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Parents Perceptions of the Impact of School Suspension on Black Boys

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Parents Perceptions of the Impact of School Suspension on Black Boys

by

Christopher Kemp

MA, Liberty University, 2014

BS, Georgia College and State University, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

May 2024

Abstract

Due to the unintended impacts of out-of-school suspension that may occur to Black boys in middle school, all stakeholders, specifically school counselors, must fully comprehend how this type of discipline affects this population to better support them with best practices. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how out-of-school suspension impacts middle school Black boys' social and psychological well-being. The research population was individuals who met the following criteria for the study: (a) self-identify as Black, (b) have a son in middle school (grade 6-8), and (c) have a son who has been suspended from school at least one time. The study was centered around the research question: What are the lived experiences of parents of Black middle school boys and the social and psychological impact of school suspension. A hermeneutic design was used, incorporating interpretive phenomenological analysis as well as critical race theory as the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, respectively. Through data analysis, four primary themes emerged: (a) perceived emotional turmoil, (b) unjust feelings of suspension, (c) dreadful beliefs about return, and (d) singled out as a Black boy. The outcomes of this research hold promise for positive social change by contributing data to existing research, addressing the information gap concerning Black boys and the often overlooked impact of out-of-school suspension on them. Additionally, these results can inform school counselors and other stakeholders engaging with this demographic to adopt approaches and tools grounded in best practices for assisting Black boys reintegrating post suspension.

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Dedication

First, I would like to give honor and thanks to God, who has been my source of

strength throughout this journey. I dedicate this dissertation to the incredible and

supportive individuals in my life, including family, friends, co-workers, as well as past

teachers and coaches.

To my children, Brooklyn and Jaden, I express gratitude for bestowing upon me

the most wonderful title in the world, parent. Your presence has been a source of strength

that propelled me to continue through challenges and complete this journey. To my

husband RaShaun, a heartfelt thank you for your unwavering support and having my back

throughout this endeavor. I acknowledge the sacrifices that spouses make during such

journeys, and your resilience has been commendable.

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embarked on, serving as my greatest cheerleaders. Your unwavering love and support

carried me through challenging moments on this journey. To my nephews, Ayden and

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appreciated.

To my Grandma Clara, your spiritual presence accompanied me throughout this

journey. Witnessing Cardinals outside my window as I wrote most mornings, I felt your

gentle reminder of your support and pride in me.

Last but certainly not least, to all the Black boys who have experienced

suspension, you are acknowledged, your voices are heard, and your worth is recognized!

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Together, your mentorship and support have played a pivotal role in this academic endeavor, and I am truly grateful for the guidance you two have provided on this scholarly journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction of Study

School discipline has been a persistent and much discussed problem over the past few years in education (Nasir, 2019). Although the primary goal of suspension is to ensure offenses do not occur again, Black boys are over-targeted more than their White or other peers (Maxime, 2018; Moore, 2016; Skiba, 2016). Suspension is often used subjectively for minor, harmless offenses and disproportionately targets Black students, especially Black boys (Morrison & D'Incau, 2017). This time away from school directly impacts dropout rates, lower grades, and lower graduation rates (Skiba, 2016; Toldson, 2011).

There is a lack of literature that explores how suspension influences Black boys with regard to their mental, social, and emotional well-being, and limited research is on Black parents' perception of how suspension has impacted their son's social and psychological health and well-being. Parental input and involvement are crucial to understanding the whole child's social, emotional, and psychological wellness (Anderson & Ritter, 2018). This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Black parents whose sons have been suspended from school. These parents' voices could offer insight to support this population when they return to school by exposing and combatting the potentially unintended psychological consequences that may occur after their son has been suspended. Furthermore, parent testimonies could help school counselors better understand and assist Black boys in the education environment by providing insight into the support this population may need after being suspended from school. This study has

many potential social implications in supporting Black boys in the education sector. This study can inform best practices that include parents working closely with school counselors, teachers, administrators, and policymakers to advocate for Black boys, specifically regarding discipline. From this study, stakeholders could see how impactful parents' voices are and the information they can share about their son's psychological, social, and emotional well-being. This could support a culture where parents are invited to collaborate to focus on how discipline fully impacts Black boys. This study could also impact how Black boys see themselves in the education sector and notice the team of support they must help them become successful Black men.

This chapter presents background information that summarizes current literature related to this topic's scope. A statement of the problem that describes the need for this study and offers evidence that the problem presented is current and relevant is provided. The purpose of the study, research question, theoretical framework, nature of the study, definitions of terms used throughout the study, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations are also discussed. The chapter concludes with the significance of the study, which elaborates on what the problem truly addresses.

Background

School discipline is one of the many ways to ensure students are under control. But for three decades, Black males have been met with harsher punitive measures than other racial and ethnic groups (Shirley & Cornell, 2017). Research studies imply an overrepresentation of Black students, especially Black males, in the population of

students suspended and expelled from school because of current zero-tolerance policies (Cholewa et al., 2018; Curran, 2019; Maxime, 2018; Moore et al., 2016), which may feed into the school-to-prison pipeline (Kim et al., 2016; Toldson, 2020). This population has a disproportionate number of special education referrals, excessively high suspension and expulsion rates, and low achievement levels (Kunjufu, 2017; Morrison & D'Incau, 2017; Skiba, 2016). Many studies that focus on Black boys have concluded that disciplinary actions, such as suspension, has no positive impact and is seen as being punitive (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2017; Clements & Grenyer, 2017; Moore et al., 2016).

Black males in particular appear to be overrepresented in out-of-school suspension (Kunjufu, 2017). OSS is described as removing a student from the school setting for a period not exceeding 10 days (Insley, 2018; Gregory et al., 2017). OSS has a negative outcome on student success for students suspended for any violation, including non-violent or classroom disorder violations (Gregory et al., 2017). Loss of learning and sinking grades are direct consequences when it comes to OSS (Gregory et al., 2017; Morrison & D'Incau, 2017). Students lose beneficial instruction and learning time whenever they are removed out of the classroom, and some schools have a no-makeup policy for work missed because of suspension. (Gregory et al., 2017). This time adds up quickly, and as a result, grades tend to decrease at dramatic rates (Moore et al., 2016). During the 2017-2018 school year, public children lost closely 18 million days of instructions due to methods of suspension and expulsion (Losen et al., 2019). OSS thus causes an increase in the achievement gap among Black males, with low pass rates on

class and states assessments, which has an overall impact on graduation rate (Skiba, 2016). Dropout rates are significantly increased by three to four times when a Black boy is suspended from school (Skiba, 2016).

The impacts of suspending a student have only been examined by looking at grades, graduation rates, and dropout rates. Outside of affecting these boys academically, little to no literature explores how suspension impacts Black boys emotionally, socially, and psychologically. These aspects should be explored due to their potential harm and the long-term negative impact they could have on this population. Further, there are some studies that do provide insight into Black parents' perception of school discipline, but there is limited scholarship that exists on how Black parents perceive out-of-school suspension and how it has impacted their son. Findings indicated that Black single mothers have a negative opinion and experiences when it comes to out-of-school suspension (Mowen, 2017). But a platform has not been established or created for their voices to be heard on how suspending their sons from school may have impacted them inside and outside the education environment. Also, research has suggested that Black parents feel a disconnect with schools, especially when collaborating on academic and discipline policies and procedures (Insley, 2018; Toldson, 2020).

This study is essential to the profession of counseling because it may arm counselors, specifically school counselors, with a better understanding of the unique needs of this seemingly targeted population after they have been suspended and returned to school. This study is also important because it may illuminate the need to build a

partnership with this population's parents. Shining light on school discipline policies, such as suspension, that could negatively affect Black boys is essential. It is necessary to be aware of how current discipline policies are perceived to impact their overall well-being (Toldson, 2020).

Problem Statement

Black boys are disproportionately suspended from school at higher rates, three times the rate of White students (Skiba, 2016). These higher suspension rates correlate with a wider achievement gap, lower grades, lower graduation rates, and higher drop-out rates among Black boys (James, 2019; Skiba, 2016). As a method of school discipline, suspension is believed to have no positive or effective end goal (Toldson, 2020). Though the literature describes the negative impact of suspension on Black boys' academic achievement (Moore et al., 2016; Skiba, 2016; Toldson, 2020), what is not well understood is the impact suspension has on Black boys beyond academic achievement, specifically on their social, emotional, and psychological well-being.

Further, a body of research solidly supports the relationship between parental involvement and student academic success (Marucucci, 2019). It is important and the responsibility of parents to support their student's academic achievement and development of social and emotional skills to prepare them to interact with society on a global scale (Anderson & Ritter, 2018). However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the negative impact of out-of-school suspension on this population from their parent's perspective. This could result in school counselors not fully understanding how

this type of discipline impacts parent's Black boys. A better understanding could provide school counselors with different approaches and tools grounded in best practices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how OSS impacts middle school Black boys' social and psychological well-being. Specifically, I explored this study from a parents' perspective because it could offer new insight into the unseen impact suspension has on Black boys outside of academics. This study gave Black parents whose sons have been suspended from school an opportunity to speak on their experiences of how suspension has impacted their sons' social and psychological well-being. While this study could add to the literature on Black boys and the impact of suspension, it could also be used as a resource for policymakers around rules about out-of-school suspension. Black boys, their parents, counselors, teachers, administrators, and school policymakers could all benefit from the findings of this study. An increased understanding of suspension and its impact on Black boys could help ensure that stakeholders who interact with this population understand how Black boys are affected. As counselor educators teach, supervise, and prepare future counselors, they could specifically target school counselors and use this study to provide examples of best practices. Information from this study could help school counselors-in-training ensure that there are systems put into place at the school level to support this population once they reenter following suspension. Also, after suspension, school counselors can ensure they are assessed psychologically, emotionally, and socially.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of parents of Black middle school boys and the social and psychological impact of school suspension?

Frameworks

The philosophy of phenomenology was the conceptual framework and critical race theory (CRT) is the theoretical framework for this study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study is phenomenology. The discipline of phenomenology is defined as the study of structures of experiences or consciousness (Belvedere, 2020), which is based on Edmund Husserl's philosophy of the essence of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view (Robinson & Kerr, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Husserl's approach is used to take the intuitive experience of phenomena as its starting point and extract from it the essential features of experiences and the essence of what we experience. Husserl's protégé, Heidegger, modified Husserl's conception of phenomenology because of what Heidegger perceived as Husserl's subjectivist tendencies. Where Husserl conceived humans as having been constituted by states of consciousness, Heidegger countered that consciousness is peripheral to the primacy of one's existence that is known as the mode of being Dasein, which cannot be reduced to one's consciousness of it (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger offered a way to conceptualize experience that could accommodate those aspects of one's existence that lie on the periphery of sentient awareness.

Suggesting that phenomenology concerns an origin much more profound than consciousness, the transcendental ego, and its eidetic structures, Heidegger's philosophy was used to establish the hermeneutic research design to explore a phenomenon by investigation of firsthand experiences and analysis of the phenomenon using the hermeneutic circle to provide interpretation (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Heidegger, 1962). The hermeneutic cycle is a method of interpreting and making clear what the experiences are in being in the world, making it possible to develop an understanding of everyday experiences (Bell, 2020). Hermeneutics is seen as a theory of interpretation and an interpretive process that brings knowing and discovery of phenomena through language (Demathews, 2018). This philosophy can be applied to the methodology, allowing participants to tell of their experiences and for researchers to analyze their textual accounts (Bell, 2020). Phenomenology was one of the first philosophical resources CRT began to use to explore racial effects on experiences, subjectivity, and social relations (Ngo, 2017; Yancy, 2008). To understand the study population's experiences, I used phenomenology as the underpinning of this study's research design, coupled with CRT, which was used to analyze data through this theoretical lens that spotlights racial inequities.

Theoretical Framework

CRT is a framework to help people understand why racial inequities exist in society and how people can eradicate them (Ladson-Billings, 2018). CRT is used to examine society from a critical perspective to bring social change and justice for

marginalized groups (Robinson et al., 2018), specifically through the incidence of counter-storytelling and interest convergence. Interest convergence is the idea that operational decisions are often made, intentionally or unintentionally, in the best interest of dominant groups. Although CRT began as a movement in the law, it rapidly spread beyond that discipline. Today, many in the field of education consider themselves critical race theorists who use the ideas proposed by CRT to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing (Anyon et al., 2018). Aligning with this study, critical race theorists have argued that minority students in public school settings are not as prepared, supported, or offered the same opportunities as those students identifying as White (Douglas & Peck, 2017).

Applying CRT's concept of interest convergence to public education in the United States, White educational leaders and decision-makers often make decisions that primarily benefit White students as the beneficiaries of quality education and resources to ensure academic excellence and college preparation (Tripses & Scroggs, 2019). CRT explains that while these decisions may be intentional or unintentional, students of minority races are affected by and must comply with decisions made by district leaders, even if the decisions are inequitable (Dixson et al., 2018). Interest convergence suggests that possible improvement strategies such as rebuilding communities and encouraging community participation in schools are more likely to evolve if enhanced ethnic representation at the district level emerges (Ladson-Billings, 2018). Therefore, CRT is

the lens through which I analyzed the data.

