions as needed to address these deficiencies. The American Psychological Association (APA) recommended a three tier approach to ensure school safety and avoid the use of exclusionary discipline (Bloomenthal, 2011). First, they suggested the use of programs such as conflict resolution, bully

prevention, and socio-emotional learning. The second tier is focused on the use of early screening to identify students that are at risk for violence. The last tier recommended restorative justice and multisystemic therapy, which is a form of family and community based treatment. Restorative justice, along with Schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (SWPBIS) are two interventions that have garnered much of the attention in the research on discipline disproportionality. Restorative justice has its foundation in the criminal justice system. The most often thought of form of restorative justice is the practice of victim-offender mediation, which allows for the rehabilitation of the offender by offering reconciliation to the victim (Simson, 2014). Simson (2014) described restorative justice as an alternative method of dealing with student misbehavior. As such, restorative justice is often utilized from the standpoint that the student has already engaged in violent or disruptive behavior. The overall premise of SWPBIS is to hold all students to the same standards through the creation of schoolwide expectations of behaviors, the recognitions of appropriate behavior through the use of incentives, and the consistent enforcement of consequences for inappropriate behavior. SWPBIS is often credited with decreasing overall office discipline referrals and holding all students to the same behavioral standards (Tobin & Vincent, 2011; Vincent, Swain-Bradway, Tobin, & May, 2011). Other interventions suggested in the research on racial discipline disproportionality include mentoring and anger management. Bloomenthal (2011) described all of these interventions as methods to improve student behavior and reduce student disruptions.

As discussed above, alternatives to suspensions and the use of proactive responses to teach students new behaviors should be investigated and utilized, but as also stated above, critical race discourse analysis has to also examine why interventions are implemented, who they benefit and/or put at a disadvantage, and what are the outcomes, intentional or inadvertent. All

of these interventions seem to operate from the assumption of if we address the behaviors and the deficits of African American students, then we will see an overall reduction in suspensions, and decreases in discipline disproportionality for African American students will be the natural progression. Yet none of these interventions have been shown to directly reduce racial discipline disparities for African American students.

In their research on aversive racism, Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) found subtle expressions of racial bias tend to occur when acts of discrimination can be rationalized on the basis of factors other than race. Education leaders and researchers often distract attention away from racial bias and discrimination by suggesting that discipline disproportionality is more closely related to socioeconomic (SES), family and community deficits, or academic issues that lead to student behavioral problems. As such, emphasis is placed on the behavior of African American students, and the problem is identified as being “in” African American students (Gregory & Mosely, 2010). None of these commonly suggested and utilized interventions address racial bias and discrimination in the context of school discipline or in the structure of the educational organization. By keeping the focus off race, educational leaders present discipline disproportionality not as a racial inequity, which must be addressed accordingly, but instead as an unfortunate or inescapable result of student behaviors and factors outside of the control of schools. This discourse advances the justification for the identification of strategies and interventions to “fix the student” as opposed to acknowledging the educational organization has historically marginalized African American students and then adjusting policies, practices, and the culture of the organization to counter these historical underpinnings.

A Critical Race Discourse Analysis Challenges Ahistoricism

In the critical race discourse analysis of racism, justification is used as a way to provide a

legitimate defense for a negative act or discourse toward a racial minority group by presenting that group as deserving of the reaction (van Dijk, 1992) and denying the failure of one's own policies. In a discourse of justification, the act itself is not denied; what is denied is that the act is negative and unjustified. Educators exhibit justification when they acknowledge that African American students are being suspended, even at disproportionate rates, but they justify these suspensions as being unrelated to race and as the best and/or only way to address the deficiencies in the behavior of African American students. As stated above, poverty is often a code word for African American students, yet as was presented in Chapter One, discipline disproportionality exists for African American students even when socioeconomic indicators are held constant (Skiba et al., 2009). Instead, school suspensions are better predicted by school culture than student behavior and attitude (Skiba et al., 2009). However, in the years following desegregation, discipline disparities began to be rationalized through a discourse that posited the assumptions that first there were deficiencies within the African American students, their families, and communities which affected their behavior, and second that schools had to utilize methods such as exclusionary discipline to address these behaviors.

Wynn (1971) interviewed teachers in Bibb County, Georgia, following desegregation to determine if discipline problems were related to perceived communication issues. Fifty-one percent of Caucasian teachers perceived a communication issue existed between Caucasian teachers and African American students, however, most of their responses demonstrated this discourse of deficit and the need for punishment for African American students. The Caucasian teachers in the study referred to African American students as “culturally deprived” and “difficult to improve” (Wynn, 1971, p. 12) and made repeated reference to African American students being academically “slow.” The Caucasian teachers also spoke of the need for

increased punishment for African American students because African American students had not been “taught any respect in their homes,” and their behavior was “related to emotional problems” (Wynn, 1971, p.14).

This discourse continues to be demonstrated in the research today. Glass (2013) discussed the need to “bring [African American] students into compliance,” (Glass, 2013, p. 387). Gregory and Mosely (2010) found in their study that teachers commented that most African American students “don’t know how to act,” and that they “lacked home training to know how to behave appropriately in a formal setting like a classroom” (Gregory & Mosely, 2010, p. 23). Hyland (2005) demonstrated that teachers often have deficit views of African American students, seeing gaps in student achievement as being within the students, their home, or their culture. Even teachers who self-described themselves as effective teachers of African American students inadvertently perpetuate the inequities and issues of power (Hyland, 2005). Hyland (2005) presented some central metaphors of teacher discourse and practices with African American students. One metaphor teachers used was seeing themselves as the helpers. In this metaphor teachers view African American students as needy and incapable, and they see themselves as the helpers of the less fortunate. Helper teachers may recognize African American students are discriminated against, but often do not recognize their role as benefactors in a system of racism that patronizes African American students.

Not focusing on school factors comes with the implication of denying the failure of one’s own policies. After desegregation, the organization and structure of most schools did not change despite the new social and cultural contexts that existed within them. Many school officials admitted that a large percentage of African American students were suspended after desegregation because they had a difficult time fitting into “our schools” (Southern Regional

Council, 1973, p. 3). It became part of the culture of schools to view their system in high regard and find fault with the African American students instead. Caucasian teachers in Wynn's (1971) study put the onus for the communication issues, as well as the responsibility for acclimation, solely on African American students. Regarding school acclimation, they made such comments as, "I started out as I would with a White class," "[Negro children] are not willing to cooperate with school regulations," and "The children are not prepared to have a white teacher." The discourse of diverting blame from school policies to African American students continues today. Farrell (1984) pointed out that the position of schools has always been for African Americans students to "adapt to the way education (has) always taken place" (Farrell, p. 64), while Glass (2013) discussed the need to "bring [African American] students into compliance," (p. 387). Vincent et al. (2011) described the goal of School wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (SWPBIS) as being "to acculturate them [students] to the school's institutional order" (p. 177). Gregory and Mosely (2010) found that although teachers did discuss school organization and culture as contributors to discipline issues, they failed to acknowledge the connection with race and racial bias, and stated instead that discipline was linked to class size. Teachers also did not admit to their own racial bias as a factor in racial discipline disparities.

A critical race discourse analysis recognizes inequities are perpetuated when historical events are ignored and examines the ways African American students are blamed for disparities without the educational organization having to be implicated as the source of the problem (Sullivan et al., 2010). Strong factors for discipline disproportionality lie less within the African American students themselves and more so in a history of reprehensible race relations within the educational organization. Critical race theory insists that an analysis of race and racism in education be placed in historical context (Solórzano, 1997). The historical underpinnings of

discipline disproportionality can be found in the years following desegregation. When we place student discipline in a post-desegregation context, what emerges is a historical rationalization for the exclusion of African American students from equal access to educational resources. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka*, called for an end to segregated schools, finding schools which are separate are “inherently unequal” (Southern Regional Council, 1973). Despite this landmark decision, the act of dismantling segregation was slow and frequently met with resistance. It took an additional eight years after the decision before a single school in the south was desegregated, and by 1971, only 38% of southern African American students attended majority white schools (Southern Regional Council, 1973). Transcripts of former students and school staff who were a part of the desegregation of public schools in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, tell the story of one interviewee, an African American student bused to one of the newly desegregated schools (Noblit, 2014). In her oral history, she stated that many African American parents had the belief that by placing their children in these predominantly White desegregated schools, they would be exposed to better opportunities, but she went on to point out that there was often a price to pay. The Southern Regional Council (1973) explained the cost of the “price of desegregation” as being most heavily incurred by African American students. Desegregation resulted in the closure of Black schools, the removal of African American principals and school staff who served as role models, and inflicted on African American students the burden of adjusting to a system of “White authority,” which rejected them, their traditions, and their culture.

While the 1960s were marked with massive active acts of White resistance to desegregation, the 1970s and 1980s presented more subtle forms of discrimination and resistance. By the mid-70s, the racial disparity in suspension rates increased across the nation.

Farrell (1984) found that in Maryland the gap increased by five percentage points, while in Boston the increase was over twenty points. In the two years after a court-ordered desegregation plan was implemented, African American students in Milwaukee were suspended at a rate 2.5-3 times that of Caucasian students, an increase that occurred in almost all of the secondary schools (Larkin, 1979). Bireda (2002) stated discipline disparities were found to be associated with a lack of administrative support for desegregation, while Peretti (1976) found a positive correlation between teachers' attitudes towards busing for integration and the need for disciplinary measures, with those opposed to busing having 25% more of a need for discipline in their classrooms. The Southern Regional Council (1973) referred to suspensions and expulsions during this time period as "weapons of discrimination" (p. viii) used as a form of resistance to increased desegregation and concluded increase in suspensions for African American students was directly related to resistance to desegregation.

Thornton and Trent (1988) studied racial disproportionality in suspension patterns in secondary schools in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, following a 1981 court order to desegregate its schools. The court order required the elimination of "one race" schools and resulted in school closings and a large number of student transfers. Their analysis included suspension counts from the years immediately preceding the court order through the first year of implementation after the court order. It measured disproportionality both in terms of composition index, comparing the proportion of students of that race in the total school population to the proportion of students of that race who were suspended, and the relative rate ratio, which compares the suspension rate for students by race. Thornton and Trent (1988) found that regardless of which disproportionality index was utilized, African American students were suspended at higher rates than Caucasian students and that the gap in rates increased

“considerably” in the year following the court order. Although Thornton and Trent (1988) emphasized that their study was not focused on analyzing responsibility for the increased suspension rates and disproportionality rates for African American students, they did demonstrate a quantitative link between suspension rates for African American students and desegregation. Disproportionate discipline had become the new tool for depriving African American students of equal access to educational opportunities.

When discipline disproportionality is investigated through a critical race discourse analysis framework, we recognize that individual solutions will not address structural problems. Student factors do not adequately account for discipline disparities. Instead we explore the ways in which the beliefs and ideologies bred in the historical exclusion of African American students from the educational process continue to serve as a contributor to racial discipline disproportionality. Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) found subtle acts of racial bias are more likely to occur when there is a threat to power, control, and status. As African American student enrollment increased in desegregated schools, so too did school suspension rates, African American student suspension rates, and racial disproportionality in suspension rates. More schools were beginning to desegregate and the threat now existed that African American students would have increased access to the skills and opportunities needed to achieve academic and economic success.

The Discourse of Education: Education is the Great Equalizer

The formal purpose of education is to be an instrument of egalitarian principles and to reduce social inequities by affording equal provision of educational opportunities to all students, but as Lumby and English (2009) pointed out, there are also some unconscious goals of the educational organization that include the justification for the maintenance of a culture of power.

Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) contended that negative feelings and beliefs about African Americans are initiated because of the need for power, control, and status both for oneself and one's in-group. Power in this context is not focused on one's personal power, but instead is based on privileged access to resources and the ability to control who has access to those resources. Although schools are seen as transmitters of egalitarian principles and education as a means of overcoming inequities, the educational organization actually creates inequitable circumstances for African American students compared to their peers by excluding them from access to educational opportunities and from achieving academic excellence.

A Critical Race Discourse Analysis Challenges the Absolute Right to Exclude

Critical race discourse analysis views discourse and communication as a resource and defines power in terms of privileged access to and control over discourse (van Dijk, 1993c). Discourse is examined as a means of maintaining dominance and racial inequities. Van Dijk (1993c) pointed out that “dominance is enacted and reproduced in subtle, routine forms in talk and text that appear ‘natural’ and ‘acceptable’” (p. 254). One aspect of critical race theory is the concept of Whiteness as property, which views those who possess White racial identity as beneficiaries of privileges and rights much like the rights of property ownership. A central premise of Whiteness as property is the absolute right to exclude, which gives Whites exclusive rights of possession, use and disposition, and the right to exclude those who are not White from these rights and privileges (Harris, 1993). The privilege of the power to control access through exclusion is an expectation in White-controlled institutions (Harris, 1993). The premise of education as an egalitarian system is built on the belief that access to the educational curriculum increases access to opportunity and economic advancement. Limiting access to the educational curriculum limits one's ability for advancement and thus limits one's power. It is not by chance

that the use of suspensions is referred to as exclusionary discipline. The disproportionate suspension of African American students compared to students of other racial/ethnic groups, especially Caucasian students, means that African American students are also disproportionately excluded from educational access while students of other racial/ethnic groups, especially Caucasian students, are afforded the right to the use, enjoyment, and benefit of educational opportunities.

The expectation and privilege of power within the educational organization has been established and reinforced through case law. It is the belief of the courts that school discipline should be left to the discretion of school administrators (Skiba et al., 2009), and the use of Constitutional landmark cases demonstrate an historical and legal precedence for this position on racial disparities in discipline. There is a long history of African American students challenging racially based discipline practices. Early cases focused on attempting to prove discipline policies violated the Fourteenth Amendment Due Process and Equal Protection rights of African American students. In public schools law, the Due Process clause in the Fourteenth Amendment ensures a fair hearing for students facing suspensions, while the Equal Protection clause ensures all students are afforded equal protection, that one group or class of students is not shown favor while other groups or classes of students are discriminated against. Under due process, school districts are required to have procedures in place for suspensions and expulsions that align with the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Procedural due process states that procedures must be provided and substantive due process requires that the actions must not be arbitrary or unreasonable. African American students have often been unsuccessful in their attempts to demonstrate to courts that schools and districts have not given them due process when they are suspended. They have also attempted to bring joint claims of Due Process and

Equal Protection Clause violations against school districts in an effort to highlight racially discriminatory discipline.

Equal Protection and Due Process, as it applies to discipline, requires that schools utilize the same procedures for suspensions for all students, regardless of race, and that their discipline policies do not discriminate on the basis of race. Equal Protection cases are held to strict scrutiny, meaning African American students must not only show the policies result in higher discipline rates for African American students, they must also prove the purpose and intent of the discipline policies were to discriminate. In the case of *Sweets v. Childs* (1975), a civil rights action was brought on behalf of the Black students attending public schools in Jackson County, Florida. The appellants alleged that the school board implemented racially discriminatory discipline practices and procedures throughout the Jackson County Public School System, which failed to afford procedural due process. The appellants also argued that more African American students had been disciplined than Caucasian students in violation of the equal protection clause. In the *Sweets* (1975) case, the court found the appellants were not denied procedural due process, and they neither showed that suspensions and expulsions were arbitrarily given to African American students nor that Caucasian students were not suspended or expelled for similar conduct.

In the case of *Tasby v. Estes* (1981), the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) had already had the attention of the Circuit Court for twenty-five years, when the court sought to desegregate the DISD school facilities and remove de jure, or legal, racial discrimination. In 1976, the court ordered that measures be taken by the DISD to ensure that racially discriminatory practices be eliminated, including student discipline policies. As in the *Sweets* (1975) case, the plaintiffs in *Tasby* (1981) filed a Due Process and Equal Protection claim. The plaintiffs in

Tasby (1981) alleged that the DISD discipline practices did not meet the demands of due process and did not guarantee against racial discrimination in light of the history of segregation in the district. In response to the plaintiffs' argument, the court pointed out the extensive discipline procedure utilized by the DISD when students committed a serious offense. Therefore, the court found that the DISD did not violate due process. The court then turned its attention to the claim that the student discipline in the DISD unconstitutionally discriminated against African American students. The plaintiffs presented statistical evidence to show the disproportionate punishment of African American students in the DISD, student discipline data, analysis of the data, and an evaluation of this analysis by expert witnesses. The experts examined the percentage of discipline cases according to race in comparison to the percentage of district enrollment for that race in an effort to show that African American students were frequently disciplined more than Caucasian or Mexican American students. Next, they presented statistical evidence that showed African American students received more severe forms of punishment in greater proportion than their proportion in the population and they received more severe sanctions than their Caucasian counterparts. The court found the statistical evidence persuasive, yet it still found the evidence insufficient to establish racial discrimination by the district.

The power to exclude African American students rests heavily in the hands of educational leaders. A critical race discourse analysis examines the ways in which the privilege of power is used by educational leaders to secure interests as opposed to challenge inequitable systems as well as how addressing issues of racial disparities may be viewed as a threat to the privilege of power. Delpit (1988) explained that there are issues of power within the educational system that are enacted over African American students. Delpit (1988) presented five aspects of the culture of power which permeate the educational discourse discussed in this chapter. One

aspect of the culture of power is there are rules and codes for participating in the culture of power, which include communication strategies and ways of interacting or behaving that are reflective of the rules of the culture of those who have power. Harris (1993) stated that “definitions are a central part of domination” (p. 17) and noted that those in power have the right to define meanings. Code words in education are used to define “Whiteness” and Blackness.” Whiteness is set as the standard in the educational organization and although African American students, “operate from a wonderful and viable culture,” (Delpit, 1988, p. 283) it is not the culture defined as capital in the educational institution. Instead, Blackness is defined as deficient, dangerous, and in need of being saved or fixed. To examine definitions of Whiteness or to even redefine Blackness and the discriminatory experiences of African American students as relevant, may be viewed as a threat to Whiteness.

Another aspect of the culture of power is if you are a not member of the culture of power, being told the rules explicitly makes acquiring the rules easier (Delpit, 1988). Van Dijk (1993c) expressed that when majority group members communicate beliefs implicitly, without actually asserting them, those who are not members of the groups will be unable to understand the meaning and coherence of the discourse. Ambiguity in discipline policies not only makes discretion in decision making necessary and beneficial to school administrators, policies also position administrative discretion as a form of power. When discipline policies are ambiguous, it creates opportunities for the overt or unconscious misuse of authority by administrators and the arbitrary enforcement of disciplinary action. Educational leaders have latitude in the enforcement of disciplinary consequences and limiting their discretion could be viewed by school administrators as a threat to their power, control, and status.

Finally, those with power are less aware of, or less willing to acknowledge, the existence

of power while those with less power are more aware of its existence (Delpit, 1988). The purpose of educational discourse is to present the desired image of the educational organization as grounded in positive, egalitarian intentions. Although the discourse is so ingrained that intentions of exclusion and oppression have become almost unconscious, those who continue to feel the weight of historical subordination are well aware of its existence and well aware that it is based on race. Laraeu and Horvat (1999) discussed the power of race in shaping interactions in the educational setting. They found the attempts of African American parents to intervene for their students were rejected unless it was viewed as legitimate and acceptable to educators. African American parents were also very cognizant of the history of discrimination within the educational organization and the role it played in their ability to advocate for their children. When applied to discipline disproportionality, Fenning and Rose (2007) found one reason for the disproportionate treatment of African American students was school staff perceived African American parents as powerless in preventing their students from being suspended.

In this chapter, the researcher examined racial exclusion as an ideology of education policy, the disproportionate suspensions of African American students as a subtle act of racial bias, and discourse as the unconscious practice of educational leaders in advancing the myths of the educational organization. The researcher examined the literature through the lens of the conceptual framework, providing a means of critically examining the visible variables most often discussed in the literature on discipline disproportionality, as well as unpacking the deeper dominant assumptions, associations, and ideologies that are revealed when race is placed at the center of the analysis. As discussed in this literature review, racial inequities are not necessarily overtly racist policies and practices. Instead, they may be a series of seemingly innocent practices, mindsets, and discourse that together create a disparate effect for racialized groups

(Briscoe, 2014). In Chapter Three, the researcher will present her methodology for engaging in a critical race discourse analysis, the relationship between subtle racial bias, educational discourse, and racial discipline disparities for African American students.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

“The same educational process that inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other people.”

Carter G. Woodson, *The Miseducation of the Negro* as cited in
Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1993, p.50).

The purpose of this study is to explore subtle racial bias as an explanation for racial discipline disparities through an examination of the discourse of educational leadership and policy, in the context of school discipline, towards the end of developing a framework to address the disproportionate suspension of African American students. In Chapter Two, the researcher reviewed the literature through the lens of the conceptual framework and began to unpack the deeper ideologies that are revealed when race is placed at the center of the analysis. In this chapter, the researcher will discuss the methodology for identifying the discourse of educational leaders and policy in the context of school discipline; exploring the ideologies, assumptions, and associations in the discourse about African American students; and analyzing the possible connection between the discourse and racial discipline inequities. The researcher will discuss the rationale for utilizing a critical race discourse analysis methodology and then outline the methodology, including selection of participants and method of data collection. The researcher will conclude with a description of the data analysis process and present a framework for the

analysis of the data. The researcher will begin the chapter with a brief review of the discourse of educational leadership.

In Chapter Two, the researcher discussed the discourse of educational leaders. This discourse tells how and why things are the way they are within the educational organization. The discourse advances “unquestionable assumptions” that support the desired image of an organization grounded in positive, egalitarian intention, however there is a “dark secret” to the discourse. The discourse conceals intentions of exclusion, power, and self-interests, and the “unquestionable assumptions” are actually myths used to justify policies and practices that exclude and oppress certain members of the organization (Lumby & English, 2009). As creators of the myths, it is incumbent upon educational leaders to present the “unquestionable assumptions” with veracity and to conceal the underlying interests of the organization. Van Dijk (2002) described educational discourse as one of the most influential in society and the discourse of those in educational leadership as playing an integral role in the discursive reproduction of racism. If it is the case that discourse plays a significant role in establishing, justifying, and maintaining racial disparities in education, then including an examination of the discursive strategies used by educational leaders as part of an analysis of subtle racial bias in disciplinary practice, could provide a pertinent perspective and new insights to disrupting the over 40 year pattern of racial discipline disproportionality.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework guides this study. The framework fuses elements of aversive racism and the themes and tenets of critical race theory with discursive strategies utilized in the critical discourse analysis of racism to demonstrate the relationship between subtle racial bias, educational discourse, and racial discipline disparities for African American students. The

framework utilizes aversive racism theory as a guide for identifying when acts of subtle racial bias will occur in school discipline.

Aversive racism refers to acts of implicit bias specifically related to race. Aversive racism is a subtle, unconscious manifestation of racial bias (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). The fundamental premise of aversive racism theory is that many people consciously support egalitarian principles and do not view themselves as prejudiced, yet harbor unconscious negative feelings and beliefs about African Americans. The conflict between the support of egalitarian principles and unconscious negative feelings and beliefs creates a “distinct pattern of discriminatory behavior” which is “manifested in subtle, indirect, and rationalizable ways” (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, p. 618). Within aversive racism theory is a guideline for determining when acts of subtle racial bias will occur. Stereotypes are utilized to justify negative acts toward and feelings and beliefs about African Americans. Aversive racism theory points out that subtle racial bias will occur in situations when the guidelines for appropriate behavior are vague or ambiguous, when responses can be rationalized on the basis of factors other than race, and when there is a threat to power, control, and/or status.

