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Black Female Students' Perspectives and Experiences With School Resource Officers

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Kimberly M. Redding

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Black Female Students' Perspectives and Experiences With School Resource Officers

by

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MPhil, Walden University, 2019

MA. Ed., University of Phoenix, 2007

BA, Valdosta State University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Black female students are disciplined disproportionately compared to other female students in the Georgia public school system. Negative interactions with school resource officers (SROs) may leave Black female students feeling unsafe at school. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore seven Black female students' perceptions and interpretations of their experiences with SROs in the school setting in the state of Georgia. Purposive sampling strategy was used to solicit Black female students ages 18 to 22; interviews were conducted via Zoom. Labeling theory and the theory of self-fulfilling prophecy provided the framework for explaining how Black female students make meaning of their experiences with SROs at school. The research questions asked about Black female students' perceptions/meanings of their interactions and experiences with SROs in the school environment. Braun and Clarke's six-step process data analysis strategy was used to identify themes. The key results indicated that SROs serve many roles in the school system; however, SROs do not perform these roles equitably, and a better form of communication between Black female students and SROs may create a positive overall experience in the school environment. Findings from the study may inform positive social change by increasing awareness and improving communication between Black female students and SROs. These findings can be used by educators, administrators, and police departments to promote positive social change by developing policies to provide a safe space for Black female students in the educational environment.

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Dedication

To my mom, Judith M. Canady, who never doubted me for one minute.

Acknowledgments

To my daughter, Mora Nicole Redding, thank you for understanding when Mom was sitting in front of the computer for hours and hours instead of playing and talking with you. It is all for you, Honeybun. To my true friends, family, and classmates, which are too many to name, pushed me from day one: You know who you are. To my chair, Dr. Hedy Red Dexter, and my second committee member, Dr. Medha Talpade: You showed me what a scholarly student looks like, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. To everyone in the social media groups who went on this journey with me in this world, who helped me understand this process with your advice or words that made me think a little deeper, who made me uncomfortable until I am now comfortable to be that voice that a Black female on a news broadcast asked someone to hear. I was listening. I am thankful, blessed, and only praises to God to be your voice that I heard. Because of you I am that voice the world needs to hear to create change.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore Black female students' perceptions of their interactions with school resource officers (SROs) in school settings. Interactions between SROs and Black female students—particularly, the disciplinary practices of SROs—have caused alarm across the United States (Morris et al., 2017). SROs had been caught on camera aggressively disciplining and handling Black female students (Persio, 2017; Ralph, 2018; Walsh, 2017). The data showed that Black female students' experience disciplinary practices disproportionate in severity compared to other female students in school settings, resulting in a lack of security among Black female students (Bottiani et al., 2017; Morris et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Given the comparative feelings of unsafety and disproportionate application of discipline, suspension, and expulsion, it was important to explore Black female students' experience with SROs in order to (a) improve communication and (b) promote Black female students' academic success (Bottiani et al., 2017; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris et al., 2017; Wun, 2018).

Chapter 1 includes the background, problem statement, purpose of study, research questions, theoretical foundation, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope, and limitations. The conclusion of this chapter explains the importance of the study.

Background

SROs are four times more likely to arrest Black female students than their White counterparts and three times more likely to refer Black female students than White

female students to law enforcement (Morris et al., 2017). Furthermore, Black female students are three times more likely to be disciplined by SROs for subjective disruptive behavior (Bucknor, 2015; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Epstein, et al., 2017; Inniss-Thompson et al., 2017; Smith & Harper, 2015). Black female students have stated that authority figures (e.g., SROs) whose mandate is to ensure student safety paradoxically make them feel unsafe in school because of unfair disciplinary practices (Bottiani et al., 2017; Wun, 2016). A specific example found that a brutal assault of a Black female on school grounds undermined the sense of security felt by Black female students at that school (Lindsey, 2018). Because female students believe they will not receive fair, unbiased treatment, they have become disillusioned with the education system.

There are gaps in the literature regarding Black female students' articulating their feelings about (a) being unsafe in the presence of SROs and (b) being disproportionately targeted by zero tolerance policies (ZTPs) and SROs' disciplinary practices. Addressing these gaps helped relevant stakeholders and policymakers understand the perspective of a core-yet-marginalized constituency, which helped inform best practices among SROs when interacting with Black female students. In turn, schools will be better positioned to provide opportunities for Black female students to achieve academic success.

Problem Statement

In 2018, 15-year-old Jasmine Darwin and 14-year-old Rockell Baldwin were physically assaulted by security/police officers at their North Carolina school (Persio, 2017; Ralph, 2018; Walsh, 2017). Unfortunately, as young Black female students, their stories are not uncommon. Incidents like these are byproducts of zero-tolerance policies

(ZTPs), policies adopted by K-12 school systems seeking federal funding through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Aldridge, 2018). Ostensibly, ZTPs are intended to suspend or expel students for drug possession, gun possession, or other aggressive/disruptive behaviors on school grounds (Smith, 2015). However, contrary to the stated intent, ZTPs have been applied less to egregious offenses than to minor infractions (e.g., using profanity, getting up to throw away trash, or challenging a teacher's authority). Punishment for low-level misbehavior has been directed disproportionately at Black female students (Aldridge, 2018; Inniss-Thompson, 2017; Wun, 2018). In the specific case of Georgia high schools, female students were suspended 73.3% and expelled 65.1% more often than female students of other races (Smith & Harper, 2015). In that they have received the preponderance of school-centered punishments (i.e., suspensions and expulsions), Black female students feel particularly insecure regarding their place and their status in U.S. elementary and secondary schools (Crenshaw et al., 2015).

Implementation of ZTPs has been used to justify the increasing deployment of SROs to schools (Lynch et al., 2016). SROs are not school administrators; they are sworn law enforcement officers. Consequently, while school administrators have authority only to suspend or expel, SROs can go much further, referring students to local law enforcement agencies and even making formal arrests. As a result, the introduction of SROs to the school environment marks a major escalation of tensions: as has been shown, the threat of school punishment makes Black female students feel insecure or unstable; now, the threat of SRO-leveraged legal punishment has great potential to make

Black female students feel profoundly unsafe. Feeling unsafe can then impact these students academically and socially, leading to displays of anger, behavioral problems, and depression, all of which diminish their school engagement (Anyon et al., 2016; Bottiani et al., 2017; Morris et al., 2017). Yet, as Theriot and Orme (2016) acknowledged, students' feelings and attitudes toward the presence of SROs in their schools has not been explored. Given that schools have established a climate in which Black female students have been targeted, it is especially important to explore Black female students' experiences with SROs in order to improve communication and, ultimately, academic outcomes (Bottiani et al., 2017; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris et al., 2017; Wun, 2018) which this study explored.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand Black female students' experiences with SROs at Georgia high schools. A maximal variation and purposive sampling, and emergent sampling were the procedure used. Snowball sampling, whereby study participants are asked to recruit additional participants, will be employed (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) as well as purposive sampling was used to select specific individuals with experiences and knowledge of the experience to be studied (Taherdoost, 2016); emergent sampling was also used to take advantage of the data collection process as it unfolds. A basic qualitative approach was used. Findings from this study can inform strategies to help female students feel safe in school and to develop more equitable disciplinary practices for all students.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are Black female students' perceptions of SROs in the school environment?

RQ2: How do female students make meaning of their interactions with SROs in the school environment?

Theoretical Foundation

Labeling theory (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951; Tannenbaum, 1938) posits that self-identity and the behaviors of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them. Labeling theory is associated with the concepts of stereotyping and self-fulfilling prophecy theory. Ultimately, labeling systematically shapes the identities, response cues, and behavioral patterns of those who have been labeled.

Self-fulfilling prophecy theory (Merton, 1968) states that expectations or beliefs about an individual cause the holder of those expectations/beliefs to behave in ways that elicit an expected outcome. Merton (1968) noted that self-fulfilling prophecy dynamics can be seen in American ethnic, racial, and religious conflict: one's ideas about an individual (e.g., of a different race) can lead to unconsciously manipulative/triggering treatment, prompting the expected behaviors. Labeling theory and self-fulfilling prophecy theory served as the framework for this basic qualitative study. In Chapter 2, I provided more details about the application of these theories.

Nature of the Study

This was a basic qualitative study in which the researcher interviews participants to understand how they make meaning of their lived experiences. This basic qualitative study used in-depth, semi structured interviews with Black female students to explore and capture their lived experiences with SROs in the Georgia school setting. Other qualitative research studies (e.g., grounded theory, case study, and ethnography) were considered. For example, ethnography was not chosen for this study because it requires the researcher to act as participant–observer within the target culture to collect data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Grounded theory was also not suitable; this research project aims not to build a theory about participants’ experiences but to explore how participants make meaning of their lived experiences. All in all, basic qualitative approaches (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) provided the opportunity to capture several individuals shared lived experiences (e.g., Black female students’ experiences and interactions with SROs).

In order to develop strategies for improving relationships between Black female students and SROs, this study sample consisted of Black females between 18 and 22 who (a) attended a public Georgia school system with SROs and (b) interacted with SROs in the school environment. Purposive sampling using the snowballing approach was employed to recruit participants: announcements posted on social media; these announcements solicited referrals of other people they know who met the study participation criteria (Tracey, 2013). The proposed sample size of 3–10 participants provided sufficient data to reach data saturation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This basic qualitative research used in-depth, semi structured interviews with Black female students using Zoom, Skype, or Facebook messenger to recruit participants and collect data. The data were coded by hand. Hand coding allows the researcher to transcribe and assign codes going line by line through the data (Saldana, 2016; Smith & Firth, 2011). The basic qualitative analysis helped capture the lived experiences of Black female students and provided insight into how relevant stakeholders can develop better relationships between Black female students and SROs, thereby improving the academic experience and performance of Black female students.

Definitions

Disproportionate: Having or showing a difference that is not fair, reasonable, or expected, too large or too small in relation to something (Children's Bureau, 2016).

Expulsion: The act of forcing someone to leave the school environment for the remainder of the school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b).

Labeling: Describing an individual in terms of particular behavioral characteristics (Link & Pheian, 1999).

School resource officers (SROs): Law enforcement officers from local or county law enforcement agencies assigned to schools in cooperative agreements with education officials (National School Safety and Security Services, 2020).

Self-fulfilling prophecy theory: The process of belief or expectation that leads to manifesting and becoming true (Merton, 1948).

Stereotyping: An overgeneralized belief used to describe a particular type of person or thing or a person or thing thought to represent such idea (McLeod, 2015).

Subjective: Existing in the mind; belonging to the thinking subject rather than to the object of thought (Cambridge Press, 2020).

Suspension: Temporary removal for a period of time from an educational setting for a violation of school policies or rules (National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline, 2014).

Zero-tolerance policy (ZTP): Policies that mandate predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses (Forgione, 1998).

Assumptions

There was an assumption of negative relationships between Black female students and SROs' disproportionately punitive disciplinary practices in the school system. Prior researchers have identified Black male students as an at-risk group for suspension and expulsion in schools; however, little research has been conducted on the at-risk group of Black female students for disciplinary actions, suspension, and expulsion in the school environment (Morris et al., 2017; Morris & Perry, 2017). A further assumption was that SROs' application of disproportionate discipline may be driven by stereotyping and labeling of Black female students. Again, policymakers and researchers have addressed Black male students, but they have not yet adequately addressed the interaction between SROs and Black female students (Morris, 2014). Disproportionate leveraging of expulsions, suspensions, and other disciplinary practices have a deleterious impact on Black female students' attitudes toward the school environment, leading them to fall behind academically and socially. Relevant stakeholders can use findings from this research study to inform best practices related to the interaction between SROs and Black

female students. An additional assumption is that study participants responded honestly to interview questions.

Scope and Delimitations

This study interviewed former high school students (i.e., Black females aged 18–22) in Georgia who have had interactions with SROs in school settings. Black female students below the age of 18 were excluded from the study. This exclusion criterion was established because participants below 18 may feel the threat of harm or retaliation by SROs or adult authorities in the school setting; therefore, the interview data may have been biased or skewed.

The social setting theory was a relevant theoretical approach that could have been used for this study. This theory considers individual changes (e.g., academic, emotional, social) through the lens of social interactions (e.g., with adult authority figures) that occur repeatedly within a setting (e.g., classroom; Luckner & Pianta, 2011). However, the theoretical framework that was chosen for this study (i.e., labeling theory and self-fulfilling prophecy theory) was best suited to focus on (a) interactions between Black female students and SROs and (b) Black female students' perceptions/lived experiences that contributed to their levels of academic and social achievement.

Limitations

One potential limitation of this study was the small sample size. Because the sample size focused on Black female students from the State of Georgia, the findings may not be generalizable to the broader population. In the Recommendations section of my study, I suggested that further research is needed with additional population

subgroups or in different geographic locations. Another potential limitation of this study was the researcher bias, in that my race/gender identification mirrors that of the target population. To mitigate this potential bias, I self-monitored my behavior (e.g., vocal tone, body language) during interviews so as not to convey agreement or disapproval. Keeping and reviewing a journal helped me isolate and address any potential personal biases that may interfered with coding and establishment of themes when I conducted data analysis. To further safeguard against the influence of personal biases, I used rich, thick descriptions of the entire research process, including participants' direct quotes to support my interpretation of the data. Having participants verify the accuracy of both the interview transcriptions and my interpretation of their responses helped validate the findings.

Significance

The proposed study promoted social change for Black female high school students articulating, codifying, and building understanding of their experiences with SROs in the Georgia school system, where disciplinary practices disproportionately target Black female students (Lindsey, 2018; Smith & Harper, 2015). Black male students' experiences with SROs in the school setting have been well-documented (Dancy, 2014; George, 2015 Morris, 2014). Little is known, however, about the Black female students' experience with SROs, and findings from this proposed study will add to that body of research. Findings from this study facilitated communication among all relevant stakeholders to increase Black female students' feelings of safety and improve their academic outcomes.

Summary

This chapter provided the reader with relevant information that supports the proposed study. This chapter explained the background, problem, purpose, theoretical framework, significance, limitations, assumptions, and nature of the study. In Chapter 2, I provided an exhaustive review of the literature related to the key study concepts and the theoretical framework.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Problems with SROs' interactions with Black female students have been widely documented in U.S. schools (Persio, 2017; Ralph, 2018). ZTPs, federally funded under the Elementary and Secondary Act, were designed to keep schools safe but have been used to discipline Black female students disproportionately compared to other students (Aldridge, 2018). Minor infractions, such as profanity, dress code violations, and challenging a teacher's authority, when exhibited by Black female students, have resulted in disciplinary practices often including referrals to the criminal justice system (Aldridge, 2018; Inniss-Thompson, 2017; Wun, 2018). Black female students were suspended 73.3% more and expelled 65.1% more than female students of another race, impacting students academically and socially (Smith & Harper, 2015).