Nature of Study

To address the research question in this qualitative study, the specific research design included a hermeneutic design in which I used an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to gather data by interviewing parents who have directly experienced their son being suspended. IPA is a tradition that is "participant-oriented" and is more concerned with the "human lived experience and suggests that experience can be understood through an examination of the meanings which people impress up it (Smith et al., 2009, p. 34). The importance of IPA, as a qualitative research approach for analysis, is its ability to be used to examine and interpret the lived experiences of research participants (Smith et al., 2009). IPA requires methodologically capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon in how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk it out with others (James, 2019). In IPA, researchers explore experiences in their own terms, rather than trying to "fix experiences in predefined or overly abstract categories" (Smith et al., 2022, p. 217). Using a hermeneutic design helped with interpretation because it can be used as an interpretive process that brings knowing and discovery of phenomena through language (Demathews, 2018). Interpretive phenomenology has been described as a bottom-up approach in that it is used to work from the data up, keeping it participant-centered (James, 2019).

This approach was also appropriate for my study because I interviewed parents to

gather data. Using this approach, researchers gather detailed descriptions from the participants, by way of interviews, and try to gain an understanding of the emotions associated with the experience and how the person relates to it, makes sense of it, and understands it (Goldstein, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). During the interviews, parents described their experiences from their perspective of how suspension impacted their son. The main objective of interpretive phenomenology is to get as close as possible to the lived experience of participants so that the researcher can examine it in detail (Pyne, 2018). Broadly, the research was aimed to gain insight into what it is like to have an experience from the point of view of the person having the experience (James, 2019; Smith et al., 2009). Due to a lack of literature on this topic and population, IPA helped uncover real experiences with Black boys.

Participants were Black parents who live in a local district, whose son was currently in middle school and had been suspended from middle school at least once. Parents could be married or single as long as their son had been suspended from middle school at least once. Parents whose son fits this description was contacted via email about this study and could participate or decline. Parents who accepted the invitation had to agree to participate in the interview process and be open to talking about their son's suspension and their perception of how it impacted them. The data collected included the responses from parents' interview questions regarding how OSS has impacted their son's emotional, social, and psychological well-being.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, I defined the following terms to provide the reader with an understanding of the context of each term of this research study.

Black males: Children born male who may be able to trace their lineage to an African racial group. This term can be interchangeable with the term African American for the purpose of this study (Anderson & Ritter, 2018).

Critical race theory (CRT): An academic discipline focused on critically examining society and culture, through intersection of race, law, and power (Alexander, 2017).

Out-of-school suspension (OSS): The temporary denial of a student's attendance at school for a specific period for gross misconduct or for neglect or refusal to conform to announce, posted, or printed school rules or policies (Gibson et al., 2018).

School-to-prison pipeline: The "school-to-prison pipeline" refers to the policies and practices that push students out of schools and into juvenile and criminal justice systems (Kim et al., 2019).

Zero tolerance: Zero tolerance refers to school or district-wide discipline policies that mandate predetermined, often harsh punishments (such as suspension and expulsion) for a wide range of school policy violations that go beyond weapons, drugs, and violence (Noguera, 2018; Skiba & Peterson, 2020).

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made for the purposes of this research study. One of the

assumptions was that when OSS is used as a method of discipline, Black boys are impacted in other ways, besides academically (Gibson et al., 2016; Moore, 2016; Shirley & Cornell, 2017; Skiba, 2020). Another assumption was that parents better understand what impacts their sons' emotional, social, and psychological well-being because they spend time with them outside of school (Anderson & Ritter, 2018; Davis, 2017). The third assumption was that the participants met the eligibility criteria and answered the questions honestly.

Scope and Delimitations

I limited this research to Black parents whose son had been suspended from middle school and who were willing to speak on their perceptions of the impact they witnessed as a parent. The justification for choosing this demographic was due to the overwhelming data that supports that this population, within the school sector, is targeted for OSS (Skiba, 2020). Research has also suggested that Black parents feel a disconnect with schools, especially when it comes to collaborating about academic and discipline policies and procedures (Insley, 2018; Toldson, 2020). Thus, this study was delimited only to parents with a Black son in middle school who has been suspended. These parents had knowledge of the impact OSS has on their children. Another delimitation of this study was that the results may not be generalizable to parents with daughters and parents whose sons have never been suspended from school since they were not included in the sample.

Limitations

While it is hoped this study advances understanding of how OSS impacts Black boys from their parents' perspective, there are some limitations. Limitations of this study include the inability to apply the findings of this study to boys in elementary and high school. This study only represents the experiences of Black parents whose sons have been suspended from middle school. Thus, future research with Black parents who have sons in elementary and high school would need to be conducted to confirm or disprove the findings in this study. Another potential limitation is the sample size. Small sample size is one of the many characteristics of qualitative studies, which makes generalizability unlikely. Using purposive sampling as the sampling technique is another limitation. This can distort the results because not everyone has an equal chance of being selected, and it can be difficult to generalize the findings to a larger population because the sample is not randomly selected from all potential participants. The final limitation of this study was that the participants are Black boys' parents, not Black boys themselves. Although parents' perceptions of how OSS impacts their sons can offer great insight, their lens differs significantly from their sons. The findings cannot prove that parents' perceptions are identical to Black boys' perceptions. These limitations were aspects for consideration and caution in future research.

Significance

One of the potential implications of my study is that its findings might inform educational stakeholders who interact with this population on best practices of working

closely with their parents. This potential collaboration could help understand how suspension impacts Black boys, outside of their academics, by focusing on how their parents perceived this type of discipline impacting them psychologically, emotionally, and socially. Parental perspectives are critical; they provide a more in-depth perception of their child because they have known them longer and are around them more, but they have the most influence on their child's development and growth (James, 2019). The outcome and results of this study would be able to add to the existing literature to better understand how suspension impacts Black boys.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretive phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how OSS impacts middle school Black boy's social and psychological well-being from their parents' perception. OSS has gradually become the primary way to respond to problematic student behaviors in school and has been deemed to target Black boys more than their peers (Davis, 2017). This type of discipline impacts this population academically and drives the school-to-prison pipeline that disproportionately affects Black boys (Maxime, 2018). OSS poses threats to this population, whether it be mentally, socially, or psychologically. School counselors are ethically obligated to assess their students' mental, emotional, and psychological well-being. Increasing their knowledge of how OSS may impact Black boys would be one way of doing this. Thus, increasing professional knowledge of the impact of OSS on Black boys contributes to social change and provides insight for school counselors and

counselor educators who work with this population. In Chapter 2, I review the current

literature by covering a range of subtopics on OSS and the impact on Black boys based

on what is known and highlight what is still not known in the literature, supporting the

need for this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Student discipline refers to the methods and measures employed by educational institutions to maintain order, enforce rules, and promote a healthy learning environment. It involves addressing student behavior, managing conflicts, and ensuring students adhere to established codes of conduct and policies (Skiba, 2014). School leaders are responsible for maintaining school safety, ensuring the safety and well-being of students and teachers alike. These leaders also understand that school discipline is crucial for creating a conducive learning environment. While both concepts are accurate, there is a growing concern that the use of exclusion discipline, such as OSS, needs to be addressed (Nasir, 2019).

Throughout the history of school discipline, studies have shown that more severe responses to student behavior have had little to no impact on improving how students behave at school (Mokhele, 2006; Moore & Cooper, 1984; Skiba, 2014; Weingarten, 2015). Exclusionary discipline, coupled with punitive punishments, has too often failed to produce the intended results it set out to accomplish. In the 19th century, with some of the cruelest forms of corporal punishment in schools, there were increased reports on the decline of student behavior and the rise of problematic behavior in the classroom (Weingarten, 2015). More recently, data has shown that expulsions and suspensions have little to no impact, harming relationships between faculty and students and even damaging the overall school climate (Skiba, 2014; Weingarten, 2015).

Over the past decade, student discipline has been a topic of significant discussion

and concern within the educational community, especially regarding Black boys (Moore, 2016; Skiba, 2016; Toldson, 2011). Recently, 24% suspension rate for Black boys was more than 2 times higher than the 11% suspension rate for White boys (Gregory et al., 2021). The growing problem regarding the suspension rates of Black boys in school is a significant issue that has been acknowledged but has not been fully addressed. Research shows that the phenomenon of overly high discipline and suspension rates for Black boys is not new (Arcia, 2007; Fenning & Rose, 2017; Skiba & Williams, 2014). This trend had been consistent for over 40 years (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Some scholars suggest that racially disproportionate rates appeared directly after school desegregation (Skiba & Williams, 2014). This general trend has impacted Black boys in many ways, including higher dropout rates, lower graduation rates, and creating the school-to-prison pipeline. But this problem of Black boys being disproportionately suspended from school has effects seen and unseen (Morrison & D'Incau, 2017). Few studies address the "unseen" effects, such as understanding the emotional, social, and psychological consequences of OSS.

Involving parents in the conversation is also crucial when discussing disciplinary issues and policies (Anderson & Ritter, 2018; Davis, 2017). Stakeholders could collectively address this systemic issue that contributes to the disproportionate suspension rates by engaging parents in dialogue and working together. Parents can help create a cohesive and supportive approach to addressing behavioral issues, which leads to better outcomes for the child's overall development (Hill, 2009). Parents can also provide

personal insight to support their social, emotional, and psychological well-being.

After completing an extensive search on how OSS impacts Black boys' social, emotional, and psychological wellness, I found minimal information on this topic. Furthermore, only a few studies incorporated parents' dialogue and their perspectives, focusing mainly on drop-out and graduation rates. Given that research has shown that Black boys are disproportionately impacted by this type of discipline, it is necessary to know how this affects them in different aspects of their lives (Skiba, 2016). Because school counselors are responsible for supporting their students' mental, emotional, and psychological well-being, this lack of information on how OSS impacts Black boys and limited understanding of best practices to support this population impacts their approach. Without proper research to support the understanding of OSS's social, emotional, and psychological implications, there may be limitations for school counselors seeking to provide proper support for this population. This qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed to better understand how OSS impacts middle school Black boys' social, emotional, and psychological well-being. Specifically, I explored this study from a parents' perspective because it could possibly offer new insight into the unseen impact suspension has on Black boys outside of academics. This study gave Black parents whose sons have been suspended from school an opportunity and a platform to speak on their experiences of how suspension has impacted their sons' social, emotional, and psychological well-being.

In this chapter, I present the literature search strategy I used to locate the literature

associated with this study. Then, I present the theoretical foundation and conceptual framework I used to guide this study. Next, I discuss the literature review that focuses on the "seen" consequences of OSS with this population, such as academic disruption, graduation rates, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Additionally, the literature review spotlights how parents' interactions are critical to the success of their child's academic career and their social, emotional, and psychological wellness.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted multiple searches using Walden University's Thoreau search system to collect literature that pertained to my study. Walden's library was the source of peer-reviewed articles used in the literature review. The databases searched included PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), SAGE Journals, Thoreau multidatabase, PROQUEST, PsychCRITIQUES, Dissertations and Theses at Walden University, eBook Collection (EBSCO Host), and Teacher Reference Center and Education Source database. The following keywords and phrases were used for the literature review: *Black boys, African American boys, Black parents, African American parents, suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion, school discipline, disproportionality of suspensions, perspectives of parents and school discipline, Black parents and school discipline, African American parents and school discipline, school climate, Black parents and school climate, African American and school climate, middle school suspension, zero-tolerance policies, school-to-prison pipeline, Black boy's perspectives on school discipline, African American boys' perspectives on school*

discipline, impacts of suspension, the mental health of middle school Black boys, the

mental health of middle school African American boys, emotional wellness and Black

boys, emotional wellness and African American boys, social wellness and Black boys,

social wellness and African American boys, psychological wellness and *Black boys,*

psychological wellness and African American boys. Using the same keywords and

phrases, I also used Google Scholar to locate articles that may not have been available

through Walden databases and to increase access to current and more diverse content.

The scope of the literature review was within the last 5 years to ensure that the most

recent information was used for this study.

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

Phenomenology

The conceptual framework chosen for this study was hermeneutic

phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach and methodology that

focuses on studying subjective experience and consciousness (Paterson & Higgs, 2005).

This framework can be used to understand the structures, meaning, and essence of human

experiences as they are directly lived and perceived by individuals. Heidegger (1962)

noted that phenomenology offers a unique approach to studying human experiences by

providing rich insights into the subjective dimensions of life. By focusing on the first-

person perspective and exploring the depths of consciousness, phenomenology expands

understanding of the complexities and nuances of human existence (DeMathews, 2018;

Dowling & Cooney, 2012). I used this approach to gain a deeper insight into the unseen

impacts OSS has on middle school Black boys from their parent's perception.