Ladson-Billing and Tate (2010) proposed the use of critical race theory as a means of explaining sustained racial inequities in education. Education is consciously presented as an organization that supports egalitarianism, but there are some unconscious ideologies and assumptions within the organization, especially as it relates to African American students. In this study, the researcher utilizes critical race theory to reveal the ways that the dominant assumptions, associations, and ideologies embedded in the discourse of discipline policies and educational leaders perpetuate racial discipline disparities for African American students. It provides a means of analyzing and challenging the dominant discourse on race and making

assumptions, associations and ideologies more transparent. This framework utilizes four themes and tenets of critical race theory, whiteness as the standard; race neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness; ahistoricism; and the absolute right to exclude.

Rationale for Critical Race Discourse Analysis Methodology

The research on discipline disproportionality has primarily utilized quantitative methods, which have focused on correlating school variables and student factors with suspension rates and measuring the degree to which African American students are overrepresented in the use of suspensions (Blake et al., 2011; Bloomenthal, 2011; Butler et al., 2012; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). This line of research has demonstrated that racial discipline disparities exists, but explanations can only be implied. This study adds to the existing literature by using qualitative methods and by developing a critical race discourse framework that challenges the ideologies and disrupts the discourse that produces, justifies, and maintains racial discipline disparities for African American students. There are three research questions for this study:

1. What shared ideologies, assumptions, and associations about African American students, in the context school discipline, are reflected in the discourse of educational leadership and discipline policy?
2. How might this discourse be linked to the enactment of racial discipline disparities for African American students?
3. What contribution can an analysis of the discourse of educational leadership make towards the creation of an analytic framework for addressing racial discipline disparities?

These questions sought to gain an understanding of the issue of racial discipline disparities through an exploration of the discourse of educational leaders and discipline policy. A

qualitative research design is well suited for a study that seeks to gain an understanding and provide rich descriptions of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Race and racial bias can be both complex and abstract. The use of qualitative research allows for an in depth exploration of the complex processes of race and racial bias that may exist in school discipline practice, while the use of a critical race discourse analysis methodology provides a means of operationalizing and revealing racial bias through the discourse.

The methodology for this study is based on Briscoe and Khalifa's (2013) critical race discourse analysis methodology. Briscoe and Khalifa (2013) described their use of a critical race discourse analysis as incorporating aspects of critical race methodology and being informed by a discourse analysis of power. Briscoe and Khalifa (2013) focused their examination of the discourse on the racialized experiences of people of color. In this study, the conceptual framework serves as the guide for this critical race discourse analysis methodology. This critical race discourse analysis is a thematic analysis organized around the themes and tenets of critical race theory, with aversive racism theory serving as a guide for the identification of acts of subtle racial bias in school discipline, and which incorporates discursive strategies based on van Dijk's critical discourse analysis of racism. In this critical race discourse analysis, the emphasis is on linking the written or verbal text to racial ideologies and to the practice of disproportionate discipline for African American students. While critical discourse analysis places the role of discourse at the center of the analysis and seeks to reveal the association between discourse and power (van Dijk, 1993), this critical race discourse analysis places subtle racial bias at the center of the analysis and reveals the dominant assumptions, associations, and ideologies embedded in the educational discourse which perpetuate racial discipline disparities.

This critical race discourse analysis provides insight into the relationship between subtle

racial bias, educational discourse, and racial discipline disparities for African American by making the subtle structures of talk and text explicit. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as a set of practices that transform the world and make it visible. By utilizing a qualitative critical race discourse analysis methodology, this research seeks to support the experiences of African American students by bringing to light and challenging the dominant discourse of school discipline, so that they may be better able to defend themselves against this master narrative (Solórzano & Yasso, 2002).

The Researcher's Positionality

Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, and Silverman (2004) pointed out that one of the characteristics of sound qualitative research is being transparent and reflexive about one's theoretical perspective and values, while Solórzano and Yasso (2002) explained that a critical race methodology includes not only the gathering of data and the incorporation of existing literature, but also the integration of one's personal and professional experiences into the research process. Ladson-Billings (2000) discussed having a personal and political stake in her research on the education of Black children and having all of her "selves" invested in her work.

The researcher is an African-American mother, educational leader, and doctoral student. The researcher views her identity in that order. The fact the researcher sees herself as African American before she even see herself as a mother means that she is acutely aware of being racialized. The researcher has long felt the educational experience of African American students is vastly different from the educational experiences of other students. She has both witnessed this difference as an African American educator, experienced it as an African American student, and challenged it as a parent of three African American children. The researcher brings all of these "selves" and systems of knowing with her as she engage in this research.

The researcher's first recollection of experiencing racial bias was at school. The researcher went from a school setting where the majority of students and teachers looked like her, to a school where she was one of only a handful of African American students, and where all of the teachers and educational leaders were white. Almost immediately, the researcher recognized that she was treated differently than some other students. At first, the researcher thought it was because she was new to the school, but the subtle acts and comments by the teachers continued throughout the year. "If you have blonde hair, you are dismissed. If you have green eyes, you are dismissed. If your hair comes past your shoulders, you are dismissed." For the first few dismissals, the researcher did not really pay any attention to the traits that were being called out. She was simply waiting for the teacher to say something that described her. "Everyone else you are dismissed," and the researcher would run to go get in line. As the year went on however, the researcher began to notice that she was never one of the first students dismissed. In fact, she was often one of the last students sitting in the class, no longer waiting for a physical trait, instead simply waiting for, "Everyone else you are dismissed." The researcher also found herself becoming resigned to being viewed as someone who was somehow less than other students. Still, something inside her told her to fight against this image that the teachers were trying to project onto her, because she knew this was not her story. She knew she was a "straight A" student who scored in the top percentile on state tests. She was not an "everyone else."

In Chapter Two, the researcher mentioned the story of an African American interviewee who had been part of the desegregation of public schools in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The interviewee pointed out there was often a price to pay for African American students in predominantly White desegregated schools. She explained that the payment came in the form of

a lack of support and encouragement from teachers or as a crisis in racial identity development and issues with self-esteem and self-concept for African American students (Noblit, 2014). She went on to say that African American children often internalized these feelings. Although she was referring to the experience of African American students in newly desegregated schools, the researcher believes you can hear a similar narrative from many African American students today.

While working as a middle school counselor at a middle school, the researcher served on a committee tasked with investigating and addressing discipline disproportionality for African American students. One of the first things the committee did was to give the staff a survey. On the survey was the question, “If African American/Black students in this school are disciplined more frequently and if disciplinary actions in this school's impact African American/Black students more frequently, it is because...” The answers were filled with stereotypical perception, deficit thinking, and blame directed at the African American students, their parents, and their communities. What stood out for the researcher was that the question did not ask about African-American students of low socioeconomic status, or about parent level of education, or parental involvement. It simply said African-American students. The researcher is the mother of three African American students and she was immediately struck not only by the comments, but also by the thought that if her own children attended her school, it would not matter that she was middle income, or a fellow educator, or a doctoral student in educational leadership. These comments would be the images projected onto her children just as it is projected onto the students with whom she works. There appears to be, as Solórzano (1997) pointed out, a subtle but pervasive discourse about African-American students that transcends socioeconomics, grade level, gender, and other student factors and that has even transcends time.

The researcher sees discipline disproportionality as having less to do with the behavior of

African American students and more to do with historical inequities within the educational system as experienced by African American students. As a mother, the researcher cannot turn a blind eye to these inequities because her children are not exempt from their effects. As a school counselor and educational leader, she is bound by a professional framework that says she should advocate for systemic change and promote social justice. As a doctoral candidate, she is the product of a program that is committed to preparing leaders in education for equity and excellence in a democratic society. The researcher believes that the experiences that come along with each of her “selves” play an important role in how she approaches this research and analyzes the data.

No one is exempt from unconscious bias, including this researcher, but as Staats (2014) pointed out, acknowledging and being open to new mental models are the best approaches to countering biases. As a practitioner with a critical race theoretical orientation, the researcher recognizes that she approaches this research with the assumption that there are subtle racial processes within the educational system that result in disparities for African American students and that the focus of the research on discipline disproportionality must move beyond the level of addressing student behavior to challenging the racial association and ideologies that perpetuate racial discipline disparities. The researcher also acknowledges that her theoretical orientation leads her to lean toward themes within critical race theory. The researcher has structured her data collection procedures with the attempt of minimizing bias in her interpretations. Additionally, the final “self” that she brings to this research is that of school counselor. As a school counselor, the researcher listens without judgment and she views her role as not only a researcher who seeks to contribute to the body of research on racial discipline, but also as a support for fellow educators, as well as students. It is her hope to collaborate with the school

administrators who are participating in this study towards the development of a framework that they, as well as other educational leaders, will find beneficial in their work.

State and District Context

The participants and documents for analysis are from one urban school district in North Carolina. The suspension rates in the school district and the state mimic those across the nation. North Carolina's state department of education provides an annual report of suspensions and expulsions for each school district across the state. Although the website contains access to these reports dating back to 2001-2002, reports after 2006-2007 provide a more accurate representation of state suspension numbers and rates. According to the 2006-2007 report (NCDPI, 2007), suspension numbers for Black and Multiracial students began to be reported separately in 2004 and a uniform policy of reporting was instituted by the state in 2006. Before 2006, there was a lack of consistency in reporting suspensions by districts as some schools and districts did not report suspension days for suspended students who attended alternative learning programs. In the 2016-2017 report, the state noted that as in years past, Black students continue to receive the most short-term suspensions and continue to be disproportionately represented among suspended students compared to other racial and ethnic student groups. While Black students made up 26% of the total student population in the state, they comprised 57% of the total 216,895 short term suspensions for the state. Conversely, White students comprised 50% of the total student population and accounted for 25% of short term suspensions. The suspension rate for Black students was 3.17 compared to a 0.72 suspension rate for White students (NCDPI, 2018).

The school district for this study is one of the largest in the state and has one of the highest numbers of suspensions in the state. The researcher selected the district because, in

addition to being one of the largest districts in the state and having a higher short-term suspension rate than the state average, Black students are also disproportionately represented among suspended students compared to their percentage in the total student population and compared to students of other racial/ethnic groups in the district. According to the district suspension data, the suspension rate for Black students in the district is three times the suspension rate for White students. This disproportionate suspension rate applies to both in-school and out-of-school suspension.

Black students in the district received the most short-term suspensions followed by White students. In the 2016-2017 year, Black students accounted for 41% of the total student population in the district but accounted for 71% of district's short-term suspensions, while White students accounted for 33% of the total student population in the district and 14% of short-term suspensions (NCDPI, 2018). There are 127 schools in the district and 71,747 students in grades K-12. Of the 127 schools, 69 are elementary, 23 are middle, 28 are high, and 10 are alternative. Some of the schools are multi-level, housing both elementary and middle school students or middle and high school students. Based on the 2016-2017 enrollment, 105 different languages/dialects are represented through the student population, 15% of students receive special education services, 19% are identified as advanced learners, and the student poverty rate is 63%. Forty-one percent of the student population is Black, 33% White, 15% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 4% Multiracial, .42% American Indian, and .15% Pacific Islander.

Site and Participant Selection

Although this is not a quantitative study that seeks to calculate the rate of disproportionality, the extent of racial disproportionality at schools in the district will serve as a supplemental variable used to determine administrators selected for participation. This study

utilizes suspension rates and the relative rate ratio to measure disproportionality. Since the same students may receive more than one suspension, Porowski et al. (2014) stated comparing “removal rates” provides a more central measure of disproportionality than number of students receiving suspensions. Both suspension rates and the relative rate ratio measure disproportionality at the level of incidents of suspensions received. The suspension rate measures the number of incidents of suspensions per 100 students. Suspension rates are calculated by taking the number of suspensions for students in a population, dividing that number by the total number of students in that population, and then multiplying that number by 100 (Porowski et al., 2014)..

$$\text{Suspension rate} = \frac{\text{(Number of Black students receiving a suspension/Total number of Black students enrolled in the school)}}{100} \quad (1)$$

Disproportionality can be measured when the suspension rate for Black students is compared to the suspension rate for a comparison group. Most often, White students serve as the comparison student population when examining racial discipline disproportionality (Boneshefski & Runge, 2014). Comparing the suspension rate for Black students, to the suspension rate for White students, results in the relative rate ratio. The relative rate ratio is calculated by dividing the suspension rate for Black students by the suspension rate for White students (Porowski et al., 2014).

$$\text{Relative rate ratio} = \frac{\text{Suspension rate for Black students}}{\text{Suspension rate for White students}} \quad (2)$$

Discipline disproportionality is determined when the target group, Black students, receives suspensions at a significantly higher rate than the comparison group, White students. A relative rate ratio of 1.00 denotes proportionality, that both groups are equally proportionate in receiving

suspensions. A relative rate ratio over 1.00 denotes overrepresentation for Black students and a ratio under 1.00 denotes underrepresentation.

The researcher selected schools for this study based on racial discipline disproportionality as measured by the relative rate ratio. The district provided the researcher with a 2016-17 Discipline Summary which included the suspension rates for Black students and White students for each school in the district. Since the report already included the suspension rate for Black students and White students, the researcher only needed to calculate the relative rate ratio for each school in the district. Boneshefski & Runge (2014) pointed out that disproportionality ratios can be greatly influenced by the size of the sample group and, as such, they recommend not utilizing a sample less than 10 when determining disproportionality. The researcher asked the district to remove schools from the discipline summary report with less than 10 Black students or White students enrolled and schools with less than 5 suspensions for both Black students and White students. The researcher then utilized the suspension rate data in the 2016-17 Discipline Summary to calculate the relative rate ratio for each of the schools by dividing the suspension rate for Black students by the suspension rate for White students. A relative rate ratio over 2.00, indicates the suspension rate for Black students is over two times that of White students. The researcher eliminated schools from the sample with a ratio of 1.00 or less, indicating proportionality. The researcher then grouped the remaining schools by school level and ordered the schools based on their relative rate ratio.

Based on the 2016-17 Discipline Summary data, and the researcher's calculation of the relative rate ratio, on average Black students in elementary schools are suspended at a rate 2.5 times that of White students. In middle school, on average the suspension rate for Black students is four times that of White students, and at the high school level, the suspension rate for Black

students is about three times that of White students. Since the highest disproportionality between Black and White students occurs in middle schools, the researcher drew participants from the middle school level. Briscoe (2014) pointed out that context influences the production of discourse, therefore the researcher sought to match schools as closely as possible based on enrollment size, racial composition of student population, and socioeconomics. The district website provides information on school enrollment size and socioeconomic status, as measured by the receiving of federal Title I funding, and the 2016-17 Discipline Summary included the percentage of Black student enrollment and White student enrollment. Title I is a federal program which provides financial assistance to schools serving a high percentage of low-income families (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

The researcher selected six schools with similar enrollment size, racial composition of student population, and socioeconomic status for possible inclusion in the study. The researcher contacted the administrators of these schools, and of the six, two agreed to participate in the study. The researcher listed the demographic characteristics of the participating schools in Table 3.1. The names of the participating schools are pseudonyms.

Table 3.1. <i>Demographic Characteristics of the Participating Schools</i>					
School	Relative Rate Ratio	Total Enrollment	Percent Black	Percent White	Title 1
Roseland Middle	2.1	706	51%	24%	Yes
Beck Middle	3.4	610	66%	11%	Yes

Table 3.1

A critical race discourse analysis not only examines the ways that racial inequities are reinforced, justified, and maintained, but it also examines the ways that racial inequities are challenged (Ladson-Billing and Tate, 1995). However, the four middle schools in the district with low disproportionality did not demographically match the schools with high disproportionality. Although the criteria for the study classifies both schools as having high disproportionality, Roseland Middle's rate was .2 away from low disproportionality and, according to 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 archive suspension data, the researcher found on the district website, Roseland has consistently had among the lowest disproportionality rates for middle schools in the district. The researcher chose Roseland Middle as a way to examine if the administrator was challenging the dominant discourse and racial inequities as a means of keeping the disproportionality rate down, in contrast to Beck Middle. The researcher asked the administrator and teachers from these two school sites to participate in this study. In addition to the two school administrators, several teachers agreed to participate. The researcher listed the demographic characteristics of the participants in Table 3.2. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 3.2.

Demographic Characteristics for Participants

Name	School	Role in school	Race	Gender	Years in education
Beach	Roseland Middle	Teacher	Caucasian	Female	29
Bobby	Beck Middle	Teacher	African American	Male	5
Herbie	Beck Middle	Teacher	Caucasian	Female	1
Joe	Beck Middle	School Administrator	African American	Male	12

Name	School	Role in school	Race	Gender	Years in education
Nigel	Beck Middle	Behavior Intervention/ISS Teacher	African American	Male	10
Rick	Beck Middle	Teacher	African American	Female	7
Rob	Roseland Middle	Teacher	Caucasian	Male	5
Sean	Roseland Middle	School Administrator	Caucasian	Male	16
Twinkie	Beck Middle	Teacher	African American	Female	11

Table 3.2

Data Collection

Educators are often reluctant to discuss issues of race and often avoid the implication of racial dynamics in educational processes (Stevenson, 2008). Race is a sensitive topic and as such, participants may not be completely forthcoming with their opinions and attitudes as they relate to the racial discipline gap. One way to address this possible limitation is through triangulation, the collection of data from multiple sources through which the dominant discourse can be analyzed. The data for this study came from observations, documents, and semi-structured one-on-one interviews with two school administrators and seven teacher participants from Roseland Middle School and Beck Middle School during the 2017-2018 academic year. The first research question seeks to identify shared ideologies, assumptions, and associations. As such, there is some consistency among interview questions for the administrators and teachers.

Administrator interviews. The researcher collected data the first semester of the 2017-

2018 school year, August 2017-December 2017. The researcher obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The district also has a protocol that the researcher followed in order to obtain data and gain access to employees. Upon receiving approval by the IRB and the district, the researcher began contacting participants and collecting data. The researcher utilized a written invitation to participate which included the purpose the study, an explanation of the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, and potential benefits of participation. The researcher provided the participants with a written consent form which reiterated these points and which required the signature of participants to verify consent. The researcher utilized pseudonyms to protect the identity of those who consented to participate as well as pseudonyms for the schools and district.

The researcher conducted two semi-structured one-on-one interviews with the administrators at their school sites and one semi-structured interview with teachers. The use of a semi-structured interview is appropriate because it allows the researcher to construct questions that explore topics relevant to addressing the research questions, but also allows for the flexibility to make the interview more conversational (Fylan, 2010). Fylan (2010) also pointed out that semi-structured interviews are appropriate when discussing sensitive topics. The length of the interviews ranged from 32 minutes to 75 minutes and the average length of the interviews was 48 minutes. The researcher audio recorded and transcribed the interviews. The researcher made the transcriptions available to participants for member checking to verify and clarify information.

The researcher contacted the administrators from the selected schools via email to request a meeting to discuss their possible participation in the study. During this initial meeting, the researcher explained the study to the administrators and, upon obtaining their written consent to

participate, the researcher set dates with administrators for conducting interviews and observations. The researcher sought to build rapport with the administrators during this initial meeting by explaining the relevance of the study, engaging the administrators in a discussion about their schools, and making the administrators aware that the goal of the researcher is not only to collect data, but also to assist and collaborate with the principals in addressing discipline disparities at their schools.

The first interview with the administrators was a life story interview. Although called an interview, the life story is more of a narrative with guiding questions. The life story interview for this study focused on the interviewee's journey into educational leadership. The guiding question serve as prompts to encourage the principals to reflect on and discuss key aspects of this journey (see Appendix A). The researcher decided to utilize life story interviewing as a way to build rapport as well as because of the methodological relevance. Life story interviews are a research tool which can serve as a means of collaboration between the interviewee and the interviewer (Atkinson, 2002). Atkinson (2002) stated that the telling of one's story has the ability to create community and bring greater knowledge and better understanding to the listener as well as the storyteller. The use of storytelling is also an integral component of a methodology based on critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 2010). The telling of stories can make "the implicit explicit" (Atkinson, 2002, p. 129) by revealing personal ideologies and uncovering hidden characteristics. When utilized in critical race discourse research, storytelling provides a platform for the analysis of myths and assumptions about race (Ladson-Billings, 2010) and assists in determining the relationship between language and social practice and the formation of social identity (Atkinson, 2002). The second interview with the administrators focused on discipline data, policy, and practice. The researcher constructed exploratory interview questions

that were designed to engage administrators in a discussion about school discipline in general and the racial discipline gap, communication of discipline expectations, the interpretation and use of their discipline data and district discipline policies, and the role of race in discipline disparities (see Appendix B).

Observations. Briscoe and Khalifa (2013) pointed out that most school administrators “would vehemently object to racism as a policy or practice” (p. 1). Therefore, in addition to interviews, the researcher utilized observations in order to gain access to the discourse that participants may be unwilling to share in an interview format, to validate the data obtained from interviews, and to establish context for the discourse. The researcher selected participant observations because of the utility when trying to gain an understanding of how participants communicate in the course of routine practice (Kawulich, 2005). In this study, the researcher employed an observer-as-participant role. Kawulich (2005) described observer-as-participant as the most ethical approach to participant observation because it allows the researcher to participate in group activities and partially be viewed as an insider, while still emphasizing the role of the researcher as an observer to the natural discourse and interaction of the participants. There are several reasons why this type of participation may be well suited for addressing the research questions. First, beginning the research as an observer-as-participant allows for the building of a greater rapport, which may help the school principals and teachers feel less guarded about discussing the issues surrounding race and their practice during the interviews. Engaging in the activities and everyday interactions of the participants may also assist the researcher with gaining access to the unconscious, “insider” discourse that Lumby & English (2009) discussed. Finally, by still maintaining the role of observer, the researcher will have the ability to observe how the myths of the organization are presented to someone outside of the organization within

the natural setting.

The research began observations after the initial meeting with administrators and observations were ongoing throughout the data collection process. The researcher visited the schools throughout the semester and engaged in such activities as shadowing the administrators to observe interactions and attending meetings such as staff meetings, trainings, and community meetings. The researcher recorded observations through field notes. The field notes included a description of what the researcher observed, the researcher's reflections, and notes on the use of discursive strategies relevant to a critical race discourse analysis (see Appendix C).

Teacher interviews. The second research question sought to determine the relationship between the dominant discourse and the practices associated with the disproportionate suspension of African American students. One-on-one semi-structured interviews (see Appendix D) with teachers from the selected school sites provided a source of data for addressing this research question as well provided additional data to assist with the identification of shared ideologies, assumptions, and associations. During the observations, the researcher and administrator determined a date for the researcher to present the study at a staff meeting. At the meeting, the administrator introduced the researcher to the staff and the researcher presented and explained the study. The researcher also invited teachers to participate in either a one-on-one interview or as a member of a focus group. The researcher also explained that the district had set the stipulation that the researcher could only interview teachers outside of the instructional day, before or after school. The researcher provided the teachers with her university email address and explained to teachers that they could sign-up to participate through email. A few days after the presentation, the researcher followed up with an email to the teachers inviting them to participate in the study.