The purpose of this study was to explore Black females' experience interacting with SROs in the Georgia School system with the intent to improve communication with SROs and thereby improve Black female students' academic outcomes. Chapter 2 established the relevance of the problem and discussed the theoretical framework. This was followed by an exhaustive literature review of the key concepts.

In 2018, 15-year-old Jasmine Darwin and 14-year-old Rockell Baldwin were physically assaulted by security/police officers at their North Carolina school (Persio, 2017; Ralph, 2018). Unfortunately, as young Black female students, their stories are not uncommon. Incidents like these are byproducts of zero-tolerance policies, policies adopted by K-12 school systems seeking federal funding through the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act (Aldridge, 2018). Ostensibly, zero-tolerance policies are intended to suspend or expel students for drug possession, gun possession, or other aggressive/disruptive behaviors on school grounds (Smith, 2015). However, contrary to the stated intent, zero-tolerance policies have been applied less to egregious offenses than to minor infractions (e.g., using profanity, getting up to throw away trash, or challenging a teacher's authority). Punishment for low-level misbehavior has been directed disproportionately at Black female students (Aldridge, 2018; Inniss-Thompson, 2017; Wun, 2018).

In fact, Black female students are three times more likely than their White female counterparts to be disciplined for subjectively determined disruptive behavior (Bucknor, 2015; Crenshaw et al. 2015; Epstein et al., 2017; Inniss-Thompson, 2017; Morris et al., 2017; Morris & Perry, 2017; Smith & Harper, 2015;). In the specific case of Georgia high schools, Black female students were suspended 73.3% and expelled 65.1% more often than female students of other races (Smith & Harper, 2015). In that they have received the preponderance of school-centered punishments (i.e., suspensions and expulsions), Black female students feel particularly insecure regarding their place and their status in U.S. elementary and secondary schools (Crenshaw et al., 2015).

Implementation of zero-tolerance policies (which, again, are supposed to stamp out criminal behavior) has been used to justify the increasing deployment of school resource officers (SROs) to schools (Lynch et al., 2016). SROs are not school administrators; they are sworn law enforcement officers. Consequently, while school administrators have authority only to suspend or expel, SROs can go much further,

referring students to local law enforcement agencies and even making formal arrests. As a result, the introduction of SROs to the school environment marks a major escalation of tensions: as has been shown, the threat of school punishment makes Black female students feel insecure or unstable; now, the threat of SRO-leveraged legal punishment has great potential to make Black female students feel profoundly unsafe. Feeling unsafe can then impact these students academically and socially, leading to displays of anger, behavioral problems, and depression, all of which diminish their school engagement (Anyon et al., 2016; Bottiani et al., 2017; Morris et al., 2017). Yet, as Theriot and Orme (2016) acknowledge, students' feelings and attitudes toward the presence of SROs in their schools have not been explored. Given that schools have established a climate in which Black female students have been targeted, it is especially important to explore Black female students' experiences with SROs in order to improve communication and, ultimately, academic outcomes (Bottiani et al., 2017; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Wun, 2018; Morris et al., 2017).

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand Black female students' experiences with SROs at Georgia high schools. Maximum variations and Snowball sampling was used for this study. The snowball sampling allowed study participants to ask and recruit additional participants to participate in the study (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The maximum variations allowed study participant to recruit additional participants in other school districts in Georgia to obtain diversity about the experiences with SROs in the Georgia school system (Creswell, 2005). A qualitative approach was

used. Findings from this study can inform strategies to help Black female students feel safe in school and to develop more equitable disciplinary practices for all students.

Zero-tolerance policies have created a context where SROs apply disciplinary practices and make referrals to law enforcement disproportionately (Inniss-Thompson et al., 2017). Race-based disparities in punishment have a negative impact on Black female students in the school environment (Bottiani et al., 2017; Lynch et al., 2016; Wun, 2016). Much of the current literature has focused on Black male students and their lack of safety in the presence of SROs (Theriot & Orme, 2016). Studies exist that document how Black female students have been injured, arrested, and hospitalized as a consequence of interactions with SROs in schools (Crenshaw et al., 2015). However, there is a paucity of research querying Black female students directly, cataloguing/classifying their perceptions of SROs, and capturing self-assessments of how the interactions with SROs affect them emotionally, academically, and socially (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Theriot & Orme, 2016).

Black female students receive more discipline referrals and stay-at-home suspensions than other girls in the U.S. public school system (Morris et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2016). In academic year 2011–2012, Black female students were suspended six times more often than their White female counterparts (Smith and Harper, 2015). These unfair disciplinary referrals impact Black female students' moral development, respect for authority figures, and academic achievement (Buckingham, 2013). In an effort to address this growing problem, a necessary first step was to hear from the Black female

students themselves; to that end, the proposed qualitative study explored Black female students' experience with SROs in the school environment.

This chapter provided an overview of how Black female students are affected by SROs in the school system. Labeling theory and self-fulfilling prophecy theory will be served as a theoretical foundation. There was an exhaustive review of the literature related to key concepts.

Literature Search Strategy

I used several different databases and search engines to access peer-reviewed journals published within the past 5 years, including ProQuest, EBSCOHOST, ERIC, PsycArticles, PsycInfo, SAGE Journals, and Google Scholar. Search terms included, *black females, black girls, African American girls, African American females, security resource officers, police officers, public school, fear, safe, unsafe, and zero-tolerance policy*. The Walden University library database was used to search for theoretical framework concepts. Key words in these searches included *stereotypes, prejudice, self-fulfilling prophecy theory, labeling theory, norms, authority figures, and child development*.

Theoretical Foundation

Labeling Theory

Labeling theory (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951; Tannenbaum, 1938) posits that self-identity and the behaviors of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them. This theory is associated with the concepts of stereotyping and self-fulfilling prophecy theory. An example of labeling theory in praxis

is as follows: A group is labeled as deviant; then, group members are treated in accordance with the group label (i.e., poorly, unfairly); next, the labeled group will internalize the label and self-identify with the characteristics that follow from the wearing of the label; finally, the labeled group will exhibit behaviors consistent with the internalized label (i.e., unruly, aggressive), confirming/reinforcing the original label. Ultimately, labeling systematically shapes the identities, response cues, and behavioral patterns of those who have been labeled.

Individuals are labeled by their ethnicity and demographics; behavior associated with certain ethnicities/demographics and contexts comes to be regarded as deviant (Becker, 1963; Lemer, 1972). Individuals classified as lower social status are more likely to be subject to this labeling process (Rocheleau & Chavez, 2015), and in fact, the same behavior can be regarded as deviant or non-deviant depending on the social status of those performing the behavior. For example, Paternoster and Iovanni (1989) found that lower-class boys were known as “roughnecks” and middle-class boys as “saints” despite displaying nearly identical sets of behaviors.

Sibicky and Dovidio (1986) found that people respond to patients who have been diagnosed as mentally ill as if the latter are threatening and socially undesirable. Even caretakers, friends, and family members tailor their vocabulary choices and response cues to be appropriate for those with mentally ill diagnoses. Furthermore, people bearing the label *mentally ill* have been known to alter their behavior and display deviant behavior, confirming the label assigned by their diagnosis.

Kelly (1977) noted that (a) students who are labeled may view the school environment as hostile/unhealthy and (b) students with a negative perception of school may be reflecting or reciprocating perceived negative beliefs held about themselves by adult authority figures. Findings from recent studies (Morris, 2016; Nyachae, 2016) corroborated Kelly's finding that stereotypes pathologizing Black female students' behavior undermine the students' development/educational outcomes and discourage their self-determination/autonomy.

Students with school-centered behavioral issues or lower grade-point averages are more likely to be labeled *deviant* if they are female and/or African American than if they are White males (Rocheleau & Chavez, 2015). In turn, this labeling affects the students' sense of self-identity, educational performance, interactions with peers, and potential for criminal activity (Kroska et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2017; Rocheleau & Chavez, 2015). Furthermore, deviant adolescents continue to self-identify as deviant and manifest deviant behaviors into adulthood, affecting employment outcomes (Lee et al., 2017). In other words, societal labels get internalized, leading to self-labeling.

On the other hand, self-reflection can lead to rejection of an externally imposed label. Haynes (2010) found that study participants could (a) isolate personal behaviors that society had stamped as deviant, (b) neutrally evaluate those behaviors, and in some cases, (c) come to rebrand those deviant behaviors as positive or meritorious. In addition, study participants who did assess their own behavior as deviant could change those behaviors pursuant to input from social circles/support networks or exposure to educational materials. For example, when family, friends, and coworkers advised study

participants that their personal financial practices were self-destructive or adversely affected those around them, participants would seek out advice, books, or therapies to help them change the deviant behavior (Haynes, 2010).

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Theory

Self-fulfilling prophecy theory (Merton, 1968) states that expectations or beliefs about an individual cause the holder of those expectations/beliefs to behave in ways that elicit an expected outcome. Merton (1968) noted that self-fulfilling prophecy dynamics can be seen in American ethnic, racial, and religious conflict; ideas about an individual (e.g., of a different race) can lead to unconsciously manipulative/triggering treatment, prompting the expected behaviors.

In their germinal work, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1969) informed a group of teachers that students had exceeded expectations and scored above average on the Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisitions, an intelligence/aptitude test. Teachers were given a list of names of students with the highest scores on the assessment. These teachers expected those who scored above-average on the Harvard Test to perform better in class, so the higher-scoring students were given more challenging assignments, leading to better classroom test scores for the better prepared students. However, the information that had been provided to teachers at the outset of the experiment was fabricated. None of the students had taken the Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisitions, so none of them had demonstrated an intellectual predisposition for superior academic performance. Differences in classroom outcomes resulted from disparate treatment from teachers, which resulted from disparate expectations held by the teachers. Thus, the Rosenthal and

Jacobson study corroborated Merton's theory: we behave toward individuals in a way that evokes and thereby confirms our assumptions about them.

Guyll et al. (2010) showed how teachers mirrored a perceived lack of investment in education on the part of Latino parents. The researchers found that Latino parents wanted to participate in their children's school success but were precluded from doing so by a language barrier. Nevertheless, because the students' parents did not communicate about or participate in their children's schooling, teachers did not put in the effort (i.e., provide challenging assignments) to educate the Latino student population; in turn, the students were labeled as less intelligent and received lower grades (Guyll et al., 2010). Therefore, the low expectations of the teacher were validated, demonstrating self-fulfilling prophecy informed by labeling (Guyll et al., 2010).

Chandrasegaran and Padmakumari (2018) found that students perform to teacher expectations: if a teacher expects students to perform well, the students believe they can perform well, and then, they do; on the other hand, if students believe that the teacher has low expectations of them, the students' self-confidence flags, their academic performance suffers, and their emotional and psychological state is negatively affected. In short, labeling students as unworthy of high expectation triggers a self-fulfilling prophecy cascade.

Gentrup et al. (2020) suggested that teachers' expectations of students can result in self-fulfilling prophecy, which affects students' academic development and levels of achievement. However, Gentrup et al. (2020) also found that teacher expectations could be inaccurate when based on students' backgrounds or socioeconomic status (e.g.,

minority students, those from disadvantaged homes). Lower expectations lead teachers to provide less feedback, which in a self-fulfilling prophecy chain reaction, can lead to poorer student performance. This study reveals how inaccurate preconceptions, informed by labeling theory, can trigger self-fulfilling prophecy, and affect how both teachers and students perform. Atmaca (2020) also found that students internalize and manifest the labels that teachers and adult authorities apply, thereby fulfilling the prophecy. The author interviewed a student who had been labeled as a *thug*. The student displayed behavior that was abnormal for the school environment (e.g., provoking authority figures, fighting with peers). But the students' reputation came to shape perceptions of him: He was accused of starting fights that he actually was breaking up; teachers who had no contact with him talked about instances of his belligerence. When they were made aware of this labeling process, teachers acknowledged that the student had not, in fact, acted like a thug; consistent with labeling theory, the student indicated that he sometimes lived up to the label; having internalized it, he exhibited behavior confirming the label that had been placed on him by teachers and other adults.

Like Atmaca (2020), Madon et al. (2018) also found that stereotype-informed false expectations engender self-fulfilling prophecies. Looking at the variables of weight, sex, and race, Madon et al. noted that negative expectations of individuals can result in lower standards and suboptimal outcomes, all of which corroborated the findings of other studies (Chandrasegaran & Padmakumari, 2018; Guyll et al., 2010). The authors created several scenarios (e.g., a race-based one wherein White and African American study participants took turns interviewing each other). Study results showed that racial

stereotypes of job applicants affected the applicants' performance during the interview process (i.e., African American participants performed worse when interviewed in a way that seemed to incorporate race-based stereotypes).

Clark (2018) investigated how self-fulfilling prophecy affects online communication. If individuals believe that online communication promotes close relationships, they will be more likely to engage in online communication, and the quality of their online communication will be better. However, if individuals have a negative attitude about online communication, their online communication will diminish in frequency and quality. Individuals who believe that all forms of communication (e.g., in person, by phone, and online) contribute to better relationships have positive expectations of online interaction, which fosters good online communication. Study findings indicate that stereotyping spurs self-fulfilling prophecy. The qualitative study proposed here will add to the body of knowledge about how stereotype-based labeling drives self-fulfilling prophecy and influences behaviors/interactions between Black female students and SROs.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

History of Zero Tolerance Policy

In 1993, 54 homicides in the school system caused schools and communities across America to demand student safety. Congress responded with the Zero Tolerance Policy (ZTP), which was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1994. As a condition for dispersing federal funds, ZTP required public schools to implement policies that (a) expelled students who possessed firearms on school grounds and (b) referred such

students to the juvenile justice system (Curran & Richard, 2014; Rodriguez, 2017).

Previous studies have addressed how ZTP has been implemented and interpreted differently across school districts, in ways that affect students, generally, and students' educational outcomes, specifically (Castillo, 2014; Curran, 2019; Rodriguez, 2017). The proposed study contributed to that body of literature.

Schools vary on how to discipline students for weapon, drug, and assault offenses. While ZTP mandates that firearm possession on school grounds carries the penalty of expulsion, individual States in America have expanded the mandate to include other weapons, including lookalike weapons (Curran, 2019). The varying ways of implementing ZTP, and the strictness/expansiveness with which it is applied, depend largely on the racial composition and socioeconomic status of the school's student body (Curran, 2019): school systems with a large minorities population are more likely to have mandatory expulsion (ME) policies for drug or assault offenses; accordingly, urban and suburban districts are more likely to have drug-related ME policies than are rural districts (Curran, 2019). Differences in ZTP implementation contribute to differences in student achievement and dropout rate (Curran, 2019).