Specifically, I used hermeneutic phenomenology, which combines two philosophical traditions: hermeneutics, which focuses on interpretation and understanding, and phenomenology, which is used to explore the lived experiences of individuals (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Robinson & Kerr, 2015). Hermeneutics allows researchers to explore individuals' lived experiences and gain a deep understanding of their subjective realities (Robinson & Kerr, 2015). It is used to uncover the meanings people attribute to their experiences, feelings, and actions, aiming to capture the richness and complexity of human experiences (DeMathews, 2018). The hermeneutic approach also recognizes that experiences are within specific cultural, social, and historical contexts and seeks to explore the interplay between these contextual factors and individual experiences (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). This approach helps researchers understand how external factors influence subjective experiences. From a practical implication, this approach helps gain a deep understanding of subjective experiences, where researchers can inform interventions, practices, and policies that address the needs and concerns of individuals and communities (DeMathews, 2018). I used this approach because it may help improve the quality of care, enhance empathy and understanding among stakeholders interacting with this population, and contribute to developing more inclusive and person-centered approaches.

The hermeneutic approach steered the analysis part of my study using the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle refers to the idea that understanding any

individual part of a text or any aspect of an object or phenomenon is influenced by our understanding of the whole. Conversely, understanding of the whole is shaped by understanding of the parts (Higgs et al., 2012). By examining the parts about the whole and the whole in relation to the parts, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the context and uncover layers of meaning that may not be immediately apparent (Higgs et al., 2012). The aim of the hermeneutic circle is to achieve a fusion of horizons between the interpreter and the text or object of interpretation (Knotts, 2014), bridging the gap between their own horizon of understanding and the horizon represented by the text or object. This process allows for the emergence of new insights and a deeper appreciation of the subject matter (Knotts, 2014). The hermeneutic circle helped provide a framework for engaging with this phenomenon, enabling a deeper and more nuanced understanding.

Critical Race Theory

CRT was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study. Critics of CRT argue that it is divisive, promotes racial essentialism, and undermines the principles of equality and colorblindness (Howard, 2008; James, 2016). Some critics note that it fosters a victim mentality or perpetuates racial tensions. But it is important to note that discussions surrounding CRT can be complex and multifaceted, with varying interpretations and perspectives. Understanding and implementing CRT can differ among scholars, researchers, educators, and policymakers (Douglas & Peck, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2018).

CRT is a theoretical framework that gained prominence in the field of education

in the 1970s (Ladson-Billings, 2018). At its core, CRT is used to understand and challenge how racism is ingrained in societal structures and institutions, such as education (Douglas & Peck, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2018; Robinson et al., 2018). This theory poses that racism is not merely a product of individual prejudices or biases but is deeply embedded in systems and operates on both an individual and systemic level. It aims to uncover and address how racial inequities and disparities are maintained and reproduced in society.

As the researcher, I looked through the lens of CRT by using two fundamental principles and concepts. The first one was structural and institutional racism. This concept focuses on systemic forms of racism that are embedded within institutions, policies, and practices rather than individual acts of prejudice. The second one was counter-storytelling. This concept focuses on sharing narratives and experiences that challenge dominant narratives and expose the lived realities of marginalized racial groups.

Like the approach of this study, Howard (2008) examined the underachievement and disenfranchisement of African American males in preK-12 schools using CRT as its framework to interrogate their disenfranchisement. Howard used this approach to enable a discourse about race, class, and gender. This lens allowed him to acknowledge the presence and perniciousness of racism, discrimination, and hegemony. CRT also enabled various cultural and racial frames of reference to guide his research questions, influence his methods of collecting and analyzing data, and inform how findings can be interpreted.

In another study similar to the current one, Anyon et al. (2021) used CRT to understand racial discipline gaps across in-school and OSS using data from students and schools in one large district. The researchers used CRT as its lens to suggest that racial disparities in school discipline result from complex and interlocking systemic inequities, such as discipline conduct codes that privilege White norms. From the perspective of CRT, Anyon et al.'s findings illustrated how purportedly race-neutral disciple policies are insufficient tools for reducing or eradicating racial disparities in exclusionary practices.

The research question "What are the lived experiences of parents of Black middle school boys, and the social and psychological impact of school suspension?" relates to CRT in many ways. Both focus on systemic forms of racism embedded within institutions and policies, and both focus on sharing experiences. CRT exposes the lived realities of marginalized racial groups, which is what this study revolves around. Using two of CRT's key principles, I was able to expose the lived realities of Black parents whose sons have been suspended from school, which is an institution that has systemic forms of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2014). Viewing the research through CRT's lens helped not only myself as the researcher but also the reader to understand the racial implication of marginalized populations' lived experiences and perceptions in educational settings (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2014; Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2018).

Summary of Frameworks

While CRT and phenomenology are two distinct frameworks that have been

influential in different fields of study, they share some connections and overlaps (Ngo, 2017). Both CRT and phenomenology emphasize the significance of lived experiences in understanding social phenomena. CRT recognizes the importance of personal narratives and storytelling in exposing the realities of racial oppression, while phenomenology explores how subjective experiences shape one's understanding of the world. Both frameworks highlight the importance of considering diverse perspectives and standpoints. While phenomenology primarily concerns subjective experiences, some phenomenologists have also engaged with broader societal structures. Some phenomenologists analyze how social, cultural, and historical context influences individuals' experiences and shapes their subjective interpretations (Ngo, 2017). This broader analysis resonates with CRT's focus on systemic racism and how social structures perpetuate inequality. The intersections between the two frameworks could provide insights into understanding and addressing issues of race and racism within society (Ngo, 2017; Yancy, 2008).

Literature Review

In this section, I comprehensively reviewed the available literature related to school discipline, Black boys in education, Black boys and suspension, and Black parents' involvement. I used relevant and current sources as they relate to the major themes in my study. I outlined the limitations of the reviewed literature and identified research gaps and weaknesses that justified the need for my proposed study.

History of School Discipline

School discipline refers to educational institutions' policies, rules, and practices to maintain a safe and orderly learning environment and promote positive behavior among students (Skiba et al., 2010). It involves the establishment of clear expectations and boundaries, as well as enforcing consequences for any violations of those expectations. It is important to note that the approaches to school discipline have varied across countries, cultures, and educational philosophies throughout history.

The history of school discipline can be traced back to ancient times when education systems first emerged (McCann, 2017). However, the nature and methods of discipline have evolved significantly over the centuries. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Progressive Education Movement emerged, spearheaded by educational reformers like John Dewey (Jarah et al., 2019). This movement emphasized child-centered approaches and focused on fostering self-discipline and personal growth rather than strict authoritarian discipline. Progressive educators advocated for positive reinforcement, student engagement, and individualized instruction (Welsh & Little, 2018).

During the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, school discipline became a subject of debate and activism. Bradshaw et al. (2010) argued that traditional disciplinary practices disproportionately targeted minority students. In a study on school discipline and Black boys, Hines et al. (2018) examined the overrepresentation of Black boys with and without disabilities, using data from the U.S. Department of Education,

Office of Civil Rights, and Civil Rights Data Collection 2011-2012. Hines et al. (2018)

found that Black males experienced a greater representation in both in-school suspension

(ISS) and out-of-school suspension (OSS). They also indicated that Black boys are

continuously overrepresented in disciplinary punishments regardless of geographic area.

In another study on school suspension, Taylor and Foster (2018) examined the

application of public school suspension by race and sex in an integrated school district.

They also found that Black males were disproportionately suspended in elementary and

secondary schools. These findings are consistent with other research noting that Black

students, particularly Black male students, are disproportionately affected by the various

policies of public schools (Bell, 2016; Dumas, 2016; Strayhorn, 2013). As a result,

efforts were made to promote more equitable and inclusive disciplinary approaches.

However, in recent years, schools have shifted towards restorative justice

practices and alternative disciplinary methods (Welsh & Little, 2018). Restorative justice

aims to repair relationships and address the underlying causes of misbehavior through

mediation and dialogue rather than punitive measures. Other strategies include positive

behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), which focus on rewarding positive behavior

and teaching appropriate social skills (McCann, 2017; Welsh & Little, 2018). Today, the

emphasis is increasingly placed on creating safe and supportive learning environments

that promote students' well-being and academic success (Welsh & Little, 2018).

Types of School Discipline

School discipline refers to the methods and strategies educators and

administrators use to promote appropriate behavior and maintain a positive learning environment. Many types of school discipline are used throughout the world. The common ones I focused on are in-school suspension (ISS) and out-of-school suspension (OSS).

ISS

In-school suspension, commonly called ISS, is a disciplinary measure imposed on students within the school setting (Cholewa et al., 2018). It involves temporarily removing students from their regular classroom and placing them in a designated area or room within the school. Allman and Slate (2011) stated that, unlike OSS, ISS allows students to remain on school premises while serving their disciplinary consequences.

Students are typically expected to complete assigned academic work or alternative activities under supervision during an in-school suspension. They may be required to complete assignments, read assigned material, or participate in other educational tasks provided by the school. In-school suspension aims to allow students to reflect on their behavior, make amends, and learn from their mistakes while maintaining a structured learning environment (Cholewa et al., 2018). It also aims to minimize the disruption caused by the student's behavior to other students and teachers.

Even though ISS was intended to serve as a less severe approach to discipline, researchers such as Cholewa et al. (2018) and Morris and Howard (2003) believed and reported that this type of discipline impacted Black boys more than their peers. In a study on middle school Black boys, Cholewa et al. examined the Black male middle school

experience of boys labeled as either economically disadvantaged or listed as special education students. Cholewa et al. found that Black male students who were economically disadvantaged or listed as special education students were more prone to receive ISS. Cholewa et al. also found that in schools where OSS was replaced with ISS, there was a strong correlation with an elevated dropout rate, which raised even more concerns about the use of ISS. Allman and Slate (2011) reported that ISS might negatively impact students' self-esteem and increase the risk of dropping out. Lastly, the American Institutes for Research released a study showing that both ISS and OSS are ineffective methods for punishing the misbehaviors of students (LiCalsi et al., 2021).

OSS

Out-of-School suspension is a disciplinary action schools may take when students violate school rules or engage in behavior that disrupts the learning environment. During an out-of-school suspension, a student is temporarily excluded from attending school and typically must stay at home or an alternative location for a specific period of time (Cholewa et al., 2018). Allman and Slate (2011) mentioned that school administrators began adopting OSS as a discipline method as early as the 1960s. Although administrators may use this type of discipline to maintain order within the school, Noltemeyer et al. (2015) reported that suspended students are less likely to graduate. Allman and Slate indicated that automatically expelling students from school for violating a school rule promoted poor behavior and encouraged students to become repeat offenders.

Dropout rates, graduation rates, and a sense of belonging have all been identified as consequences associated with OSS (Allman & Slate, 2011; Gregory, 2017). What is even more concerning is that there have been many studies that linked OSS disproportionately impacting Black boys more than their peers (Cholewa et al., 2018; Morris & Howard, 2003; Nichols, 2019). Losen and Skiba (2010) analyzed disciplinary policies and practices in Pennsylvania schools and found that African American students, particularly boys, were disproportionately suspended compared to their White peers. Losen and Martinez explored the national trends in school discipline, focusing on racial disparities, and found that Black boys were more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts. Rumberger and Losen (2016) examined suspension rates among Black males in California and found significant disparities in that more Black males were suspended at higher rates than their White peers. Their research highlighted the negative consequences of suspension, including increased dropout rates and involvement with the criminal justice system. Due to the impacts seen with OSS, many critics are concerned about its overall effectiveness and potential adverse consequences (Cholewa et al., 2018).

Black Boys in Education

Historically, black boys in schools have faced numerous challenges and disparities compared to their counterparts (Carter et al., 2017). Black boys in education have been discussed and researched for many years. Many factors can influence their educational experiences and outcomes. Some of these factors include but are not limited to the achievement gap, stereotyping and bias, and lack of representation. These

challenges can be traced back to the legacy of systemic racism and discrimination that has persisted in education throughout history. Barbarin (2010) mentioned that during the era of racial segregation in the United States, Black students were often forced to attend separate schools with limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate facilities. These conditions severely hindered their educational opportunities. He further expressed how segregation has been an "underlining issue" that has never died in the country and continues to transcend in today's educational buildings.