Document analysis. The researcher utilized the 2017-2018 Student Handbook, The Annual Report on Discipline Data 2016-2017 presentation to the district School Board, and information about the district on the district website for document analysis. The district's Board of Education has established a Student Code of Conduct which defines system-wide standards for the behavior of district students and which the district publishes annually in the Student Handbook. The handbook includes the district's vision for discipline, policies and procedures for disciplinary action, and definitions and consequences for code of conduct violations. Administrators often utilize the code of conduct when issuing suspensions. An analysis of the code of conduct is relevant, not only because it is an element of the disciplinary decision making process, but also because the researcher believes it will also speak to the ideologies of those in leadership in the district.

Trustworthiness

Creswell (2014) discussed several strategies, which the researcher will employ in this study, to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. In addition to presenting the researcher's positionality, to clarify bias, the researcher will triangulate data from multiple sources as a means of establishing added validity. The researcher had repeated interactions with participants and visits to the selected sites over the course of four months, in order to develop rich descriptions, adding to the validity of the findings, and to increase the credibility of interpretations (Creswell, 2014).

Data Analysis

Coding. The researcher coded the collected data throughout the data collection process as the researcher transcribed interviews immediately after conducting interviews. The researcher began the process of organizing the data from the transcriptions, field notes, and documents

based on Lichtman's (2013) approach to thematic coding of developing codes, organizing the codes into categories and identifying central concepts and themes. The first stage in the development of codes includes looking for patterns. Consistent with research question one, the researcher began the coding process by noting recurrent words, phrases, and other shared patterns of practice within the data sources. These repeated and shared words, phrases, and patterns became the initial codes. As a way to keep the codes organized, the researcher assigned each of the codes a color and highlighted them with the assigned color whenever they showed up in the transcripts and documents. The researcher created a spreadsheet and added all the highlighted codes. As the researcher collected data, the researcher repeated the coding process. The researcher identified words, phrases, thoughts, and interpretation that spoke to already identified codes and added them to the spreadsheet. As the researcher identified and established new codes, the researcher assigned colors and added the codes to the spreadsheet for future coding.

The next stage in the coding process was organizing the codes into categories. The researcher began with 180 codes that she then organized into 10 categories. The researcher identified commonalities among the codes and grouped them into the overarching categories that spoke to shared assumptions and associations about African American students, school discipline and discursive strategies. The final step in Lichtman's (2013) process involves moving from categories to central themes. Coffey and Atkinson discussed "finding conceptual and theoretical coherence in the data," (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 47) as one approach of moving from categories to concepts and themes. For this part of the analysis, the researcher utilized a priori coding derived from the conceptual framework for the study.

Critical race discourse analysis. The conceptual framework serves as the guide for this

critical race discourse analysis. This is a thematic analysis organized around the themes and tenets of critical race theory, with aversive racism theory serving as a guide for the identification of acts of subtle racial bias in school discipline, and which incorporates discursive strategies based on van Dijk's critical discourse analysis of racism. In this critical race discourse analysis, the emphasis is on linking the written or verbal text to racial ideologies and to the practice of disproportionate discipline for African American students. The researcher organized the categories into themes that coincided with the conceptual framework and created a spreadsheet with tabs for each theme. The themes for the analysis, whiteness as the standard; race neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness; ahistoricism; and the absolute right to exclude, are based on the racial ideologies of critical race theory. Table 3.3 provides a description of how the researcher analyzed the themes.

Table 3.3. <i>Analytic Framework: Description of Themes of Analysis</i>	
Theme	Description
Whiteness as the standard	Advances shared norms, standards, expectations, negative representations of African American students, how African American students are represented compared to how others are represented
Race neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness	Colorblind discourse, decision making processes, interpretation of behaviors, examples of agreement and lack of agreement in policy definitions
Ahistoricism	Stated reasons for discipline disproportionality, interventions utilized to address disproportionality, links to historical discourse utilized in desegregation

Theme	Description
The absolute right to exclude	Representations of power and control in discipline, ways that power is exerted in discourse and practice, ways discipline excludes African American students

Table 3.3

Embedded within each theme are indicators that speak to subtle racial bias and discrimination. These indicators, stereotypical perceptions and associations; ambiguity; rationalization of factors other than race, and threat to power control or status, are based on the elements of aversive racism theory. The researcher organized the codes that spoke to these indicators and added them to corresponding theme. The researcher organized the codes that spoke to these indicators and added them to the corresponding theme. Similarly, there are discursive strategies defined by van Dijk's critical discourse analysis of racism, which are related to the themes, such as implications, the distinction of "Us" vs. "Them," and impression formation, and which may signal the presence of subtle racial bias. The researcher discussed the critical race theory themes, the aversive racism indicators, and the discursive structures and strategies in detail in Chapter Two. The researcher looked for ways that the coded data fit into the themes by using the aversive racism and discursive indicators as points of analysis (see Table 3.4). The critical race theory themes, aversive racism indicators, and discursive structures and strategies will serve as the analytic framework for identifying the ideologies in the dominant discourse of educational leaders, revealing subtle racial bias embedded in the ideologies, and linking the ideologies in the discourse to the enactment of racial discipline disparities for African American students.

Table 3.4. <i>Analytic Framework: Thematic Coding</i>				
Theme	Indicator	Shared beliefs, assumptions, associations	Shared practices	Discursive structure and strategies
Whiteness as the standard	Stereotypical perceptions and associations	Negative representation of AA students	Enactment-teachers use of accountability to discipline AA	Positive self-representation
Race neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness	Ambiguity <hr/> Discretion in decision making	Ambiguity-differences in definitions of fighting <hr/> Discipline is grey	Ambiguity-any behavior could be made to fit the rule <hr/> Policy as a guideline, admin decides interpretation	Slippery as code word for rule ambiguous <hr/> Presupposition-assumption that rules and behaviors are interpreted the same
Ahistoricism	Rationalization of factors other than race	AA student as having issues	Recognition of teacher, but no recognition of the role they play	Pre-Brown discourse of AA students, blame
The absolute right to exclude	Threat to power, control, and status	Ideologies: discipline as power	Directs teacher not to give up power	Silencing-delegitimize the parents valid concern

Table 3.4

In this chapter, the researcher presented her methodology for identifying the discourse of educational leaders and policy in the context of school discipline, exploring the ideologies, assumptions, and associations in the discourse about African American students, and analyzing the possible connection between the discourse and racial discipline inequities. The researcher discussed her rationale for utilizing a critical race discourse analysis approach and outlined the

methodology for participant selection and data collection. The researcher concluded by providing a description of the data analysis process and presenting a framework for the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Discipline disproportionality for African American students has persisted despite over 40 years of research. Although researchers have often examined other factors, race is consistently correlated with disproportionate discipline sanctions, particularly for African American students. The purpose of this study was twofold: to explore subtle racial bias as an explanation for racial discipline disparities through an examination of the discourse of educational leadership and policy in the context of school discipline; and to utilize the analysis towards the end of developing a framework to address the disproportionate suspension of African American students. In Chapters One-Three, the researcher illustrated the extent and impact of discipline disproportionality for African American students, reviewed the prominent literature on racial discipline disproportionality, and discussed the methodology for exploring the discourse of school discipline and addressing the research questions. In this chapter, the researcher addresses the first two research questions and accomplishes the first part of the purpose, to explore subtle racial bias as an explanation for racial discipline disparities.

In this critical race discourse analysis, the emphasis is on linking the written or verbal text to racial ideologies and to the practice of disproportionate discipline for African American students. The analysis examines the ways that racial inequities are produced, justified, maintained, and reproduced through the discourse. The researcher addresses the research questions through a critical race discourse analysis of district discipline policy and semi-

structured interviews with school administrators and teachers from participating schools.

The research questions for this study are:

1. What shared ideologies, assumptions, and associations about African American students, in the context school discipline, are reflected in the discourse of educational leadership and discipline policy?
2. How might this discourse be linked to the enactment of racial discipline disparities for African American students?
3. What contribution can an analysis of the discourse of educational leadership make towards the creation of an analytic framework for addressing racial discipline disparities?

A conceptual framework guides this qualitative study. The conceptual framework serves as the guide for this critical race discourse analysis. This is a thematic analysis organized around the themes and tenets of critical race theory, with aversive racism theory serving as a guide for the identification of acts of subtle racial bias in school discipline, and which incorporates discursive strategies based on van Dijk's critical discourse analysis of racism. In this critical race discourse analysis, the emphasis is on linking the written or verbal text to racial ideologies and to the practice of disproportionate discipline for African American students. The researcher utilized the framework to capture discourse that provided evidence of subtle racial bias and to link that discourse to racialized ideologies and the enactment of racial discipline disparities.

In this chapter, the researcher begins with an overview of the school and participant demographics. The researcher will then address the first research question by presenting the shared discourse of educational leadership and discipline policy. Next, the researcher will address the second research question by conducting a critical race discourse analysis of the

shared discourse through the lens of the conceptual framework. The researcher applies the discourse of the educational leaders and discipline policy to the domains of the conceptual framework, analyzing the implicit meanings, discursive strategies and racialized ideologies of the discourse, and linking the discourse to the practice of disproportionately suspending African American students.

School Demographics

The participants in this study are from one urban school district in North Carolina. The researcher utilizes the pseudonym Sun Valley School System to refer to the district for the remainder of the dissertation. The researcher selected the Sun Valley School System because, in addition to being one of the largest districts in the state and having a higher short term suspension rate than the state average, Black students are also disproportionately represented among suspended students compared to their percentage in the total student population and compared to students of other racial/ethnic groups in the district. According to Sun Valley School System suspension data, the suspension rate for Black students in the district is three times the suspension rate of White students. This disproportionate suspension rate applies to both in-school and out-of-school suspensions.

The researcher utilized suspension rates and the relative rate ratio as a means of measuring the extent of racial disproportionality for schools in the district. The district provided the researcher with a 2016-17 Discipline Summary which included the suspension rates for Black students and White students for each school in the district. The researcher then utilized these data to calculate the relative rate ratio for each of the schools by dividing the suspension rate for Black students by the suspension rate for White students. For this study, the researcher considered a relative rate ratio over 2.00, indicating that the suspension rate of Black students is

over two times that of White students, to be high disproportionality. Based on the 2016-17 Discipline Summary data, and the researcher's calculation of the relative rate ratio, on average Black students in elementary schools are suspended at a rate 2.5 times that of White students. In middle school, on average the suspension rate for Black students is four times that of White students, and at the high school level, the suspension rate for Black students is about three times that of White students. Since the highest disproportionality between Black and White students occurred in middle schools, the researcher drew participants from the middle school level.

The Sun Valley School System website provides information on school enrollment size and socioeconomic status, as measured by the receiving of federal Title I funding, and the 2016-17 Discipline Summary includes the percentage of Black student enrollment and White student enrollment. The researcher selected six schools with similar enrollment size, racial composition of student population, and socioeconomic status for inclusion in the study. The researcher contacted the administrators of these schools, and of the six, two agreed to participate in the study. The researcher listed the demographic characteristics of the participating schools in Table 4. The names of the participating schools are pseudonyms.

Table 4.1. <i>Demographic Characteristics of the Participating Schools</i>					
School	Relative Rate Ratio	Total Enrollment	Percent Black	Percent White	Title I
Roseland Middle	2.1	706	51%	24%	Yes
Beck Middle	3.4	610	66%	11%	Yes

Table 4.1

Participant Demographics

The data for this study came from semi-structured one-on-one interviews with two school administrators and seven teacher participants from Roseland Middle School and Beck Middle School during the 2017-2018 academic year. To recruit teacher participants, the researcher presented the study at a staff meeting and invited teachers to participate in either a one-on-one interview or in a focus group. The researcher then followed up with an email to all of the teachers at each school. In addition to the two school administrators, several teachers agreed to participate in one-on-one interviews. The researcher listed the demographic characteristics of the participants in Table 5. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 4.2 <i>Demographic Characteristics for Participants</i>					
Name	School	Role in school	Race	Gender	Years in education
Beach	Roseland Middle	Teacher	Caucasian	Female	29
Bobby	Beck Middle	Teacher	African American	Male	5
Herbie	Beck Middle	Teacher	Caucasian	Female	1
Joe	Beck Middle	School Administrator	African American	Male	12
Nigel	Beck Middle	Behavior Intervention/ISS Teacher	African American	Male	10
Rick	Beck Middle	Teacher	African American	Female	7

Name	School	Role in school	Race	Gender	Years in education
Rob	Roseland Middle	Teacher	Caucasian	Male	5
Sean	Roseland Middle	School Administrator	Caucasian	Male	16
Twinkie	Beck Middle	Teacher	African American	Female	11

Table 4.2

The researcher conducted two semi-structured interviews with the administrators and one semi-structured interview with each teacher. The length of the interviews ranged from 32 minutes to 75 minutes and the average length of the interviews was 48 minutes. The first interview with the administrators was a life story interview and each teacher interview began with life story prompts (see Appendices A and C). The life story format provided the participants with the opportunity to tell the story of their journey into education and educational leadership. Beginning the interviews with the life story prompts allowed time for the researcher to build a rapport with the participants and to set the tone of the interaction as one in which participants could feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues without judgement. The experiences that emerged from the life story interviews also provided context for the discourse presented throughout this chapter.

Beach. Beach has more years of experience in education than the other participants in the study. Although her explicit discourse reflects a colorblind ideology, implicitly her discourse demonstrates an awareness that the faces of her students have changed over the years.

When we first came here...our school made their scores, we worked with children that you thought you could make a difference. I mean, and then we've come forward where the school's demographics have changed and uh the parent support is gone, and uh we're

not making the scores...I just wish they'd take that [race] off it causes so much... Lord help us let's just get it [race] off if that causes people that much problems because that's not what we're about. We're about educating children.

Bobby. Bobby's discourse reflects an awareness of the inequities he's faced as an African American male and a desire to use his position as an African American male teacher to instill in his African American male students what he believes they need to be successful men.

If nothing else, I'm not saying all of the time, but a lot of the times, within seconds a kid will figure out, "Ok he's Black just like I'm Black." Might not have even had too many Black teachers but some of them I think I am literally the first Black (names subject he teaches) teacher they've ever had, so I'm just like, "Look man let's just have a real conversation," and they get it.

Herbie. Herbie is a first-year teacher who has recently participated in some racial equity training as part of a teaching preparation program. Her discourse throughout the interviews mirrors the discourse of this training.

We did a phenomenal program, Racial Equity Institute...and we talked about disparities in education and like, how teachers might say, "Oh well it's just the like the um African Americans just act up more," right. But in reality it's the bias of you look there for trouble. Um which is something I've like checked myself and tried to make sure that I'm not doing is like, "Oh I know to look in this corner of the room cause that student's over there," and they already think that he's going to be doing something wrong.

Joe. Joe sees himself as a role model and advocate for the African American students who share his roots of growing up in poverty. Joe's discourse reflects his attempt to reconcile being an equity focused educational leader with navigating the micro-political aspect of

educational leadership.

Sometimes you're faced with a lot of micro-political decision making and you're obligated to make an objective decision even though you might know there's some extenuating circumstances...Even though policies are important to help keep us on the straight and narrow and make our objective decisions, sometimes there are circumstances that policies don't understand. And the humanistic factor takes over in me and um being from a poverty stricken community and understanding what students experience um often weighs in on my decision making.

Nigel. Nigel had several occupations working with low income families before working in education. He decided to work for the school system because he thought it would provide him with some deeper insights as to why patterns of disparate outcomes for low-income minority families occur. Nigel's discourse reflects his experience in, and knowledge of, the conditions that impact minority students from low income families.

You can't talk to them if you haven't been where they been, if you haven't at least gone out there and see it. You look stupid trying to talk to them...That's why I put so much energy and time into them. If we don't catch them here they're done...And maybe it is the background I have, maybe it's growing up in that background, that I knew if it wasn't for (names one of his former teachers) taking that interest in me at that point in my life, I'm being honest with you I don't know where the heck I would be right about now.

Rick. Rick is working on his administrative license. His discourse reflects his transition from the classroom and the role of teacher to assuming the identity of a school administrator.

I continue to follow the rules and policies. Um if it's something it deems a referral then I make the referral um and then let administration handle it from there and I just accept

whatever the outcome is with that. And uh I don't always agree with it, but you know that's probably ninety-nine percent of why I'm trying to get to the position where I can do something about it.

Rob. Rob's prior occupation in law enforcement has made him particularly aware of the school-to-prison pipeline. His discourse reflects his becoming a teacher to disrupt this cycle.

Unfortunately it's a reality. Um, the statistics prove that it's there...It's, it's a direct pipeline. We have students that flunk out here, they go into the streets commit crimes and um, as they go into the prison systems...they go in completely illiterate and they have no education and when they get out, they still have no education....I was like, maybe I can change it if I go into the education side. Uh, I can start bringing up some students and police officers and those who get a degree in criminal justice to start looking at it a different way.

Sean. Sean sees building genuine, supportive relationships with all his students as important. He also has an awareness that he is a Caucasian administrator at a school that disproportionately suspends African American students. Sean's discourse reflects the desire to just figure out what he needs to do to "fix" discipline disproportionality.

It's so easy to just discipline the kid and walk away but never have the conversation about how do we fix the problem. Um you know how do we fix what happened. Um I think it's also important when you work with kids for them to understand that you're not mad at them or you're not disciplining them, you're disciplining the action.

Twinkie. Twinkie's classroom is highly structured and controlled. Her discourse reflects her belief that this structure serves as a means of preparing African American students for life.

I'm trying to push them all to the same level cause the world out there doesn't see them as extremely high, extremely low, they just see them as Black and I have to make them aware every day that you're Black.

The second interview with the administrators (see Appendix B) and the remaining interview questions with teachers focused on discipline policy and practice. The researcher constructed exploratory interview questions that engaged the administrators and teachers in a discussion about school discipline in general, the racial discipline gap, communication of discipline expectations, the interpretation and use of district discipline policies, discipline decision making, and the role of race in discipline disparities. These interviews along with Sun Valley School System discipline policy, found in the 2017-18 Student Handbook, serve as the data sources for the critical race discourse analysis and were utilized for addressing the research questions.

Research Question 1: What shared ideologies, assumptions, and associations about African American students, in the context school discipline, are reflected in the discourse of educational leadership and discipline policy?

In Chapter Two of this dissertation, the researcher discussed the myths of educational leadership, which are “unquestionable assumptions” that tell the story of how and why things are the way they are. The researcher’s approach to addressing research question one was to identify the “unquestionable assumptions” that are advanced in the shared discourse of educational leaders and discipline policies which tell the story of discipline disproportionality for African American students. The researcher coded two themes: 1) the association of African American students with poverty; and 2) the assumption that educators must fix African American students.

The association of African American students with poverty. The researcher asked Sean and Joe the open-ended question, “Tell me about your African American students.” The

question allowed the administrators to discuss whatever aspects about their African American students they wanted to discuss and it allowed the researcher to explore the administrators' ideologies, assumptions, and associations about African American students. Sean constructed an identity of the African American students at Roseland Middle around poverty saying, "More of my African American kids come from that poverty side." Sean further illustrated the association of the African American students at Roseland when the researcher asked his thoughts on why the suspension gap existed at Roseland Middle. Sean stated,

I think in our building that disproportionality comes especially from our...most of our African American kids are our disenfranchised poverty kids and most of our White kids are not. You know and so I think they just, those students come with different baggage.

Rob, a teacher at Roseland Middle, also expressed Sean's discourse of constructing an identity of African American students around socioeconomics. Rob said of the African American students at Roseland,

I do have some African American students and some of the things that I see in them are distinct differences...We've got the ones that, come from the lower income families...They end up having to take care of siblings. And we see that they're, they're grades are rather depressed...And I see that in a lot of these socioeconomic issues.

Although Joe expressed that the African American students at Beck Middle were from both upper middle-class and low-income environments, he then went on to generalize about African American students.

I see, um frustration in a lot of their faces. Um, I see a lack of identity sometimes from them, a lack of ability to have the determination to do anything. Um, to be honest I see some excuse making.

The teachers at Beck Middle associated African American students with poverty. Twinkie described the African American students at Beck Middle in this way,

We've had kids in the past that have refused to come to after school tutoring. That's cause it was their day to get their food stamps and they were going to get Takis [a type of snack] and those, getting those Takis was more important than their grade, their education.

Rick said of African American students at Beck Middle,

Why we're gonna have all these disproportionality rates is because kids and especially minority kids that have, a lot of them that are disadvantaged. If you give them gaps in structure and they're already lacking structure at home, it's all, it's gonna balloon out of control.

This discourse not only advances an ideology that African American students do not care about academics and their behavior must be strictly monitored, but it also advances assumptions about their family dynamics and home life. The implications are that there is more than one child in the household, and that African American parents are either unable or unwilling to take care of their children. This seems to set the stage for the disproportionate suspension of African American students by presenting African American students as having behavioral, academic, and social/emotional “baggage.” The discourse does not, however, account for lower suspension rates for low-income Caucasian students. Instead, the discourse seems to demonstrate deficit ideologies, assumptions, and associations about African American students and suggests that the participants link discipline disparities to perceptions about race and socioeconomic status more than socioeconomic status alone.

The assumption: African American students must be “fixed.” The researcher found that the administrators expressed positive self-representation coupled with subtle negative

representations of African American students. The administrators appeared to be emphasizing their positive practices, but subtly they were shaping an impression of African American students. The administrators accompanied the theme of problematizing African American students with comments that positioned the schools and educators in a positive light, as helpers for African American students with “issues.” Joe illustrated this discursive strategy in a role play with the researcher.

The researcher asked Sean and Joe to do a role play in which the researcher acted as the parent of an African American student who had been suspended from their school. In the role play, the parent/researcher is meeting with the administrator to discuss the student’s suspension. During the meeting, the parent/researcher presents the school’s discipline data and asks the administrator to explain this suspension in light of the school’s disproportionate suspension data for African American students. Both Sean and Joe made similar comments stating that they had given the student multiple “chances to rectify the situation,” in Joe’s words. Joe then continues to say to the parent/researcher,

I’m not saying that if you’re not involved you wouldn’t know, but I’m in the community.

I meet kids where they are. I hang out with them on the weekends in the mall. I try to be a pillar in the community and this hurts me, as if, as it hurts you because I’m a representative of this culture as well.

Joe’s comments of having given the student multiple chances before suspension, of being available to students on the weekend, and being an active pillar of the community, seem to emphasize positive self-representation. However, these comments subtly place the blame on the parent and the student by creating the impression of a parent who is uninvolved and disconnected from the community and the behavior of his/her child, and a student who has failed to correct

his/her behavior after receiving multiple chances to change.

Joe also demonstrated the subtle blame of African American students coupled with positive self-representations when he discussed how he addresses the suspension gap. After telling the researcher about a number of interventions that he has implemented at Beck Middle, Joe stated,

I generally don't look at what need to be done about reducing the suspensions. I, I look at what can I do to prevent them from being suspended, what type of supports can be put in place and I feel like the kids who fall through those gaps are truly the kids that just truly don't want to do well.

Joe's emphasis appears to be the positive representation of his efforts to prevent African American students from being suspended, but here again, Joe creates the impression that African American students refuse to correct their behavior. Joe does not seem to consider that his interventions may not be effective in addressing the suspension gap; instead he places the blame on the unwillingness of African American students to do better.