ZTP introduces police officers, security cameras, metal detectors, and locker/body searches to schools, making the environment more correctional than educational (Castillo, 2014). The ZTP-inspired, militarized landscape creates a culture where students must fear not only suspension and expulsion but also arrest and incarceration. For example, 2.2 million juveniles were arrested, with 1.7 million cases were referred to the juvenile courts with nearly 100,000 are placed in the juvenile system from the educational

institution (Kim et al., 2010). Additional concerns with ZTP include its non-distinction between serious/non-serious offenses and its non-accommodation of behavioral disorders, which were not defined in the 1994 law. ZTP has led to many students being arrested and charged for spurious reasons, such as a 10-year-old putting soap in a teacher's drink or an eighth grader receiving too many tardies and dress-code violations (Castillo, 2014). As a result, ZTP has moved students from the school environment to the prison environment without making schools safer in the process (Rodriguez, 2017).

ZTP is applied wildly disproportionately: African Americans receive 42% of multiple out-of-school suspensions and 35% of expulsion; moreover, 95% of African American student suspensions were not for weapons, drugs, or assaults—as intended by the federal ZTP mandate—but rather for minor, nonviolent disruptions (Rodriguez, 2017). Another study (Ryan & Goodram, 2013) found that African Americans were two to three times more likely than Whites to be disciplined. Still another study (Bell, 2015) found that African American boys make up 61% of those students who have been expelled from school and 44% of those who have been suspended. Being suspended or expelled from school for nonviolent behavior (e.g., tardiness, smoking) diminishes a student's likelihood of academic success and increases the student's likelihood of engaging in violent, illegal deviant behavior (Balfanz et al., 2015); 82% of people in prison are school dropouts who had been suspended or expelled from the school environment (Rodriguez, 2017).

African American girls have also experienced a rapid increase in the number of post-ZTP discipline referrals (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris et al., 2017). Nationwide,

African American girls were suspended at a rate of 12% in 2011-2012, compared with only 2% of White girls, and African American girls made up 27% of referrals to law enforcement that were conducted in school settings (U. S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

In Georgia, African American female high school students were suspended 73.3% more often, and expelled 65.1% more often, than female students across all other races (Smith & Harper, 2015). A study set in Denver, CO indicated that African American female students were 37% more likely than female students of other races to have their behavior labeled as defiant or disobedient, 50% more likely to be referred for detrimental behavior, and 5% more likely to be referred for third-degree assault (Annamma et al., 2019). Annamma et al. (2019) found that African American female students were more likely to be disciplined for subjective offenses (e.g., defiance and disobedience) and more likely to be expelled from school than girls of other races.

Hines and Andrews (2017) concluded that the ZTP has created a school environment where African American female students are targeted and punished for forms of cultural expression (e.g., communication style, posture, hairstyle, and clothing). Culture-specific behaviors have been interpreted as deviant/threatening by teachers and administrators, leading African American girls to be suspended or expelled (Hines & Andrews, 2017). The authors suggest that ZTP allows for and sanctions racial/gendered undertones that result in African American female students being disciplined in disproportionate numbers. Still, more research is needed to better understand African American female students' experiences in the school system and to understand why they

are being disproportionately disciplined and referred to law enforcement (Annamma et al., 2019).

ZTP has had a significant impact on students' academic and social development, especially among minority and lower SES groups (Ryan & Goodram, 2013). School suspension has been negatively correlated with academic achievement (Christle et al., 2007); this negative effect is compounded by (a) the pejorative treatment teachers afford students who have returned to school post-suspension (Ryan & Goodram, 2013) and the difficulty students have in catching up on school assignments post-suspension (Bell, 2015).

In sum, non-uniform implementation of ZTP across states, municipalities, and schools has led to non-uniform disciplinary practice across gender and race. This situation can have a major impact on the relationships between African American female students and security resource officers (SROs). The purpose of the present study is to explore African American female students' perceptions of and interactions with SROs in the school environment. Findings from this study may help address the problem of disproportionate discipline experienced by African American female students and help them feel safe around SROs in school environments.

School Resource Officers

In the 1950s, security resource officers (SROs) were introduced in Flint, MI to help decrease school violence (NASRO, 2012; James & McCallion, 2013). Decades later, from 2009-2018, when public school systems in America reported 288 school shootings (Grabow & Rose, 2018), President Obama signed an executive order to again hire more

SROs, to again protect the school environment (US Department of Homeland Security, 2017). SROs are sworn law enforcement officers whose stated mission is to educate students about crime, conflict resolution, and school safety (Lynch et al., 2016). The proposed study explored and addressed the unique dynamics that inform interactions between SROs and African American female students.

There is no consistent, nationwide training program specifically for SROs. In fact, only 11 states require formal training and certification (US Department of Education, 2015), and even in those states, outside agencies do the training (NASRO, 2012). In 2013, a majority of states (i.e., 29) required SROs to be sworn police officers (Lynch et al., 2016). As a result, SROs' roles are not always clear and codified (Ryan et al., 2018; Count et al., 2018). In theory, SROs have numerous, expansive responsibilities, including being visible in school settings, investigating potential crimes, assisting with student discipline, educating staff and students on safety and violence prevention, and mentoring students. In practice, they simply deal—and often very harshly—with low-level student misbehavior issues (Count et al., 2018; Ryan et al., 2018). In 2013 alone, 260,000 students were referred to law enforcement, 92,000 were arrested, 70,000 were physically restrained, and 37,000 were placed in seclusion (US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014). SROs' results have been mixed: positive effects include the proactive handling of disturbances and instances of trespassing on school grounds; negative effects include the linkage of schools with the juvenile justice system, which exposes students to the criminal justice system at a younger age (Lynch et al., 2016). Understandably, this

situation adversely affects students' feelings of safety in the presence of SROs (Lynch et al., 2016).

Lacoe (2015) found that SROs in New York City middle schools indeed made students feel unsafe. African American and Asian students felt the presence of racial tensions in the school, as well as an increase in social disorder. African Americans had a negative perception of school safety officers and believed the administration of discipline was unfair (Lacoe, 2015). The results revealed that African American students felt unsafe compared to Hispanics, Whites, and Asian students in the same schools and even the same homerooms (Lacoe, 2015).

Theriot and Orme (2016) conducted a study examining SRO-students' interactions and students' perceptions of safety in the school environment. Surveys about interactions with SROs were completed by middle school and high school students ($N = 1,956$) in schools across the Southeastern US. The results indicated that males, older students, students with higher grade-point averages, and White students reported feeling safer at school than African Americans. Students who reported having a negative attitude about SROs also reported having had a negative interaction with SROs. The study authors linked feelings of safety in school with stronger connectedness among students, better academic performance, and more respectful relationships with staff and administrators (Theriot & Orme, 2016).

Pentek and Eisenberg (2018) examined whether SROs gave students from all racial/ethnic groups in Minnesota a sense of safety. In survey responses, 70% of the students were aware of the SROs, and 92.4% felt safe at school. Among students in

higher-grade levels, 74.8% of African American students reported having had an encounter with SROs, and their positive perceptions of SROs were 6.8% lower than those of their White and Asian counterparts (Pentek & Eisenberg, 2018).

SROs and Student Interactions

Student perceptions of SRO-student interactions vary by race, SES, and gender. Morris et al., (2017) focused on interactions between SROs ($N = 57$) and African American female students aged 13-18 ($N = 28$). Study results included suggestions from the African American female students about how to reduce contact with the juvenile justice system. They felt that SROs' racial biases pre-dated the SROs' arrival on campus and shaped the SROs' responses. The African American girls believed that (a) better channels of communication with SROs would improve the students' sense of safety and that (b) SROs should try to build a relationship with girls of color to establish a comfort level and student sense of safety. For their part, SROs indicated that they had no specific training on how to interact with girls of color, nor had they received resources or guidance about alternative ways of disciplining girls of color (i.e., other than suspension, expulsion, and referral).

There is a perception on the part of SROs that interactions with African American females can escalate quickly, with the associated perception that African American females tend to be non-compliant and aggressive (Howard, 2017; Lindsey, 2018; Rhor, 2019). These beliefs derive from what is assumed to be appropriate female behavior and that Black females' voice, tone, and demeanor, having been labeled unladylike, do not conform to standard norms; adding to that, adult authorities claim that Black females are

too loud, aggressive, and confrontational (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Gibson & Decker, 2019; Morris & Perry, 2017). Based on assumptions held about each other, the interaction between SROs and Black female students will be aggressive, as captured in the 2015 incident aired on ABC and CBS of an SRO grabbing a Black female student and tossing her to the ground because the female would not willingly comply (Baker-Bells et al., 2017). To that point, published articles in Education Week and USA Today have documented SROs' mistreatment of Black female students who allegedly do not obey SROs' orders (Howard, 2017; Lindsey, 2018; Rhor, 2019). To address these troubling events, Morris et al. (2017) argued the need for more research that explores why interactions between African American female students and SROs go badly and why the students perceive racial bias in disciplinary practices (Morris et al., (2017).

Wun (2018) conducted in-depth interviews at a California high school, exploring the hypothesis that African American female students' experiences with adult authorities in school are informed by those female students' experiences outside of school (i.e., reinforcement by adult authorities triggers the students' defensive behavior, which then labels them a "behavior problem"). Study participants expressed a lack of trust of school authorities in that the latter neither understand the former's emotions/anger nor take the time to learn to understand. Study participants indicated that if school authorities stop trying to combat students' "defiant" or "disobedient" behavior and instead address the underlying emotions, then the trust gap may be bridged, and the African American female students may interact differently with adult authorities (Wun, 2018). Toward this end, SROs could function more as mentors and counselors; rather than operating solely in

a disciplinary capacity, SROs should refer more students to social workers who can address underlying trauma (Turner & Beneke, 2020).

Such a patient, holistic approach could go a long way toward increasing mutual understanding and changing SROs' and African American female students' perceptions of each other. SROs encourage African American girls to be more "ladylike" and align with cultural norms of behavior and appearance; not doing so subjects African American female students to disciplinary action (Morris et al., 2017). African American female students believe that SROs base their decisions on a stereotyped racial identity that stamps them as inferior (Morris et al., 2017). By branding African American female behavior as "rowdy" or "ghetto," SROs take standard behavior and repurpose it as "defiant," thereby making it punishable (Crenshaw et al., 2015).

Study findings show that African American female students believe SROs to be corrupt, abusive, and unintelligent (Lindgren, 2015); other findings show that students characterize police, generally, as "folk devils" (Gormally & Deuchar, 2012). Police officers are resented for targeting certain forms of behavior, such as stop and search without cause and speaking rudely to youth, using their positions of authority to antagonize and hassle them (Gormally & Deuchar, 2012). If African American female students' perceptions of SROs do not change, then they will likely continue to act in accordance with the label that has been placed on them. Interactions between African American female students and SROs will continue to be negative, and this group of students will continue to be suspended, expelled, and referred to the justice system far

more often than other groups (Bottiani, 2017; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris et al., 2017; Wun, 2018).

Studies have suggested that additional SRO training could improve interactions with African American female students (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris et al., 2017). A consequence of that additional training and improved interaction is that SROs would leverage their disciplinary power less frequently, fostering fairness and building trust (May et al., 2012). One element of this proposed training could focus on helping SROs understand how stereotyping, labeling, and self-fulfilling prophecy can affect African American female students. The study I proposed helped address the paucity of research conducted on the interaction between African American girls and SROs in school settings. Previous studies have linked students feeling unsafe in the presence of SROs to (a) the lack of SRO training, (b) the fraught relationship between students and SROs (based on the experiences that both sides bring to the relationship), and demographic factors (e.g., race, SES, gender). At the same time, previous studies have found instances of positive relationships between students and SROs, which yield safer feelings among the students, which, in turn, yield positive student outcomes (e.g., stronger peer connectedness among students, better relationships between students and school staff, and higher levels of academic performance). Positive in-school relationships between African American girls and authority figures may prevent future violence and promote adolescent development.

Conclusion

Self-fulfilling prophecies can lead to positive or negative outcomes of interactions. However, if self-fulfilling prophecy theory is informed by labeling theory—which deals exclusively in assignation of deviance and stigma—then the self-fulfilling prophecy dynamics can lead only downward. If SROs continue to apply the “reprobate” label to Black female students, then the SROs will treat Black female students uniformly as reprobates, and Black female students will manifest reprobate-like behavior. If Black female students continue to label SROs as corrupt and abusive, their interaction will continue to result in Black females being suspended, expelled, disproportionately; Black females will continue to feel unsafe in the school setting (Lindsey, 2018; Morris et al., 2017). On the other hand, if the negative assumptions held by each are challenged, then an opportunity to redefine mutual expectations may break the negative self-fulfilling prophecy cycle.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The proposed study explored Black females' experience with SROs in the school setting. This study was designed to address the gap in the literature related to (a) Black females' perceived lack of safety in the presence of SROs and (b) the potential for zero tolerance policies (ZTPs) and SRO disciplinary practices to disproportionately affect Black females. Crenshaw et al. (2015) found that Black females were suspended and expelled from school at higher rates; the authors recommended further investigation into how implicit biases, stereotypes, and cultural factors may shape Black females' perceptions of disciplinary structures and practices. The proposed study provided Black females the opportunity to actively voice their experiences, which allowed relevant stakeholders in educational systems to listen. These stakeholders can then use the data to inform more equitable disciplinary structures for Black females in educational settings, helping reduce the number of disciplinary instances and promoting achievement and positive social outcomes among Black females.

In this chapter outline the research methodology and the rationale for using the basic qualitative design analysis that was used to explore Black females' experience with SROs in the school setting. In addition, this chapter detailed the role of the researcher, the selection process of participants, and the ethical guidelines that will be used to protect study participants.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: What are Black female students' perceptions of SROs in the school environment?

RQ2: How do Black female students make meaning of their interactions with SROs in the school environment?

Qualitative research design seeks to capture/describe social phenomena by exploring (via interviews, observations, and documents) the lived experiences of a group (Burkholder et al., 2016). In the current study, qualitative research design was used to explore Black females' perceptions of how their interactions with SROs in the school environment affected their social and academic performance. Not only can this novel approach give voice to an underrepresented group of study participants (i.e., Black female students in school settings), but it can also help stakeholders (e.g., teachers, principals, taxpayers, SROs) better interact with Black female students and create more equitable disciplinary policies.

The basic qualitative research approach gives voice to participants' interpretations of their lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The basic qualitative research design approach is best suited for this study as it allowed for the discovery of how Black female students make meaning of their interactions with SROs. In turn, in-depth understanding of participants' experiences can help illuminate strategies, techniques, and practices that school authorities can use effectively.