The achievement gap is another topic commonly paired with Black boys in education. Carey (2019) described the achievement gap as the persistent disparity in educational performance and outcomes between different groups of students. It is often discussed in the context of racial and ethnic differences in academic achievement. A specific area of concern within the achievement gap is the underperformance of Black boys compared to their peers. Carey stated that the achievement gap affecting Black boys is a longstanding education issue. Factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural biases, institutional barriers, and limited access to quality educational resources have been the leading causes of this significant concern. These factors usually create challenging environments for Black boys, which leads to lower academic performance and reduced opportunities for success (Carey, 2019). In a review of studies from the past ten years on the academic achievement gap, Merolla and Jackson (2019) argue that while all of the factors identified in the literature can add insight into how race structures educational achievement, the fundamental cause of the achievement gap is structural racism, a system

of social organization that privileges White Americans and disadvantages Americans of color, specifically Black boys. They also argue that acknowledging structural racism as the fundamental cause of the achievement gap can provide a unifying framework for interpreting findings from studies of specific mechanisms that link race to academic outcomes.

In a recent article addressing the achievement gap, Prager (2021) stated that the statistics are bleak when it comes to Black boys. Nationally, graduation rates for Black males are under 50%. In many large, urban school districts, more than half of Black males drop out of school. Prager's article highlighted the average Black male achievement falls far below that of White and Asian boys. Only 12% of Black fourth-grade boys are proficient in reading, compared to 38% of White boys. Only 12% of Black eighth-grade boys are proficient in math, compared to 44% of White boys. The Educational Testing Service (ETS), which is the world's largest private non-profit educational testing and assessment organization, believes that the achievement gap between Black boys and their peers is the most challenging problem in American public education (Prager, 2021).

The achievement gap across gender is also worth mentioning as it relates to the plight Black males. In the context of black boys versus black girls, there have been studies and discussions about how the achievement gap also manifests differently between the genders within the Black community. Although there is no inherent difference in intellectual capacity between boys and girls of any race or ethnic group,

some studies have shown that Black girls outperform Black boys academically, leading to a gender achievement gap within the Black community (Allen, 2013; 2015; Henry et al., 2020; Webb and Thomas). Data indicates Black boys maintain a greater academic risk than other students even when they are compared to Black girls (Simons et al., 2002). In the school year 2017-2018, the National Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) for public high school students was 85%. Forty-six percent of Black male students earned a standard diploma compared to nearly 60% of Black females. Black females are graduating from high school and college at much higher rates, when compared to Black males who are lagging (Saunders et al., 2014). Barriers such as discipline, school environment, role models and representation, and stereotypes and biases are a few of many factors that play into the achievement gap that exist between Black boys and Black girls.

Stereotypes and biases have been shown to impact Black boys' experiences in schools (Henry & Warren, 2017). Stereotypes and biases in education refer to preconceived notions, generalizations, and prejudices that can impact students and educational settings (Carey, 2019). This issue has disproportionately impacted Black boys, contributing to unequal treatment and limited opportunities (Henry & Warren, 2017). In a study that examined the role of stereotypes in disciplinary disproportionality, Kunesh and Noltemeyer (2015) randomly assigned teachers to read a vignette about a defiant student. Those who read a vignette about a Black student believed that the student was more likely to misbehave in the future compared with those who read a vignette

about a White student. Their findings suggest that some teachers believe the misbehavior of Black male students is simply a common issue with this population, which may lead them to alter their behavior toward these students.

Research, such as Tsai et al. (2016), Acquaviva and Mintz (2010), and Leonardo and Boas (2021), has shown that having teachers who share their racial and cultural background can have a positive impact on students' academic success. The underrepresentation of Black male educators in schools contributes to the lack of positive role models for Black boys (Leonardo & Boas, 2021). Leonardo and Boas believe this impacts their sense of belonging, motivation, and achievement, as well as their feelings of isolation in the educational space. In a study that examined the theoretical arguments and empirical evidence supporting the importance of teacher workforce diversity, Goldhaber et al. (2019) concluded that there are sound academic reasons to believe that Black males would benefit from a more diverse teaching workforce, specifically Black male educators. They also found that these theoretical arguments were primarily backed by empirical evidence suggesting that there are small but meaningful "role model effects" when Black male teachers teach Black boys.

Black Boys and Suspension

Literature on suspensions suggests that students who are suspended more are less likely to graduate, have higher drop-out rates, and are more likely to enter the School-to-Prison pipeline (Nelson, 2020). Nelson describes the School-to-Prison pipeline as a disturbing trend where students, primarily Black boys, are funneled from educational

institutions into the criminal justice system. It describes the various policies, practices, and societal factors contributing to this phenomenon. Skiba and Williams (2014), Bell (2020), Coles and Powell (2019), and Owens and McLanahan (2020) have all conducted studies that indicated that Black boys are disproportionately suspended from school compared to their peers. Research consistently shows that Black boys are suspended at higher rates, and these disparities exist across various grade levels and are evident in both elementary and secondary schools.

The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights snapshot confirms this disproportionality. Their snapshot revealed rates of suspension by race. Whereas Black students represent 16% of the student population, they are suspended at a rate of 32-42%. In comparison to White students, who make up 51% of the student population, and are suspended at similar rates that range from 31-40%. The snapshot also showed gender differences. Per the Civil Rights Data Collection, Black boys are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than their peers. On average, 4.6% of White boys are suspended, compared to 16.4% of Black boys. This disparity has raised questions about racial bias and the potential for systemic discrimination in school discipline practices.

Evidence suggests that racial bias plays a role in the higher suspension rates for Black boys. Studies have shown that the same behaviors can be perceived differently depending on the student's race, with Black boys often facing harsher disciplinary actions for similar incidents committed by White students. Liu et al. (2022) used novel data on disciplinary referrals to better understand the origins of racial disparities in out-of-school

suspensions. They found significant differences between Black and White boys in both referral rates and the rate at which referrals convert to suspensions. Their findings proved that Black boys received harsher sentences than their white co-conspirators. A study conducted by Shi and Zhu (2022) provided evidence of racial bias in school discipline decisions using statewide administrative data that contained rich details on individual disciplinary infractions. They found that Black boys face higher suspension probabilities and longer suspensions than White boys and are suspended for longer than Hispanic boys. This disparity raises concerns about fairness, educational equity, and the potential perpetuation of racial stereotypes and discrimination. This disparity is the driving force for this study. Knowing that Black boys are disproportionately impacted, the effect it has on this population is critically concerning.

School policies can significantly impact the experiences of Back boys in education. School discipline policies such as zero-tolerance have disproportionately targeted and negatively impacted Black boys (Ward, 2014). Ward describes zero-tolerance policies as disciplinary measures implemented by schools that enforce strict consequences for certain behaviors, typically without considering the specific circumstances or context surrounding an incident. While these policies often aim to promote safety and order, they have been criticized for their disproportionate impact on Black boys. These policies have contributed to suspension rates and what is commonly referred to as the "School-to-Prison Pipeline," a phenomenon where disciplinary actions in schools lead to increased involvement in the criminal justice system (Ward, 2014;

Whitford et al. 2016; Wilson et al., 2020).

In a study by Heilbrun et al. (2015), the researchers investigated an association between zero tolerance and suspension rates for White and Black boys in Virginia schools. The study showed a statistically significant difference in the types of offenses that resulted in suspensions, with Black boys significantly more likely to be suspended for disruptive offenses. Another study by Curran et al. (2016) examined the effect of state zero-tolerance laws on suspension rates. The researchers found that state zero-tolerance rules predict a 0.5 percentage point increase in district suspension rates. Furthermore, the results indicate that the laws predict larger increases in suspension rates for Black boys than White boys, potentially contributing to the Black-White suspension gap. Critics, such as Whitford et al. (2016), argue that these types of policies ignore the underlying issues that lead to disciplinary problems and do not promote a positive and supportive school environment.

Excessive suspensions can adversely and negatively affect Black boys' academic achievement and school engagement. Academic achievement has been paired with suspension dialogue because school suspensions are inversely related to the academic achievement of individual students (Toldson et al., 2015). When students are suspended, they miss valuable instructional time, impacting their academic progress (Caballero et al., 2019). This educational disruption can cause students to fall behind on their coursework, which can start the cycle of them struggling to catch up, leading to lower grades and reduced academic achievement (Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Raffaele, 2003; Toldson et al.,

2015). Researchers Morris and Perry (2016) examined the impact of student suspension rates on racial differences in reading and math achievement. Their findings suggest that exclusionary school punishment hinders academic growth and contributes to racial disparities in achievement. A meta-analysis study was conducted by Noltemeyer et al. (2015) to quantify and synthesize the relationship between Black boys' school suspension and achievement. The results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between their suspension and academic achievement.

Black Boys and Mental Health

Black boys face unique challenges related to their mental health that are important to address. Pachter et al. (2018) mentioned that mental health issues can affect anyone, regardless of race or ethnicity. However, there are distinct experiences and barriers for Black boys that make it more challenging. In the Black community, mental health is a widespread stigma. In many cases, seeking mental health help may be perceived as a sign of weakness or a lack of faith (Geller et al., 2017). Pachter et al. believe this stigma has prevented Black boys from seeking the necessary support and treatment they may need.

Factors such as racism and discrimination have been a concern regarding mental health for Black boys. Geller et al. (2014) stated that constant exposure to discrimination, both overt and subtle, can lead to a phenomenon known as "racial battle fatigue," negatively impacting mental health. This phenomenon, coupled with limited access to care, is a widespread issue throughout the communities that house Black boys. Even if services are provided, there could be a cultural mismatch. Ida et al. (2012) mentioned that

traditional mental health services may not always be sensitive to the cultural norms and experiences of Black boys. Due to this insensitivity, Black boys could feel disconnected from or misunderstood by mental health professionals. Milner et al. (2018) stated that Black boys are subjected to a culture where the standards of masculinity are literally killing them. One of the factors that contributes to the underuse of seeking professional help with this population is masculinity norms. Masculine norms are defined as the social rules and expected behavior associated with men and manhood within a given culture (Hoskin, 2022). Toxic masculinity is the demonstration of masculinities that are enforced by restriction in behaviors, such as crying and fear, based on gender roles that amplify existing power structures that favor the dominance of men (Milner et al., 2018). This barrier, that is prevalent in the Black community, has a negative impact on Black boys feeling comfortable to ask or seek help.

Williams et al. (2023) conducted a study that directly examined Black boys' perceptions of and understanding of mental health conditions such as depression. The study used data from a social media-based intervention for Black boys who were in 8th grade. Their findings revealed that Black boys, while well-versed in many of the causes, symptoms, and treatments for mental health challenges and depression, preferred to address mental health needs on their own and through informal family support. Their study also revealed that Black boys wrestled with the complex ways in which their racial identity would affect their experiences with mental health. The findings of this study speak to the importance of mental health education for Black boys and the need for

further research incorporating Black boys' voices in their perceptions, experiences, and understandings of mental health. It also sheds light that addressing the mental health of Black boys requires a collective effort from schools, communities, healthcare providers, and policymakers to create an environment that promotes mental health wellness and reduces barriers to care.

Lindey et al. (2017) stated that untreated depression is a prominent precursor to suicide, leading to a start increase in the rates of suicide among Black youth. According to a new research letter in JAMA Pediatrics, from 2001 to 2015, the suicide risk for Black boys between the ages of 5 and 11 was two to three times higher than that of White boys (Bridges et al., 2018). The rates of attempted suicide, including attempts that resulted in an injury, poisoning, or overdose, are 1.2 times higher among Black boys compared to White boys. This trend continues through adolescence as reported by the Nationwide Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Kann et al., 2017). The American Psychological Association report discusses how Black boys are more likely to be viewed as older, less innocent, and more culpable than others (APA, 2018). Kann et al. mentioned that these biased beliefs have led to harsher interventions in school starting as early as pre-kindergarten. Bridges et al. believes the lack of awareness about what depression looks like in Black boys has led to social reprimand, school suspension, and expulsion rather than to the mental health care that they need.

Parental Involvement in Education

Parent involvement in education is crucial for students' academic, social, and

emotional development (Tarraga, 2017). Sebastian et al. (2017) described parental involvement as the active participation of parents or guardians in their children's educational journey. Research consistently shows that parental involvement positively impacts students' academic achievement, school attendance, behavior, mental health, and overall educational outcomes (Wilder, 2014). Parents can contribute to a supportive and enriching learning environment by actively participating in their child's education. These researchers believe parents are the bridge that connects students to teachers. They believe this "marriage" strengthens the partnership between parents and schools, enhances students' motivation and achievement, and contributes to a positive and inclusive learning environment.

Research consistently shows that students with engaged parents tend to have higher academic achievement. When parents are actively involved in their child's education, they can provide support, monitor progress, and reinforce learning at home. This involvement often improves grades, test scores, and overall academic success (Jaynes, 2012; Sebastian, 2017; Wilder, 2014). Lara and Saracostti (2019) conducted a study that aimed to analyze the associations between parental involvement in school and children's academic achievement. They performed a cluster analysis from a sample of 498 parents or guardians. They found differences in children's academic achievement between parental involvement profiles, indicating that children whose parents have a low involvement have lower academic achievement. A meta-analysis study by Jeynes et al. (2016) examined the relationship between parental involvement and academic

achievement. Results indicated a significant relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement. This relationship between involvement and academics existed for younger (grades K-5) and older (secondary school and college freshmen) students. Parental involvement was associated with better school outcomes by .52 of a standard deviation unit. Although this study only proves that parental involvement correlates with the success of their child academically, it further proves that having parents as a part of the child's educational career will only benefit the child.