Sean repeatedly utilized two words, "void" and "baggage," when discussing the African American students at Roseland Middle. The researcher coded these as code words for the association of African American students with having issues. Sean often coupled these words with positive self-representations of the school and the teachers at Roseland. The researcher asked Sean his thoughts on the suspension gap as a racial inequity. He responded, "You know the part of me that truly believes that kids act up for a reason is like what, what we can put in place to fill that void before these things happen." Sean views the "void" within African American students lives as playing a role in the suspension gap, and Sean advances the implication that the school can prevent the disproportionality by addressing the issues within

African American students. The researcher also asked Sean if there were any teachers at Roseland Middle who he felt were particularly equity minded. Sean views teachers that position themselves as helpers for African American students who have baggage and issues as a model of racial equity. He described his equity-minded teachers in this way,

Understands that kids have baggage, baggage when they come to school and doesn't ignore them, cause I think that's one of the things we do a lot in schools. We ignore that baggage, but I think they help kids to learn how to deal with that baggage and I think that's a big difference that I see, really good teachers and you know strong teacher, is they help kids to understand what that baggage is and how to deal with it.

Sean often utilized the word, "fix," in conjunction with "void" and "baggage," linking descriptions of African American students with the need for the school to come up with a way to "fix" them. After, Sean stated, "I believe that discipline is a way that students are acting out trying to fill a void. And if all we do is just discipline them, we're never filling that void." Sean then stated, "We've gotta fix what's causing the behavior not just the behavior itself." Sean illustrated this a second time. After stating, "I think you know more of my African American kids come from that poverty side. So I think understanding what baggage they come with," Sean made the comment,

How as a school can we fix those things? And I don't want to say fix them cause that's probably the wrong word cause that makes it sound like it's a negative, but how do we help kids overcome those obstacles to be able to achieve and be the students they want to be?

The association of African American students with poverty and the assumption that African American students must be fixed are the "unquestionable assumptions" that are advanced about

African American students within schools and that tell the story of African American students in the context of school discipline. These assumptions lay the foundation for the enactment of discipline disparities for African Americans, which the researcher examines in Research Question 2.

Research Question 2: How might this discourse be linked to the enactment of racial discipline disparities for African American students?

In this critical race discourse analysis, the emphasis is on linking the written or verbal text to racial ideologies and to the practice of disproportionate discipline for African American students. The conceptual framework for the study seeks to demonstrate the relationship between subtle racial bias, discourse, and racial discipline disparities for African American students. The researcher addresses the second research question by conducting a critical race discourse analysis of the discourse from district discipline policy and the interviews with administrators and teachers. The researcher applies the discourse to the domains of the conceptual framework, analyzing the implicit meanings, discursive strategies and racialized ideologies of the discourse, and linking the discourse to the practice of disproportionately suspending African American students. The shared discourse and discursive strategies of educational leadership and policy aligned with each of the domains of the conceptual framework and suggest a relationship between subtle racial bias, discourse, and the production, justification, maintenance, and reproduction of racial discipline disparities for African American students. There were 13 themes, based on critical race theory, which emerged from the data analysis. The researcher presents a summary of the findings and a framework for the analysis of subtle racial bias and the discursive enactment of racial discipline disparities in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3.

Analytic Framework: Findings

Point of Analysis	Domain	Indicator of Subtle Racial Bias	Analysis Description	Shared Discourse Themes	Discursive Strategies
The ways racial discipline inequities are justified	Whiteness as the standard	Stereotypical perceptions and associations	<p>Critique “the standard,” what it is, how it came to be</p> <p>Attend to the image that is created about African American students when viewed through the discourse of the standard</p> <p>Attend to the associations that develop from this discourse</p> <p>Examines the ways these representations and associations justify racial disparities in discipline</p>	<p>The discourse of expectations, standards, and accountability</p> <p>An association with criminal justice</p> <p>Assumptions about African American parents/guardians</p>	<p>Implications</p> <p>Contradictions</p> <p>Positive presentations of “Us” with negative presentations of “Them”</p>
The ways racial discipline inequities are produced	Race neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness	<p>Ambiguity</p> <p>Discretion in decision making</p>	<p>Challenge objectivity by attending to outcomes</p> <p>Examine the stated and implied meanings and definitions within the discipline policy</p>	<p>The assumption of objectivity</p> <p>The ambiguity of the code</p> <p>Discretion in assigning consequences</p>	<p>Inconsistencies</p> <p>Implications</p>

Point of Analysis	Domain	Indicator of Subtle Racial Bias	Analysis Description	Shared Discourse Themes	Discursive Strategies
			Identify subjectivity in the disciplinary process		
The ways racial discipline inequities are maintained	Ahistoricism and context	Rationalization of factors other than race	<p>Attend to the topics most discussed</p> <p>Attend to the topics with less prominence or which are avoided</p> <p>Place the analysis in historical, social, cultural context</p>	<p>Disproportionality rationalized as related to the concentration of African American students</p> <p>Placing disproportionality in the context of racial equity</p> <p>Disproportionality rationalized as being related to Office Discipline Referrals</p>	<p>Level of description</p> <p>Degree of completeness</p> <p>Discreet silence</p> <p>Contradictions</p>
The ways racial discipline inequities are reproduced	Whiteness as property	Threat to power, control, and status	<p>Examine the ideologies of discipline</p> <p>Examine the association of discipline with elements of whiteness as property</p>	<p>Ideology of discipline as power and transferable</p> <p>Ideology of discipline as the exercise of power</p> <p>Ideology of discipline as respect</p> <p>Ideology of discipline as exclusion</p>	Discursive manipulation

Table 4.3

Whiteness as the standard. In this critical race discourse analysis, the researcher sought to identify the standard and to attend to the ways that the administrators utilize the standard as a

tool for the justification of marginalization and exclusion. The themes that emerged within this domain were a discourse of expectations, standards, and accountability; an association with criminal justice; and assumptions about African American parents/guardians.

The discourse of expectations, standards, and accountability. There is a discourse of expectations, standards, and accountability that exists in the context of school discipline. Expectations, standards, and accountability govern every aspect of student behavior. In the Student Handbook, the district explains that the Sun Valley School System has, “Broad jurisdiction over students,” and provides an expansive list of locations where school staff will hold students accountable for the Code of Conduct. Sean and Joe also discussed having expectations, standards, and accountability at the school level that provide students with guidelines for behaviors. Both administrators noted that they begin outlining behavior expectations for students within the first couple of days of school. Sean remarked that the first few days of the school year are a time of “embarking all these rules on them.” Similar to the Sun Valley Code of Conduct, there are standards and expectations for every aspect of the school day, from arrival to dismissal, and for every location within and outside the school building. Joe said of behavioral expectations at Beck Middle, “They go from the bathroom, to the hallways, to the classroom, to the PE locker rooms, um to the cafeteria,” and Sean explained that at Roseland, “We start the year off with, where we lay out, pretty much top down expectations for everything...Then teachers have time in their classroom to lay out their classroom expectations.” The teachers at Roseland Middle and Beck Middle also discussed the use of classroom expectations as part of their disciplinary practices, and they view the detailing of these expectations as a way of limiting office referrals by making students aware of expectations. However, the participants also utilized the discourse of expectations, standards, and

accountability as means of justifying discipline referrals and suspensions for African American students.

Sean seemed to recognize the discourse of expectations, standards, and accountability as a form of justification. When the researcher asked Sean about the teachers at Roseland with high discipline referrals he stated,

What I always hear is, 'I'm going to hold them accountable.' 'I hold high standards in my room.' And no everybody in this building I think holds high expectations. It's about the relationship you have with your kids and these expectations.

Twinkie and Rick, teachers at Beck Middle, utilize a similar discourse to the discourse that Sean hears from teachers at Roseland. Twinkie stated,

I have some [students] that are really high some that are really low but I still hold everybody to the same expectation even if that's not fair...Somebody needs to go on and hold them, make them accountable, for their behavior.

While Rick remarked,

I'm very um clear, upfront, um with my students about my expectations. I mean I even have um, hand signals for movement and everything in my class. So my class is very structured and very well organized so if a student is not following that structure, then that's when discipline occurs.

Twinkie and Rick seem to demonstrate that expectations are not always simply guidelines for behaviors. They also utilize expectations to create a highly controlled environment, even at the expense of what is fair or equitable for students.

In the critical race discourse analysis of the data, the researcher examined how "the standard" came to be. One of the questions that the researcher asked the administrators was

about their school wide expectations--who developed them and how do administrators communicate expectations to parent/guardians, teachers, and students. Implications are a discursive strategy in which meanings are not explicitly stated, but may be implied. Explicitly, the district discipline policy states that the district expects school personnel, "to seek parental/guardian input in planning and implementing discipline plans." Both administrators in this study refer to expectations as school wide standards and expectations. When one hears the term, "school wide," the implication then, is that these are the shared expectations and standards of the school community. School wide, however, does not mean shared. There is no equal voice in deciding the standard and expectations at the classroom, school, or district level. None of the teachers in the study discussed student input in deciding classroom expectations. The researcher asked Twinkie who came up with the definitions and expectations for her classroom, "I did," she affirmed, and when the researcher asked Herbie if students were aware of how she defined the behaviors that meet or do not meet her expectations, her response was, "Hummm. I don't think so." The school community also does not decide on school level expectations and standards at Roseland Middle and Beck Middle. Instead, administrators and school leaders develop and define them. At Roseland Middle, the leadership team assists in developing what activities the teachers will utilize to teach expectations, and at Beck it is the School Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (SWPBIS) team that determines and defines the expectations for students. Beck's SWPBIS team are staff members who are "appointed or invited" by the principal.

Similarly, there doesn't appear to be collaboration with parents/guardians on the development of the definitions of rules within the Code of Conduct at the district level. The Sun Valley School System website points out that there are both policies and administrative

procedures. The Board of Education will “periodically” post policies for public feedback and input. Administrative procedures, however, do not require Board action and public feedback. The discipline policy states that, “...the administration has established system-wide standards for the proper conduct and behavior of students in the Sun Valley Schools.” The Board defines the definitions of rules and the consequences for violating those rules as administrative procedure, and, “The Superintendent will establish a Code of Conduct and rules for violations of the Code of Conduct that will be contained in a Student Handbook distributed to parents and students at the beginning of each school year.” The implication is that parents/guardians may have input on the Board policy portion of the Code of Conduct, if posted for public comment, but it is the district leadership that establishes the standard and defines the rules and the consequences.

Schools not only exclude parents/guardians from the process of providing input, but the school administrators also did not have a clear process for communicating the standard to parents/guardians. When asked how expectations were communicated to parents/guardians, Sean admitted,

Probably not very well. Um, you know we send a student handbook home that we create. It has that in there. Um I mean we do have parent sessions you know where we talk to parents about stuff like that, um but I’d say most parent find out about it when their son or daughter is involved in discipline, and then we talk to them about it more individually, but overarching there's probably not really a, a way that we get that information out to parents universal, um to have that except for the handbook.

The use of implications allows the administrators to leave things out so that the researcher can imply meaning. Saying that there are parent sessions allows the listener to imply that this is a process for the school to communicate expectations. However, the vagueness of the term “about

stuff like that,” demonstrates instead, that administrators do not clearly communicate expectations.

When the researcher asked Joe about the communication of expectations to parents/guardians, he initially stated, “Everybody’s involved with the process. Um, parents actually are responsible for going over the [says the school’s acronym for expectations] information with their kids.” Then, while discussing how he communicates expectations to teachers and students, he stated,

So to answer your question more specifically, I feel like, everybody's involved in this process. We can do a better job of getting the parents up to speed or involved greater.

We just really haven't found a way to do it yet but the plan is to get the parents involved.

So, yeah, it’s a holistic approach involving the staff, the students, and the parents.

The researcher realized that she did not have a clear understanding of how Joe communicated expectations to parents, so the researcher asked Joe a clarifying question,

Researcher: So, how are parents made aware of the expectations?

Joe: Um, the students are responsible for teaching their parents as well. We also um, invite parents into the building. Like if they go to every classroom, it’s an expectation that you should see a [says the school’s acronym for expectations] matrix. As well as um, information about PBIS at the front of the building. Um, also if they ever wanted to get in-depth about it we, we have a representative here that’ll be able to explain everything they need to know to kind of get them up to speed. Um, the parental support, um is a piece that I feel like can continue to grow. We do get some parents that donate snacks and stuff for the [says the school’s acronym for expectations] cart but I think us um as a school we need to do a better job of kinda having a one-on-one type of meeting

with the parents to kinda let them know um what PBIS really is and how they can help it as well.

A critical race discourse analysis of Joe's contradictions provide some insight. Joe's responses seem to fluctuate between expectations as a process that parents/guardians are not only aware of but also fully engaged in on the one hand, and the need for the school to improve on communication of expectations to parents/guardians on the other. The contradiction demonstrates Joe's attempt to negotiate the communication of a message that interferes with the goal of a positive presentation of "Us." Not communicating expectations does not position "Us" in a positive light, so Joe mediates the negotiation instead, through the negative presentation of "Them." Although the researcher asked Joe about the school's communication of expectations to parents/guardians, by saying that parent support and involvement is a piece that needs to grow, Joe shifted the focus of the discourse from an expectation for the school to communicate with parents/guardians to an expectation that the school has for parents/guardians.

The association with criminal justice. Within this critical race discourse analysis, the researcher attended to the image that the administrators created about African American students when viewed through the discourse of the standard, the associations that develop from this discourse, and the ways these representations and associations justify racial disparities in discipline. The findings of this study demonstrate that there is an intersection between the discourse of school policies and practices and the discourse of the criminal justice system. For this part of the analysis, the researcher analyzed word usage and word meanings.

The researcher began this discussion of expectations, standards, and accountability by mentioning both Roseland and Beck Middle Schools begin each school year with a time of acculturating students to expectations. Both schools refer to this process as "boot camp." Boot

camp has a military connotation, one of strict discipline. When applied to youth, boot camp takes on the additional association of youthful offenders, minors whom law enforcement have convicted of a crime, are involved in the criminal justice system, or who are “troubled” and are heading for involvement in the criminal justice system. Although there are no metal detectors at the schools, the shared reference to student behavior as an offense and to students with numerous suspensions as “repeat offenders” or “repeaters,” along with the presence of a School Resource Officer, further reinforces the image of a disciplinary system mimicking the criminal justice system. When the researcher asked about behaviors that fail to meet the expectation, Joe stated, “I like to categorize them as level one offenses, level two offenses, and level three offenses.” Sean began his discussion of schoolwide expectations by explaining, “We sat down with staff and looked at every single consequence in the handbook and decided first offense, second offense, third offense and what the punishment would be so that we’re all on the same page.” Sean also made an analogy between discipline and getting a speeding ticket,

Kids have to learn because in the real world that’s what happens. In real world when I get pulled over for speeding, they don’t shake my hand and say, ‘Principal Sean are you gonna do it again?’ and I say, ‘No’ and they say, ‘Well have a great day,’ They write me a ticket and I have to suffer the consequences of what that ticket means...So I do think it has to be in proportion to the crime.

Sean connects behavior that does not meet the school’s expectation to a crime and by applying the analogy to a real life situation, it furthers the discourse of disproportionality as justified, as a preparation for “suffering” real life consequences with law enforcement.

This discourse also extended to the teachers and to their disciplinary practices. When the researcher asked Herbie what administrators have communicated about school discipline, she

stated,

I know that, there's kinda like a no double jeopardy rule, like um we had a student that was on three day of ISS [in-school suspension] and they had another offense come up and they don't give him another three, they just like looped them together."

Beach, in a discussion on which behaviors she most often has to address with African American students, explained that for some behaviors, "I feel like it's totally out of my jurisdiction."

Beach further explained that these are the behaviors that she automatically refers to the office.

This discourse and discipline practice can also be associated with the school-to-prison pipeline. Rob suggested that the discourse within classrooms mimics the ideology of the prison system. In discussing the school-to-prison pipeline, Rob stated,

I think part of that has to start even here at the school system because the teachers, some of the teachers get this mentality of I'm the teacher, you're the students you're going to do what I tell you to do when I tell you to do it.

The district Code utilizes a similar legalistic discourse when discussing discipline. There are 39 pages in the Student Handbook dedicated to student discipline. "Maintaining order" is listed 17 times. Words such as, "violation," "enforce," and "infraction" are also used throughout the discipline policy. When the researcher looked these words up in various dictionaries, they were all related to law enforcement. In addition, the Student Handbook defines administrative write-ups as, "The written summation by the principal or his/her designee of the charges against the student." Thus, the Student Handbook equates receiving an administrative write-up with the discourse of "catching a charge."

The association with the criminal justice system also provided some insight into why African American students receive more severe consequences and for longer periods of time.

When discussing the behaviors for which African American students are most often referred, Rick stated, “I think if the consequences were a little more severe, then our numbers for discipline referrals would actually go down and I think the disproportionality would actually go down too.” Nigel compared the number of days students of other racial/ethnic groups spend in ISS to the number of days administrators send African American students to ISS,

They [students of other racial/ethnic groups] usually receive the lower end of consequences when they are referred. Whereas, a kid that did something I consider minor, an African American kids that does something that I consider minor, are usually given the full, the full slate of time that they’re gonna get in here.

Nigel’s comment relates in-school suspension to “serving time” and demonstrates the disparities in the length of the consequence for African American students.

Sean provided some insight about the disparity in discipline. When the researcher asked Sean why the suspension gap exists at Roseland Middle, he discussed a number of possibilities including differences between Caucasian students and African American students.

I think our, our white students sometimes can get away with things because they’re sneaky or they know how. Um, that they’ve just learned...Um, you know and I think it goes back to those kinda, we used to have a big discussion in the United States about blue collar crimes versus white collar crimes. And they’re very similar crimes but their suspensions and how they are done are very different. Um, and I just think it’s, it’s the same thing in, in the schools.

In this comment, Sean makes another criminal justice analogy. The researcher did not follow up by asking Sean to describe the difference between white and blue collar crime in this context. However, Sean’s comment seems to suggest a comparison between blue and white collar crimes

and their sentencing and the application of that reasoning to the distinction between African American and Caucasian students and their suspensions. Sean then identified the ability for Caucasian students to know how, to continue with the legal discourse, to “navigate the system.” It is not that Caucasian students overwhelmingly abide by the expectations, it is that they know how to not get caught. Nigel summed up the experience of African American students with school discipline in this way, “They punish em. They punish em hard. They punish em in the classroom and then they punish em, they punish em mentally a lot of times. They beat em down.”

Assumptions about African American parents/guardians. How administrators perceive parents/guardians when viewed through the lens of the standard, also affects the perceptions of student behaviors. When Sean compared the behaviors of African American students to students of other racial/ethnic groups, he said,

I think that’s part of a cultural thing, um that you know, a lot of my Hispanic students know that if they get in trouble at school then there’s going to be some hell to pay when they get home.

Joe stated that the administrators rarely suspend Caucasian students at Beck Middle because “They generally are a little better behaved in this environment,” and “take their academics very seriously.” He went on to state, “I also look at the corollary that they got also involved parents in this environment. The parents are always up here.” Joe then continued,

I see that same relationship or correlation between um, our upper middle-class African American students. They’re very, they’re rarely ever suspended either. Um, and they carry themselves to a different standard and I think that correlates with making better decisions and prioritizing what’s important and why you’re here.

In contrast, Joe asserted,

We do have the same issues that's, um, becoming an issue nationally, where we can't get our African American population of low income parents and some of our Hispanic population, um to come in and support the cause, and as a result of that, sometimes we do see a higher number of those students getting consequences for a failure to follow expectations.

While Sean utilized the discursive strategy of implication, implying that the parents/guardians of African American students do not care as much about their children's behavior as parents/guardians of some other racial/ethnic groups, Joe made the explicit connection between the perception of African American parents/guardians, the behavior of African American students, and discipline rates for African American students. Some of the teachers at Beck Middle shared Joe's view.

Rick supposed that the reason administrators most often suspend African American students for fights and physical aggression at school is because of a lack of supervision by their parents in addressing disagreements that start in the community. Twinkie and Bobby attributed the difference between African American students and students of other racial/ethnic groups to a lack of parent values, and Twinkie added, "They didn't learn respect so they're not teaching their kids respect." These comments begin to speak to this link between discourse, ideologies, and the enactment of racial discipline disparities. Based on these findings, racial discipline disparities are justified when administrator view African American students as being outside the standard, when administrators aren't communicating the rules of the culture, and when neither African American students nor their parents/guardians have a voice in deciding expectations.

Race neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness. Within the process of analysis, the

researcher examined the administrators' interpretation of discipline policy, their disciplinary decision making process, and the stated and implied meanings and definitions within the discipline policy while attending to discipline outcomes for African American students. The themes that emerged within this domain were the assumption of objectivity, the ambiguity of the Code, and discretion in assigning consequences.

The assumption of objectivity. To say that there is an amount of discretion in the decision making of school administrators would be inaccurate. Discipline is discretion. Discipline is subjective. Sean said this about discipline, "Things can change very easily depending on the situation because the issue with discipline is it's not black and white, it's very gray." Joe stated, "In terms of discipline and how we approach it, I just, like to say that no two situations are alike." There was some shared discourse among the administrators within this domain, but what is more relevant was the analysis of inconsistencies.

Since it is the administrators that actually define the behaviors and interpret the discipline policy, the researcher asked them to define those behaviors for which African American students are most likely to be suspended. The researcher then gave the administrators the Sun Valley School System 2017-18 Student Handbook and asked them to find the code that they would assign for these behaviors. Finally, the researcher asked the administrators to read the definitions and discuss whether they agreed with the definition provided in the handbook.

Sean and Joe both explained to the researcher that the discipline policy is a "guideline" and to reinforce that point, they both made a religious reference. Sean stated, "It is not written in stone, that's not the Ten Commandments. That didn't come, you know, written from God," and Joe said, "I would like to think that that book is more of a less a guideline to help you make a professional decision versus, the Bible of discipline for school." The handbook states the Code

is not meant to restrict the principal and the state grants principals the ability to exercise good judgement, so it seems the writers of the Code do position it as a guideline. The implication, however, is that there is some level of consistency among administrators in their interpretation of the Code, since the handbook follows the comment about not restricting principals' decisions with, "not inconsistent with the Code." There is an additional discursive strategy within the Code: presuppositions. Presuppositions are a type of implication where, again, meanings aren't explicitly stated, but with presuppositions, there is a knowledge that participants must share for the discourse to be meaningful. In addition to the implication of consistency, there is the implication that there must be some shared meanings among the writers of the Code and the administrators who utilize it.

Sean and Joe stated that the administrative team at their schools most often suspend African American students for physical aggression. Sean defined physical aggression as, "Shoving, you know or I pushed him out of a desk. To me hitting is a fight. It's either a fight or an assault depending on if the other student hit back." Joe defined physical aggression as

Applying force. You know, it's not soft tap on your shoulder or tickling. It's a forceful push that could be dangerous or harmful to another individual. You know whether that's fighting, whether that's pushing someone up against the locker, grabbing them by their neck, slapping them on their neck...Um, I think physical aggression is more it's the aggressive and mean form of horseplay...You know it has a level of, I'm trying to hurt you associated with it I should say.

The two definitions may not seem vastly different at first glance, however there are some subtle distinctions. For Sean, there is a point where physical aggression turns into a fight, and for him, it is based on the action of hitting. Joe seems to combine physical aggression, fights, and

assaults into one category and the student's intent, whether or not the student tried to hurt another, plays a role in how he defines the behavior. These distinctions are relevant because there are three different codes for each of these behaviors.