A case study design was considered for this study. However, because a case study requires data collection over an extended period of time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), the researcher favored a basic qualitative approach. Ethnography, another qualitative method,

was not chosen for this study because it requires the researcher to act as participant observer within the target culture to collect data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Grounded theory was also not suitable; the goal of this research project is not to build a theory about participants' experiences but to explore how participants make meaning of their lived experiences. Furthermore, a quantitative survey design approach was considered, one that would examine relationships between variables and be subject to statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Role of the Researcher

For the past 15 years, I have been an educator in America and abroad, and I can sympathize with students in their interactions with adult authorities. I have developed a passion for keeping all children safe in the educational setting. I have seen and read stories that focus on Black females who wanted people to know about their interactions with SROs and unfair disciplinary practices in the school setting (Baker-Bells et al., 2017). My experience and knowledge about policy and in the school system strengthened my ability to understand disciplinary practices and actions that may take place. Familiarity with these processes allowed me to set aside any judgments I may have made about how equitably zero-tolerance policies have been applied.

To ensure trustworthiness of the data, I used member checking to verify that my interpretation of the data accurately captured participants' experience. Providing a rich, thick description of all aspects of the research process allowed for peer validation of the findings. To conduct this study, I functioned as a qualitative researcher and not as an educator. I asked questions of Black females that elicit insights about their perceptions

and experiences of interacting with SROs in the school setting. I alone conducted the interviews and analyzed, interpreted, and reported the results.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The target population will be Black females aged 18–22 who have interacted with SROs in school settings in the State of Georgia.

Purposive sampling using the snowballing approach and emergent sampling was used. Purposive sampling entails selecting specific individuals with experiences and knowledge of the experience to be studied (Taherdoost, 2016). A snowballing approach means that participants who fit the inclusion criteria will refer additional suitable study participants (Creshaw & Creshaw, 2018). Emergent sampling enhances flexibility whereby new directions can be pursued as the sampling process unfolds (Creswell, 2005). The sample size was small in order to (a) contribute to researcher–participant rapport, (b) explore more fully each participant’s lived experiences, and (c) reach data saturation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Participants must be Black female students aged 18–22 who have attended school in Georgia and have had interactions with SROs. Selecting students aged 18–22 precludes the need for parental consent for study participation while still allowing them to recall their experiences and interactions with SROs in the school setting. A Zoom meeting was scheduled to inform participants about the purpose of the study, obtained electronic signature on the consent form, and scheduled an interview.

I used the snowballing approach to recruit seven Black females, a sample size sufficient for conducting a qualitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). First, I posted a flyer (Appendix B) explaining my study and listed inclusion criteria (with my email/text message contact information) on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Email, Messenger, WeChat, Hangout, and WhatsApp. I did send respondents an electronic consent form (i.e., including identification of the researcher, sponsoring institution, the purpose of the study, the benefits of participating, the level and type of participant involvement) and some prospective days/dates/times for conducting the Zoom interview. The consent form informed the participants about potential risks, guaranteed participant confidentiality, and let the participant know that she can withdraw at any time if any problems or discomfort arises during the interviewing process (Burkholder et al., 2016). I asked suitable respondents to recommend additional suitable study participants. However, snowballing sampling can result in a group of participants from the same geographic area; therefore, I asked participants to refer potential participants from different locations in Georgia (Tracey, 2013). If the participants had any questions about the consent form, my text message number and email address was listed on an instruction letter (Appendix A); the instruction form also explained why I needed the participant contact information (i.e., to set up the interview that constitutes study participation). Participants was informed that a follow-up interview may be needed to expand on or clarify any answers. Participants received a \$10 gift card as a reward, which was emailed to them upon completion of the interview.

Semi structured interviews were conducted to collect data from participants who met inclusion criteria. Semi structured interviews allowed the researcher to organize/guide the interview and ask follow-up questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The semi structured interview design allowed participants to answer at length and provide vivid details about the experiences and interactions they have had with SROs. All participants were asked the same questions, but the wording or order of the questions may vary. Participants were informed that the interview would be recorded, and questions would be asked about their experiences and interactions with SROs in the school setting. Participants were also told that follow-up questions may be needed afterward to expand on or clarify any responses.

A basic qualitative study is conducted to seek to understand how participants make meaning of and interpret their experience, in this case, with SROs in the school setting. Therefore, the questions asked involved the experiences and interactions between Black female students and SROs in the school environment. I prepared seven open-ended questions/prompts with sub questions/prompts for the participants to respond. Open-ended questions/prompts allowed the participant to provide feedback in their own words about their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The questions/prompts for the interview can be found in Appendix C.

Data Collection Procedures

To protect participant health during the current pandemic, interviews were conducted via Zoom, Facebook Messenger, or telephone. Confidentiality of participants' identities and data were assured throughout the process by using pseudonyms. To create

rapport, participants had the option to turn on their cameras to better approximate an in-person meeting; however, this was not required, nor was there any penalty for opting not to use the video feature. Interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes; the interviews were audiotaped using a digital recorder, and the recordings were used to transcribe and analyze data. External data storage with password-protection, and audiotapes were stored in a locked safe.

During the interview process, I expressed empathy to build a trusting relationship while being cautious not to get too involved in the participant's feelings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I listened actively, employed a pleasant/professional tone, and used nonverbal cues (e.g., nodding my head) to convey my interest to the participant. After the interview, I thanked the participant for sharing their experiences and perspectives of SROs; I also asked if they have any further questions or comments that I could address.

Data Analysis Strategies

My data analysis strategy was a thematic analysis using an inductive approach. The inductive approach allows themes to unfold from the interview data. To determine the codes and themes, I implemented Braun and Clarke's (2005) six-step process:

Step 1: Familiarization. Making verbatim transcripts of participants' interviews allowed me to familiarize myself with their experiences. I listen to each audiotaped interview several times and made notes.

Step 2: Coding. After reviewing the transcripts, I highlighted significant phrases or sentences to identify a code within the content. Coding refers to identifying heavy-rotation words or short phrases that captured responses to the interview

question (Saldana, 2016). The coding was done in two cycles: the first cycle involved looking for single words or full paragraphs of significant meaning from each participant; using analytic memos, the second coding cycle identifies similarities across participants' experiences and perceptions (Saldana, 2016).

Analytic memos are the researcher's journal of thoughts on codes and themes that arise as a result of listening to and reading the transcripts from the interviews.

Interview transcripts were coded by hand. Manual coding allowed the researcher to take the transcriptions and assign codes by going line by line of the data (Saldana, 2016).

Step 3: Generating themes. Coded data placed in thematic categories addressed the theoretical framework. The naming of the themes was guided by the theoretical framework; this is the deductive part of the thematic analytic process. The digital recording was replayed several times and the transcript was reviewed several times on the same day after the interview was conducted to maximize thematic accuracy (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Step 4: Reviewing themes. After I generated the themes, I reviewed the themes by going back to the transcript and making sure that the selected themes represent the data and the codes. If the themes are not acceptable, I omitted or changed the themes as needed.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes. This is the process of naming the themes, making sure they are consistent with the guiding theoretical framework. I then

explained why each theme helped to tell the experiences and understanding of the participants.

Step 6: Writing up. Is the last step of the thematic analysis, where I reported the findings. The thematic analysis yields a concise, coherent, logical, nonrepetitive, and interesting account and provided insight into participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2005).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility was obtained by ensuring that the findings are grounded in participants' experience and do not reflect my personal biases or preconceptions. The data presented aligned with the research question (Burkholder et al., 2016). To make sure my study had credibility, I used member checking and reflexivity. Member checking involved asking participants to review transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcripts. Reflexivity was the process of self-analysis of biases during a research study (Burkholder et al., 2016), which is essential to any qualitative approach (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Tracey, 2013). Reflexivity was used to document through journaling, notes, and memos my thoughts on how I assigned themes/codes/categories and analyzed the data. Noting past experiences that may affect my interpretation of the data is known as bracketing. Using brackets allowed me to separate my experiences from those of the participants (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Transferability

Transferability is the ability to put participant data into a descriptive context that can be understood by different readers of the research study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As the researcher, I provided thick description, or rich details. The description provided, supported by participants' quotations and field notes so that (a) readers can evaluate my study findings and (b) other researchers can replicate the study with different populations in other settings.

Dependability

Research dependability refers to other researchers' ability to employ the same procedures and perform the same analyses to reach similar conclusions in subsequent studies. I laid out this research roadmap in an audit trail, which are field notes, memos, or journal reflections that I collected during the research process (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Confirmability

One way to ensure confirmability is through reflexivity. Attention to reflexivity helped maintain awareness of strengths, weaknesses, and potential biases in my choices, interpretations, and findings. I took notes on both participants' reactions and my reactions so that readers understood my thought processes throughout the study.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical research procedures included doing no harm, avoiding deception, ensuring informed consent, and maintaining privacy and confidentiality on behalf of all participants (Tracey, 2013). Toward that end, I completed the Walden University Institutional Review Boards (IRB) application and submitted for approval to conduct my

study. The IRB application form included the consent form (Appendix A) that informed the participants of the purpose, procedures, and risks of participating in my study. A confidentiality form of participant's rights, in accordance with federal law, was included in the IRB application. The participants also signed a written consent form allowing the interviews to be recorded. The confidentiality of the participants secured by using pseudonyms; the identity of the participants will neither be used nor disclosed. Participants was told they can quit the study at any time without penalty. The information obtained was password-protected, and all documents was stored in a locked safe accessible only by me.

Summary

This basic qualitative study design explored Black female students' experiences with and perspectives toward SROs in the school setting. This study design allowed for a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences. This chapter provided an overview of how data was collected and analyzed. Procedures for recruiting and selecting participants were discussed as were issues of trustworthiness and ethical standards. Chapter 4 addressed data collection in this qualitative study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore Black female students' experiences with SROs in the Georgia public school setting. Labeling theory (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951; Tannenbaum, 1938) and self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1968) guided this exploration to address Black female students' perceptions of SROs in the school environment and how Black female students make meaning of their interactions with SROs in the school environment. This chapter will present the setting in which data were collected, a brief description of the participants, and the data collection and analysis procedures. The results will be reported followed by a description of how issues of trustworthiness were addressed. To conclude Chapter 4, a brief introduction to Chapter 5 will be provided.

Setting

The study was conducted virtually via Zoom in the State of Georgia; owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were handled virtually to avoid in-person contact. Interviews were conducted in a private home office with closed doors to protect participants' privacy. Participants were reminded that neither their names nor the names of the schools they attended would be used in the study. All documents will be retained and stored in a secure fireproof safe filing cabinet accessible only by me.

Demographics

The population of interest for this study was Black females ages 18 to 22 who had attended a Georgia public school and had experiences with school resource officers (SROs) in the school setting. Seven participants were recruited by flyers posted on social

media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snap Chat, Twitter, and the Walden University participant pool. The flyer included the eligibility criteria and my contact information. Five participants were obtained through snowball sampling, which occurred when existing participants referred others, they knew who had interacted with SROs while attending a Georgia public school.

It should be noted the recruitment process was slow due to COVID-19 conditions, end of the school year activities such as prom, graduations, and family gatherings that typically take place toward the end of each school year in Georgia Public schools. To protect the participants' privacy, an assigned numeric code was used for purposes of identification.

Summary of Participants

All seven participants were Black females, ages 18–22, from the state of Georgia. Two of the participants volunteered that they were attending college and one participant informed me that she is currently a stay-at-home mother. The remaining participants did not discuss their current employment status, nor did any discuss their marital status.

Table 1

Main Study Demographics

Participant	Sex	Region	Age range	Race	Education	Marital status
P1	Female	North Georgia	18–22	Black	N/A	N/A
P2	Female	North Georgia	18–22	Black	N/A	N/A
P3	Female	West Georgia	18–22	Black	N/A	N/A
P4	Female	North Georgia	18–22	Black	N/A	N/A
P5	Female	South Georgia	18–22	Black	College	N/A
P6	Female	North Georgia	18–22	Black	College	N/A
P7	Female	North Georgia	18–22	Black	N/A	N/A

Data Collection

Once my study received approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (#03-29-21-0761443), I recruited and interviewed participants. The process from recruitment to data collection completion took 3 months. I conducted seven interviews via Zoom technology in a closed office space located in my home. Each interview was recorded on a digital recorder, ranging from 45-60 minutes. At the end of each interview, I thanked participants and informed them that I would email a copy of the transcript and to contact me if I needed to add, delete, or change anything. I also informed participants that I will send an e-gift Visa card for participating in my study. I transcribed the interviews by hand and by rev.com technology, which transcribes the interviews for you. I compared the recording to my transcriptions and the technology transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the data. I also emailed each participant a copy of her transcript for the purpose of member checking. Member checking is the process of verifying that the information provided by participants accurately reflects what they stated during the interview process; any discrepancies identified by participants would be corrected.

Each participant was assigned a numerical identity code to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Transcriptions were saved to a document file on my personal computer that has a locked password accessible only by me. The recorder and the signed consent forms were placed in a locked fireproof safe to maintain the security of the information obtained. I printed hardcopies of all transcripts, using the numerical coding to identify

each participant; hardcopies were stored in my locked fireproof safe until I was ready to analyze the data. Once I completed data analysis, I returned the hardcopies to my safe for protection. There were no variations in data collection that deviated from the plan presented in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

Coding Process

The data analysis was guided by the Braun and Clarke's (2005) six-step process used in qualitative research to condense descriptions and identify themes that emerge relevant to the research questions.

Phase 1: Familiarization

Familiarization is achieved by immersing oneself in the data by reading and rereading the participants' interviews while noting ideas, thoughts, and reactions (Braun & Clark, 2005). I listened to each recording four times to familiarize myself with participants' experiences with SROs. I made notes and highlighted key words and phrases that were repeated across all participant interviews. I created notes and keywords associated with participants' responses to each research question. While familiarizing myself with the data, I asked myself questions about how participant revelations are meaningful to the research questions asked.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

The second step is to generate codes that are common across the data by listing ideas, words, and key phrases used repeatedly by participants. After reviewing the transcripts, I highlighted phrases or sentences to identify a code within the content.

Coding refers to identifying heavy-rotation words or short phrases that captured meaningful responses to the interview question (Saldana, 2016). To generate initial codes, I used NVivo coding described by Saldana (2016), whereby phrases taken directly from the participants' words were set off by quotation marks. This was followed by simultaneous coding (Saldana, 2016), i.e., taking two or more codes within a single datum, simultaneously coding and categorizing participants' responses during the interview process. The participants may have had similar experiences related to the same issue, but their individual perceptions, attitudes, experiences, and values allowed me to search for patterns categorized by similarity, differences, sequences, correspondence, and or causation. Understanding the process of generating codes, I was able to code in two cycles: the first cycle involved looking for single words or full paragraphs or quotes that are meaningful from each participant.