Parental involvement has also been linked to better student behavior and attendance. Research shows active parents can establish clear expectations and reinforce positive behavior (Ma et al., 2016). When engaged, parents can address issues promptly, reducing the likelihood of behavior, and they can emphasize the importance of regular school attendance and punctuality, leading to reduced absenteeism (Jeynes, 2012; Ma et al., 2016). Smythe-Leistico and Page's (2018) study aimed to reduce chronic absenteeism in kindergarten. They implemented a pilot program that encouraged parents daily to get their children to school on time. They found that the pilot schools' kindergarten chronic absenteeism rate (13%) was substantially lower than that of a synthetically constructed comparison school (24%), thus proving that parental engagement decreases absenteeism.

Another critical advantage of parent engagement is enhanced social and emotional development. Parent engagement has been found to significantly impact their student's social and emotional wellness (Lindey et al., 2014). Several studies have explored the relationship between parent engagement and student well-being, including a sense of

school belonging and connectedness, emotional support, and resilience and coping skills. Uslu and Gizir (2017) examined how parent involvement can predict a sense of school belonging among adolescents according to gender. They found that parental involvement is a significant predictor of school belonging among adolescents and that it plays a higher role in the sense of school belonging among boys than girls. Uslu and Gizir stated that when parents are engaged in school activities, it creates a sense of belonging and connectedness for students. This helps students feel supported and a part of a larger community, positively impacting their social and emotional development.

Black Parent's Engagement in Education

The involvement of Black parents in their child's education is crucial for supporting their academic success, promoting cultural identity, advocating for equity, and bridging educational disparities (Posey-Maddox, 2017; Yull et al., 2018). Parental involvement is strongly associated with academic achievement and mental and emotional well-being among African American students (Posey-Maddox et al., 2021). However, racial biases within schools have dissuaded many Black parents from fully participating in their children's academic experiences. Grace and Nelson (2019) stated that Black parents feel school personnel view them as being uneducated and, as a result, negatively interact with them. Because of this divide, many Black parents have become critical of the schools' agenda and are unwilling to support or respect its goals and objectives, thus widening the divide between Black parents and the school (Grace & Nelson, 2019).

Although historically, Black communities have faced systemic educational

inequities and disparities, Black parents must be involved in their child's education

(Posey-Maddox et al., 2021). By actively participating, Black parents can positively

influence their child's educational journey and empower them to reach their full potential

(Yull et al., 2018). Parental involvement has consistently been shown to positively impact

a child's academic achievement and overall development, regardless of race. Rall and

Holman (2021) investigated cultural resourcefulness among seven Black families who

proactively collaborated with the school to ensure their children's academic excellence in

a highly suburban community. Like research reported early by Grace and Nelson (2019),

Posey-Maddox et al. (2021), and Yull et al. (2018), collaboration with the school

correlated with their children's success academically.

Avnet et al. (2019) study analyzed nation-wide survey data on Black students in

elementary school and investigated the relationship between student achievement and

Black parental involvement. They found that students with more parental involvement

were more successful in school than those whose parents were not involved. Rolle et al.'s

(2019) systemic review examined the existing literature concerning the association

between Black parental involvement and children's cognitive skills development during

early and middle childhood. Their findings suggest that there has been a wide and

constant interest increase in this issue in recent years. The findings revealed that the focus

is the impact of Black parental involvement on their children's cognitive skills. Most of

the studies highlighted that parental involvement is positive and statistically significant.

This confirms that Black parents play a crucial role in their child's academic achievement

and social and emotional well-being in school.

It is clear evidence that parental involvement is beneficial. There is a lack of literature that supports Black parents being seen as a useful resource in advocating for their Black sons' mental, emotional, and psychological well-being. This lack of information is quite concerning given that this population is disproportionately suspended from school more than their peers. My study addressed this issue by giving Black parents an opportunity to talk about their lived experiences and the social and psychological impact on their sons following school suspension.

Critical Race Theory in Education

CRT is an academic framework that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s within legal scholarship (Dixson et al., 2018). While CRT originated in legal studies, due to CRT examining how race and racism intersect with systems of power and privilege in society, it has since expanded into various fields, including education (Ladson-Billings, 2018; Robinson et al., 2018). Ladson-Billings stated that CRT within education is an evolving methodological, conceptual, and theoretical construct that attempts to disrupt race and racism in education. It enables researchers to ask the critical questions of what racism has to do with inequities in education in unique ways and examines racial inequalities in educational achievement in a more probing manner by centering the discussion of inequality within the context of racism. In the context of education, Howard (2008) and Douglas and Peck (2017) stated that CRT offers a lens to analyze the impact of race and racism on educational institutions and practices. CRT aims to understand how racial

inequalities are reproduced and perpetuated within the educational systems and how these inequities can be challenged and dismantled.

Wright et al. (2016) argue that it is vital to acknowledge and address the historical and systemic inequities that have disproportionately affected marginalized racial and ethnic groups. They believe that traditional approaches to education can overlook how racism and racial bias shape policies, curriculum, and disciplinary practices. Dixson et al. (2018), Robinson et al. (2018), and Howard (2008) are proponents who believe that CRT helps educators develop a deeper understanding of issues of racial bias and racism as it relates to policies and disciplinary practices. The goal of using CRT is to see the issues from a racial bias lens and to address the issues by working towards more equitable educational opportunities for all students.

CRT is commonly used in studies to provide a valuable lens through which researchers can critically examine and understand issues related to race and racism (Ladson-Billings, 2018). By using CRT, researchers can uncover and critique ongoing racial injustices, disparities, and power dynamics within education (Ladson-Billings, 2018; Wright et al., 2016). Anyon et al. (2018) used CRT to guide their research. They examined how students were being disciplined within the school and how often. Looking through the lens of CRT, the researchers found that students of color were more likely than White students to be disciplined in unowned school spaces (bathrooms and hallways) at twice the rate. In another study, Dematthews (2018) used CRT as its theoretical framework to examine the stories of two elementary school principals

struggling to create more inclusive schools for Black boys with emotional disabilities (ED) in a racially segregated and low-performing district. Using CRT as the framework, the findings highlighted how principals who recognized the vulnerability of Black boys in special education are compelled to create more inclusive schools.

Critical Race Theory and Black Boys

CRT enables discourse about race, class, and gender to be the centerpiece for analyzing Black males (Ladson-Billings, 2012). When it comes to the experiences of Black boys, CRT provides a lens for researchers to analyze and address the racial disparities and injustices they may face (Anyon, 2016; Fronius et al., 2019). Using this lens acknowledges that racism is not merely a matter of individual attitudes or actions but rather profoundly embedded within policies and institutions. Within education, CRT provides a theoretical frame within which the experiences of Black males can be best understood (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Dixson et al. (2018) stated that CRT helps shed light on how historical and ongoing racism can impact Black boys' educational opportunities, disciplinary practices, and overall well-being. These researchers believe CRT can be used in studies to analyze racial disparities in school suspensions when referencing Black boys. Using CRT as their guiding framework, Annamma et al. (2016) examine Black boys' exclusionary discipline outcomes by looking at disciplinary data from a large urban school district to assess racial group differences in office referral reasons and disparities for Black boys in out-of-school suspensions, referrals, and expulsions. In their multivariate analyses, findings were

statistically significant for Black boys in all three categories. In Anyon et al. (2017) study, which was guided by CRT, they used administrative data from a large urban school district to consider the relationship between student race and exclusionary school discipline. They found that exclusionary school discipline practices disproportionately impact students of color more than White students.

Summary and Conclusions

The review of the current literature on different aspects of Black boys, education, and suspension revealed a fantastic opportunity to understand further how this type of discipline impacts them. This chapter was written to highlight the importance of the current research study and the gap in the research literature concerning the lived experiences of parents of Black middle school boys and the social and psychological impact of school suspensions. Although this review provided a clear picture that Black boys are disproportionately suspended from school than their peers and the ways they are impacted, which include lower grades, higher dropout rates, and lower graduation rates, it is important to note that there are limited studies that have inquired about their social and psychological well-being. Furthermore, the literature review showed that parental involvement is critical to the success of students' academic, social, and emotional well-being. The lack of studies that include parental input leaves an untapped area of research for this population to know how suspension affects them. Therefore, by filling this gap in the literature, school counselors may better understand what support this group needs and the best practices that should be implemented to ensure their success in school. Chapter 3

of my study comprehensively review my chosen research method. I present how I collect

and analyze data. I also discuss possible threats to validity and how I ethically protect my

participants.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the parental lived experiences of Black middle school boys and the social and psychological impact of school suspension. In this study, Black parents' perspectives were the focal point, as they are believed to know their sons best (Davis, 2017). In this chapter, I restate the research question that guided the focus of this study as it was described in Chapter 1. I expound on the research design and my rationale for selecting it for the study. I also explain the sample size, population, and recruitment. Further, I describe the role of the researcher, the methodology, the issues of trustworthiness, and ethical practices throughout the study.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question for this study was "What are the lived experiences of parents of Black middle school boys and the social and psychological impact of school suspension?" To answer this question, I used a hermeneutic phenomenological design to gain insight into how OSS affects Black boys. Understanding the phenomena gives clarity and direction to a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2017). A central element in qualitative phenomenology is understanding phenomena. In phenomenological research, lived experiences are actual events, circumstances, or phenomena that individuals encounter that have meaning for them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The hermeneutic research design is used to explore a phenomenon by investigating firsthand experiences and analyzing the phenomena using the hermeneutic

circle to provide interpretation (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Heidegger, 1962). The phenomenon under study in this research was the impact on social and emotional that suspension has on middle school Black boys.

In qualitative tradition, a researcher may select from multiple research designs. For this study, I used a hermeneutic design in which I used IPA to analyze data. The hermeneutic underpinnings of IPA allow researchers to go beyond surface-level descriptions of findings and offer insightful interpretative accounts of participants' lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is used to uncover what a lived experience means to the individual through in-depth reflective inquiry (Smith, 2007). IPA draws on phenomenological thinking and acknowledges that we are each influenced by the worlds in which we live and the experiences we encounter (Goldstein, 2017; Smith et al., 2007). This approach is an interpretive process between the researcher and researched, influenced predominantly by Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Smith et al., 2007). Additionally, IPA offers an adaptable and accessible approach to phenomenological research intended to give a complete and in-depth account that privileges the individual (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). IPA consists of capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon and how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk it out with others (Porteous & Machin, 2018). This approach allows the researcher to pose open-ended questions to participants and interpret their responses based on the meaning of experiences as understood by participants (Porteous & Machin, 2018; Green, 2018).

Using this approach, I aimed to gain knowledge of the existing themes, generate

meanings from experience, and identify the frequency of specific themes (Bevan, 2017).

Another reason this approach was deemed appropriate is that the exploration of

participants' lived experiences and the meaning of these experiences remained a central

focus (Bevan, 2017; Giorgi, 2015).

Role of the Researcher

For this study, I served in the role of researcher. In qualitative studies, the

researcher is known as the instrument (Creswell, 2015). Researchers in qualitative studies

could be perceived as having a higher status than the participants, which makes a power

differential present (Patton, 2015). My job as the researcher was to ensure that

participants clearly understood my role, with the intent to access their thoughts and

feelings and collect data from what they share. I built and maintained a trustworthy

relationship with participants by letting them know that my primary responsibility as a

researcher was to protect them and their data.

Another power difference that must be addressed is the counselor role. I am a full-

time school counselor at an inner-city school that includes middle school Black boys. I

did not use any participants whose sons attended my school. This helped eliminate

potential fear and reluctance of the participants to be honest about their perspectives. I

did not accept any participant I have a professional or personal relationship with, as that

could compromise trustworthiness.

Being a human instrument, interpreting raw data, and having a similar

background to the participants, I was intentional in remaining neutral and understanding and acknowledging assumptions and biases concerning my research phenomena. Because qualitative research is subjective, it allows the characteristics of researchers to influence their work (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Researchers' unique histories, cultures, biases, social statuses, prejudices, identities, and experiences are all interwoven into their research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Positionality

Being a Black parent with a Black son, I can identify and empathize with the participants. The only difference between my son and the participants' sons was that my son is a 19-year-old sophomore in college. This self-awareness and over-identification could have skewed my interpretations of participants' unique experiences. However, I used the following tools. Gibbs (2016) recommended using analytical memos/notes and reflexive journaling to track feelings and biases. This allowed me to expound on personal feelings and reflections as I proceeded with the study.