Ambiguity of the Code. There is a rule for Fighting Among Students, a rule for Aggressive Physical Action, and a rule for Physical Assault Upon a Student. The number of rules for these behaviors increases when you include the rule, Threats or Actions of Assault Against Adults. In addition, the rules for Assault each have two subcategories. Assault Upon a Student can either be a) physical assault upon a student or b) violent physical assault upon a student resulting in injury. Threats or Actions of Assault Against an Adult has two subcategories as well, a) physical assault or harm to school employee or other adult or b) written or verbal assault to school employee or other adult. Each of the rules, for Fighting, for Aggressive Physical Acts, and for Physical Assault, also have different consequences listed in the Code. Table 4.4 provides a list of Code of Conduct rules utilized by the administrators for physical aggression and the corresponding consequences.

The consequences for Aggressive Physical Action range from in-school disciplinary action to three days of OSS, while the consequences for Fighting and Assaults begin with OSS, with Assault beginning with ten days of OSS. There is also a difference in terms of law enforcement involvement. The consequence for Aggressive Physical Action does not include calling law enforcement, and note the change in wording (may; will...if...may; and will) when it comes to calling law enforcement among the consequences for Fighting, Assault Upon a Student, and Assault Against Adults. Administrators may call law enforcement for a fight. They will call law enforcement for an assault upon a student, if required by law and may in other circumstances, and they will call law enforcement if the assault is against an adult.

Table 4.4. <i>Rules and Consequences</i>	
Rule	Consequence
Aggressive Physical Action	In school disciplinary action up to 3 days Out of School Suspension (OSS), including long term suspension for repeated incidents.
Fighting	3 days OSS up to long term suspension and law enforcement may be called.
Assault Upon a Student a) physical assault upon a student	OSS up to long term suspension and law enforcement will be called if required by law and may be called in other circumstances.
Assault Upon a Student b) violent physical assault upon a student resulting in injury	10 days OSS up to long term suspension and law enforcement will be called if required by law and may be called in other circumstances.
Threats or Actions of Assault Against an Adult a) physical assault or harm to school employee or other adult	10 days OSS up to long term suspension and law enforcement will be called.
Threats or Actions of Assault Against an Adult b) written or verbal assault to school employee or other adult.	OSS up to long term suspension and law enforcement will be called.

Table 4.4

The researcher asked Sean and Joe to find the code that they would use for physical aggression and to tell the researcher if they agreed with the definition in the Code. Sean assigned physical aggression to the rule for Aggressive Physical Action and when asked if he agreed with the definition, he stated,

No, for rule [says the rule number for Aggressive Physical Action], no. I would define aggressive infraction completely different. Um, spitting, that's not an aggressive physical action, to me, that's an assault. You spit on me, that's, that's not aggressive, that's that's an assault. Throwing objects. You know you throw a stapler at me, that's not aggressive physical action. That's an assault. So no [says the rule number for Aggressive Physical Action], I would completely disagree with how it's written.

Despite not agreeing with the definition, in a disciplinary situation, Sean would apply the rule for Aggressive Physical Action, even though the definition included behaviors that he would actually assign to the rule for Physical Assault.

Joe vacillated between all three rules. He first assigned physical aggression to the rule for Physical Assault Upon a Student. When the researcher asked if he agreed with the definition listed in the Code for this rule, Joe stated,

Yeah, because it's, it's past playing now and the definition say, 'Student should not cause, attempt or threat to cause injury of any kind to a student,' and I feel like when you're taking it past playing, you're trying to physically harm someone, which is, at that point would be an injury.

Joe continued,

You know while also, I feel like [says rule number for Fighting], physical aggression is like fighting as well. You physically trying to hurt somebody, um, or cause bodily harm so with physical aggression, I think Rule [says rule number for Fighting] and Rule [says rule number for Physical Assault Upon a Student], are the two main rules that physical aggression falls under.

Joe then added,

So if you get a [says rule number for Physical Assault Upon a Student], or an [says rule number for Aggressive Physical Action] that could contribute to a higher number of physical aggression because it's more than one rules that's being applied to that same categorization.

That Joe felt that he could classify the behavior in any of the three rules and that Sean can utilize a rule, even though he doesn't fully agree with definition, speak to the subjectivity in decision

making and the ambiguity of the Code.

Joe stated that the administrators at Beck most often suspend African American students for disrespect, in addition to physical aggression. The researcher asked Joe to find the code that he would use for disrespect and to tell the researcher if he agreed with the definition in the Code. Joe classified disrespect as the rule for Insulting, Abusive, Harassing, Profane, Obscene, or Seriously Disrespectful Words, Acts of Touching, Gestures, Signs, Verbal Threats, Acts of Bullying or Intimidation, or Other Acts. Sean said the African American females at Roseland Middle were most often suspended for harassment and bullying and he classified this behavior with the same rule. The administrators had a similar position about this rule. Sean said,

Rule [says rule number for Insulting, Abusive, Harassing, Profane, Obscene, or Seriously Disrespectful Words, Acts of Touching, Gestures, Signs, Verbal Threats, Acts of Bullying or Intimidation, or Other Acts] is, is very slippery, because there is so much contained in the Rule [says rule number].. So I think do I define it the same way that the district does? Sometimes, sometimes not. Just because it's such a catch all. I mean any kid you could write-up for Rule [says rule number]. I mean a kids who skips you could also add Rule [says rule number] on there. You know I mean a kid who gets in a fight you could add Rule [says rule number]. So it's one of those, but then there's also just Rule [says rule number]. So you know it's, if a student cusses out a teacher, that's Rule [says rule number].

Joe commented,

It's very general Rule [says rule number for Insulting, Abusive, Harassing, Profane, Obscene, or Seriously Disrespectful Words, Acts of Touching, Gestures, Signs, Verbal Threats, Acts of Bullying or Intimidation, or Other Acts], because it's so many different

pieces that can get you to fall under Rule [says rule number].

Although the teachers in this study are not required to interpret the district discipline policies, they were aware of the ambiguity in the definitions of behaviors and some drew the connection between the ambiguity of the discipline policy and disparate outcomes for African American students. Twinkie stated,

It goes back to the county. They need to define these things better because the parents that stay on top of stuff when they [administrators] try to give their kids a consequence they're like it doesn't say that in the handbook this way. Other, you know, people they don't do that."

Here, Twinkie is pointing out, as the researcher discussed in the previous domain, the distinction between the discipline outcome for students whose parents/guardians know how to navigate the system of expectations compared to the discipline outcome for students whose parents/guardian may not know how to utilize the ambiguity of the Code in their favor. In reading over the definition of another rule, for a behavior for which teachers at Roseland most often refer African American students, Rob pointed out,

"To acceptable community standards," Once again, here's the question, what's acceptable for me may not be acceptable for the student so you gotta be careful when you use statements like acceptable...You know you've gotta be careful when you use the word acceptable and especially to community standards. What are the community standards? They haven't explained to me in here what a community standard is. Which community are we talking about? Are we talking about the single parent community? Are we talking about an African American community?

Here, Rob not only points out a presupposition in the discipline policy, the implication of a

shared “community standard,” but he and Twinkie also point out how the Code reinforces the discourse of the standard and how the ambiguity of the Code creates disparate outcomes.

Discretion in assigning consequences. Applying a critical race discourse analysis to the Code not only reveals how African American students come to be disproportionately suspended, but also how they come to receive disproportionate consequences with longer and harsher suspensions. As the researcher pointed out, each of the behaviors within the Code have different consequences, some more severe than others. How administrators classify the behavior affects the consequences, but there is an additional way that administrators come to discipline African American students more harshly. Joe’s comment above, about being able to apply more than one rule to a behavior, gets to this point. As the researcher discussed the Code with the administrators, Sean mentioned,

I think because some people add on rules, I don’t, typically we don’t do that here.

There’s one rule and that’s what you’re being, that’s the rule you broke. We don’t go, I mean, cause most of these rules you could write kids up for three and four when they do something wrong. You know, they fought between classes, well I guess they were skipping because they weren’t in class. They didn’t go to class when they supposed to. It’s rule [a the rule number] because they were being insulting. They were rule [says a rule number] because they were noncompliant. They were told to stop fighting. Uh, I think that’s just stupid. It’s, they got into a fight. It’s Rule [says the rule number for Fighting Among Students]. They got into a fight, Write it up and that’s the Rule [says the rule number for Fighting Among Students].

Despite Herbie perceiving the communication of administrators at Beck to be “no double jeopardy,” when the researcher asked Joe if he added in rules, he replied, “Generally we do.”

The ambiguity of those rules for which most African American students are suspended allows administrators to add on rules, which can increase the suspension. This also demonstrates how ambiguity within the Code produces discipline disparities for African American students.

There is subjectivity and inconsistency throughout the disciplinary process, which may suggest race neutrality in that any student regardless of race could be subject to subjective interpretations, but a critical race discourse analysis attends to the outcomes. Fighting; Physical Assault; Aggressive Physical Action; and Insulting, Abusive, Harassing, Profane, Obscene, or Seriously Disrespectful Words, these are the very rules that most affect the African American students at the schools in this study. Walking through the approach to defining and classifying behaviors within the Code with administrators illustrates how subjectivity and ambiguity can lead to disproportionate outcomes for African American students. There is a lack of agreement about the interpretation of the behaviors for which African American students most often get suspended, and subjectivity and ambiguity, coupled with the negative perceptions of African American students, places them at a disadvantage. Administrators make subjective judgments about whether discipline is merited, how to define and classify behaviors, how many rules to apply, and what consequences to assign. The administrators in this study referred to the Code of Conduct as a “guideline” and the implication of assumed shared meanings serve as the basis for this guideline. Although the writers of the Code sought to allow room for administrative judgement, based on the findings they have also allowed room for the production of disparate discipline outcomes for African American students.

Ahistoricism and context. The researcher utilized the discursive strategies level of description and degree of completeness to analyze where in the text topics appear and the amount of detail with which the handbook explains them. The first topic in the Student

Handbook is marked as, “STUDENT **DISCIPLINE** GRADES K-12.” The font utilized for this topic is larger than for any other topic in the book. The word “discipline” is in bold and the handbook does not discuss any other topic in more detail than student discipline. Five of the sixteen headings in the handbook are related to discipline and two of the five appendices are for use with discipline.

The discipline policy states, “The Board expects the principal to treat any suspension or expulsion as a very serious matter.” In isolation, the level of description and degree of completeness which the district ascribes to discipline would support this statement. However, the researcher did not examine the discourse in isolation; instead, the researcher placed the discourse in context. Race and racism are sensitive topics that people often avoid or approach very gingerly, and these topics can become even more uncomfortable when the discussion is placed within a historical context. Within this analysis, the researcher also attended not only to the topics and themes that administrators, district leadership, and discipline policy most discussed, but also to those topics and themes they gave less prominence to in the discourse and examined the ways the avoidance of topics maintains racial disparities. In this domain, the researcher coded the themes of disproportionality rationalized as related to the concentration of African American students, disproportionality in the context of racial inequity, and disproportionality rationalized as related to office discipline referrals.

Disproportionality rationalized as related to the concentration of African American students. When the researcher asked Joe his thoughts on why the suspension gap existed at Beck Middle, he attributed it to the concentration of African American students,

They’re the majority in this environment so, on comparison of other ethnicities or backgrounds, I feel like we have a higher concentration of African Americans which,

makes it easier for them to stand out when they get suspended because they represent the majority.

Joe continued,

Just solely like I said based on the number of African American students compared to every other population....We don't have a fair number of each to be able to decide if the disparity is due to practices that we're having or just the sole difference of the higher concentration of one population.

The teachers from Beck shared this discourse. Rick stated, "I would argue at this school it's not disproportionate simply because the majority of the students here are African American and so the majority of the incidents that you have here are with African Americans." The researcher asked Twinkie to complete the sentence, "If African American students are disproportionately suspended at this school it is because..." Twinkie's response was, "It is because they are the predominate group."

The literature utilizes two definitions of discipline disproportionality. One of the definitions compares the percentage of African American students in the total student population to the proportion of African American students who are suspended. The researcher discussed this definition with Joe, as well as with the teachers from Beck Middle who also expressed that disproportionality was linked to student enrollment. The researcher then gave an example utilizing the school's data and explained that a school with a predominantly African American student population can still have racial discipline proportionality. The researcher then asked Joe again what might account for the disparity. Joe responded,

Um, it's too many variables that could play a part, I don't think it's one thing that accounts. I would have to go back and look at ethnicity of the staff. When is it

occurring. What interventions have been put in place. What type, what's going on in the class environments. You know, what does the parental involvement look like? I don't know it's just **so** [emphasizes so] many factors that could contribute to that.

The researcher found that participants in the study seemed to doubt or discount any explanations about discipline disproportionality that might portray them or the educational system in a negative way. Although the researcher was asking Joe about the suspension gap at his school, his response of, "I would have to go back and look," along with his earlier response of not being able to determine if the disparity is due to practice, suggest a distancing from other variables that could account for the disproportionality at Beck Middle, including those factors that might implicate the administrators' and teachers' practices. That teachers share this discourse further indicates the examination of factors, other than the population of African American students, is not a part of the discourse at Beck Middle.

Disproportionality in the context of racial inequity. According to the Sun Valley Strategic Plan, equity is one of the core values for the district. During the time of data collection, the district introduced two equity initiatives. The first was for administrators at each school in the district to establish a school based equity leadership team, to whom the district would provide equity training. The second initiative was a professional development on racial equity that administrators at each school in the district were to conduct with staff. The district discipline policy also states that, "Each school principal shall systematically identify potential problem areas within his/her school that may contribute to discipline problems." Despite the implication within the discourse of district leadership that equity in general, and even racial equity specifically, is a priority within the district, neither of the administrators seemed to perceive that district leadership wanted them to address the disproportionate suspension of African Americans

as a racial inequity within their schools. The researcher posed a few questions to the administrators and teachers in this study asking their thoughts on the role of race and racial bias in the discipline gap for African American students. The researcher coded two categories of discourse that emerged. The first was an acknowledgment that race and racial bias play a role in discipline disparities, but a lack of connection to one's own discourse or practices or the educational institution to racial bias. The second category of discourse was an uncertainty that race and racial bias played a role in discipline disproportionality.

Both Twinkie and Bobby discussed the role of race in discipline explaining that they have witnessed other teachers speak negatively to and about African American students while they overlook the behavior of Caucasian students. Bobby discussed witnessing a Caucasian teacher's interaction with African American students,

There was a teacher here that used to talk about them in front of them. Or in proximity of them like they wouldn't hear it... 'They're so low.' But then when they talk about their advanced class where they've got six Math II students and all of them are white females, 'Oh I love this class they're such a joy to teach.'

Twinkie indicated she has also encountered teachers speaking negatively about African American students, "'These kids were just low and stupid.' And even some of the African Americans that were in the cream of the crop class were [described as] just defiant."

Despite these experiences, the teachers seemed to view the interruption of racial disparities in discipline as outside of the control of schools. Twinkie stated, "It starts at home," and Bobby clarified, "In other words, it's not something that we do, it's something the parents do at home." Nigel acknowledged the role of race and racial bias in the suspension gap for African American students, but he too seemed to place responsibility on parents, while contemplating

how schools and society are going to look as more undisciplined African American students enter schools and the workforce.

You peel the onion that last leaf is race and that's the thing they will not address and until they address it we're gonna we're gonna have these problems. The way kids are growing up, the lack of discipline from the parents that are sending them to us, it scares me how this thing gonna look in the next ten, fifteen years.

The teachers at Beck also did not associate their own discourse and practices with racial bias. Twinkie said, "Because we're Black...so we're not gonna do anything discriminating against our own." Discipline disproportionality exists for the African American students at Beck, despite the majority of the teachers and two thirds of the administrators at Beck being African American. Rick presented this explanation,

I think sometimes we come in with blinders on that say, 'Well because I'm Black anything I do to another Black person is ok'...we even as African Americans have biases against other African Americans...it's a blind spot for us.

Other participants seemed unsure that race and racial bias were contributing to disparate discipline outcomes for African American students. When the researcher asked Joe his thoughts about the role of race and racial bias in the discipline gap, he paused then stated, "It varies from day to day, in which it depends on the environment I'm in, because I'm seeing African American students perform at such a high level in certain environments." Joe's discourse advances an ideology of dichotomy; racial bias may exist in discipline disproportionality, but if you can find one African American student, or in this case a group of African American students, in a certain environment that is excelling, then racial bias can't fully be the explanation. The reader will also recall that the administration at Beck has attributed discipline disproportionality to the

concentration of African American students, and this ideology has hindered the exploration of other factors at the school, including race and possible racial bias in their practices.

When the researcher asked Sean his thoughts about the role of race and racial bias in the suspension gap, Sean replied that he thought it was about implicit bias. Sean's discourse of replacing racial bias with implicit bias advances an ideology of race neutrality. The discourse of the teachers at Roseland also reflect colorblindness of race. Beach clarified early in her interview that she did not see race and Beach's colorblindness led to her inability to answer any of the researcher's questions that specifically asked about African American students. When the researcher asked Beach the open-ended question, "Talk to me about your African American students," she replied,

See I don't see I, I don't see any one particular race or anything I see a child...so that's the reason I have a hard time when Principal Sean said that we're suspending more Black children than we are white children.

The researcher asked Beach what steps can be taken to disrupt the predictive value race has on student discipline, she stated, "I don't agree with that...I just, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm missing something but, I, and, if you don't see color, you see a child, you don't notice those things so I don't notice those things." Rob said about racial bias in the suspension gap for African American students, "We've got a really great leader in Principal Sean that, that tries to take race out of the equation," and when the researcher asked Rob to complete the sentence, "If African American students at this schools are disproportionately suspended it is because..." he stated,

Something unfair is occurring because if we're suspending our White students or Hispanic students for the same exact things then the number should all equal out. Which

obviously you know they don't so that leads me to question, ok what is it the African American students are doing that is causes them to be suspended or is there a problem with the policy? That I don't know.

Similar to Joe's implication, Rob expresses a discourse of dichotomy; racial bias may exist in discipline disproportionality, but if you can find one student of another racial/ethnic group that administrators suspended for the exact same thing, then racial bias can't fully be the explanation. The researcher asked Rob this question 37 minutes into the interview. At this point in the interview, Rob had gone through and pointed out ambiguities and inconsistencies that he recognized in district discipline policy. Rob also commented that when Principal Sean discusses the suspension gap for African American students that, "You know where are we going wrong because he doesn't just say, where's the problem. He says where are we as a staff going wrong?" Yet, Rob is still unsure not only of the role of policy and practice in the discipline gap, but also unsure that it isn't something within African American students. In his discussion about his thoughts on the role of race and racial bias in the suspension gap for African American students, Sean explained "I think that race is a, is a real thing and if we don't recognize it as a real thing that affects both students' discipline and their achievement, then we failed."

Implicit biases are outside of the individual's awareness and control. Sean not only recognizes that administrators must discuss race when addressing racial disproportionality, but he also implies that administrators who do not do so fail their students and staff. However his discourse, which advances colorblindness, fails to place discipline within the context of race and racial bias.

Disproportionality rationalized as related to office discipline referrals. The disciplinary process generally begins with an office discipline referral. Also known as a teacher write-up,

office discipline referrals are documentation that the teacher submits to an administrator when a student's behavior does not meet an expectation. The researcher was required to submit a proposal and application to the research committee of the Sun Valley School System in order to gain permission to conduct this research. In response to the application, the committee replied with a few questions of clarification about this research. One of the questions the committee asked was why the researcher was not focusing on disproportionality at the level of teacher referrals. The researcher also noted that the 2016-17 Discipline Summary data, which the Sun Valley School System research committee provided, included the discipline referral rates for Black students and White students at each school. Additionally, the district discipline policy states, "The classroom teacher has the first level of responsibility in matters of student discipline and most matters should be handled by the teacher at that level." Based on the discourse of district leadership, there appears to be the assumption that the district leadership links disproportionate discipline of African American students to office discipline referrals.

The researcher asked Sean and Joe a series of questions about teacher referrals to gain more insight into this seemingly important aspect of discipline disproportionality. The researcher coded three categories that, based on administrators' responses, advance the assumption that discipline disproportionality for African American students is linked to teachers' disciplinary decision making. The three categories were; teacher disposition; relationships to or knowledge of the students; and interpretation of rules. The first code the researcher assigned to the teachers' disciplinary decision making was teacher disposition. Within this code, administrators' positioned the inconsistency of teachers' feelings and emotions as the basis for office discipline referrals. Sean stated, "I think as a generality, most teachers and I don't think just here, I think in general, write kids up based on their own personal feelings, not on fact." He

continued, “You know two kids can walk in late and the teacher can rip one over the coals for it and the other one they just say, oh you know come in, have a seat. So it’s also, we try to talk to staff a lot about you gotta be consistent and fair with discipline.” Joe expressed a similar sentiments about teachers and how their emotions impact their disciplinary decisions,

Some people come with the stresses of things they’re dealing with outside of work and have a negative impact on kids and they just make irrational decision based off emotion and just being tired of dealing with kids....You have some instances where teachers just lose control emotionally and just want to go the extreme.

Based on the administrators’ responses, the researcher assigned relationship to or knowledge of the students, as another code in teachers’ disciplinary decision making process that may be linked to discipline disproportionality for African American students. The researcher asked the administrators about the link between the disproportionate discipline of African American students and teacher discipline referrals and asked administrators to discuss any differences they noticed between teachers with a high number of office referrals compared to teachers with a low number of office referrals. Both administrators discussed relationships with students as mitigating disciplinary action. Sean stated, “Teachers who I know have really good relationships with kids I get very few write-ups. Teachers that you know it’s a struggle and kids don’t really want to be in their class anyway you know I get the most write-ups from those teachers.” Joe explained that relationships with students account for the difference in office referrals. He went on to state,

I feel like discipline and relationships go hand in hand and if teachers keep those relationships to the point they need to have them, they shouldn’t get to that extreme point where they want to remove kids from class regularly.

When the researcher asked Sean why the suspension gap existed at Roseland, Sean directly mentioned the link between discipline disproportionality for African American students and relationships. “I think relationships with kids. So I think the kids that I see the most in discipline are kids that, I’m not gonna say don’t have a relationship with an adult, but are the hardest ones to build a genuine relationship with.”

The researcher assigned, the interpretation of behaviors, as a third code in teachers’ disciplinary decision making that may be linked to discipline disproportionality. When the researcher asked Sean and Joe to talk about teacher interpretation of behaviors, Sean responded, “It’s very loose,” and Joe stated, “That’s very subjective.” The researcher then asked the administrators about teachers’ interpretations of rules, specifically for those behaviors which African American students are most often suspended. Sean stated that administrators at Roseland Middle most often suspend African American males for fighting and acts of physical aggression, while African American females are most often suspended for harassment and bullying. The researcher asked, “Does everyone in the building define these behaviors in the same way that you do?” Sean replied, “No! No! No! No! I wish. Um, no I think, you know especially when it comes to bullying and harassment, even fighting.” Joe stated that the administrators at Beck Middle most often suspend African American students for disrespect and physical aggression. The researcher asked the same question to Joe, “Does everyone in the building define these behaviors in the same way that you do?” Joe replied,

I think 100% of the building, not everybody processes disrespect the same, now looking at retrospect. Because some people have 30 years’ experience and touching their chalk on their board is disrespect. Your pants sagging is disrespect. You know while some people you really gotta almost curse them out to feel they got disrespected. So, it varies

from person to person in the building but I think every person has some definition of disrespect but it, it, it causes an issue because it varies from person to person and there's no consistent one message in terms of disrespect.