Table 2 lists the number of codes derived from each question for each participant; using analytic memos, the second coding cycle identified similarities across participants' experiences and perceptions (Saldana, 2016). Analytic memos were from my journal thoughts that emerged as I listened to and read the interview transcripts. Interview transcripts were coded by hand. Manual coding allowed me to assign codes by reviewing the transcripts line-by-line (Saldana, 2016). Table 2 below presents the codes (including the numbers of each) derived from the participant interview questions. Descriptive coding was also done after reading through the transcriptions and coding according to the keywords, phrases, or concepts (Saldana, 2009).

Table 2*Descriptive Coding*

Question	Description of codes	How many codes derived
1	Positive participant experiences with SROs	10
1	Negative participant experiences with SROs	14
2	Interactions between SROS and girls of other races	20
3	Positive participants' feelings of SROs in schools	17
3	Negative participants' feelings of SROS in schools	6
4	Zero tolerance policy affects SROs' interactions with Black females positive	20
4	Zero tolerance policy affects SROs' interactions with Black females negative	6
5	Experiences with SROs affecting participants' academics positively	8
5	Experiences with SROs affecting participants' academics negatively	4
6	Experiences with SROs affecting participants' social skills with an authority figure positively	6
6	Experiences with SROs affecting participants' social skills with an authority figure negatively	6
7	Ideas, example, or suggestions for SROs to improve their relationships with Black females in the school setting	23

The first cycle of *coding* was determined by the keywords and short phrases generated by analyzing each interview syntax. For the second-cycle pattern coding, I developed a word document table, indicating key words/phrases associated with each research question for each participant. The second cycle coding allowed me to identify, from the original codes, key words or phrases repeated across participants. By color coding the common words, phrases, and quotes, easily identifiable *patterns* emerged. Table 3 illustrates examples of participants' responses to the interview questions and examples of codes that emerged from the original coding. Table 4 features the code categories from which themes emerge.

Table 3*Coding Process Data*

Questions	Participants' quotes	Codes
1. Please tell me about your first experiences you had with SROs	<p>P1: It was not a good experience. And, also, we felt like these people are not bound to, they were to be judgmental towards us because of our actions.</p> <p>P1: I felt like, for me, I think because the SROs is all White, so I felt like, because now we were Black and also in term, there was racism for sure.</p> <p>P2: I felt intimidate, that the SROs treated Black girls more harshly than White girls. They've had that intimidation power.</p> <p>P3: I was terrified, I cannot lie. Because, you see, the, they sounded so frightening in that, you are being forced to like give information.</p> <p>P4: We faced a lot of threats from the SROs</p> <p>P5: I thought it was a pretty good experience with having SRO because, um, usually some might feel very frightened or very uncomfortable with having SROs around them. But I felt very secure knowing that I had a good relationship with them. I knew that they were there to help out whenever we need them to.</p> <p>P6: I remember the SROs were very, very threatening. In that they would give us stern warnings and even if they just saw you walk out, like, in the middle of the class, they would follow you. So, it felt like you were not even safe.</p> <p>P7: Um, like they weren't very friendly. Like, I would expect them to be friendly and try to start conversation and make you feel safe and like they wanted to have a conversation with you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not friendly • Intimidated • Felt like a suspect • Treated badly • Threatened by SROs • Safe in school • Not safe • Good interaction
2: Please describe the interactions you have seen between SROs and other girls of the Opposite race that you have observed in the school setting	<p>P2: The penalties are not all that harsh, and it could be taken to as a very light thing. But on the cases of someone who's Black, then it's like, made a- a mountain out of a mile hill.</p> <p>P4: At one point I saw them manhandle some two girls who were threaten-who are-who are being threatened by- by other schoolgirls.</p> <p>P4: The SROs treated Black girls more strictly and like they were already criminals</p> <p>P6: They would give us stern warnings and even if they just saw you walk out, like, in the middle of the class, they would follow you. So, it felt like you were not even safe. Like you were a suspect throughout.</p> <p>P6: It- it felt even like the SROs were saying that the Black girls are bad influence on the, some of the White girls. I don't know why there was that innocent nature of the White, I don't know. Then there's the Black who are now rowdy, they are taking us as main suspects in everything.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judged differently because of color • Black girls accuse more than White for same rules • Judged in terms of race not because of actions • Different treatment • Manhandled • More strict
3: How do you feel about SROs being in the school system	<p>P1: SROs are there to enhance the law and it ensures that the law enforcements protect everyone as well as it makes SROs be accountable on their end.</p> <p>P2: SROs in the school are there for security and enhancement of law and order, but on the other hand, SROs can be racist and be unfair.</p> <p>P2: SROs in the school system is good for safety, they give information, and prevent a lot of crimes from happening.</p> <p>P3: SROs in the school system is good for safety, they give information, and prevent a lot of crimes from happening.</p> <p>P4: They're supposed to be maintaining the standards of discipline.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent a lot of crime from happening • Enhancement of law and order • Maintain standard of discipline • Educating others • Security • Safety
4: Please explain how you think the Zero Tolerance Policy affects SROs interactions with Black females in the school setting.	<p>P1: I think this policy is very effective. ...if you do a crime, you will feel like you would be expelled from school. The student will be obliged to observe the school's rules, and this will actually improve the student's behavior because no one want to be expelled, no one wants to be suspended. So, to improve generally the school performance, the school students' behavior and people will be more disciplined.</p> <p>P2: it makes them more intimidated. ...more disciplined in a way. It makes them, also, to, like, shy away from airing their grievances.</p> <p>P3: it has improved school climate and school safety. I kinda feel like it has enhanced good behavior and improved a lot of like interaction and created an open-minded like conversation between students and also other enforcement officers.</p> <p>P4: it makes students to be very, to behave in the right way, because you are feeling that if you do something, something is going to follow.</p> <p>P6: I feel like this policy is mainly helping them in the streamlining of behaviors of students and just, general, making people prepared of the, like, outside environment, you know?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamline student behavior • Obligated to observe school rules • Students behave right way • Make people prepare for outside word

Questions	Participants' quotes	Codes
5: How have the experiences with SROs affected your academics?	<p>P1: I felt like they had destroyed my, my period that was to be in school. You see, I lost so much because of something small.</p> <p>P2: The positive of being suspended she stated, "I focus on being a good person and I changed." She became more focused of her academics.</p> <p>P3: There's a lot of confusion. You're being treated as the suspect. So that time is a period of confusion and lack of focus.</p> <p>P4: I think it made us feel bad. Like we barely interact with others because we were treated bad, like we were already criminals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive: more secure being at school • Positive: changed for the better • Negative: performance poorly • Negative: not able to concentrate
6: How have the experiences with SROs affected your social skills with an authority figure in the school setting?	<p>P2: Even now I feel like I'm not comfortable, like, talking to a policeman because of the experience I had with SROs.</p> <p>P6: I shied away, I didn't want to be involved in any crime because I feared, like, in the worst case neither if I'm involved to, in- in a bad crime and, um because of my race, then I might get very heavy consequences. So, I chose to, like, be distant.</p> <p>P7: They expect us to act and react to things or certain things they say or do." The policy reinforced the behavior of how students should behave in school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive: more accountable • Positive: improved relationship • Negative: fear authority figures • Negative: not comfortable
7: Can you provide any ideas, example, or suggestions for SROs to improve their relationships with Black females in the school setting?	<p>P1 they should be friendly. They should not be harsh. They should get to understand where the problem is even before like instituting certain measures that are too harsh, have a listening ear.</p> <p>P2: Um, the suggestions I have, they could, I don't know, just try to interact with us more and not show favoritism...</p> <p>P4: They should treat them fairly for first. They should not act like they're biased to one side. They should be friendly.</p> <p>P5: I feel like they should not be so biased in situations and be able to interpret and handle the situations the proper way and regardless of the race and gender of anyone.</p> <p>P3: they should have seminars and workshops to inform the students. At time, the students could like not to understand where, why are they needed in the school setup? So, some information on that is important. And, also, some get to listen from the students' what they have to say. And believe that the, believe that, if they are doing their job in the right way, everything is going to go as, as planned and with a lot of fairness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do job right and be fair • Treat fairly • Be friendly • Be there for everyone despite race • Educate students to help understand the importance of SROs • Hold seminars • Communication • Interact more

Table 4*Categories and Themes*

Categories	Themes	Definitions of themes
Perceptions and experiences of student–SRO interactions.	Inequality	Unequal distribution of opportunities, rewards, and punishment
	Racism	Feeling or action of hatred and bigotry toward a person or persons because of their race
	Fairness	Nonpartial treatment of favoritism toward one side or another
	Kindness	The act of being friendly, generous, and considerate
Perceptions of student roles	Self-reflection actions	Conscious thoughts of the mind to consider changing the actions of the behavior
Type of interactions	Lack of reciprocation between SROs and student	A connection between two or more things that affect the outcome of how the relationship connects
	Communications	The way one expresses self through verbal or nonverbal cues
Perceptions of SROs	Services	The act of helping. Ex. “SROs are mainly to ensure the safety and to ensure that everyone is getting the right treatment.”

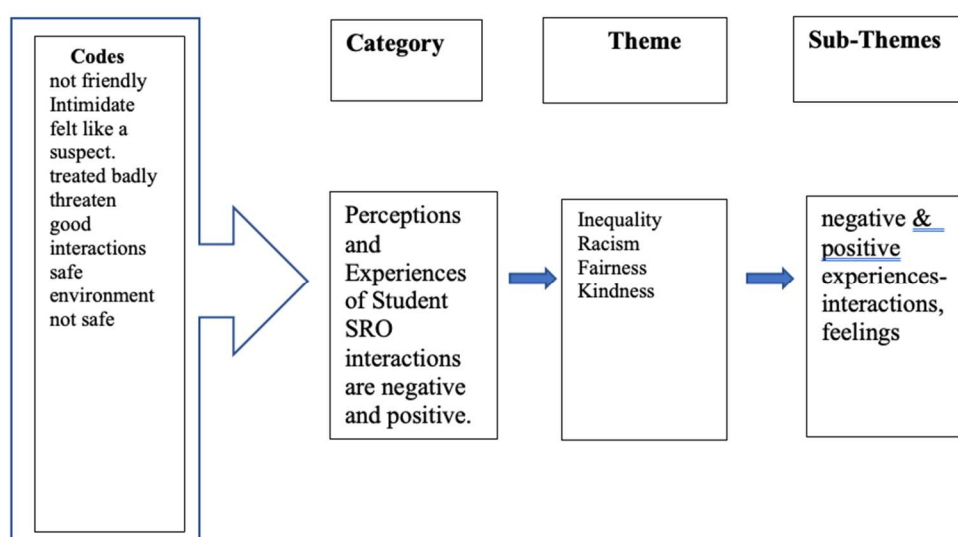
Phase 3: Generating and Defining of Themes

Themes emerged from the categories. Table 4 demonstrates the categories that derived from the codes. I placed the codes in groups that helped generate possible themes. This step may generate new themes and/or some themes may be deleted if the codes are not relevant after reviewing the research question, theoretical framework, and

participant responses. I took the time to review the themes and generate a thematic map of the analysis, a visual map that illustrates how themes are derived. Once generated, the thematic map enables the researcher to name and define the theme. The naming of the themes was guided by the theoretical framework; this was the deductive part of the thematic analytic process. After reviewing the codes, categories, and themes, I continued to ask myself questions to ensure that the final themes generated aligned with the theoretical framework and answered the research questions. Figures 1–7 illustrate the interview questions, codes derived, categories established, and emergent themes and subthemes. I replayed the digital recording and reviewed the transcripts several times on the same day after the interview was conducted as well as I replayed the transcripts and reviewed the data again during the final generating of themes to maximize thematic accuracy according to Burkholder et al., (2016).

Figure 1

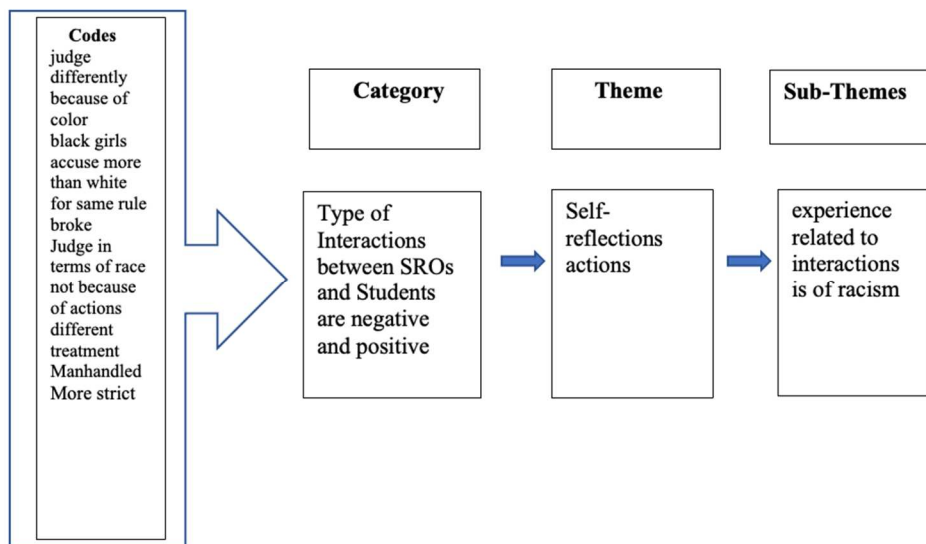
Potential Themes and Subthemes From Codes for Question 1



Note. Question 1: Please tell me about your first experiences you had with SROs.

Figure 2

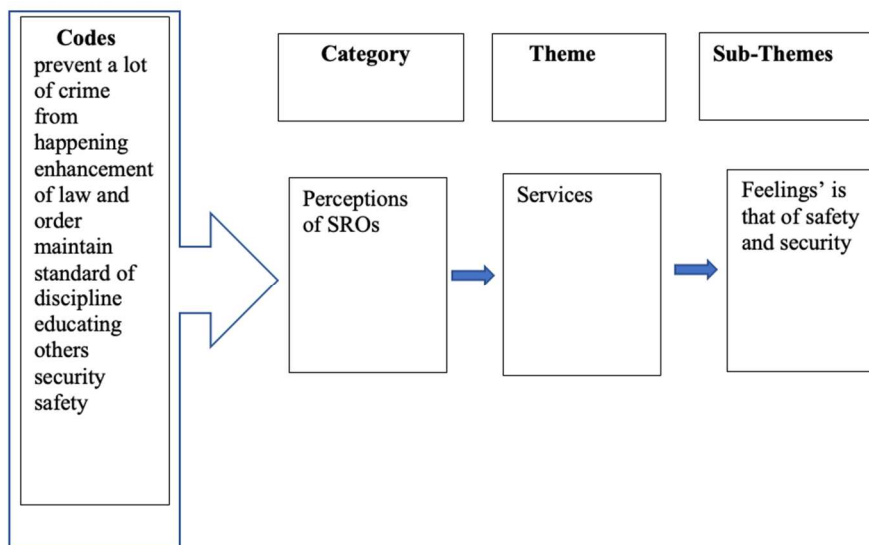
Potential Themes and Subthemes From Codes for Question 2



Note. Question 2: Please describe the interactions you have seen between SROs and other girls of the opposite race that you have observed in the school setting.