Another strategy I used was reflexivity. Reflexivity pertains to the analytic attention to the researcher's role in qualitative research (Palaganas et al., 2017). Reflexivity entails self-awareness, which means being actively involved in the research process (Lambert et al., 2010; Palaganas et al., 2017). This involves researchers writing down or talking through thoughts of biases and prejudices and allowing other researchers to review their processes, interpretations, and collections methods, while remaining aware and conscious of these influences (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The key to

reflexivity is to make the relationship between the influence of the researchers and the participants explicit (Jootun et al., 2009). As another added level of accountability, I spoke to, had discussions with, and was challenged by my chair and committee member throughout this study that ensured my biases and power relationships were managed.

Methodology

Participant Selection

To investigate the phenomenon of how out-of-school suspension impacts Black boys from a parent's perspective, I interviewed Black parents to gain insight into their lived experiences. The research population was individuals who met the following criteria for the study: (a) self-identify as Black, (b) have a son in middle school (grade 6-8), and (c) have a son who has been suspended from school at least one time. The sample was a small subset of participants from the population.

I used purposive and snowball sampling to recruit participants. In my approach to purposive sampling, I used the population criteria to selectively choose participant who aligned with the definitions of my study. Patton (2015) stated that purposive sampling is deemed necessary to enhance the replicability of my study for future research endeavors. Patton (2015) also mentioned that the purposive sampling technique allows access to participants whose experiences are the most relevant to the research problem and purpose. In my approach to snowball sampling, I communicated with my participants and social circle, expressing my intention to identify additional participants who met the specified criteria. Utilizing snowball sampling was a strategic move to enhance the

likelihood of reaching saturation. This method was aimed to recruit a sufficient number of participants, aligning with the supported, effective sample size necessary for obtaining an accurate representation of the targeted phenomenon (Patton, 2015: Smith et al., 2009)

Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) recommend a smaller sample size, usually 6-8. Creswell (2016) recommends extended interviews with up to 8 people for a phenomenological study. Smith and Shinebourne (2016) mentioned that the range could be from 1-10 participants, depending on participants who can provide an in-depth view of their experience. Since the focus is more on depth than breadth, and to ensure saturation is reached, my sample size was 6 participants. Creswell and Creswell (2015) believed that focusing on participants' lived experiences through in-depth interviews and descriptions is better accomplished with a small group of participants.

Instrumentation

As the researcher, I am considered a vital part of the research process. Rubin and Rubin (2015), Turato (2015), and Cassell (2015) all believe that due to the level of researcher involvement in qualitative interviewing, the researcher is deemed as the main instrument for qualitative data collection. Turato mentioned that researchers use their sensory organs to grasp the study objects, mirroring them in their consciousness, where they are then converted into phenomenological representations to be interpreted. Through the researcher's facilitative interaction, a conversational space is created, which is an arena where respondents feel safe to share their stories about their experiences and life worlds (Owens, 2016).

I used open-ended questions for the interview for this study. Open-ended questions allow the researchers to take a more profound and holistic approach to studying the underlying concepts. Turato (2015) and Rubin and Rubin (2015) stated that open-ended questions do not provide the participants with a series of options based on a predetermined set of answer choices. Weller et al. (2018) stated open-ended questions are used to explore topics in depth, to understand processes, and to identify potential causes of observed correlations. Smith et al. (2009) added open-ended questions allow for gathering targeted information without regulating the participants in expressing their experiences and thoughts. The interview questions (Appendix A) were designed to answer the research question: What are the lived experiences of parents of Black middle school boys and the social and psychological impact of school suspension? They were grounded in the tenets of phenomenology, informed by CRT, and be no more than 6-8 questions. Creswell and Creswell (2015) recommended that qualitative researchers only ask one or two central questions followed by no more than five to seven sub-questions to narrow the focus of the study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

For recruitment, I posted a flyer (see Appendix C) on my social media accounts including educational Facebook groups and LinkedIn, as well as email it to those in my network. For those who express interest in participating and fit the inclusion criteria, I then sent an informed consent form via email to the potential participant. The consent form was signed by stating, "I consent," via email. Once I have received the signed

consent form, I began to schedule interviews. Additionally, after potential participants signed the consent form, I told them of my interest in finding more participants and provided a detail explanation of my inclusion criteria as well as my contact information. Prior to beginning the interview, I reviewed the informed consent and asked if they had questions.

McGrath et al. (2019) believed that semi-structured interviews are most helpful with studies that rely on asking questions within a predetermined thematic framework. Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021) stated that open-ended interviews allow researchers some flexibility, giving the researcher the autonomy to modify the questions mid-interview. This was very important and helpful in case there were revelations communicated by the participants during the interview. There were options in how the interviews could be conducted. Those participants who could do an in-person interview, it was conducted at the local library in a closed room. The second option was a video meeting option via Zoom. I used a Sony PX Digital Voice Recorder during the interview for data analysis. This allowed me to repeat the interviews to transcribe what was said.

Before the interview began, I informed the participants that their participation was completely voluntary and that if they wished to discontinue the study, they were free to do so by telling or emailing me. I also stressed the importance of their confidentiality and how their names and sons' names were not be used in the study. I did not share details that might identify the participants or their sons. I did inform them that I would delete the data from the device after five years, as required by Walden University. I reminded them

that I would follow the IRB guidelines to ensure ethical research.

I informed each participant that they would be allowed to review the accuracy of their transcripts. This allowed the participant to clarify any point that may led to misrepresentation of their intended meaning. This also ensured the credibility of my study by allowing each participant to clarify or challenge any misrepresentation of their intended responses. I also gave them my contact information should they think of any questions in the future.

Smith et al. (2009) stated that in a phenomenological approach, the only time a researcher must keep their preconception out of the process is during the interviews of participants and the collection of research data. Smith et al. (2009) suggested the following steps while collecting data: (1) the interview duration should be approximately 60-90 minutes, (2) the study should keep the interview invitation to one interview per participant, (3) the site (including the date, time and place) for the interviews should be left to the participants to decide, and (4) the research study should utilize different technological devices to collect necessary data. I collected data through semi-structured interview questions (Appendix A). I conducted a 60-minute in-depth, one-on-one semi-structured interview with all participants using the same interview protocol which allowed for probing questions for each interview, which strengthen trustworthiness. During the interview, van Manen (2016) instructed researchers to listen to participants' descriptions of their experience, including their state of mind, feelings, mood, and emotions. I paid attention to and documented their non-verbal cues, which was part of the

memos that I took following each interview. Rubin and Rubin (2015) stated that non-verbal communication is an essential part to pay attention to when a participant is telling their story.

Data Analysis Plan

For this study, I used IPA data analysis. IPA is a qualitative research approach that focuses on exploring and understanding the lived experiences of individuals. It seeks to uncover the subjective meanings people attribute to their experiences and how these meanings influence their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Smith et al. (2009) stated that IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of individual lived experience and how they make sense of that experience.

IPA data analysis is considered by Smith and Osborn (2008) to be flexible and dynamic. IPA advocates for researchers to return to the interview data as needed and to focus on meanings throughout the process of analysis (Smith et al., 2009). Although no single, definitive method was employed to undertake IPA, Smith et al. offered several vital steps I used in my study. Smith et al. (2009) stated that transcribing interview recordings is essential in IPA. While transcribing the interviews, I used verbatim words to ensure and enhance my study's credibility and validity.

After transcribing the interviews, to ensure my transcriptions were accurate, I listened to the interviews on the recording device they were stored on while reviewing the transcripts. Smith et al. (2009) suggested that researchers should listen to the recordings, transcribe them, and read through the transcripts multiple times to become familiar with

the content and gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. While engaging in multiple readings of the transcripts to immerse myself in the data, I read and reread transcripts, highlighting meaningful statements, phrases, or themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences. I also incorporated the memos I took during the interview into consideration as well. During this step of transcription and familiarization, Smith et al. stated that it is essential to pay attention to both explicit and implicit meanings.

Coding is an essential part of this process. Codes are created when researchers start to capture the main ideas and themes emerging from the data. I generated initial codes based on the meaningful units identified during the familiarization process (Smith et al., 2009). Coding involves labeling and categorizing portions of text related to specific concepts and themes.

Lastly, I begun the thematic development portion. This was done by analyzing the coded data to identify overarching themes (Smith et al., 2009). I looked for patterns, connections, and relationships between codes. The themes that emerged represented shared experiences, perceptions, or perspectives that provided insight into the phenomenon being studied (Smith et al., 2009), which is the lived experiences of parents of Black middle school boys and the social and psychological impact of school suspension.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Unlike quantitative studies, which refer to trustworthiness as validity and

reliability, this concept is more obscured in qualitative studies because it is put in different terms. Qualitative researchers do not use instruments with established metrics about validity and reliability. Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that it is pertinent to address how qualitative researchers establish that the research study's findings are credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable. Credibility refers to how confident the qualitative researcher is in the truth of the research study's findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2015). Transferability is how the qualitative researcher demonstrates that the research study's findings apply to other contexts (Elliott, 2015). Confirmability is the degree of neutrality in the research study's findings (Elliott, 2015). Dependability is the extent to which other researchers could repeat the study and the findings would be consistent (Creswell & Creswell, 2015).

Credibility

Research credibility is knowing that your findings are true and accurate. This occurs when the data from the study accurately the participants' lived experiences (Ingram et al., 2018). To ensure credibility in my study, after collecting the data by way of interviews using the transcription, I made sure each participant had an opportunity to review the accuracy of their transcribed response. This allowed each participant to clarify or challenge any misrepresentation of their intended response. Denzin (2019) stated that as the participants have the final say in interpreting their interview responses, this step will help ensure the study's credibility.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the probability that the information researchers acquire can be referenced to other groups, contexts, or settings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Due to most qualitative research having small sample sizes, which makes generalizability unlikely, researchers can present their findings in ways the readers can connect to other settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Merriam (2009) described transferability as "providing enough detailed description of the study's context to enable readers to compare the 'fit' with their situation" (p. 226). One of the primary methods of increasing transferability is keeping detailed descriptions of each stage of the study (Holloway & Wheeler, 2013). I used detailed face-to-face interviews and observations to address transferability to provide in-depth data. My memos included expressions of feelings, voice tones, silences, and movements to get more detailed and thick descriptions from the participants.

Dependability

Denzin (2019) considered dependability as an added element to increase the rigor of research projects. A qualitative researcher can use an inquiry audit to establish dependability, which requires an outside person to review and examine the research process and the data analysis to ensure that the finds are consistent and can be repeated (Elliott, 2016; Ingram et al., 2018). To increase dependability, I used the same recording device, as well as the same questions, during the interviews. Using the same instrument and the same questions ensured the study had an instrument consistent for dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a crucial and essential part of a qualitative study because it ensures that the study's finding is unbiased (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This involves ensuring the researcher's bias does not skew the interpretation of what the research participants said to fit a particular narrative. To combat any bias, I provided an audit trail, highlighting every step of data analysis to provide a rationale for the decisions made (Ingram et al., 2018). This held me, as the researcher, accountable and helped establish that the study's findings accurately portray participants' responses. I also used memos and reflexive journaling to track my feelings and biases throughout the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2016; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Ingram et al., 2018).

Ethical Procedures

Maintaining ethical standards and federal regulation remains a priority in this study. To ensure the ethical soundness of this process, I secured approval from the IRB at Walden University. After approval from the IRB, I followed their guidelines and stipulations to ensure ethical research. No participant contact or data collection occured before acquiring such approvals. Throughout this process, I ensured that confidentiality was upheld in every phase of the study. Instead of using the participants' actual names or their sons' names, I used pseudonyms.

Summary

Chapter three heavily focused on the research methodology that was applied to conduct the research study. My research concentrated on the perceptions of Black

parents whose sons had been suspended from school and how they believe it has impacted them. In this chapter, I reviewed the hermeneutic design in which I used an interpretive phenomenological approach and the rationale behind why I used it. I also examined the role of the researcher and explained the methodology in detail. Trustworthiness and ethical procedures were also discussed as they were relevant pieces to the development of the study. Chapter four contains the detailed results of the data collected.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how OSS impacts middle school Black boys' social and psychological well-being. The study was centered around the research question "What are the lived experiences of parents of Black middle school boys and the social and psychological impact of school suspension?" My aim was to explore repercussions associated with the suspension of Black boys from school. By acquiring insights and knowledge regarding the intersection of race, gender, and school suspension, primarily Black boys and school suspension, this information has can enhance comprehension of the ramifications of suspension on this demographic. As the researcher, I wanted to ensure that individuals engaging with this population, such as teachers, principals, school counselors, and stakeholders, grasp the specific challenges faced by Black boys. The findings of this study can be instrumental in guiding school counselors, counselors-in-training, and counselor educators to implement effective support systems at the school level for the reintegration of Black boys post-suspension. This chapter encompasses details on the setting, demographic information, data collection and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results derived from my study.