Since the administrators' responses demonstrated an awareness of the subjectivity in teacher discipline referrals, in terms of how teachers' define behaviors, interpret rules, and the variations in teachers' dispositions, the researcher asked Sean and Joe about their decision making process when they receive a referral. Sean explained, "They still have the write-ups and you know they still write it up um, you know it's up to administration in how we classify it and you know we put it in the system what we classify it." Joe utilizes the same approach at Beck Middle,

We don't allow that. Um, the teachers share the scenario with me and I write it up. So I issue the consequences. I issue which code it falls under based on the scenario and based on the student code of conduct or the handbook. So a teacher will more or less send me a paragraph about what happened and then I'll decide what that was based on **my** [emphasizes my] definition since ultimately I'm responsible for processing this and making the decision on consequences. So, it removes that subjectivity from **them** [emphasizes them] and they trust the decision making.

The teachers confirmed this practice. Herbie pointed out, "I typed up what happened and emailed it to the administrator, but they themselves do the write-up, so like they handle the discipline. Administrators handle discipline. They hand out consequences." Rick stated, "It is the administration's discretion on how they want to punish a particular child for a particular incident." The teachers also recognized the role of administrative discretion in the disproportionate suspension of African American students. When the researcher asked Herbie,

“If African American students at this schools are disproportionately suspended it is because...” she stated, “Administrators pick and choose their battles.” When the researcher asked Twinkie about the communication of administrators at Beck regarding the suspension gap for African American students, she discussed that although administrators may try to make disproportionality about the teachers, it is the administrators who actually process the referrals.

The administrators in this study rationalize discipline disproportionality as being related to office discipline referrals and the findings do suggest that a number of factors play a role in whether a teacher decides to refer an African American student to the office. Teacher lack of consistency in the definitions of rules and interpretations of behaviors coupled with teacher dispositions, not only suggest that African American students do not receive a clear message about expectations, but also that office referrals may have less to do with their behavior than teacher factors. However, the responses of the administrators and teachers in this study also suggest that the assumption of examining disproportionality at the level of teacher referrals may not be accurate and may not provide a complete picture of disproportionality. Teacher referrals do not solely account for the disproportionate suspension of African American students. Instead, it is the administrators who define behaviors, interpret the discipline policy, and assign the consequences and therefore, it is also relevant to examine the decision making of administrators within an investigation of discipline disproportionality.

Discipline as property. In this critical race discourse analysis, the researcher analyzed parallels between the privileges and rights associated with discipline and the characteristics of Whiteness as property. The researcher examined discipline as protected under law and the ideologies that encompass discipline as essential for the stability of education. In this domain, the researcher will present the ideologies of discipline and describe their association with the

elements of Whiteness as property.

Rights of disposition. State law and district policy have conferred the authority and power of discipline on administrators and teachers. State law says, “The principal shall have the authority to exercise discipline over the pupils of the school.” (Power and Duty of Principal, G.S. 115C-288) and the Sun Valley School System district policy states, “Students are subject to the authority of school personnel.” The discipline policy reinforces this authority stating, “The Code is not intended to restrict, in any way, the authority of principals and teachers...as they are authorized by law.”

Just as the owner of property can transfer the rights of ownership of property, administrators can transfer the power of discipline. The district discipline policy includes a section on definitions. The word “Principal” is defined as, “The school principal or any school personnel to whom the principal may officially designate authority.” Thus, school principals may transfer the title of “Principal” to any school personnel and, in doing so, the principal may also transfer all rights and authority as related to discipline that the state and district conferred upon the principal. Just as teachers immediately acculturate students to expectations and standards, there is an acclimation process for teachers, but theirs is an acclimation to the transfer and expectation of power.

Sean and Joe both demonstrated the transferability of discipline and advanced the ideology of discipline as power; as something that can be given as well as lost and how they acclimate teachers to guarding against threats to that ownership. Joe stated, “It’s also a power shift when you have to call an administrator.” Sean explained how he has to get new teachers to understand and to take ownership of their discipline power.

I think that’s where, especially new teachers who don’t know, don’t understand and know

yet and ones who aren't parents, and who have never dealt with discipline and having to write kids up or correct kids' wrong behavior, don't realize how that power works, that as soon as you write it up and you hand it to someone, you're now done.

Administrators not only acclimate new teachers, but also often reinforce the expectation of power with all teachers. Sean pointed out,

I think one of things I talk to lots of teachers about, not necessarily just ones that write-up a lot of kids, but, is as soon you write that paper and you hand it to me, you've given up your control and so be very careful in how much control you give up...Sometime you have to write kids up. I mean I think that's a part of education but the more you do it the more power you're relinquishing to someone else and you gotta be very mindful of that.

By advancing a discourse that links discipline with power and control, then describing discipline as a part of education, Sean, in turn, advances the ideology that power and control are an expected part of education.

The rights of use and enjoyment. The researcher coded one of the ideologies of discipline as the power to instigate. In the domain of Whiteness as the standard, the researcher discussed Sean's comment about White students knowing how to navigate the standard. Here's the rest of Sean's comment,

I think our, our White students sometimes can get away with things because they're sneaky or they know how. Um, that they've just learned, um and so they know you know 'If I say this he's gonna punch me or he's gonna get in trouble. Yeah I said it to get him started.'"

There is a rule within the Code for inciting student disruption that is defined as behavior leading to activity that affects the educational process. If Caucasian students are instigating situations

that lead to a behavior for which African American students are disciplined, then administrators could also suspend Caucasian students for their part in this situation. Sean provided the above answer when the researcher asked him about the discipline gap at Roseland Middle and in the context of why administrators suspend African American students more often than Caucasian students. It would seem that Caucasian students not only know how to navigate the standard, which in and of itself speaks to use and enjoyment that the identity of whiteness affords them, but the identity of whiteness also allows them the privilege to instigate a situation without being exposed to the same disciplinary outcomes as African American students.

Sean and Joe both talked about working with teachers on de-escalation strategies. Joe discussed how teachers' perceptions can escalate situations and lead to discipline referrals,

'Hey is this students personally trying to disrespect, and disregard everything I'm asking and just trying to make a fool outta me and hurt me, you know whether it's physically or emotionally.' I think all of those things to go through your mind versus just saying, 'This kid won't sit down.'

Sean commented,

I think as adults a lot of time we can escalate. I mean I can go out in the hall now and I can get anybody to throw a punch at me or cuss me out or do whatever because I know where to, where to poke...Like there doesn't have to be this debate back and forth with students, Just let 'em, let 'em go. Let it be and write 'em up, call the office, but don't antagonize the situation, don't make it worse. You know, standing in the doorway not letting the kid leave...if they were upset and they just walked out of your class and then you're gonna stand in front of 'em and block 'em and, like there's at some point where we're asking the kid to raise their level up.

These comments demonstrate that teachers and administrators also have the power of instigation over African American students in disciplinary situations.

Just as in some other professions, education has its own discourse, and this discourse is a resource that educators can use to marginalize when they use it to hinder the receivers' understanding. Educational discourse is known to be characterized by acronyms and, at times utilizes technical or overly scholarly words and explanations. Joe pointed out, "It's so hard to, watch a teacher say demeaning things based on academic language that parents don't understand. That can be considered racist." The administrators' discourse demonstrates an awareness of position and discourse as a resource that teachers can use to exercise power, however they seemed less aware that they too exercise the rights of use and enjoyment within their position and discourse.

The administrators in this study exercised power over African American students through discursive strategies such as discursive manipulation. By utilizing discursive manipulation, administrators can get students to think or do what may have been in the best interest of the administrator but not necessarily in the best interests of the students. The researcher found that, in a disciplinary interaction with African American students, administrators utilized their position and discursive manipulation to control African American students' understanding of the situation. The researcher asked Sean and Joe to discuss the steps they take upon receiving a discipline referral. Sean explained that he has a conversation with the student about the office referral. He then illustrated how that conversation might go,

You know, if the students is so, 'Principal Sean this didn't happen. This is a lie' 'Well why would the teacher waste their time to write this up...Why? Like if they don't care about you and they're just making it up, I wouldn't waste 10 minutes. I would just be

done with you.’ So trying to get students to understand this. That nobody’s faking this and making stuff up. So typically, I’ll you know typically they’ll get down to at least some part of the truth with me. And then from there we assign consequences based on the student.

The researcher noted a few points of analysis for this comment. Sean exhibited the characteristic of discursive manipulation by trying to get the student to understand the situation as he sees it. Sean also aligned himself with the teacher when he replaces the teacher in the scenario with himself, creating a discourse of “Us” vs. “Them.” This discourse is furthered through the positive self-presentation of the teacher/”Us” by trying to get the student to see the referral as the teacher/”Us” exhibiting an act of caring.

When the researcher asked the administrators about office referrals, both administrators positioned the inconsistency of teacher feelings and emotions as the basis for office discipline referrals. Sean stated, “I think as a generality, most teachers and I don’t think just here, I think in general, write kids up based on their own personal feelings, not on fact.” Sean also commented,

I think it’s just in their [teachers’] minds. Again they had a bad day or they don’t like this kid so they see something going on and then it’s ‘Oh so I write them up for this.’ or ‘I’ll bring them to the office for this,’ and when you really get down to it, that’s not really the whole story.

Yet, in practice, Sean tries to get students to understand that the teacher isn’t, “Making this up.” Sean’s comments in the interview demonstrate an awareness that sometimes teachers don’t have the full story and that teacher office referrals aren’t always based on facts. Sean’s disciplinary interaction evidenced discursive manipulation by securing his interest of positive self-presentation and concealing his awareness of the discipline inequities that the disposition and

subjectivity of teachers may produce. Sean ends by saying that he gets down to some part of the truth. Sean's position affords him the right to establish "truth." In this way, the discourse leads to the reproduction of discipline disparities by giving African American students a consequence, not necessarily for an actual truth, but the established "truth."

The researcher also found that the administrators in this study utilized discursive manipulation to advance a discourse that is in the best interest of the administrator and against the best interest of African American students. When the researcher asked Joe about the suspensions of African American students, he expressed that the African American students at Beck Middle have an "I don't care mentality." He stated,

I use a little reverse psychology. Which I genuinely do, I genuinely do care and when they tell me, 'I don't care.' I say, 'Well I care about you...' You know and after a while once a kid notices that you care they kinda realize that they trippin' with the wrong person. [Laughs] And that usually makes the conversation, go a bit easier and they'll be a little bit more, little bit more receptive of the consequences. The consequences are gonna come.

To say that care is significant in the education of African American students might be an understatement. Joe seems to recognize the importance of establishing care with African American students. However, Joe also seems to utilize care as a tactic within his discursive manipulation. It is in his interest for the African American students to believe he cares but it is not in their best interest to have care equated with exclusion.

The rights of reputation and status. The researcher found that, in discipline there is reputational value in respect. Both administrators discussed respect in terms of students' behavior towards teachers and staff. Joe explained that the administrators at Beck most often

suspend African American students for disrespect to staff and discussed respect as maintained through discipline, “It’s also a power shift when you have to call an administrator...and then you start to see that respect start to diminish, for the teacher.” Sean had a similar discourse, “Students are never going to respect you. Because you’re not the disciplinarian at that point.” Administrators suspend African American students for being disrespectful to teachers, even when there is an awareness that African American students are experiencing a form of disrespect from teachers. When the researcher asked Joe why he thought it was the case that African American students were most often suspended for disrespect he stated,

I think it’s a combination of just lack of respect for people they feel like don’t have their best interest. You know and some people in the occupation are here just because they went to school and they want a paycheck.

By impressing upon teachers the ideologies of discipline as power, discipline as control, discipline as a part of education, and discipline as respect, instead of challenging the disparities that they already acknowledge occur, the administrators in this study advance a discourse of dominance over African American student.

The absolute right to exclude. State law protects discipline as exclusion. State law is written as “The principal shall have authority to impose short term suspensions on students,” and the Sun Valley School System district discipline policy defines in-school suspensions as, “A student is excluded from attending regular classes.” The district policy states, in regard to ISS, “The purpose is to provide a form of consequence that results in improved behaviors without the removal of students from the school environment and supervision.”

The researcher asked Sean and Joe what a day in ISS looked like for students at Roseland Middle and Beck Middle. Sean described ISS in this way,

You're in there for 7 hours...The kids probably sit there and do their writing assignment and their reflection on their behavior, go to counseling, and then they probably sit there for most upwards of five hours doing nothing...There's some ELA work but it's not very always reflective of necessarily what they're doing in class. So there's probably a lot of wasted time.

The researcher also asked Joe what he thought the response would be if administration eliminated ISS, except in cases of serious or dangerous behavior. He responded that teachers would be frustrated because, "Although teachers don't want kids permanently out of their class, they need a break from kids sometimes." Joe went on to say of ISS at Beck Middle,

I usually allow students in school suspension to um go to their math and a reading class unless they had an issue in those classes...our Behavioral Interventionist, and he usually kinda gives me an update by the end of the day where like, 'This kid really gets it, or this kid might need to stay another couple of days. They're still frustrated and just don't understand that the decisions they made, led them, led them to be here.'"

The implication is, the way out of ISS is for African American students to acquiesce to the belief that the cause of the exclusion lies within them.

The teachers at Beck paint a different picture of ISS. Herbie discussed the incidents of two African American students who had received ISS. Herbie said of the first student, who administrators suspended for poking a Caucasian student with a pencil,

She was heartbroken and I saw a big drop in how she performed in class, because it ruined her confidence. She had just been building confidence especially in (names subject she teaches) because that's something she struggled with. She went to ISS, she wasn't able to catch up as well when she came back even though we did tutoring sessions.

In discussing a second student, an African American male who received ISS, Herbie stated,

I have another student that had a really rough year last year and he came in this year fresh start...He was like 'It's a new year. It's a new me' and that's what he kept telling me and, then the first time he got sent to ISS, ruined, ruined his behavior...he came in with a fresh start ready to go. The first time he got ISS, it like depleted that mentality.

The researcher asked Nigel, who is an ISS teacher, his thoughts on the purpose of ISS. Nigel asserted, "I think that's their purpose of giving them suspension, to remove what they see to be a problem or problematic kid from the classroom...They haven't said that that isn't what it is."

Nigel went on to explain,

They're not looking at the importance of education like I do. Even though it's my job, this is what I do...my primary concern is that these kids are in their classroom and that they're learning. And even though I, teach history and I'll go over their math with them and I'll do it, it's not the same than sitting in classroom and getting it from that teacher, it's just not the same...I got some teachers that'll actually come down and tutoring them while they're here but for the most part they need to be in there [classrooms].

It is not by chance that the use of suspensions is referred to as exclusionary discipline. The findings suggest that the disproportionate suspension of African American students not only excludes them from the right to the use, enjoyment, and benefits of educational opportunity, but it also excludes them from obtaining the knowledge they need to be able to identify, as well as the discourse they need to challenge and resist, racial inequities in the future.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explore subtle racial bias as an explanation for racial discipline disparities through an examination of the discourse of educational leadership and

policy in the context of school discipline. In this chapter, the researcher accomplished the purpose by addressing the first two research questions: What shared ideologies, assumptions, and associations about African American students, in the context school discipline, are reflected in the discourse of educational leadership and discipline policy? And how might this discourse be linked to the enactment of racial discipline disparities for African American students?

The researcher addressed Research Question 1 by presenting the “unquestionable assumptions” within schools that tell the story of African American students in the context of school discipline. The researcher addressed Research Question 2 by analyzing the discourse of educational leadership and discipline policy utilizing a critical race discourse analysis through the lens of the conceptual framework. The researcher found that the discourse of the Sun Valley School System discipline policy and the discourse of the administrators in this study aligned with each of the domains of the conceptual framework, suggesting a relationship among subtle racial bias, racialized discourse and ideologies, and the enactment of discipline disparities for African American students. The researcher also found that administrators and teachers in this study have some shared discourse about African American students, school discipline, and discipline disproportionality. Based on the findings, the discourse of administrators and discipline policy, which the teachers have adopted, produces, justifies, maintains, and reproduces racial discipline disparities for African American students. In Chapter Five, the researcher will address Research Question 3 by adding to the analytic framework that the researcher presented in this chapter and moving these findings toward a framework specifically for addressing of discipline disproportionality for African American students.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

“When we first start facing truth, the process may be frightening, and many people run back to their old lives. But if you continue to seek truth, you will eventually be able to handle it better. In fact, you want more! It's true that many people around you now may think you are weird or even a danger to society, but you don't care. Once you've tasted the truth, you won't ever want to go back to being ignorant.”

(Plato, 360B.C.)

The purpose of this study is to explore subtle racial bias as an explanation for racial discipline disparities through an examination of the discourse of educational leadership and policy in the context of school discipline toward the end of developing a framework to address the disproportionate suspension of African American students. The research questions for this study are:

1. What shared ideologies, assumptions, and associations about African American students, in the context of school discipline, are reflected in the discourse of educational leadership and discipline policy?
2. How might this discourse be linked to the enactment of racial discipline disparities for African American students?
3. What contribution can an analysis of the discourse of educational leadership make towards the creation of an analytic framework for addressing racial discipline disparities?

The researcher will begin with an overview of the study. The researcher will then address research question three by presenting a Critical Race Discourse Framework for addressing discipline disparities for African American students. The framework moves educational leaders toward utilizing new discourses, developing new ideologies, and engaging in new practices to disrupt the dominant discourse in education that produces, justifies, maintains, and reproduces racial discipline disparities. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and some of the researcher's concluding thoughts.

Overview of the Research Study

Despite over 40 years of research, the pattern of disproportionate suspension rates for African American students persists. Disciplinary exclusion creates barriers to the academic achievement and opportunity access for African American students and has implications not only for the students, but also for the educational system and for society. This study shifted the focus of the research on discipline disproportionality to school administrators and to an examination of subtle racial bias in the discourse, ideologies, and practices of school discipline.

A conceptual framework guides this study. The framework fuses elements of aversive racism and the theme and tenets of critical race theory with discursive strategies utilized in the critical discourse analysis of racism to demonstrate the relationship between subtle racial bias, educational discourse, and racial discipline disparities for African American students. The conceptual framework served as the guide for this critical race discourse analysis. This was a thematic analysis organized around the themes and tenets of critical race theory with aversive racism theory serving as a guide for the identification of acts of subtle racial bias in school discipline, and that incorporates discursive strategies based on van Dijk's critical discourse

analysis of racism. In this critical race discourse analysis, the emphasis was on linking the written or verbal text to racial ideologies and to the practice of disproportionate discipline for African American students. The researcher utilized the framework to capture discourse that provided evidence of subtle racial bias and to link that discourse to racialized ideologies and the enactment of racial discipline disparities.

In Chapter One, the researcher discussed the extent of discipline disproportionality for African American students and the impact on African American students and the educational system. The researcher then discussed the significance of engaging in this study. The current literature has fallen short of providing educational leaders with an understanding of the role they play in the production, justification, maintenance, and reproduction of racial discipline disparities and with a means of assessing and addressing racial bias as the central factor in discipline disproportionality for African American students. In Chapter Two, the researcher reviewed the literature through the lens of the conceptual framework, discussing the prominent theme in the research and literature on racial discipline disproportionality, then examining the deeper dominant assumptions, associations, and ideologies about African American students, school discipline, and discipline disproportionality. In Chapter Three, the researcher presented the research methodology for engaging in a critical race discourse analysis to identify the discourse of educational leaders and policy in the context of school discipline; to explore the ideologies, assumptions, and associations in the discourse about African American students, school discipline, and discipline disproportionality; and to analyze the possible connection between the discourse and racial discipline disparities. The researcher discussed critical race discourse analysis as a way to place subtle racial bias at the center of the analysis to reveal the dominant assumptions, associations, and ideologies embedded in the educational discourse and to examine

the way that the dominant discourse produced, justified, and maintained racial discipline disparities. The researcher then outlined the approach to participant selection, data collection, and the data analysis process and concluded with a presentation of the framework for the analysis of the data. In Chapter Four, the researcher addressed research questions 1 and 2 by presenting the shared discourse of educational leadership and discipline policy and conducting a critical race discourse analysis of the shared discourse through the lens of the conceptual framework.

Discussion of the Findings

The first purpose of this study was to explore subtle racial bias as an explanation for racial discipline disparities. The conceptual framework that guides this study utilizes aversive racism theory as a guide for identifying when acts of subtle racial bias will occur in school discipline. The fundamental premise of aversive racism theory is that many people consciously support egalitarian principles and do not view themselves as prejudiced, yet harbor unconscious negative feelings and beliefs about African Americans. The conflict between the support of egalitarian principles and unconscious negative feelings and beliefs creates a “distinct pattern of discriminatory behavior” that is “manifested in subtle, indirect, and rationalizable ways” (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, p. 618). Within aversive racism theory is a guideline for determining when acts of subtle racial bias will occur. Stereotypes are utilized to justify negative acts toward and feelings and beliefs about African Americans. Aversive racism theory points out that subtle racial bias will occur in situations when the guidelines for appropriate behavior are vague or ambiguous, when responses can be rationalized on the basis of factors other than race, and when there is a threat to power, control, and/or status.

Negative perceptions and associations. There is a tendency to categorize people into

groups and to distinguish one's own group, referred to as the in-group, from the group of others, called the out-group. It is within this process of categorization that bias is initiated and discrimination enacted. People tend to make evaluations about members of the out-group and when those categorizations are based on race, evaluations are made based on racial biases and stereotypes. Stereotypical perceptions about African Americans tend to be associated with negative traits.

It is important to understand how the discourse of educational leaders constructs the identity of African American students and the ways these conceptualizations justify racial discipline disparities (Picower, 2009). The researcher has found that there is a "standard" that exists in the discourse of educational leaders in the context of school discipline. Explicitly, administrators say the discourse of expectations, standards, and accountability is utilized to establish guidelines for student behavior. Implicitly, the discourse becomes a way to sort students into in-group and out-group membership and provides justification for the disproportionate suspension of African American students. When African American students and their parents/guardians are viewed through the lens of the standard, an image develops that is laced with negative associations and assumptions.

Nigel, an ISS teacher at Beck Middle, stated that the purpose of suspension was, "getting rid of the kids." When the researcher placed this discourse within the context of desegregation a similarity emerged. Horsford (2010) found that Black former superintendents who attended segregated schools and led desegregated school districts, felt that the purpose of the American public system was to sort students. The participant went on to state that the assumption and perception of African American students as inferior was part of the reasoning behind the sorting (Horsford, 2010). After desegregation, African American students were often still segregated

within schools and within classrooms. The expectation of African American students as culturally and intellectually inferior led to their being labelled as discipline problems and justified their exclusion from mainstream classes (Horsford & McKenzie, 2008).

The participants in this study presented an image of African American students associated with poverty and academic, behavioral, and social/emotional “baggage.” They spoke of African American students as “lacking identity and determination,” “excuse making,” and as having an “undeserved sense of entitlement.” Students they considered as meeting the standard they discussed as able to “carry themselves to a different standard and I think that correlates with making better decisions and prioritizing what’s important,” “better behaved,” and they “take their academics very serious.” These perceptions extended to the parents/guardians.

Parents/guardians of students who meet the standard were described as “involved,” while participants discussed the parents/guardians of African American students as not caring about their children’s behavior, as unsupportive of the school’s efforts to address the behavior of students, and as not providing guidance and supervision at home. The perceptions that the participants have about African American students and their parents also affects their perception of African American students’ behavior and how administrators address their behavior. Herbie commented a reason for the disproportionate suspension of African American students was “Parent representation makes a big difference,” and Joe said of students who parents/guardian he perceived as “involved,” “they’re very, they’re rarely ever suspended.”