Figure 3

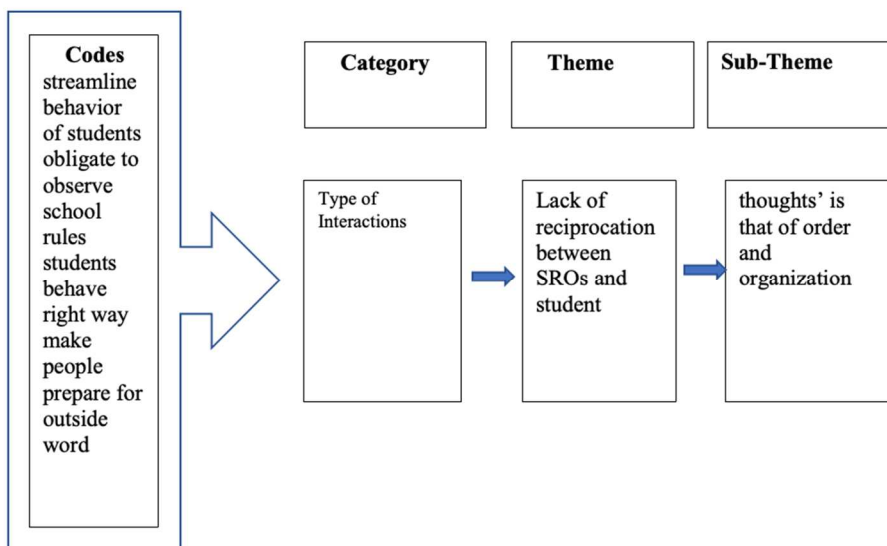
Potential Themes and Subthemes From Codes for Question 3



Note. Question 3: How do you feel about SROs being in the school system.

Figure 4

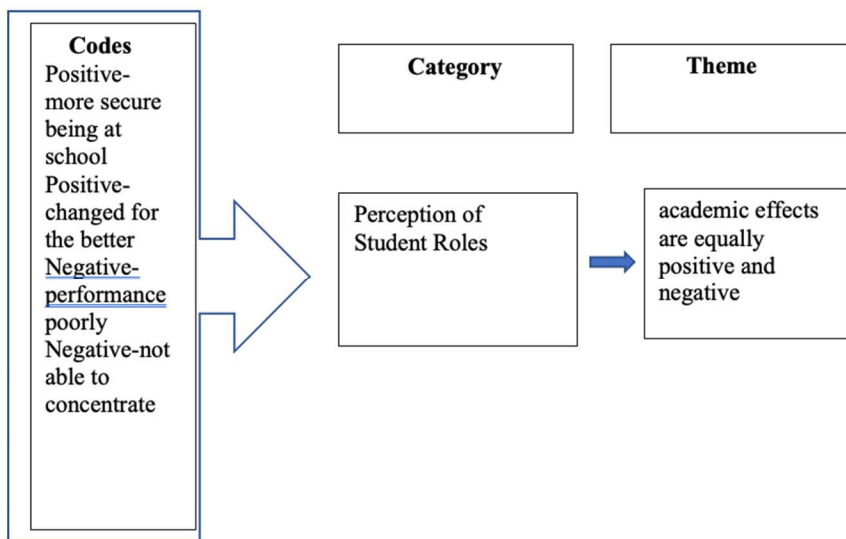
Potential Themes and Subthemes From Codes for Question 4



Note. Question 4: Please explain how you think the Zero Tolerance Policy affects SROs interactions with Black females in the school setting.

Figure 5

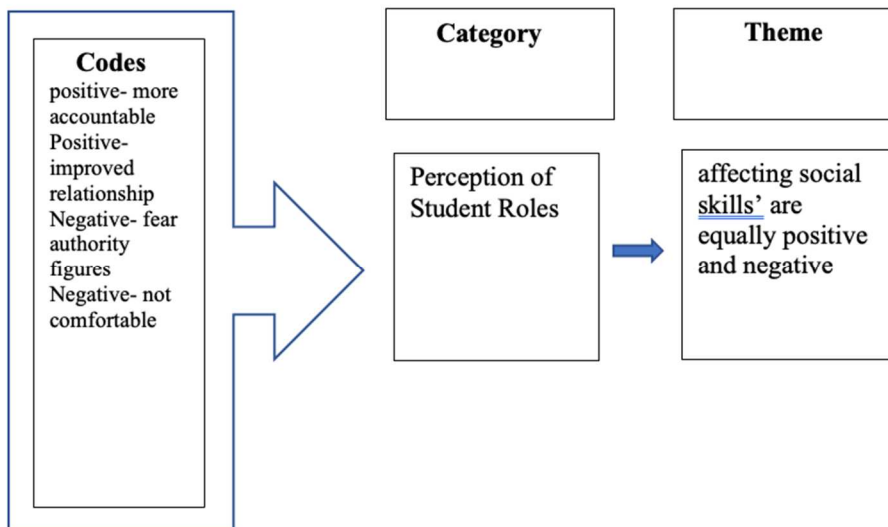
Potential Themes and Subthemes From Codes for Question 5



Note. Question 5: How have the experiences with SROs affected your academics?

Figure 6

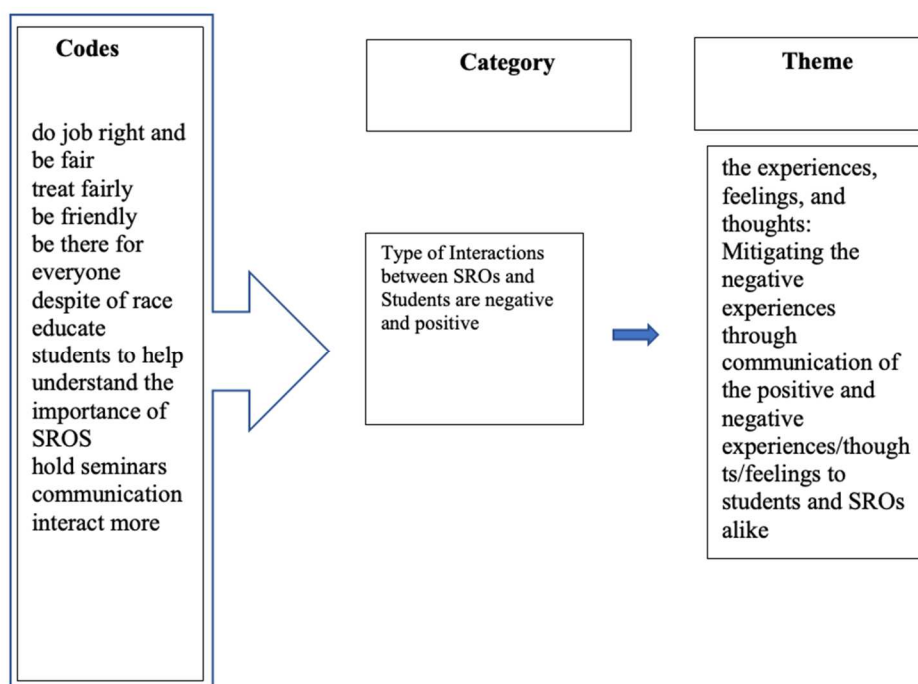
Potential Themes and Subthemes From Codes for Question 6



Note. Question 6: How have the experiences with SROs affected your social skills with an authority figure in the school setting?

Figure 7

Potential Themes and Subthemes From Codes for Question 7



Note. Question 7: Can you provide any ideas, example, or suggestions for SROs to improve their relationships with Black females in the school setting?

Phase 4 and Phase 5: Reviewing and Naming the Themes

Once the researcher identifies potential codes and themes, the next step is to review the themes and generate a thematic map of the analysis. This step may also generate new themes, or some themes may be deleted if the codes are not relevant. After generating the themes demonstrated in Figure 1-7, I reviewed them again to ensure that the statements, quotes, and key words were consistent with categories derived from the data. Table 3 shows the categories, themes, and the theme definitions accompanied by verbatim participant quotes. Categories generated by grouping similar codes, resulted in four code-groups: *Perceptions and Experiences of Students and SRO interaction,*

Perceptions of Student Roles, Perceptions of SROS, Type of Interactions between SROs and Students. After I generated the categories and themes, I reviewed the codes, categories, and themes again by returning to the transcripts to make sure that the selected themes represent the data and the codes. If the themes were not acceptable, I omitted or changed the themes as needed. The theoretical framework guided my naming of the themes as related to each research question. The overall themes are: *Services, Exhibits Fairness and Kindness Communication, Inequity, Improvement of self-reflection actions, Lack of reciprocation between SROs and student.*

Phase 6: Report the Findings

The last step of the Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis is writing up the findings of the analysis. The purpose of this last phase is to document participants' responses to the interview questions. The thematic analysis yields a concise, coherent, logical, nonrepetitive, and interesting account of participants' experience (Braun & Clarke, 2005). To that end, I described and explained how the themes emerged from the participants' responses supported by verbatim examples of their experiences with and perceptions of SROs. Guided by the literature reviewed in chapter 2, the final write-up included sufficient evidence and vivid examples that capture the essence of participants' stories of their experience with SROs in the school setting.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Member checking is to ensure that the verbatim transcriptions of participant interviews are accurate. To do that, I emailed each participant their transcribed interview,

requesting that they verify it for accuracy and inform me of any errors. None responded with any corrections. I also conducted a self-analysis of biases that could potentially taint my analysis and/or interpretation of the data. To that end, I kept a reflexive journal, documenting my reactions and bracketing my preconceptions so as to acknowledge and, thereby, set them aside.

Transferability

The study explored 18-22-year-old Black females' experiences with SROs in the Georgia public school setting. Recent studies suggest that disciplinary action meted out, disproportionately, by SROs to Black females are widespread (Smith and Harper, 2015). This study can be replicated in other states where, like Georgia, Black females have been disciplined by SROs disproportionately. The thick rich description I have provided documents all elements of the research process, making it available to other researchers interested in conducting similar studies.

Dependability and Confirmability

The transcripts were hand-coded on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Digital audio and Zoom recordings of each interview were transcribed and included in the study to establish the dependability and confirmability of the data obtained. Participants were emailed their transcribed interviews and asked to confirm their accuracy before data were analyzed. Dependability and confirmability were also established by using an audit trail that provided an accurate record of reflections and events throughout my research process. I documented my notes from the interviews and recorded journal reflections of my preconceptions, reactions, and biases.

Results

The research questions guiding the study were:

RQ1: What are Black female students' perceptions of SROs in the school environment?

RQ2: How do Black female students make meaning of their interactions with SROs in the school environment?

Black female students' expectation of SROs in the Georgia public school environment is to serve, protect, and enforce rules by ensuring fairness, kindness, and clear communication to Black females as well as to all students.

Theme 1: Services

Of the seven participants, six indicated that SROs in the school do provide a service for the students and staff. Only one participant was not sure why SROs were in the school system. The participants believed that SROs are in the school to protect all school personnel, including students, and to enforce rules and policies.

P1 "In order for fair treatment, the school system should put people who are not racist or put a combination of both people of color and people of different color and ethnicity as SROs to have fair treatment."

P2: "SROs in the school are there for security and enhancement of law and order, but on the other hand, SROs can be racist and be unfair."

P3: "SROs in the school system is good for safety, they give information, and prevent a lot of crimes from happening."

P4: “They’re supposed to be very fair. They’re supposed to be maintaining the standards of discipline. They should also be fair with justice and should not be like favoring one side.”

P5: “I think having SROs are a very good idea and concept to having in the school system, because it gives us that sense of security knowing that we have trained officers there.”

P6 indicated:

They should be there for mainly crime preventions or safety, for educating other students on how to observe safety and they should be, like, not be impartial. Treat everyone fairly and let one, everyone, on the school feel safe, let everyone know that he’s entitled to report anything, and justice will be served.

P7: “We need them to a certain extent. They just be standin’ in the hallways and monitoring.”

Theme 2: Exhibits Fairness and Kindness

Black female students’ perceptions of SROs in the school environment were not only there to serve but they should be fairer and kinder.

P1: “They should be friendly. They should not be harsh. They should get to understand where the problem is even before like instituting certain measures that are too harsh, have a listening ear.”

P2 said:

Um, the suggestions I have, they could, I don’t know, just try to interact with us more and not show favoritism and- and just...I don’t know, they act like they’ll just

freeze up with us. Like, they didn't feel comfortable talking to us. Or it just... It was just the energy that fed off. It was different. Like, you'll see them talkin' and smillin' with other races and then with us, they were just strict and just firm.

P4 said:

They should treat them fairly for first. They should not act like they're biased to one side. They should be friendly. Uh, the SROs should show the students the necessity of being there so that students don't have like fear instilled in them. They should be, they should be available when needed.

P5 added:

Um, I believe that they should be more attentive to black women, because I know that sometimes they might not believe things that we, we have said, or in situations they might not tend to take or side if it involves someone of a different race. So, I feel like they should not be so biased in situations and be able to interpret and handle the situations the proper way and regardless of the race and gender of anyone.

Participants also suggested that SROs can communicate better with students so there is a clear understanding of why SROs are in the school setting. Previous studies suggested that African American girls believed that (a) better channels of communication with SROs would improve the students' sense of safety and that (b) SROs should try to build a relationship with girls of color to establish a comfort level and student sense of safety (Morris et al., 2017).

Theme 3: Communication

P2: “SROs should engage dialogue and promote fairness and equity. Uh, just they’re there for everyone despite the race. And some education problems for, like, for the students who don’t understand the importance of SROs.”

P3 claimed:

first, they should have seminars and workshops to inform the students. At time, the students could like not to understand where, why are they needed in the school setup? So, some information on that is important. And also, some, get to listen from the students’ what they have to say. And believe that the, believe that, if they are doing their job in the right way, everything is going to go as, as planned and with a lot of fairness.

P6: “Communication is the key thing. So, that the SROs are not too harsh on the Black, on the Black girls or Black boys, hence leading to more resistance. So, it just communicates.”

RQ2: How do Black female students make meaning of their interactions with SROs in the school environment?