Setting

The participants in the study were not influenced by any known personal or organizational conditions during their participation or experiences at the time of the study and interviews. There were no identified factors that could potentially impact the

interpretations of the study results. Although in-person and Zoom were both options for conducting the semi structured interview, all six participants chose Zoom. There was no video-recording during the interview, only audio-recording, and all interviews occurred in the participant's home in a closed room that was free from distractions. I also conducted the interviews in my private office in my home.

Demographics

Data Collection

I collected data over a 5-week period in the form of semi structured interviews that included six audio-recorded interviews conducted via Zoom. Six participants consented to individual 60-minute semi structured interviews along with a follow-up member-checking email that included a summary of the interview and a prompt for the participant to provide any additional comments, clarifications, modifications, corrections, or other information. All six participants chose to attend the interviews from the comfort of their homes, in rooms that had little to no distractions. I conducted each interview from my private home office with the door locked. Although the interviews were supposed to last 60 minutes, they ranged from 35 to 50 minutes. They were audio-recorded on my password-protected computer. For transcription, I used Zoom transcription and the Sony PX Digital Voice Recorder as tools to transcribe the data so I could properly analyze the data. After completing the recording, I transferred it to my password-protected device and erased the recording from the digital recorder.

Data Analysis

After I conducted the interviews I proceeded with the transcription process, carefully listening to each recording in its entirety. I used IPA with the lens of CRT to analyze the collected data. The IPA process entails dedicating substantial time to thoroughly review transcriptions, fostering familiarity with the data (James, 2019). This preliminary step precedes the identification of themes and the recognition of commonalities across the dataset. It is important for researchers using IPA to use an open-minded process and repetitive analysis to ensure a rich interpretation (Smith, 2017). I followed the guidance of the seven IPA steps to ensure a comprehensive approach to comprehending and interpreting the experiences of each participant. Congruent with Pyne (2018), I used inductive coding, aligning with qualitative and hermeneutic styles, to adopt an exploratory lens in approaching the targeted phenomenon. This open approach allowed me to identify themes.

Entering the coding state, I used the guidance of CRT in developing themes. CRT examines society from a critical perspective to bring social change and justice for marginalized groups (Robinson et al., 2018), specifically through the incidence of counter-storytelling and interest convergence. Therefore, CRT was an essential element in identifying themes considering context.

The initial two steps of the IPA process included thoroughly reviewing each transcript and listening to the corresponding audio-recording multiple times. Throughout this repetitive process, I identified noteworthy words and phrases that seemed significant.

The next three steps in the IPA process were to identify and analyze themes, which

started the coding process (Smith, 2009). I initially looked for emerging themes

categorized based on the predetermined interview questions. Utilizing the general themes

derived from the interview questions as parent codes, I then assigned aligning phrases

and terms. After completing the first cycle of base coding, I started a second cycle to

ensure I had gathered all observed general themes. The outcomes of the second cycle

closely resembled those of the first, except for the identification of one additional theme.

After I completed the coding of the data, I organized the information through a

process of clustering the coding with similar themes. This clustering method facilitated

the identification and support of the main themes associated with the targeted

phenomenon. It is important to note that the themes had four to six supportive participant

experiences leading me to believe that I effectively reached saturation of the data (Smith

& Shinebourne, 2016). At that point, I felt confident in the effectiveness of the six

participant sample size and did not find any compelling reason to collect additional data.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

For qualitative researchers, it is imperative to prioritize trustworthiness,

considering factors such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability

(Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Without ensuring trustworthiness, researchers face the risk of

discrediting their work, leading to a lack of quality and integrity (Lewis, 2015). Such

shortcomings can be detrimental not only to the knowledge base but also to the broader

community of researchers. I implemented several strategies to ensure trustworthiness in

my study.

Credibility

To establish credibility within my study, I used member checking. This involved sending each participant a written summary of the interview, seeking confirmation regarding the accuracy of my interpretations. I invited participants to provide any comments, corrections, or clarifications to ensure the fidelity of provided interpretations. Sharing interpretations with participants is a crucial step in developing accurate results (Denzin, 2019). All six participants responded via email, confirming the accuracy of my written summaries.

I also ensured credibility by adopting empirically supported methods. I recruited six participants. A number within the appropriate range to achieve saturation in a hermeneutic qualitative study, as suggested by James (2019). Another strategy I used was approaching the entire study with an open mind. Following Palaganas et al.'s (2017) guidance, I understood the importance of research reflexivity to minimize the impact of researcher assumption on the collected data. I also maintained continuous self-reflection throughout the research process, using a reflexive journal to diminish any potential bias, preconceived ideas, or study expectations. This practice was particularly beneficial as I went through the stages of data collection and coding.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the probability that the information researchers acquire can be referenced to other groups, contexts, or settings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In

qualitative research, achieving transferability involves employing rich descriptions and clear language. This enables other individuals and researchers to gain a profound understanding of the content and facilitates the transfer of the same concepts to a larger or different population (Holloway & Wheller, 2013). Although my study focuses on a unique demographic, the concepts are broad and generalized, which allows for transferability. The presentation of my study's results was designed to bring awareness to the unseen impact suspension has, which will resonate with any similar lived experience, especially those whose child has been suspended from school before.

Dependability

To ensure dependability in qualitative research, it is advised to follow predetermined and empirically supported strategies (Denzin, 2019). I maintained consistency in my process by utilizing the IPA and hermeneutic approach, aligning with the same style and approach used by other researchers. Following the seven steps of the IPA process and incorporating the hermeneutic circle helped me in obtaining a comprehensive view and analysis of the data. Using reflexivity throughout the process also helped diminish any potential influence on the research. Additionally, I used the lens of CRT to guide me in the interpretation of the interview data. The incorporation of IPA, hermeneutics, and CRT were vital in streamlining the research process with effective procedures leading to rich and meaningful findings.

Although I followed the predetermined and empirically supported strategies to ensure dependability, the interviews ranged in time. Due to the lack of answers or the

ability of some participants to respond more in-depth to the interview questions, there was a 15-minute difference of range times between some interviews. Hence, I obtained 15 more minutes of data with some participants than others. This is a limitation of the study that will be addressed further.

Confirmability

Confirmability holds significant importance in a qualitative study as it ensures that the findings are free from bias (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I used several strategies to ensure confirmability in my study. The first approach involved using snowball sampling to guide a method of data collection that is free from bias. The result was a variety of participants from different cities, school districts, and types of suspensions, which yielded a richness to the data by providing a diversity of experiences. As recommended by Gibbs (2016), I used notes and reflexive journaling to track my feelings and biases during the study. This allowed for an in-depth exploration of personal feelings and reflections throughout the study.

<div align="center">

Results

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The research question for this study was "What are the lived experiences of parents of Black middle school boys and the social and psychological impact of school suspension?" After examining the data provided by the participants, I coded many words from each participant's interview. Four overarching themes emerged from the data which included: (a) perceived emotional turmoil, (b) unjust feelings of suspension, (c) dreadful beliefs about return, and (d) singled out as a Black boy.

Theme 1: Perceived Emotional Turmoil

This study revealed a multifaceted understanding, from the parents' perspective, of the experiences of by Black middle school boys who have been suspended. There's a significant emotional distress, as seen in the theme perceived emotional turmoil. Coded words from the participant's interviews included "upset," "mad," "sad," "afraid," "depressed," "in a dark space," "pissed," "distant," and "shut down." At least four out of six participants used these coded words/phrases during their interview. These terms all underscore the depth of psychological distress. Psychological distress in Black boys is influenced by various factors, including social, cultural, and systemic elements (Harrell, 2015).

Participant A shared her thoughts on how suspension impacted her son:

After I had gotten the call to come pick my son up from school because he was being suspended, I was irritated because I had to get off work. When I saw my son at school, I could tell that he was visibly upset and mad. He was shaking and when I asked him what happened, he wouldn't talk. After speaking with the principal about the situation, we left and went home. Once we arrived home, he went straight to his room. After an hour passed, I went to speak with him and demanded he talk. He told me what occurred but that he was mad and pissed that the teachers always blamed him. He said he was afraid to even talk when we were in the principal's office because everything he says will be turned against him. I could tell that my son was experiencing some emotional distress from our

conversation, which was very alarming to me.

Participant B also shared:

> When I dropped my son at home, I had to go back to work. I can't afford to take
> off an entire day because he was suspended. I told him his phone was not to be
> used at all unless I called him. When I arrived back at the house, he was still in his
> room. I could tell that he was still mad about what occurred at school. Although I
> do not believe in fighting, I do believe in protecting yourself and my son felt like
> he told the teachers about the young man wanting to fight him and no one did
> nothing. If he is not heard, then what is he supposed to do? He was suspended for
> 5 days and each day I could tell that he was becoming more distant with the
> family. He would only come out to eat but would not engage in any conversation.
> I felt like he was going into a dark space because he wouldn't talk, his room was
> always dark, and I felt like this incident upset him because he did all he could do
> but still got into trouble.

The effects of suspension emerged from a spectrum of negative emotional
responses. The terms "upset," "mad," "sad," "depressed," and "afraid" were used by all
six participants. Feelings expressed by words like these are indicative of a profound
emotional turmoil that can have lasting impacts on mental health and psychological well-
being (Deighton et al., 2019). This emotional burden has the ability manifest in various
behavioral issues, academic struggles, and long-term mental health challenges (Ogundele,
2018). Additionally, feelings of being "distant" or "shut down" point to a possible

defensive mechanism, a psychological withdrawal as a response to the trauma of suspension. All six participants used the words "distant" and/or "shutting down" when describing how their son acted after being suspended from school. Participant F similarly shared, "my son became distant after his suspension. Even when he went back to school, he did not interact with his peers as he did before." The reluctance to discuss their experiences, as expressed in "distant," and "did not interact," signals a deeper issue of trust and communication breakdown between the student and the school authorities (Little & Tolbert, 2018).

Emotional and psychological impact have many implications. The range of negative emotions associated with suspension from the study like feeling upset, mad, sad, afraid, and depressed points to significant emotional distress. Such emotional turmoil can lead to serious mental health concerns (Deighton et al., 2019). Participant D expressed:

My son has never been suspended before. When I saw him in the office, he looked scared and afraid. As though he was going to jail for a crime he did not commit. I was concerned that they interrogated him or something because why would he be so upset? I was shocked to see how suspending him from school, something he loves, would have that effect on him. My son is a very well-spoken and outspoken kid, and I became concerned when he wasn't himself. He was quiet and kept to himself for the rest of the day. That type of immediate isolation concerned me a lot. I didn't know if he was in a depressed state or not.

Persistent exposure to these negative emotions can manifest in various forms, such as

anxiety disorders, depression, and other mental health issues (Schmitt et al., 2014). These negative emotions have been proven to lead to behavioral issues and academic struggles.

Theme 2: Unjust Feelings of Suspension

The theme unjust feelings of suspension encapsulates the sense of disconnection from the educational environment. Five out of six participants used the words "misunderstood" and/or "picked on" during their interviews. These terms hint at a broader narrative of exclusion and misunderstanding within the school context, aligning with the phenomenological aspect of the study. Misunderstanding implies a disconnect or lack of understanding, which is a common feeling when one is suspended (Wester et al., 2016). Participate D shared her thoughts on her son being misunderstood:

> After speaking with my son about what occurred, I was shocked to hear how different his perspective was from the teachers and principal. My son has an IEP and a BIP, so sometimes he can be misunderstood when he is trying to get his point across. With him struggling in school and sometimes hard to communicate, I do feel like because it is hard to understand him at times, he is not given the opportunity to defend or explain himself. That is why I am defensive when it comes to him, because he is a Black boy who doesn't communicate well, people will and can take advantage of his challenges. Being misunderstood is unfair, which is why I am always at the school to ensure the communication between him and the teachers is clear.

Participate F added:

My son is a jokester. I do get on to him all the time about playing so much. I do

think he is misunderstood. Because he is in the 6th grade, weighing 190 pounds,

and is 5'11, I do think teachers see him and automatically sees a "big Black

person", instead of seeing a kid who has the body of a grown man. You mix his

body makeup with his playful and immature personality, then you may have mix

feelings about who he is and his intentions. I will say he has had successful

relationships with other Black male teachers, because they do not judge him from

his looks and get to know the kid that is inside. But suspending him because he is

the class clown is unacceptable to me. He is only trying to find a space to where

other kids aren't picking on his size and can relate to him, so he does joke a lot.

My child is just really misunderstood when it comes to his interactions within the

classrooms that consequently gets him suspended.

Within the theme, unjust feelings of suspension, the word "picked on" was used

numerous times by participants when describing how they felt their son was treated.