Criminal justice discourse. Brown and Beckett (2006) pointed out that there are two approaches to discipline. One is an instructional view, which the researchers view as encompassing a positive preventative approach, and the other is a legal approach. Within the legalistic approach, discipline policies and practices are seen as punitive and reactive. Smith

(2009) suggested that when the education system and criminal justice system become linked, the line between pedagogy and punishment becomes blurred. This study found that the discourse of school discipline resembles a criminal justice system discourse.

Within this disciplinary system, African American students take on the connotation of repeat offenders. Nigel remarked,

The stigma associated with them being here [in ISS] carries on after they come out. You see the window there, when the kids go by to go into that class they stop and they look in, and the kids sitting in here, that's why I got the desk arranged the way it is. I had them all facing away from the window so they couldn't see their face because the kids look at them and they point...so I gotta, put something on that window...and that's why I got that blacked out, so I don't want them seeing who's in here.

The researcher found that administrators, perhaps unconsciously, utilize the standard as a means of creating an in group/out group boundary. Negative perceptions and associations about African American students and their parents/guardians then justify the need for more disciplinary action against African American students than for those students who meet the standard. Smith (2009) defined the school-to-prison pipeline as a framework for examining the intersection between school policies and practices and the criminal justice system. This research has demonstrated that this intersection of school discipline policy and the criminal justice system exists in both practice and discourse.

Van Dijk (1992) explained that speakers use a discourse of justification as a way to provide a legitimate defense for a negative act or discourse toward a racial minority group by presenting that group as deserving of the negative reaction (van Dijk, 1992). In a discourse of justification, the act itself is not denied; what is denied is that the act is negative and unjustified.

Subtle racial bias in discipline will occur when administrators associate African American students with negative perceptions. Administrators justify the disproportionality discipline of African American students when they advance a discourse that creates an image of African American students as warranting strict punishment.

Ambiguity and discretion. According to Gaertner and Dovidio (2005), the expression of subtle racial bias and discrimination will occur when the guidelines for behavior are vague and the normative structure is ambiguous. The Sun Valley School System discipline policy serves as the guideline for assessing and responding to student behavior. Joe referred to the district discipline policy as “a guideline to help you make a professional decision.” However, the district discipline policies are ambiguous and subjective and allow for administrative discretion in decision making. The behaviors for which the administrators in this study most often suspend African American students are associated with the very rules that the administrators admitted are the most subjective and ambiguous. Skiba et al. (2009) pointed out that school suspensions are better predicted by school culture than student behavior and attitude. The definitions within the Sun Valley Code of Conduct are so broadly defined and subjective that the consequences African American students receive speak more to the administrator’s interpretation of policy and subjectivity in decision making than they do to the actual behavior of African American students.

Ambiguity leaves room for racial bias. In addition to the ambiguity of the policy, administrators have the discretion to determine which rule they will utilize, what consequences they will assign, and whether they will add on additional rules. When one couples the ambiguity of the discipline policy with negative perceptions about African American students and a disciplinary system that is reflective of the discourse and ideology of the criminal justice system,

one begins to see how discipline disproportionality is produced, as well as the connection between ideologies and discourse and the enactment of discipline disparities for African American students. Subtle racial bias in discipline will occur and discipline disparities are produced when administrators have discretion in their disciplinary decision making and guidelines for discipline policy are ambiguous and subjective. In this study, discipline disproportionality seems to be better predicted by the decision making of administrators than the behavior of African American students.

Rationalization of factors other than race. In their research on aversive racism, Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) found that subtle expressions of racial bias tend to occur when acts of discrimination can be rationalized on the basis of factors other than race. The Sun Valley School System views discipline disproportionality as being related to teachers' office discipline referrals. An examination of office discipline referrals did reveal that the administrators view office referrals as related to teacher disposition and teacher subjectivity in the interpretation of behaviors. However, the researcher also found that for the administrators in this study, teacher referrals are more so used as notification that an act has occurred. It is still the administrator who actually handles the interpretation of the behavior, determines the rule, and assigns the consequence.

The administrators in this study rationalized discipline disproportionality as being related to factors outside of the school's control, such as the concentration of African American students, poverty, and home and community issues. Raffaele Mendez and Knoff (2003) found that educators tend to blame African American students for their overrepresentation in suspensions. As one African American superintendent said of desegregation, "When people have low expectations, they blame the victim rather than assume responsibility for their learning"

(Horsford & McKenzie, 2008). Walker (1996) pointed out that the conclusion was often drawn that because Black schools during segregation were poor, “the standards were generally lower than that of white schools” (Walker, 1996, p.4). The same discourse that was used to draw assumptions and associations about Black schools during segregation is still used to rationalize discipline disparities for African American students.

Perhaps because the administrators related disproportionality to factors associated with African American students, they utilized student centered interventions as a means of addressing disproportionality. A central component of critical race theory is the notion that racism is systemic and not isolated within the individual (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As Hook (2006) pointed out, isolating racism within the individual, as a “fault of the cognition” (Hook 2006, p.209) of an “aberrant subject” (Hook, 2006, p. 209), as opposed to examining the practices within the institution, absolves the institution from responsibility. The participants in this study pointed out that despite the interventions that the schools have put in place to address disproportionality, the suspension gap still exists.

The administrators did not perceive disproportionality as being directly related to race and racial bias, and they did not believe that district leadership was directing them to address discipline disproportionality as a racial inequity. Huckin (2002) discussed silence as a form of discourse where information that is relevant to the topic of the discussion is omitted. Huckin (2002) described five categories of silence, one of which is discreet silence. Discreet silence involves the omission of information or topics that are considered sensitive in nature. Race and racism are sensitive topics that are often avoided or approached very gingerly, and these topics can become even more uncomfortable when the discussion is placed within a historical context. Although equity is one of the district’s core values, and the administrators stated that district

leaders have directed them to make “fixing” disproportionality a priority, there is a silence on moving from the presentation of discipline data to identifying the root causes of the disparity and addressing it as a systemic inequity. As such, subtle racial bias in discipline will occur when administrators rationalize disproportionality as related to deficits within African American students and limit the scope of addressing disproportionality to addressing the behaviors of African American students. Discipline disproportionality is maintained when educational leaders are silent about historical contexts and ignore a systemic inquiry into discipline disparities for African American students.

Threat to power, control, and status. Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) found that subtle acts of bias are more likely to occur when there is a threat to power, control, and status. Van Dijk (1993a) maintained that racial inequities are reproduced through ideologies. The researcher examined the ideologies associated with discipline and found that discipline was associated with power, respect, and exclusion. The researcher also found that the administrators in this study acclimate teachers to their disciplinary power and how to ward off threats to disciplinary power and respect. What stood out for the researcher was the administrators’ level of awareness. Administrators are well aware of the role of teacher subjectivity in disciplinary decision making and the interpretation of behaviors, ambiguity in disciplinary policy, and negative perceptions about African American students in the discipline gap. Yet in disciplinary interactions with African American students, they utilize discourse and practices that protect discipline inequities. In doing so, they reproduce discipline inequities for African American students.

Delpit (1988) pointed out that those with power are less aware, or less willing to acknowledge, the existence of power. Throughout the research, the administrators in this study demonstrated an awareness of the existence of power within the structure of discipline. Perhaps

then, as Delpit (1988) pointed out, the administrators are unwilling to acknowledge their participation in the reproduction of racial discipline disparities for African American students. The administrators in this study never discussed the role of their own subjectivity, authority, interpretations and definition, discourse, or perceptions in the discipline gap. The power to exclude rests heavily in the hands of educational leaders. Although teachers make disciplinary referrals, law and district policy has conferred administrators with the authority to utilize their discretion in disciplinary decision making. The power and authority that reproduce racial discipline inequities is the same power and authority that they could use to challenge the discourse and disrupt the over 40-year pattern of discipline disparities for African American students. Subtle racial bias will occur in discipline when administrators protect discipline inequities by concealing their awareness and administrators reproduce discipline disparities for African American students when they will not acknowledge their participation in or challenge the discourse, ideologies, and practices associated with the production, justification, and maintenance of racial discipline disparities for African American students.

Research Question 3: What contribution can an analysis of the discourse of educational leadership make towards the creation of an analytic framework for addressing racial discipline disparities?

The researcher will address research question three by presenting a Critical Race Discourse Framework for addressing discipline disparities for African American students. This race-based framework moves educational leaders toward utilizing new discourses, developing new ideologies, and engaging in new practices to disrupt the dominant discourse in education that produces, justifies, maintains, and reproduces racial discipline disparities.

Haviland (2008) suggested that it is irresponsible to help people find truth without providing them with options of how to move toward action now that they have these new

understandings. Educational researchers frequently conclude the presentation of their research with recommendations for educational leaders. These recommendations often illustrate the divide between research and practice. Espinosa and Harris (1997) discussed a critical issue for critical scholars of wanting to remain on the outside, and yet belong. When applied to educational research, this seems to suggest that there is a desire to challenge racial inequities, but to do so through the realm of research and recommendations. However, in critical race theory there is a connection between the researcher and the research (DeCuir-Gunby & DeVose, 2013). Buras (2013) presented critical race praxis as part of a new paradigm in educational policy analysis. Critical race praxis is a commitment not only to the analysis of racial inequalities but also to engaging in the work. It moves theory and the researcher beyond the research and into practice. There is no single plan that will address racial discipline disparities. Instead, critical praxis requires a response and a commitment, not boxed interventions and a checklist of strategies.

Commitment: Revise discipline policy. The rules administrators most often use to suspend African American students are ambiguous, subjective, and broadly defined. The administrators most often suspend African American students for physical aggression. However, they did not define this behavior in the same way or agree on which rule in the Code of Conduct to use to code the behavior. There are three different rules in the Code of Conduct that administrators use for physical aggression-- Aggressive Physical Action, Fighting, or Assault. Fighting is defined as, "Students shall not fight or attempt to cause bodily harm to another student." Similarly, Assault is defined as, "Student shall not cause, attempt to cause or threaten to cause injury to a student." One teacher participant said of the definition for Assault, "How is it different than a fight? So I think those are like, very grey areas. I think the line between the

A Critical Race Discourse Framework for Addressing Discipline Disparities for African American Students

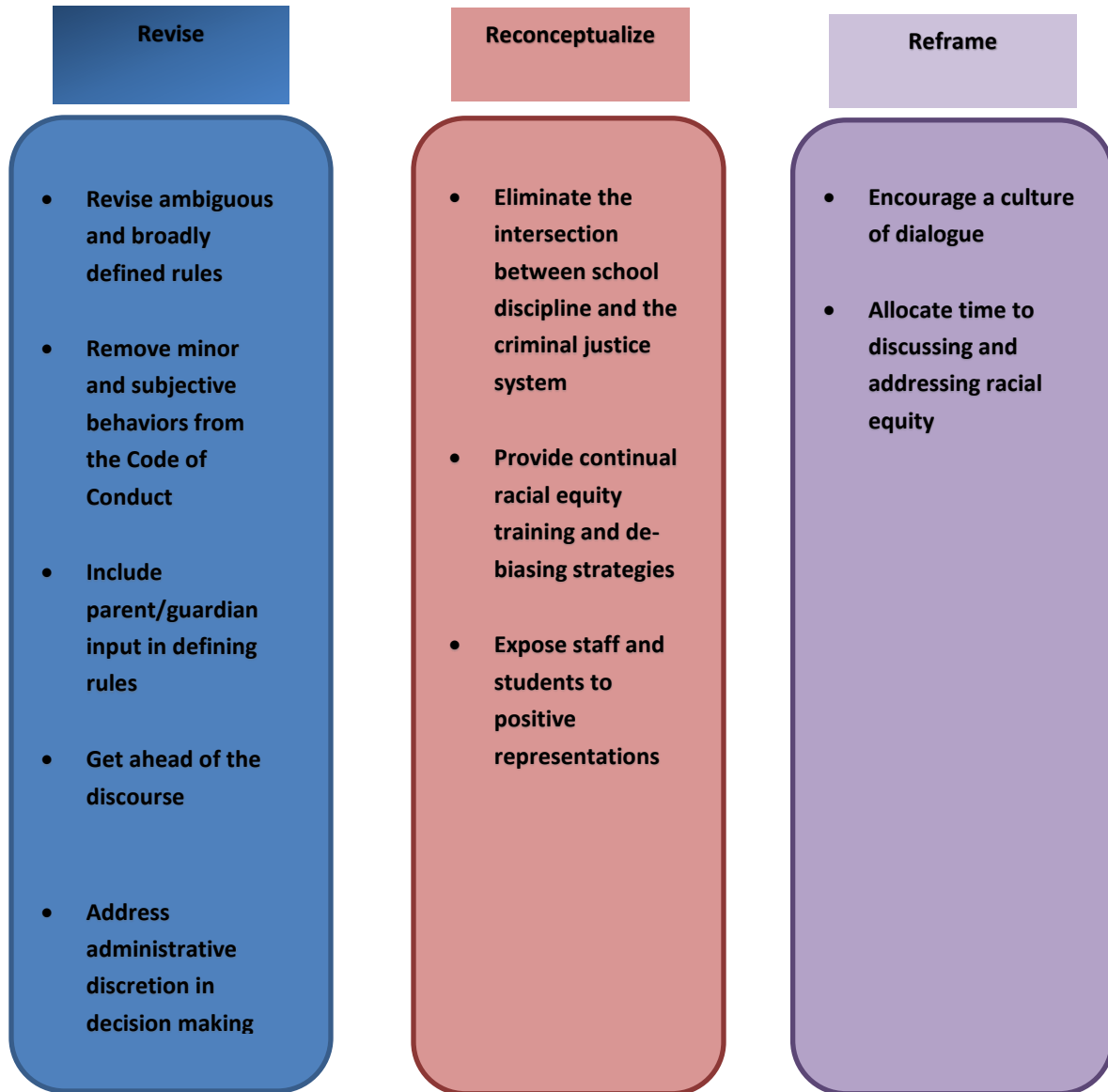


Figure 1. *Critical Race Discourse Framework*

two is very blurred.” In addition to physical aggression, the administrators in the study most often suspend African American students for disrespect and African American females for harassment and bullying. Both administrators utilized the same rule in the Code for these

behaviors. This rule is so broadly defined that the administrators referred to it as “a very general rule,” and “a catch all.” The rule includes at least eight behaviors and lists almost 20 incidents that could result in disciplinary action.

Action: Revise ambiguous and broadly defined rules and remove minor and subjective behaviors from the Code of Conduct. Educational leaders should revise ambiguous and broadly defined rules, and subjectively defined behaviors such as noncompliance and disrespect should be eliminated from the Code. Ambiguous and broadly defined rules create an automatic route to suspension for African American students because administrators can use these rules to justify a suspension for any behavior in which students engage. Administrators can also use these rules as a supplement to other rules, thereby increasing the severity of the consequence for African American students. Although there is a distinction in the severity of consequences associated with rules, one similarity among the rules in the Code of Conduct is that they all lead to suspension and/or law enforcement involvement. Listing all types of behaviors within the Code of Conduct, including those that are subjectively defined, minor, and unrelated to safety, advances the notion that any behavior students engage in warrants suspension and/or law enforcement involvement. The Code should only define behaviors and administrators should limit the use of the Code to those more serious, safety-related behaviors. For minor and subjective behaviors, administrators should work to come to shared definitions of behaviors and to identify a range of interventions and consequences that can be implemented at the school level. Administrators can engage in the process of redefining rules and subjective behaviors by first identifying the rules and behaviors for which African American students are most often referred and suspended, and then by having teachers define each of these rules and behaviors. Through this process, administrators and teachers will see where the lack of agreement and

inconsistencies lie so they will know where to direct their efforts. The next step should be to get parent/guardian input.

Action: Include parents/guardians input as part of the process of defining rules and behaviors. The study has found that discipline rules, expectations, and standards are not developed in conjunction with, or well communicated to, African American parents/guardians. Instead of desiring parent/guardian input, the current expectation seems to be for parents/guardians to simply hold their students accountable to the expectations and standards that the school and district sets. The Code utilizes phrases such as “acceptable community standard,” and one of the participants in this study questioned, what community? And what is acceptable? Solórzano and Yasso (2002) pointed out that racial bias is disguised in the “rhetoric of shared normative values” (p. 27). Educational leaders can challenge the rhetoric of normative values by including African American parents/guardians input as part of the process of redefining rules and behaviors.

Educational leaders cannot only interact with those parents/guardians who “come in and support the cause,” or those who participate in online surveys and forums held at schools and district offices. Instead, they should meet parents where they are, conducting home visits and collaborating with community leaders and organizations to hold rule and behavior definition focus groups in churches and community and recreation centers. Administrators and district leaders know which events draw the largest crowds and the most diverse parents/guardians, and they should use these events as opportunities to collect parents/guardians input. Once administrators have engaged in this process with teachers and parents/guardians, they should then rewrite the rules and behaviors to clearly defined and observable behaviors that are agreed upon by the school community. It is at this point that they can then utilize School Wide Positive

Behavior and Support as an intervention to teach behaviors and restorative practices as an intervention for minor behaviors.

Action: Get ahead of the “Increased revisions means decreased school safety”

discourse. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction defines 16 acts that must be reported to school administrators and involve law enforcement if necessary. The 16 reportable acts include assaults, arson, bomb threats, sexual assaults, drug possession, possession of a firearm or other weapon, robbery with a weapon, murder, and kidnapping. According to Sun Valley discipline data, only 3% of suspensions for Black students were for reportable acts, while 29% were for the broader rules that include disrespect and noncompliance.

Those who oppose discipline policy revision in the context of discipline disproportionality often equate revisions with the elimination of all consequences for all behaviors and make the argument that school safety will be affected. Educational leaders should counter these all or nothing dichotomous interpretations of school discipline and policy revision by explaining that there are a range of consequences and interventions between not addressing behavior and exclusionary discipline and law enforcement involvement. Educational leaders will need to get ahead of this discourse by not only presenting charts with data disaggregated by race and behavior types, but also by disaggregating the data further and explaining that African American students are more often suspended for subjective behaviors that fall under broad and ambiguous rules as opposed to more serious, safety related actions. They will need to frame their explanation of the move toward discipline policy revision within a discourse of the convergence of interests. Interest convergence is a critical race theory construct which points out that Caucasian people are more likely to support the move toward equity when the changes also serve their interests. Educational leaders should point out that Caucasian students are also more likely

to be suspended for subjective behaviors that fall under broad and ambiguous rules, demonstrating that the need for discipline policy revision is in the best interest of all students and that the revising of discipline policy in no way interferes with district leaders' commitment to the priority of student safety.

Action: Address administrative discretion in the interpretation of discipline policy.

Ambiguous situations are “ripe for the arousal of implicit bias” (Staats, 2014, p. 7) and it is not only that the rules within discipline policies are ambiguous and broadly defined, but it also that this ambiguity allows administrators discretion in determining which and how many rules they will utilize and what consequences they will assign. Educational researchers and leaders often make teacher office referrals the point of focus in the examination of discipline disproportionality. The Sun Valley School System discipline data shows that less of half of referrals for African American students result in out-of-school suspensions. This data demonstrates that examining disproportionality at the level of teacher referrals does not provide a complete picture of the disproportionate suspension gap for African American students. Instead, as the administrators in this study pointed out, it is administrators who write-up the referrals, define behaviors, interpret the discipline policy, and assign the consequences. Administrative discretion is that point where ambiguous rules move to the enactment of disparate outcomes for African American students and it is at this point where educational leaders should direct their attention.

Within their investigation of the disproportionate suspension of African American students, district leaders should examine the decision making and interpretation of policy of both principals and assistant principals, since assistant principals also assign disciplinary consequences. The researcher asked the administrators in this study to define those behaviors for

which African American students are most likely to be suspended. The researcher then gave the administrators the Code of Conduct and asked them to find the code that they would assign for these behaviors. Finally, the researcher asked the administrators to read the definitions and discuss whether they agreed with the definitions provided in the Code. By taking the administrators through this process, the researcher was able to determine variations in the definitions of behaviors and in which rule(s) in the Code of Conduct they associate with behaviors, as well as which definitions within the Code they agreed with, disagreed with, and that they felt were broadly defined and ambiguous. District leaders should utilize this same process as a way to not only examine administrators' disciplinary decision making and interpretations of discipline policy, but also as part of identifying ambiguous, broad and subjective rules in the Code.

Commitment: Reconceptualize the image of African American students. There is a tendency to categorize people into groups and to distinguish one's own group, referred to as the in-group, from the group of others, called the out-group. Although it is a normal cognitive process to categorize people and oneself into groups, it is also within this process of categorization that bias is initiated. When people categorize and make negative evaluations about African Americans based on race, it is referred to as racial bias. The in-group/ out-group boundary is created based on the perception that in-group members are more closely related to the self (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005) and the identification with the in-group can be even more salient than the identification with one's racial identity. Racial identity can seemingly "disappear" or become hidden, to adopt the in-group identity (Lumby & English, 2009). African Americans can find that their perceptions about themselves are more closely related to the perceptions and assumptions they hold about members of other racial/ethnic groups. Those that

identify with the African American identity can still hold negative perceptions and assumptions about other African Americans. In other words, no one is immune to racial bias and as such, educational leaders should work with all staff members to dispel negative assumptions and perceptions about African American students and parents/guardians.

Action: Eliminate the intersection between school discipline and the criminal justice system. “Ninety-five percent of the fights are between Black females. You don’t see White females fighting each other. Why do you do that? Why do you tear each other down? Slavery has really done a job on us,” (observation notes of a teacher at Beck Middle talking to an African American female student). Lloyd (2016) explained that humanity was forgotten when slavery existed. Slavery distorted humanity, both for the enslaved Blacks as well as for the slaveholder Whites. Against the backdrop of slavery, Frederick Douglass stated that, “Mankind lost sense of our humanity in the idea of our being property,” (as cited in Lloyd, 2016, p.13) while Harris (1993) pointed out that in the period following slavery, Whiteness itself became valued property. Harris (1993) stated that critical thinking must be adjoined to definitions, so to understand this contradictory view of property, the researcher turns to definitions. Humanity is defined as the quality or state of being human and as having human attributes or qualities (Merriam-Webster, 2017). In order for something, or in this case someone, to be treated as property, they have to be viewed as something other than a fellow human. To go one step further, of the ten definitions for property, nine use words and phrases which make reference to the inanimate, such as “object,” “something,” and “an article.” Slavery stripped Blacks of their humanity by stripping them of their very state of being seen as human. Humanity was instead replaced with distortions.

By definition, to distort is to alter or give a false or unnatural depiction or account (Merriam-Webster, 2017). Slavery distorted the image of Blacks. No longer viewed as and

defined by that which they are, human, Blacks instead came to be viewed as and defined by what they were not and by what they were lacking. Merriam-Webster (2017) defines black as “the opposite of white” and as “the absence of.” Another set of definitions include words and phrases such as “dirty,” “soiled,” “*thoroughly* [emphasis added] sinister or evil,” “indicative of condemnation or discredit,” “connected to the supernatural or the devil,” “sad, gloomy, calamity,” “hostility,” “anger,” “grim,” and “covert.” Black is not human. Black is not white. Black is the lack of good, the lack of honest, the lack of sound judgement and sound mind. Slavery distorted the image of Blacks and now any attempt to define African American students is tainted because the definitions are always based in antipathies and preconceived, negative, false notions (Lloyd, 2016).