Theme 1: Inequity

Inequity means that there is a lack of fairness. Six out of seven Participants’ interactions with SROs in the school environment described inequitable interactions, observations, or experiences with SROs in the school environment where the SROs’ treatments were unfair. Previous research studies suggested that more studies are needed to understand interactions between African American female students and SROs in an

attempt to understand why the students perceive racial bias in disciplinary practices (Morris et al., 2017). Participants in this study shared their experiences with SROs.

P1:

The first experiences with SROs were not a good experience. They were to be judgmental toward us because of our actions. . . I felt like, for me, I think because the SROs is all white, so I felt like, because now we were black and also in term, there was racism for sure.

P2:

I felt intimidate, that the SROs treated black girls more harsh then white girls. They've had that intimidation power. I felt like they were not even about what has, had really happen. I felt like I was insecure. It feels like you could get jail anytime and probably one who'll even make up a story about you and you end up being implicated even if you are, you're not all that guilty.

P2: "The penalties are not all that harsh, and it could be taken to as a very light thing. But on the cases of someone who's black, then it's like, made a- a mountain out of a mile hill."

P3 identified her interaction with SROs as if she were treated as a suspect because she was at the right place at the wrong time. There was theft in the school, and she was studying, and happened to be in the school when it happened. She stated:

You, most of the time, you are treated as like some suspect. So, I had to like encounter, had an encounter with them, uh, but I wasn't responsible of what had really

happened. So, there were those investigations, and because they are law enforcement officers, I chose to cooperate.

P4 admitted that she destroyed another girl things and paid for it; however, she stated, “We faced a lot of threats from the SROs.”

P4 stated further:

At one point I saw them manhandle some two girls who were threaten-who are- who are being threatened by- by other schoolgirls. Like in the same class they were told that they had like stolen some items, so now the SROs came and started manhandling them. And they didn't even have evidence in the first place. They just arrived at the scene of everything, and they've already concluded. You see? It's like they are setting them apart, like come here, stay here, and they are already treating them like suspects.

P4 observed the comparison of the white girls to black:

The SROs treated black girls more strict and like they were already criminals. I think they have that kind of like they love more the white girls compared to the black girls. I-they have the preference. So, in the way they will treat us and the way they will treat them is kind of different. So, in terms of the punishment or in terms of threatening, they will not face so many like penalties. But for the black girls it was quite strict. They already treated you like a criminal.

P6 was accused of arson and when she returned to school grounds, SROs continued to be very threatened:

They would give us stern warnings and even if they just saw you walk out, like, in the middle of the class, they would follow you. So, it felt like you were not even safe. Like you were a suspect throughout.

P6 also observed SROs' interactions with white girls. She stated, "SROs were saying that the black girls are bad influences on some of the white girls. SROs thought white girls were innocent in nature and Blacks who are now rowdy, they were suspects in everything."

P7 observed inequity when the school changed SROs staffing. P7 observed that the SROs were all white and would communicate more with the white students in the hallway. When she and her friends tried to communicate with the SROs, she stated, "when others try to speak to them, they weren't really interested, or they just had that nonchalant look on their face or demeanor like they didn't care."

The lack of fairness experienced by participants and observed compared to White girls revealed how SROs make them feel. Bottani et al. (2017) and Wun (2016) argued that the literature lacked the voice of Black females articulating their feelings of how and why authority figures (SROs) make them feel unsafe in the school. These findings address that gap.

Theme 2: Improvement of self-reflection actions

An additional result of this study revealed that participants experienced an improvement in self-reflection. They were asked during the interviewing process to explain the zero-tolerance policy and how they think the policy affected SROs'

interactions with them and other Black females in the school setting. Participants' reflections were mixed, some positive and some negative.

P1:

I think this policy is very effective...if you do a crime, you will feel like you would be expelled from school. The student will be obliged to observe the school's rules, and this will actually improve the student's behavior because no one want to be expelled, no one wants to be suspended. So, to improve generally the school performance, the school students' behavior and people will be more disciplined.

P1 also thought black girls' interaction with SROs is positive:

They will just have less work for SROs and at least now the students will be able to observe the school rules even without anyone to like forced them, because they know the consequences. Hence the work of the SROs is lessened.

P2: "It makes them more intimidated...more disciplined in a way. It makes them, also, to, like, shy away from airing their grievances."

P3: "It has improved school climate and school safety. I kinda feel like it has enhanced good behavior and improved a lot of like interaction and created an open-minded like conversation between students and also other enforcement officers."

P4: "It makes students to be very, to behave in the right way, because you are feeling that if you do something, something is going to follow. So just be forced to do the right thing, whether you like it or not, whether I find it fair or not. Participant 4 also stated,

The SROs interaction with black feel is some racism if it's negative interaction and if they're not bias, I think they have a level of expertise. They have a level of professionalism. They don't know how to favor one side, so it depends on the SROs involved.

P5:

It didn't necessarily single out any one black females. And from my experience, I was like it was taking into considerations of all races and gender. So, it didn't just single out, singled out any individual based off of race or gender.

P6:

I feel like this policy is mainly helping them in the streamlining of behaviors of students and just, general, making people prepared of the, like, outside environment, you know? So that people don't get engaged in crime because there will be even consequences later on even when you are outside the school compound. So, they are supposed to, like, mold you to a good person.

P7 did not think that the policy affected Black girls. She stated in her opinion. "I don't think it made a difference with that much."

A sub-question was asked, "What do you think causes SROs' interactions to be negative or positive with Black females?" This question was asked to help elaborate on how Black females think the zero tolerance policy influences SROs' interactions with Black females in the school setting. The participants gave their perspective which reinforced labeling theory (Becker, 1963; Lemer, 1972) and self-fulfilling prophecy

(Merton, 1968) with respect to how stereotype-based labeling drives the interactions between Black females and SROs revealed by two participants:

P1: labeled herself as being in a clique and was naughty. She stated, “Like in class the way there are cliques, the naughty cliques. So, I was one of the one of the members of such groups. So, we would engage in substance abuse.”

P5: SROs’ interaction was based on their personal ideologies and morals that affect how they would react in certain situations based on race and gender.

P7: “It made me think, like, okay, what am I doing’ wrong or differently to make them engage in a conversation with them rather than engaging with me.”

P6:

I shied away, I didn’t want to be involved in any crime because I feared, like, in the worst case neither if I’m involved to, in- in a bad crime and, um because of my race, then I might get very heavy consequences. So, I chose to, like, be distant.

Participant 6 also stated, “They would give us stern warnings and even if they just saw you walk out, like, in the middle of the class, they would follow you.” Participant 6 mentioned “The black girls in the class were known as the rowdy ones because they don’t keep quiet.” She stated,

They always like talking. So, they would get, like victimized. I felt like the black girls were taken as the ring leaders, also there were others, a large number of white girls also on the team. So, most of this victimization was mainly on the black girls, just because they were talkative, and they were rowdy. So, this made them automatically be treated like criminals. It- it felt even like the SROs were saying that the black girls are

bad influence on the, some of the white girls. I don't know why there was that innocent nature of the white, I don't know. Then there's the black who are now rowdy, they are taking us as main suspects in everything.

The latter of the participant responses described how labels are associated with certain ethnicities and contexts that come to be regarded as deviant (Becker, 1963; Lemer, 1972). Self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1968) was also seen in P6 and P7 responses to what are some factors that inform SROs' interactions with Black females as compared to other girls in the school system. The self-fulfilling prophecy in this study did address how racial conflicts can influence one's behavior.

P7: "They expect us to act and react to things or certain things they say or do".
The policy reinforced the behavior of how students should behave in school."

P6:

Possibly, it just depends on those who are in the SROs position and also how the black girls are also conducting themselves. Black students will give the SROs a hard time and it will be a lot of resistance, you know? So, this resistance causes a sort of, a tussle from time to time, which never ends.

Theme 3: Lack of Reciprocation Between SROs and Students

The theme lack of reciprocation between SROs and students demonstrates the interconnection between participants' interactions with SROs, their academic and social skills. The influence of interactions with SROs on participants' academic and social skills was mixed.

P1: “I felt like they had destroyed my, my period that was to be in school. You see, I lost so much because of something small.” However, her social skills were improved from being suspended during which time she learned to be more disciplined, more accountable, and display good behavior.

P2 experiences with SROs affected her academics negatively and positively. At first being suspended for two weeks [she] “focused on being a good person and I changed.” She became more focused of her academics. However, her social skills were affected negatively in that her interaction with SROs instilled fear: “Even now I feel like I’m not comfortable, like, talking to a policeman because of the experience I had with SROs.”

P3 revealed that she could not concentrate on her academics in the class setting when she was under investigation. “There’s a lot of confusion. You’re being treated as the suspect. So that time is a period of confusion and lack of focus.” However, her social skills improved such that her relationship with SROs and authority figures changed as she realized that they are there to discipline.

P4: Her experience with SROs negatively impacted her academics given that she did not attend class and did not do the assignments; however, with the support and advice from parents and other relatives, it motivated her.

I think it made us feel bad. Like we barely interact with others because we were treated bad, like we were already criminals. But later on, when we got disciplined and stopped doing bad things it got better, yeah.

P5: Her experiences with SROs did not impact her academics nor social skills in schools. She said, “It just makes me feel more secure being at school. They are there to do their jobs and to keep me and other women of color safe.”

P6: “I don’t really think they affected my academics.” However, the experiences with SROs did help her social skills by becoming more responsible and it helped her to know that they are there to enforce safety.

P7: Her academics was not affected because she did not have a formal relationship with SROs. However, her social skills improved from having a causal relationship with SROs who were nice to her and encouraged her and her friends to talk to adult authority if there was a problem that needed to be addressed, stating “that he made all of us feel comfortable and he encourage us to speak with other, um, administrators, so during those years, I was comfortable talkin’ to him and other administrators.”

Summary

The results revealed from research question one suggested that Black females’ perception of SROs in the school environments is to serve, protect, and enforce rules by ensuring fairness, kindness, and clear communication to all students. The study also concluded from research question two that Black female students’ interactions with SROs in the school environment are not always equitable but offer an opportunity to self-reflect and make interconnections between experience with SROs and its effect on their academic and social skills; participants also expressed a lack of reciprocation between SROs and students. Furthermore, I discussed the setting, demographics, the validity of

the study through member checking, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Chapter five will provide and interpretation of the study's findings. It will also discuss the limitations and strengths and recommendations for future research. At the close of Chapter 5, a summary will be presented on how potential social changes can occur from this research study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendation

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Black female students' experiences and perceptions of their interactions with school resource officers (SROs) in the Georgia school setting. The extant body of peer-reviewed literature reveals a lack of understanding of how Black female students interact with SROs and how schools disproportionately administer discipline to the Black female student population. This study addressed these gaps in the literature.

The key findings included participants' reports of (a) services SROs provide to them to keep the school safe, (b) awareness of kindness/fairness exhibited by SROs, and (c) ways that communication between SROs and Black female students affect interactions and experiences in the school environment. Findings also revealed that participants had experienced inequities, lack of reciprocation between SROs and Black female students, and the beneficial impact of self-reflection.

Interpretations of the Findings

Morris et al. (2017) found that African American girls believed that (a) better channels of communication with SROs would improve the students' sense of safety and that (b) SROs should try to build a relationship with girls of color to establish comfort and safety. However, Ryan et al. (2018) found a lack of specificity/clarity in the roles of SROs. The current study helps provide some specificity/clarity, finding that Black female students see SROs' roles as provision of services (i.e., security), exhibition of fairness and kindness, and maintenance of communicative channels.

Providing Services

While participants in this study did identify and define SROs' roles, participants also reported inconsistencies in the way SROs performed these roles when dealing with students of different genders and races. As a result, Black female students sometimes felt a heightened sense of security; at other times, interactions with SROs evoked feelings of vulnerability and unfairness. These findings are consistent with those from previous research (Persio, 2017; Ralph, 2018). P4 stated, "They're supposed to be maintaining the standards of discipline. They should also be fair with justice and should not be like favoring one side." Participants reported SROs speaking harshly and intimidating them but not manifesting those same behaviors when interacting with girls of different races. These findings align with those from previous studies (Bucknor, 2015; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Epstein et al., 2017; Inniss-Thompson, 2017; Morris et al., 2017; Morris & Perry, 2017; Smith & Harper, 2015). Racial tension can present in the school system when disciplinary practices are disproportionate (Smith & Harper, 2015). Therefore, SROs' inconsistent behavior across genders and races needs to be addressed.

Exhibiting Fairness and Kindness

Some participants in this study felt that SROs' display of fairness and kindness was race-based. P4 said, "I feel like they should not be so biased in situations and be able to interpret and handle the situations the proper way and regardless of the race and gender of anyone." P2 stated, "you'll see them talkin' and smilin' with other races and then with us, they were just strict and just firm." Previous studies indicated that Black female students who have negative interactions with SROs may display aggressive behavior

(Howard, 2017; Lindsey, 2018; Rhor, 2019). In this study, the interaction with SROs did not reveal displays of aggression among Black females; instead, reports of aggression among SROs were reported by Black female students. On the other hand, participants also noted that, at sporting events, SROs would take the time to say “hi,” be friendly, and ask about their day; this made the Black female students feel safe, liked, and cared for by the SROs. The disparate apportionment of SROs’ fairness and kindness needs to be addressed to establish a consistent feeling of safety across students of all genders and races.

Maintaining Communication

Participants discussed what constitutes effective communication between SROs and Black female students in the school environment. P3 stated, “Communication is the key thing. So that the SROs are not too harsh on the Black, on the Black girls or Black boys, hence leading to more resistance. So it just communicates.” Participants stated that they want (a) SROs to communicate with them as individuals and not simply as members of a particular race and (b) dialogue that establishes and reinforces the importance of having SROs in the school building. The U. S. Department of Education (2015) has established that there is no consistent, nationwide training program for SROs. Morris et al. (2017) found that SROs self-report a lack of skill in communicating and interacting with Black female students in particular, a finding corroborated by participants in this study. Therefore, if SROs receive more training in communicating with Black female students, interactions may become more positive, and the students may develop feelings of security and belonging.

As do previous studies, findings from this study suggest that SROs' disciplinary practices disproportionately target Black female students and other girls of color (Bottiani, 2017; Lynch et al., 2016; Wun, 2016). In Georgia, specifically, Black female students are more likely to be suspended for subjectively punishable behavior (Smith & Harper, 2015), an outcome that has an adverse effect on academic achievement (Ryan & Goodram, 2013). Some participants in this study thought that discipline or suspension helped them reflect on their own actions and positively change their behavior. P1 stated,

I think this policy is very effective...if you do a crime, you will feel like you would be expelled from school. The student will be obliged to observe the school's rules, and this will actually improve the student's behavior because no one want to be expelled, no one wants to be suspended. So, to improve generally the school performance, the school students' behavior and people will be more disciplined.