The quality or state of being human is actually the second definition Merriam-Webster (2017) lists for humanity. The first definition of humanity is compassionate, sympathetic, generous behavior or disposition (Merriam-Webster, 2017). For someone to be able to treat another person as one would treat an inanimate object, to be able to look at a people and view them as nothing more than a something or an article, would require the removal of one’s own compassion, sympathy, and generosity. It would require one to be stripped of their own humanity. Within slavery, Whites lost sense of the humanity of Blacks, but first and perhaps most significantly, they lost sense of their own humanity. As Frederick Douglass asserted, Whites began to understand and represent themselves falsely by internalizing a false sense of superiority (in Lloyd, 2016). The rationalization of superiority and the conception of Blackness as property became the only way for Whites to view themselves as human. These distortions didn’t end when the ink dried on the Emancipation Proclamation.

Walker (1996) said, about the time period of Jim Crow segregation, that the North left the

South to handle “the Negro problem” at its own discretion and that the discretionary practice of choice for Whites, was white supremacy. During this same Jim Crow time period, Myrdal (1944) wrote,

The belief in the Negro’s...lack of morals, his criminal tendencies, and so on, serve the purpose of easing the conscience of the good, upright white citizen...They also rationalize the demand for housing segregation, and tend, on the whole, to picture the Negro as a menace to orderly society unless “kept in his place” by the caste system. (p. 107).

Although slavery and Jim Crow have technically ended, a new Jim Crow has emerged. Parallel the discourse and ideologies of the mass incarceration of African Americans with the discourse and ideologies of the disproportionate suspension of African American students. In the same way that in-school suspension rooms are filled with African American students, prisons are filled with African American men and women. Alexander (2012) presented some of the discourse used to justify the mass incarceration of African Americans. The criminal justice system is objective, so harsher sentencing is not disparately applied in cases that involve African Americans. It’s not that law enforcement are racially biased, it’s that African Americans commit more crimes. The discourse even advances that schools are at fault. Alexander (2012) discusses The War on Drugs as the cause of racial disparities in the prison system. In the same way, zero tolerance policies, which were initiated as part of The War on Drugs, lead to a marked rise in racial disparities in discipline. The parallels go on and on. The ideology that the problem resides in African Americans is this same ideology and discourse that justified slavery and Jim Crow. It is these same ideologies and discourse that create the parallels between the prison system and school discipline system and which vividly demonstrate the school-to-prison pipeline. This is why, simply put, educational leaders should, no must, eliminate all references

to the criminal justice system, all use of criminal justice discourse, and any and all other intersections between school discipline and the criminal justice system.

Action: Provide continual racial equity training and de-biasing strategies throughout the year. Often racial equity training is confined to one or two professional development sessions. Instead, racial equity training must be ongoing and intentional. The administrators in this study seemed to be unaware of the role they play in the production, justification, and maintenance of racial discipline disparities for African American students. Training should focus on helping educators to understand how racial bias and systemic racism create disparate outcomes for African American students. The training should help staff understand the link between subtle racial bias and their own practices.

Within racial equity training, educational leaders should also provide all staff with training in the utilization of de-biasing techniques. Devine, Forscher, Austin and Cox (2012) presented the de-biasing techniques of perspective taking and individuation. Perspective taking not only encourages educators to see things as African American students and their parents/guardians experience it, but the technique also helps educators to recognize common goals and values. Hill-Collins (1997) stated that new knowledge is rarely acquired in isolation from other groups; instead it is developed through dialogue, the role of which is the convergence of values. Educational leaders should regularly provide opportunities for staff to connect with parents/guardians, not only within the schools, but also within the community. Educators who engage in perspective taking and dialogue come to recognize that African American parents/guardians want the same things for their children that educators want for their own children, which challenges those deficit ideologies about African American students and parents/guardians.

Individuation is the process of coming to know and understand African American students for who they are as individuals, not based on group stereotypes and negative associations and assumptions. LatCrit, an extension of critical race theory that examines the experiences of Latinas/os, emphasizes the intersectionality of experience with oppression and resistance (Solorzano & Yasso, 2002). As part of a framework of action to counter negative perceptions, associations, and assumptions about African American students, the researcher offers an extension of this concept, the intersectionality of stories. Educational leaders should create opportunities for student voices and for students to tell their stories. Teachers should come to know and understand their students' experiences and to utilize students' experiences in the development of culturally relevant lessons. The goal of individuation is for educators to come to treat African American students in the same way that they want their children to be treated, with fairness and in an environment of equity. Every interaction, every possible discipline referral, every disciplinary decision should beg the questions, what do I believe about my students? And, what would I want for my own children? One of the administrators mentioned that he has learned to not make immediate discipline decisions, if possible. Instead, he steps away and takes the night to reflect. Achieving racial equity in discipline requires that pause and reflection because automatic decisions equate to automatic racial bias.

Action: Expose staff and students to positive representations. During one of the researcher's observations, a teacher at one of the schools said to the researcher that although the students in his class had low test scores, their issue was not one of academics, but of identity. He stated, "A predominantly Black school and students can't even tell you what the Civil Rights Movement is," and he linked this lack of identity to behavior and discipline disproportionality. The administrator at this same school also described the African American students as lacking

identity. Solórzano (1997) discussed utilizing images that challenge negative stereotypes. It is important, not only for African American students to be exposed to positive representations and the accomplishments of influential African Americans, but also for all staff to be exposed to these positive representations as a means of countering the negative assumptions that they hold about African American students and parents/guardians. As staff and students walk the halls in their schools, they should see the representations and achievements of African American figures. They should hear discussions in classrooms about the thoughts of influential African Americans. If African American students only see images of poverty, then expose them to an educational environment rich in experiences and opportunities. If African American students lack an understanding of their racial identity, then offer a course or club on African American history. Move beyond guest speakers and field trips done in isolation. Instead, educational leaders should encourage impactful interactions and meaningful dialogue with students about what they just experienced and how it relates to their community, their learning, and their future.

Commitment: Reframe discipline disproportionality as a racial inequity. There is a saying, if all you have is a hammer, pretty soon everything looks like a nail. Educational leaders have focused so heavily on student-focused solutions to discipline disproportionality that the possibility of it being related to anything other than student behavior is met with doubt. Pernell (1990) suggested educational leaders and researchers are not at the point of considering whether the educational disparities that affect African American students are largely the fault of the students if they have not even examined the reliability of the educational system to determine guilt, or placed emphasis on the system acknowledging, examining, and addressing its role in racial disparities.

This study found that administrators and teachers rationalize discipline disproportionality

as being related to African American student behaviors, their parents/guardians, and community issues. This rationalization identifies the problem as being “in” African American students (Gregory & Mosely, 2010). Discipline disproportionality is an issue of race, and a central component of critical race theory is the notion that racism is systemic and not isolated within the individual (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Individual solutions will not address structural problems. Based on the findings of this study, student-focused interventions have been ineffective at addressing racial discipline disparities, perhaps because these types of interventions do not address racial bias in the school discipline system. Reframing discipline disproportionality as a racial inequity in educational systems allows educational leaders to problematize the issue as opposed to the individual and to examine the role of the educational system in racial discipline disparities.

Action: Encourage a culture of dialogue. “I think that a lot of people when they know a meeting’s coming up that we’re talking about equity or diversity, they automatically have their, you know their guard up.” “I’m very passionate about changing the way our culture is being viewed...I feel that a lot of the times and even from the administrative meetings I go in, if you're too vocal, you’re looked at like an outcast.” These quotes, from the administrators in this study, demonstrate the defensiveness and isolation that is created when meaningful discourse on racial equity is restricted and when the educational system does not have to acknowledge their responsibility for racial disparities. The approach of only discussing racial equity as part of an annual diversity training creates detachment at best, and at worse an apathy, for addressing racial inequities.

Although the administrators in this study agreed that the communication of district leadership places an emphasis on closing the racial suspension gap, they also agreed that there is

a lack of dialogue on racism. Six out of the nine participants in this study expressed a desire for more meaningful dialogue about issues of race, racism, and what could be done to change disparate outcomes. There is a difference between talk and dialogue. Talk is the conveying of information and may even include exchanging ideas. Dialogue, however, is purposeful discussion toward the resolution of issues. Carter, Skiba, Arredondo and Pollack (2017) refer to tangential talk about race that fails to address central issues and avoids meaningful discussions as “clumsy race talk.” Instead of challenging and transforming discipline disproportionality, clumsy race talk actually maintains racial discipline disparities. By examining the practices within the institution and keeping topics of race, institutional racism and racial disparities in education at the center of dialogue, educational leaders disrupt the discourse that maintains racial discipline disparities and move toward meaningful institutional change that makes addressing discipline disproportionality a priority.

Action: Allocate time to discussing and addressing racial equity. Time is a resource and one way to determine the priority of educational leaders is to examine the allotment of time. Educational leaders should no longer only view their role as instructional leaders, providing support in the instruction of the curriculum--they must also see themselves as leaders of equity. In the same way they observe and model teaching practices, they should also observe and model equity practices. Educational leaders should create a culture of dialogue within schools and the districts, such that educators are comfortable with being uncomfortable so that racial equity can be achieved. To accomplish this task, educational leaders should continually engage in dialogue aimed at purposeful solutions to racial disparities. Educational leaders should dedicate time in professional learning communities for staff members to discuss educational processes that perpetuate racial discipline disparities and to brainstorm solutions to creating more equitable

outcomes for their African American students.

Implications for Future Research

The researcher utilized an analytic framework which drew from the racial ideologies of critical race theory, the indicators of subtle racial bias based on the elements of aversive racism theory, and discursive strategies as defined by van Dijk's critical discourse analysis of racism. This critical race discourse analysis placed subtle racial bias at the center of the analysis and examined the dominant assumptions, associations, and ideologies embedded in the educational discourse which perpetuate racial discipline disparities. Although this researcher did analyze the discursive structures and patterns, as part of this critical race discourse analysis, some discursive pattern began to emerge in the data. Future research could utilize critical discourse analysis and focus the analysis on discursive patterns, structures, and strategies and the enactment of racial discipline disparities.

It is the researcher's belief that the analytical framework for this study could be utilized to analyze other racial disparities in education, however more research is needed on the framework, both as an analytic tool for racial discipline disparities and for other racial disparities in education. Each domain of the framework opens the door for additional research. This research also showed that the discourse of educational leaders and policy reflected a historical discourse of racial bias and discrimination. Future research on the parallels between the discourse and ideologies of the criminal justice system and school discipline, as well as on the connections between historical discourse, ideologies and practices, and current racial disparities in education would be beneficial to explore. Research should also focus on critically analyzing the discourse of discipline policy and the ways that perceptions about African American students and parents/guardians influence the decision making and policy interpretation of educational

leaders.

Limitations of the Study

The study's lack of district leadership participation was a limitation of the research. Although this study didn't include district leadership participation, the researcher utilized other documents such as the district strategic plan, the district website, and community meetings to serve as district leadership discourse. The researcher was able to examine the administrators' perception about what district leadership was communicating regarding discipline disproportionality, but what district leadership perceives that they are communicating to administrators is a gap in this research. Future research should include the participation of district leadership.

The participants for this research came from two middle schools in one district. The small participant sample and the lack of racial diversity from each school were limitations to the research. The district research committee set the stipulations that the researcher could only interview teachers outside the instructional day, before or after school. Some teachers initially agreed to participate in the interviews during their planning time, but were either unwilling or unavailable to meet before or after school. Instead, these teachers offered informal comments about African American students, school discipline, and discipline disproportionality which the researcher noted in the field notes. Another limitation was that both administrator participants were male. Finally, critical race theory calls for the researcher to take a critical position in the analysis of the data. However, the researcher recognizes that the time spent in data collection was limited. As such, this is essentially an analysis of a moment of time. With additional time, the researcher may have seen other significant ideologies and discourse emerge.

Conclusion and Critical Reflections

In February 2018, a teenager entered a high school from which he had been expelled and opened fire, killing 17 people. Immediately this study came to the researcher's mind. How can the researcher write this dissertation about suspensions when it was an expelled student who committed this heinous act? No one will want to hear about reforming discipline against the backdrop of violence. The researcher tried to comfort herself by saying that the point of this study was not to discontinue suspensions. That's the very dichotomous thinking she critiqued as part of her analysis, but she found little consolation in this train of thought. A few days later, the researcher came across an article which discussed why school safety measures won't stop school shootings. In the article, Warnick, Johnson, and Rocha (2018) explained that schools are often places of isolation, alienation, and humiliation and that this school culture may contribute to the violence that takes place within them. Warnick et al. (2018) went on to explain that amidst the fear of school shootings and violence, students cease to be seen as individuals whom we should nourish and cultivate, and increasingly become assessed as potential threats. It occurred to the researcher that this is not the time to put the last period on the last sentence and walk away from addressing disparities in school discipline. No, quite the opposite. Now more than ever educational leaders have to ask the critical questions: how do we transform the ideology of discipline and the culture of our schools? Educational leaders should critically reflect on what they believe about their students, what they believe about themselves, and how they go about creating a system that allows not only African American students, but all students for that matter, flourish.

Unlike some critical race research, this study sought to present the dominant discourse, taking the perspective that by doing so, educational leaders would come to recognize not only the

role they play in producing, justifying, maintaining, and reproducing racial discipline disparities, but also that they are in the best position to eliminate these disparities. Discourse can be restructured. The disproportionate discipline of African American students has been an equity issue in education for over 40 years, but it is an issue that can be addressed if educational leaders and researchers commit to restructuring and shifting the educational discourse. The ghost of slavery bred ideologies pressure us to forget humanity, but we should resist this pressure. The ease of use of the educational “unquestionable assumption” tell us to protect the myths. Instead, educational leaders should fight against this distorted sense of comfort. If educational leaders and researchers focus on the depth of the inequity or the length of time it has existed, they can become overwhelmed and give up. Educational leaders give up when they refuse to discuss race, racism, and the disproportionate suspension of African Americans students as educational inequities.

Urrieta (2007) discussed activist leadership as raising consciousness by engaging in “moment-to-moment opportunities” of “day-to-day activism” (p. 133). Moment-to-moment, day-to-day educational leaders should challenge the discourse that produces racial discipline disparities and shift to a discourse organized around shared understanding, new perspectives, and new ideologies. Moment-to-moment, day-to-day educational leaders should challenge the discourse that justifies racial discipline disparities and organize around a moral agenda, a platform for voice and a racially equitable outcome. Moment-to-moment, day-to-day educational leaders should challenge the discourse that maintains racial discipline disparities and organize around reframing discipline disproportionality and collaborative action. Moment-to-moment, day-to-day educational leaders should challenge the discourse that reproduces racial discipline disparities and organize around an emancipatory culture. Moment-to-moment, day-to-

day educational leaders will come to embrace this newly found truth that they have a greater calling, a purpose. And once you've tasted that truth, you won't ever want to go back to being ignorant (Plato, 360 B.C.).

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL PRINCIPAL LIFE STORY QUESTIONS

I believe it's important for people to have the opportunity to tell their story so today we're going to do what is called a life story interview. This is the story of your journey into education and educational leadership. It is your story so share what you wish. You can focus on key events, key relationships or key themes, whatever you feel is important. I will guide you through the interview with some questions; think of them as chapters to your story. Do you have any questions before we begin? Ok, let's write your story.

Guiding Questions

1. Talk to me about when you first realized you wanted to be in educational leadership. Do you view educational leadership as your calling?
2. There is often a gap between our calling and crossing over into the work. Talk to me about crossing into the work of educational leadership.
3. Were there any people who guided you through this process?
4. What challenges have you faced? How did these challenges impact you and your work?
5. What, would you say, have been some of the high points of your journey and work?
Follow up question: What impact did these events have on you and your work?
6. Talk to me about a turning point(s) in your journey, some place or point where you felt a change or a shift in yourself and your work?
7. What is your leadership philosophy?
8. What are some of your childhood memories of being in school and being a student?
Follow up question: What educational experience(s) would you consider the most impactful, significant, or important?
9. Tell me about your next chapter; the story that has yet to be written. How do you see your future?
10. Now that you've recalled some important events along your journey, I'd like for you to think of some of the themes that run throughout your story. What title would you give your story?
Follow up question: What themes lead you to that title?
11. Is there anything else that you'd like to add to your story or anything else you'd like to share?
12. How did it feel to think about and verbalize your journey into educational leadership?

APPENDIX B: SCHOOL PRINCIPAL SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Good morning/Good afternoon. Before we begin, are there any thoughts you'd like to share about the study or about discipline (Allow participate time to address any questions, concerns, and/or reflections). The first interview we discussed your journey into educational leadership. As you know, since that first interview, I've had some time to spend shadowing you and observing the interactions of staff members. Today I'd like for us to discuss discipline policy and practices.

1. I'm interested in the process of discipline from the perspective of administrators. Brainstorm with me for a second, what are the processes and steps involved in discipline. (Write these out on paper). Clarification if needed: For example, one process might be behavior expectations for students and another process might be teacher interpretations of behaviors.
2. Tell me about your school wide policies and procedure for student behavioral expectations. How are they developed? Are they communicated to teachers, students, and parents? If so, how? What is the goal of these expectations?
3. The research on school discipline focuses heavily on teacher referrals to the office. Talk to me about teacher interpretation of behaviors. What are your thoughts about how a teacher decides whether or not a behavior fails to meets the expectation? How does a teacher make the determination of whether a behavior should be referred to the office or handle at the classroom level?
4. Talk to me about your teachers with a high number office discipline referrals, compared to other teachers at this school?
5. You receive a discipline referral, talk me though your approach and steps.
6. What is/are the goal(s) of suspension?
7. Let's say I've been given ISS, what does my school day look like?
8. What has been communicated to you and other administrators about the district's position and expectations regarding suspensions? What are your thoughts about these expectations?
9. What do you think would be the response if you decided to eliminate ISS and to only suspend students for a serious, reportable offenses? Follow up: What do think would be the response of teachers? Parents/community? The district?
10. Tell me about your African American students.

Now let's shift our discussion slightly to the discipline gap for African American students.

11. For which behaviors do African American students receive the most suspensions at this school? Why do you think this is the case?
12. How do you define these behaviors? Clarification question if needed, for example, if noncompliance is one of the top behaviors for which African American students are suspended, how do you define "noncompliance"?
13. Does everyone in your building defines these behaviors in the same way?
14. How are these definitions communicated to students and teachers?
15. (Show them one of the district discipline policy from the handbook for which most

- African American students are suspended.) How do you interpret this policy?
16. Let's talk about the discipline data. Why do you think a suspension gap exists at this school?
 17. Complete this sentence: If African American students at this school are disproportionately suspended it is because...
 18. Let's do a brief role-play. Let's say I'm a parent of an African American student who you've just suspended. I'm here to discuss the suspension and I pull out your discipline data. I'll start, Principal X, I'm looking at this data and it looks like you're of the habit of suspending AA students. How do you expect me to believe it's my child and not you or this school?
 19. What has been communicated to you and other administrators about the district's position and expectations regarding the suspension gap for African American students? What are your thoughts about these expectations?

Just a few more questions.

20. What is being done to address discipline gaps at this school? Are there things that you specifically are doing to address discipline gaps?
21. What are your thoughts about the role of race and racial bias in the discipline gap for African American students?
22. What are your thoughts on the suspension gap as a racial inequity in education?
23. Do you have any staff members who you believe are particularly equity focused? Tell me about them.
24. Is there anything that we did not cover or any additional thought you have that you would like to share?

APPENDIX C: OBSERVATION GUIDE

For this study, the researcher is interested in observing evidence of the discourse of school discipline, particularly as it relates to African American students, discipline policies, and practices. The purpose of the study is to examine the discourse of educational leadership and explore the ways that this discourse may produce discipline inequities. The school principals and teachers may interact with students, parents, and community members during the observations, but it is the discourse school principals and teachers and the communication of central office leadership which will be the focus of the observations. The descriptive notes will describe what is being observed, including a description of how participants talked, interacted and behaved, in moments of discipline or when issues of discipline and African American students are discussed. The reflective notes will include the researcher's reflections, along with an explanation of whether the reflections were based on stated or implied discourse. In addition to descriptive and reflective notes on the observations, the researcher will also utilize notations to note the participants and document evidence of discursive strategies that were observed (refer to Observation Protocol). Table 1 lists the notations utilized for the participants in the discussion during the observation. The notation for the discursive strategies, along with a description of each strategy is presented in Table 2.

Appendix C, Table 1.

Participants

Code	Participants
PT	Principal to teacher
PS	Principal to student
PP	Principal to Principal
PC	Principal to Central Office leader
P/PC	Principal to parent/community member
CP	Central Office leader to Principals
TT	Teacher to teacher

Appendix C, Table 1.

Appendix C, Table 2.

Discursive Strategy

Code	Strategy	Description
ST	Stereotyping	Participant expresses negative portrayals of African American students and downplays positive representations
SP	Splitting	Participant makes a distinction between self and/or educational organization and African American students, parents, and community
P	Positioning	Participants expresses positive portrayals of self and/or educational organization and de-emphasize negative representations

Code	Strategy	Description
A	Ambiguity	Participant avoids using terms directly related to race, uses color neutral terms, or avoids recognizing or discussing race
I	Implicitness	Participant emphasizes the responsibility of African American students for negative acts and implies the responsibility of policies and practices, discusses these briefly or in generalizations.
SI	Silencing	Participant excludes, demeans, and/or delegitimizes the voice and/or experiences of African American students, parents or those who speak out against the inequity

Appendix C, Table 2

Observation Protocol

Date:

Setting:

Length of Observation:

Participants	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes	Discursive Strategies

Summary of Observation:

APPENDIX D: TEACHER SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. You may have already told me this if you attended the focus group, but let's begin by you telling me a little about yourselves.

1. How many years have you been a teacher?
2. How many years have you worked at this school?
3. Tell me about your journey into teaching. What have been some of the high points and some of the most challenging moments of your work as a teacher at this school?

In the focus group, we discussed discipline in general. For this interview I would like for you to talk to me about your experiences with discipline in your classroom and your interactions with students.

4. How do you decide whether or not a behavior fails to meet behavior expectations?
5. How do you make the determination of whether a behavior should be referred to the office or handle at the classroom level?
6. How are school wide policies and procedure for student behavioral expectations developed? Were the policies and procedures communicated to you? If so, how?
7. Talk to me about your African American students. Which behaviors do you find you most often have to address? Which behaviors do you most often have to make an office referral? Is there a difference in the behaviors that you have to address and refer for African American students and students of other racial/ethnic groups? If so, why do you think this is the case?
8. Let's take a couple of the behaviors that you just mentioned that African American students exhibit. How would you define these behaviors? Clarification question if needed, for example, if noncompliance is one of the top behaviors for which you refer African American students to the office, how would you define "noncompliance"?
9. Have these definitions of behaviors been communicated to you? If so, by whom and how?
10. (Show them the same district discipline policy from the handbook that was shown to the principal.) How do you interpret this policy?
11. What has been communicated to you by administrators about school discipline in general? What has been communicated to you by administrators specifically about your discipline referrals?
12. Tell me about your African American students.
13. Complete this sentence: If African American students at this school are disproportionately suspended it is because...
14. What has been communicated to you by administrators about the suspension gap for African American students at this school?
15. What is being done to address the discipline and suspension gap at this school?

Just a few more questions

16. What are your thoughts about the role of race and racial bias in the discipline gap for African American students?
17. Is there anything that we did not cover or any additional thought you have that you would like to share?

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