On the other hand, some participants thought the disciplinary actions of SROs affected them negatively (Anyon et al., 2016; Bottiani et al., 2017; Morris et al., 2017). Harsh punishment and the intimidation of being investigated made a few participants generally afraid of SROs and adult figures after high school. Some participants shared that their behavior and their experiences with SROs affected them academically because they would be thinking about the outcome during class instruction and lose focus on their studies. This aligns with findings from previous studies that academics and social skills are affected by interactions between Black female students and SROs.

Inequity

The results of this study do indicate that there are inequities in the school system. The participants reported from personal experiences and observation the unfair disciplinary treatment of Black female students by SROs. This unequal treatment led to concerns about racial tension/social disorder and prompted unsafe feelings, which aligns with findings from previous research (Lacoe, 2015). For instance, P4 said,

The SROs treated Black girls more strict and like they were already criminals. I think they have that kind of like they love more the White girls compared to the Black girls. I, they have the preference. So, in the way they will treat us and the way they will treat them is kind of different. So, in terms of the punishment or in terms of threatening, they will not face so many like penalties. But for the Black girls it was quite strict. They already treated you like a criminal.

Study findings of unequal treatment of Black and White girls by SROs—and concomitant perceptions of racial tension, social disorder, and unsafety—is a condition to be addressed.

Lack of Reciprocation Between SROs and Students

This study reveals how Black female students think the ZTPs affect SROs' interactions with them in the school setting. Study results show that participants think ZTPs improve student behavior, school climate, and school safety; participants do not think ZTPs necessarily target one race or gender. However, participants indicated that SROs leverage ZTPs to administer unfair treatment. One interview item (i.e., Please explain how you think the ZTP affects SROs interaction with Black female students in

the school setting) prompted students to reflect on how ZTP influenced the behavior of SROs, decoupling the overarching policy from the individuals charged with implementing it. Study participants reported a mixed bag of impressions of ZTP—some positive and some negative, which aligns in part with the findings from previous research (Ryan & Goodram, 2013). While P1 thought ZTP “destroyed her school career,” she thought the policy inculcated social skills, which caused her to become more disciplined in her studies and improved her behavior. Similarly, P4 reported that her ZTP-driven experiences with SROs had a negative effect on her academics, but the overall policy, with the support of her family, improved her social skills and behavior.

Improvement of Self-Reflection Actions

Study findings pursuant to an interview sub question (i.e., What do you think causes SROs interactions to be negative or positive with Black females?) revealed participant self-reflection that again distinguished between ZTPs and SROs. Participants understood that policies and procedures keep the school safe and establish order; in other words, the purpose of ZTPs is to promote good behavior and improve student–SRO interaction. However, on a personal rather than policy level, participants felt that racism and negative interaction exist between SROs and Blacks. P2 said, “There should be a level of professionalism design to help SROs know how to interact with students based on the scenario that is going on and not based on interactions and discipline practices on race.” Study findings indicate again that ZTPs prepares students for the outside environment, but that SROs need to learn to implement ZTPs in an unbiased way.

Theoretical Framework

Labeling Theory

Labeling theory explains how labels associated with certain ethnicities/contexts come to be regarded as deviant (Becker, 1963; Lemer, 1972). This study demonstrated how one can label another person and how the labeling affects that person. Findings from this study show preexisting labels can lead SROs to treat certain groups as deviant and, in turn, how the treatment can yield behavior that provides a post hoc justification for that label. Study findings further show that labeling affects students' sense of self-identity, educational performance, interaction with peers, and potential for criminal activity, congruent with findings from previous research (Rocheleau & Chavex, 2015). P1 stated, "Like in class the way there are cliques, the naughty cliques. So, I was one of the one of the members of such groups. So, we would engage in substance abuse." This participant demonstrated how being labeled could help manifest a deviant outcome. Participants' responses point up that SRO interaction with Black female students—interaction informed by preexisting labels associated with Black females—does make Black female students feel unsafe, leading to social and academic problems. This finding aligns with findings from previous research (Anyon et al., 2016; Bottiani et al., 2017; Morris et al., 2017). Study findings also show that self-reflection can lead individuals to try to slough off the label, as evidenced by self-isolation from other members of the social group bearing that label. This, too, aligns with findings from previous studies (Haynes, 2010). P6 stated,

I shied away, I didn't want to be involved in any crime because I feared, like, in the worst case neither if I'm involved to, in- in a bad crime and, um because of my race, then I might get very heavy consequences. So I chose to, like, be distant.

P6's responses further reveal the impact of labeling in the school environment:

The Black girls in the class were known as the rowdy ones because they don't keep quiet. They always like talking. So they would get, like victimized. I felt like the Black girls were taken as the ring leaders, also there were others, a large number of White girls also on the team. So, most of this victimization was mainly on the Black girls, just because they were talkative, and they were rowdy. So this made them automatically be treated like criminals. It, it felt even like the SROs were saying that the Black girls are bad influence on the, some of the White girls. I don't know why there was that innocent nature of the White, I don't know. Then there's the Black who are now rowdy, they are taking us as main suspects in everything.

Study findings show how Black female students are labeled, how those labels dictate treatment, and how that treatment influences behavior.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Theory

Study findings also show the relevance of self-fulfilling prophecy theory (Merton, 1968). Participants reported insecurity regarding their place in the school system, based in part on a preexisting perception that their interactions with SROs would be dictated by SROs' personal ideologies/beliefs/morals. These findings align with those from previous studies (Crenshaw et al., 2015). P7 said, "It made me think, like, okay, what am I doing

wrong or differently to make them engage in a conversation with them rather than engaging with me.” Per self-fulfilling prophecy, self-consciousness/self-scrutiny manifested by one party in an interaction—necessitated by the idea that the other party in the interaction bears entrenched, negative predispositions—leads to mutual awkwardness, causing the second party to treat the first party in an uncomfortable manner and ramping up the insecurity level of the first party. This dynamic typifies in-school interactions between SROs and Black female students and is emblematic of self-fulfilling prophecy theory. Study participants stated that they believe SROs expect them to act and react in certain ways, so the participants acted or reacted in those ways. According to P6,

Possibly, it just depends on those who are in the SROs position and also the, how, how the Black girls are also conducting themselves. Black students will give the SROs a hard time and it will be a lot of resistance, you know? So, this resistance causes a sort of, a tussle from time to time, which never ends.

How Black female students think how SROs will react to them supports self-fulfilling prophecy theory such that expectations or beliefs about an individual cause the holder of those expectations/beliefs to behave in ways that elicit an expected outcome.

Limitations of the Study

Characteristic of qualitative research, one limitation of this study was the sample size ($N = 7$). The small sample size may not provide a true reflection of all Black female students' experiences with SROs in school settings in Georgia, which may limit the validity of the study findings. The information obtained reflects solely the participants' perspective and does not include perspectives from other people involved in the

encounters. A triangulation approach (i.e., interviewing SROs, teachers, and other students) may have enhanced the validity of this study by taking into consideration different perspectives. Another limitation of this study is that the interviews were conducted via Zoom, and the participants had an option to have their camera on or off. Participants opted to have their cameras off during the interviewing process to protect their identities. Therefore, the accuracy of the information provided in the signed consent form (e.g., age, race, gender) cannot be verified.

Recommendations

Other US states (i.e., besides Georgia) report disciplinary practices that disproportionately target Black female students (Smith & Harper, 2015). Therefore, studies examining the real and perceived interactions between Black female students and SROs are needed in other states. Furthermore, although this study focused on Black female students, future research may center on other non-White populations (e.g., Hispanic). Findings from this study indicated that training and policies need to be established in schools and police divisions that use officers as SROs. Such training would focus on how to interact with Black female students to make them feel safe in the school environment. Focus studies, town hall meetings, and individual meetings with parents, students, and adult authorities are recommended so parents and Black female students can address what they hear, see, and experience with SROs, thereby allowing Black female students both to feel safe and to thrive.

Implications for Positive Social Change

This study promotes positive social change by providing insights into experiences with SROs in the Georgia school system, where disciplinary practices disproportionately target Black female students (Lindsey, 2018; Smith & Harper, 2015). Findings from this study address Black female students' experiences and interactions with SROs in the school system and how the experiences/interactions affect them socially and academically. These insights can inform policies designed to train SROs in effective communication and interaction with Black female students should be implemented. When schools address cultural awareness/diversity and apply communication/interaction strategies, disproportionate disciplinary practices may decrease and self-worth levels reported by Black female students may increase, which may improve social and academic skills. Findings from this study will create communication and dialogue among all relevant stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, principals, and SROs) to increase Black female students' (a) feelings of safety, (b) social skills, and (c) academic performance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this basic qualitative study explored Black female students' interactions with SROs in the Georgia school system by giving students an opportunity to share their experiences and perceptions. The school system should be a safe haven for all students; no student should feel unsafe or be treated unfairly by any adult authority in school. Soliciting the feelings and perceptions of students about in-school interactions with adult authorities can help craft policies and training programs. Training programs can inculcate ways that SROs and adult authority figures can communicate with and care

for all girls of color, contributing to successful individual members in our future society. Development of successful individuals requires an understanding of how labeling theory and self-fulfilling prophecy theory function.

Self-fulfilling prophecy can launch either a positive or negative cascade effect: the negative spiral may result in ever-worsening behavior, mutual disrespect, and shows of defiance between Black female students and SROs; in contrast, the positive feedback loop may enhance ever-more-positive interactions and communication events between Black female students and SROs. Findings from this study suggest that if SROs continue to label and stereotype Black female students, then the SROs will treat Black female students uniformly as reprobates, and Black female students will manifest reprobate-like behavior. If Black female students label SROs or stereotype SROs as biased against them, the students may reflexively act aggressively toward SROs, causing Black females to continue (a) receiving disproportionately harsh disciplinary measures (i.e., suspension, expulsion) and (b) feeling unsafe in school (Lindsey, 2018; Morris et al., 2017). On the other hand, if Black female students have positive, non-stereotyped interactions with SROs, the former may feel safer in school, and there would be a diminished perception by the latter of a need for disproportionate punishment. In sum, if the negative self-fulfilling prophecy cycle can be broken, then a positive self-fulfilling prophecy cycle can replace it (Merton, 1968).

To break the negative cycle and catalyze the positive one, we must understand Black female students' beliefs, ideas, stereotypes, and perspectives related to SROs (and vice-versa). Questioning any belief or behavioral norm allows for the introduction of

different assumptions. When we begin to understand and change beliefs and behaviors, then self-fulfilling prophecy and labeling can work as a scaffold, helping us better respond and react to each other, and fostering respect and love.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study about Black females' experiences and perspectives with School Resource Officers (SROs) in the Public School System in the State of Georgia. The researcher is inviting Black females between 18-22 who have interacted with SROs to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Kimberly Redding, who is a Ph.D. Candidate at Walden University.

Background Information:

This study aims to understand Black females' experiences and perspectives with School Resource Officers in the Public School System in Georgia. Recruitment of 7 to 10 participants will be needed to interview in this study.

Procedures:

This study involves the following steps:

Interviewing Participants for 45 - 60 minutes, which will be audio recorded.

After the interview, I will email a copy of your answers to the questions to ensure I recorded your answers accurately.

It will take you approximately 30-60 minutes to review your answers to the questions. Please, email or text me to confirm the accuracy or to make any needed changes. The email will be listed at the bottom of this consent form.

Here are some sample questions that will be used in the interview: "Please tell me about your first experience with school resource officers." How do you feel about SROs being in the school system?"

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time without penalty. The interviewing process will be conducted by Zoom, Skype, or Phone. The interview will be audio recorded.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Participation in this study could involve some risk of the minor discomforts ordinarily experienced in daily life. With the protections in place, this study will pose minimal risk to your wellbeing.

Please contact Georgia Crisis and Access Line 1-800-715-4225 OR Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline 1-800-662-HELP (4357) if you encounter any minimal risk to your wellbeing.

This study offers no direct benefits to individual volunteers. The aim of this study is to provide insights into students' experience with school resource officers.

Payment:

As a thank you for participating in the study, each participant will receive a \$10.00 Visa gift card for her efforts, including participants who withdraw from the study before completion.

Privacy:

The researcher is required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential, within the limits of the law. The researcher who is a mandated reporter due to the professional oaths that were taken as an educator, must report any possible instances of abuse to the authorities.

Your identity will be kept confidential. I am permitted to share your identity or contact information only as needed with Walden University supervisors (who are also required to protect your privacy). I will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project; your name or anything else that could identify you will not be included in the study reports. If I were to share this data with another researcher in the future, I would be required to remove all names and identifying details before sharing. Data will be kept secure by data security measures, including password protection, data encryption, use of codes in place of names, and pseudonyms (false names) to protect your identity separately from the data, discarding names (when possible). Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university. After that, the data will be destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:

If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 03-29-21-0761433 and it expires on March 28, 2022.

You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask me or Walden University for a copy at any time using the contact information above.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by replying to this email or text photo of this consent form . If you prefer to mail this consent form, I will send via postal service a self-address stamp envelop to return before you can begin participating in the study.

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

Research study: Seeking Black females 18–22 to discuss their experiences and interactions with school resource officers in GA public high school system

I am Kimberly Redding, a Ph.D. candidate at Walden University. If you have interacted with school resource officers in the high school setting, I would love to hear about your experience. For this study, you are invited to participate in an interview to talk about your experience

About the study:

- One 45–60-minute interviewing session that will be audio recorded.
- 7 to 10 participants are needed to conduct an interview.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- 18 to 22 years old
- Attended a Public High School setting in Georgia
- Have had experiences and interactions with SROs in the school setting

To confidentially volunteer text

404-895-****

Appendix C: Questionnaire

RQ1—Qualitative: What are black female students' perceptions of SROs in the school environment?

RQ2—Qualitative: How do black female students make meaning of their interactions with SROs in the school environment?

Questions	Prompts
1. Please tell me about your first experiences you had with SROs.	a. Describe how you felt when you first had your experience with SROs. b. Describe any other time you have had to interact with SROs. c. Explain the difference between your first experience and any subsequent encounters you have had with SROs.
2. Please describe the interactions you have seen between SROs and other girls of the opposite race that you have observed in the school setting?	a. Explain how it made you feel to observe SROs interactions with other girls compared to your interaction with SROs. b. What do you think are some factors that inform SROs' interactions with Black females as compared to other girls in the school system?
3. How do you feel about SROs being in the school system?	
4. Please explain how you think the Zero Tolerance Policy affects SROs' interactions with black females in the school setting.	a. What do you think causes SROs interactions to be negative or positive with black females?
5. How have the experiences with SROs affected your academics?	a. Please describe a situation or a time when your experiences with SROS affected your academics.
6. How have the experiences with SROs affected your social skills with an authority figure in the school setting?	
7. Can you provide any ideas, examples, or suggestions for SROs to improve their relationships with black females in the school setting?	