Using the phrase "picked on" implied a perceived injustice and indicated feelings of

unfair treatment or bias. From previous studies, Losen and Martinez (2018) confirmed

that the national trends in school discipline, when focused on racial disparities, found that

Black boys were more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts. Feeling

unfairly picked on can exacerbate feelings of injustice and alienation from the school

community (Barksdale et al., 2019). This can lead to distrust in the education system and

authority figures. Participant C expressed:

My son was new to this school and 8 times I was called about his behavior. What

I was upset about was who was calling me. He has 4 teachers but only one calls

me with issues. I do feel like she picks on my son. I am not saying my son is a

saint, but it is a flag to me that he is acting up just in one class and the rest of the

teachers do not have an issue with him. He even told me that he hates going to her

classroom because he feels like if he breathes wrong, she will send him out. He

has told me numerous times that the teacher just don't like him and has it out for

him. Is it because my son is the only Black boy in her class that she always calls

him out? I don't know but I definitely have said that to the principal because she

is constantly picking on him for little things.

Participant A similarly shared:

My son is no stranger to the office for getting into trouble. I am not about to say

that my son doesn't do some of the things they say he does, but I do think that

teachers talk, and his reputation has traveled with him. I do feel like because of

his reputation, teachers pick on him a bit more than others. It could be because

they are already on high alert from what another teacher has said to them, but I

think that is doing my son a disservice. I wish they would just get to know him for

themselves first.

Being misunderstood or picked on can lead to a sense of alienation from the

educational system (Wester et al., 2016). This disconnection is not just a result of the

suspension itself, but also indicative of a possible pre-existing gap between Black boys'

experiences and the understanding (or misunderstanding) of those experiences by the school authorities (Anglin et al., 2014). Participant D agreed that "after suspension, my son who used to love to go to school, now does not want to go back. He feels like when he returns, everyone will view him as a bad person". It is evident that these feelings after being suspended can also create a disconnection and hindered the development of a positive identity within the school.

Theme 3: Dreadful Beliefs About Return

The theme dreadful beliefs about return measures derived from terms that were repeatedly used by the participants. Several keywords/phrases overlap across themes because the themes are interconnected. The phrases "picked on" and "misunderstood" were categorized under this theme as well. Along with "voiceless", "don't want to go back", and "it's going to happen again", these phrases/words all suggested a concern about returning to an environment where one is targeted. Barksdale et al. (2019) stated that the dread of returning to school from a suspension and the belief that negative experiences will recur can and will create a state of constant anxiety and stress. Participant B shared her thoughts on her son's perspective of returning:

> With this being the first time my son has been suspended, it really did some damage to him. He was suspended for 3 days and the night before he was to return, he came to me and told me he didn't want to go back. I was confused because I did not see it to be that deep, but when I asked him where this was coming from, he said he felt like the kids and teacher would pick on him and tease

him. After I reassured him that they wouldn't, he still did not want to go. I was

afraid that that suspension would ruin his love for going to school. Remind you,

my son has never been to the office and this one incident, he is treated like he was

on his third strike. I have seen his now dislike for school has impacted his grades.

Do I think his teachers are picking on him, not necessarily, but it doesn't matter

what I believe. He believed he will be picked on by teachers and his peers and I

have to support my baby any way I can.

Participant E added:

My son was not a fan of going back to that school. He actually wanted to transfer

to another school. I wondered why he felt this way. My heart broke knowing that

my son didn't want to go back to school because he was suspended. Although I

can see why he felt that way with the situation. He did what he was taught to do.

Tell the teacher and let her handle the situation. When he did that, nothing

happened, and he had to defend himself. He felt like the boy was a bully and it's

going to happen again. All I could do at the time was tell him to not allow this one

situation change his perspective on school. I just remember my son not being able

to sleep that night because he was concerned about his first day back.

The anticipatory anxiety revealed in this theme, dreadful beliefs about return, is a

critical area of concern. This anxiety stems from the fear of suspension and the idea that

this negative experience will recur. Phrases that fit into this theme reveal a profound fear

and apprehension towards the educational environment. Ogundele (2018) and Wester et

al. (2016) both believed that anxiety could have a cascading effect on student's willingness to engage with the school upon their return, potentially leading to further academic and social difficulties. This anxiety to return to school can have long-term consequences. Ogundele stated that anxiety can significantly affect the student's readiness to re-engage with the school environment after suspension. It can lead to avoidance behaviors, further academic struggles, and difficulties in social reintegration. Participant A shared:

> Before going back to school, I did have a talk with my son. Again, this wasn't the first time he had been suspended. But I did notice a trend of him being suspended then his grades decline dramatically. Whether it's 3, 4, or 5 days, any time away from school is harmful to the child. Although my son has only been suspended 3 times, each time he goes back, he becomes more isolated. It's always a fight to get him to go to school and once he is there, he is withdrawn from it. My son does fear of being suspended again. He truly thinks that he will be targeted, and he will be suspended again. Kids are kids and my fear is that he's being punished for being a kid who will make mistakes. Every mistake does not cause for a suspension, but my son now feels that way.

Theme 4: Singled Out as a Black Boy

The theme, singled out as a Black boy, captures the racialized aspect of the experience. When interpreted through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the coded words "targeted", "unsafe", and "picked-on", suggest a perceived racial bias in

disciplinary actions and a feeling of marginalization due to their identity. Considering the study's focus on the social and psychological impacts of out-of-school suspension on middle school Black boys, it became evident that these experiences are not only deeply personal and emotional, but also embedded within a larger social and racial context. Participant C expressed:

> I do feel like my son was targeted when he was suspended. Black kids make up 10 % of the school's population and I feel like there is a disconnect when it comes to understanding how to interact with another race. We moved here because of a job and I searched to find a more diverse school but could not. My son is the only Black boy in his class and from our conversations over the year, it does appear that he is picked on more than the other kids. For instance, they have to wear unforms with black and/or white shoes. My son has gotten in trouble for having color in his shoes, but others are allowed to. My son even took pictures of other kids being allowed to wear color in their shoes without consequences. I try to come up with reasons why my son is always in trouble and all I have come up with is that he is singled out and being picked on because he is Black. As soon as my orders are up, we will be moving. I am hoping it is a more diverse location.

Participant B similarly shared:

> I do think race plays a factor in the reason my son has been suspended so many times. Instead of suspending these kids, they need to find other ways to correct their actions. Instead, what they do is continue to pick on the same ones until they

are expelled from school. After my son was suspended the second time, I did feel

like he was starting to be targeted and he felt that way too. He was relucent to

even go back to school and weeks later, he was back at home for being

suspended. My child feels unsafe, and I do for him as well. Any Black man is

unsafe in America, but it seems like even in the school systems, Black boys are

unsafe as well!

The theme, singled out as a Black boy, reflects the racial dynamics inherent in the

disciplinary actions. The feelings of being targeted and being unsafe in the educational

environment aligns with the principles of Critical Race Theory, which posits that racism

is ingrained in societal structures, including education systems (Robinson et al., 2018).

Anyon et al. (2018) stated that the experience of feeling targeted and being unsafe can

reinforce negative racial stereotypes and contribute to a cycle of systemic inequality,

affecting not just the individual child, but also the broader community's perception of

racial bias in school discipline. Participant F shared her thoughts on her son being unsafe:

My son's safety is always my number one concern. He's been suspended 3 times

and each time I felt like another action could've taken place instead of suspension.

I do feel like my son is targeted and it is easy to just suspend him. I know people

see my son as a threat because of his size in the 6th grade and that makes me

nervous. I need those teachers to see him as they see the others. He even told me

that he felt unsafe at school because one day they all were outside playing tag and

his hits can be harder than others so the teachers told him to stop. The last

suspension he had was due to a fight and the resource officer contained him

instead of the other kid who threw the first punch, who happened to be white.

These are the reasons I am concerned about my son's safety.

This theme highlights the racial dynamics at play. The experiences encapsulated

by "targeted", "unsafe", and "picked-on" resonate deeply with CRT, which argues that

racism is embedded within the systems and structures of society (Robinson et al., 2018;

Ladson-Billings, 2018; Douglas & Peck, 2017). This racialization of disciplinary actions

suggests that the experiences of suspension are not just about the behavior that led to the

suspension but also about how these behaviors are perceived and penalized within the

racial context.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings of my data collection and analysis process

for my qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study on parents' perspectives of out-

of-school suspension and the impact it has had on their sons. The findings supported the

developing themes that arose from the data. Based on the themes that emerged, this

research illuminates the complex layers of emotional, psychological, social, and racial

implications of out-of-school suspension for Black middle school boys. The outcome and

discovery from the study revealed that all six participants believed their son experienced

some form of psychological, emotional, social, or racial impact, as it pertains to their son

being suspended from school. It underscores the need for a holistic approach in

addressing the disciplinary practices in schools, one that considers the emotional well-

being of Black boys, their reintegration into the school environment post-suspension, and the systemic racial biases that may influence disciplinary actions.

In Chapter 5 of this study, I present my data analysis and interpret the findings of this research study that provides answers to the main research question. I also discuss the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. I conclude Chapter 5 with a description of the impact this study will have on social change efforts and the study's research implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding, from a parent perspective, of how OSS impacts Black middle school boys' social and psychological well-being. In this study, the perspectives of Black parents, who are believed to know their sons best (Davis, 2017), were the focal point. I conducted this study to explore and understand the unseen impacts of suspension on this population. These findings may equip parents, counselors, teachers, administrators, and school policymakers with a better understanding of how Black boys are affected by school suspension beyond academics. Understanding the social and psychological impact of school suspension on middle school Black boys could encourage all stakeholders who interact with this population to put systems put into place at the school level to support them mentally and emotionally once they reenter the education setting following suspension. The findings may assist with filling a gap in the literature related to the mental health of middle school Black boys who have been suspended.

I completed this study using a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological methodology with IPA to collect and analyze data from semi structured interviews. I recruited six parents who self-identified as Black. All six participants had a son who had been suspended at least once in middle school. I used a qualitative interview process to collect data and a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A) focused on inviting participants to share their lived experiences as parents of Black boys who had been suspended and how suspension impacted them. I transcribed the interviews and manually

coded the data. The resultant data generated four overarching themes: (a) perceived emotional turmoil, (b) unjust feelings of suspension, (c) dreadful beliefs about return, and (d) singled out as a Black boy.

In this chapter, the findings are interpreted by employing the hermeneutic process and CRT as the lens through which I analyzed the data. The targeted phenomenon is expounded on using the CRT framework, offering a nuanced interpretation while considering the context. I describe in what ways my findings confirmed and extended knowledge in the discipline by comparing them with what has been found in peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter 2. Finally, I summarize the present the recommendations for future research and explain the implications of this research.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings from this study produced a rich view of parents' perspectives on how school suspension impacts their sons. Although recent literature provided a clear picture that Black boys are disproportionately suspended from school at rates higher than their peers (Skiba, 2016; Toldson, 2011), and current literature illuminated the ways they are affected, which included lower grades, higher dropout rates, and lower graduation rates, there were limited studies that included parents' perspectives about their son's experiences (Moore et al., 2016; Skiba, 2016; Toldson, 2020). More specifically, there was limited research examining Black boys' social and psychological well-being following school suspension. Furthermore, literature suggests that parental involvement is critical to the success of a student's academic, social, and emotional well-being

(Anderson & Ritter, 2018; Marucucci, 2019). This study demonstrates that parents can provide valuable perspectives on their child's mental and emotional health. Within this study, feedback from parents of boys who have experienced suspension indicates that there is indeed a noticeable impact when their son is suspended.

Perceived Emotional Turmoil

Little research exists on parental involvement with their children's mental well-being in the education sector. Additionally, there is limited research on parental perspectives when it comes to the effect of suspension. This study provides valuable insights to fill this research gap. One emergent theme of this study was perceived emotional turmoil. All six participants felt there was a significant emotional toll that was associated with their son being suspended. All six participants used words illustrating suspension's profound social and emotional ramifications. The range of adverse emotions expressed by participants in the interviews, including feelings of upset, anger, sadness, fear, and depression, underscores significant emotional distress. Such turmoil has the potential to give rise to severe mental health concerns (Deighton et al., 2019). Moreover, continual exposure to these negative emotions may manifest in diverse ways, including the development of anxiety disorders, depression, and other mental health issues (Pyne, 2018).

Recent literature makes it clear that parental involvement is key to the success of students. Specifically for African American students, parental involvement is strongly associated with academic achievement and mental and emotional well-being (Posey-

Maddox et al., 2021). Although there are studies that speak to parental involvement and

how crucial it is for the success of the child (Grace & Nelson, 2019; Posey-Maddox et al.,

2021; Wilder, 2014; Yull et al., 2018), it has only been correlated with children's

academic success. Wilder synthesized the results of nine meta-analyses that examined the

impact of parental involvement on academic achievement and was able to identify

generalizable findings across these studies. The results indicated that the relationship

between parental involvement and academic achievement was positive, regardless of a

definition of parental involvement or measure of achievement. Yull et al. reported their

findings from a community based participatory action research. They argued that parent

mentor programs, in which marginalized parents of color assist in classrooms, increases

the engagement of parents of color in the school system. This engagement had direct

impact on their student's academic success within the school.

It is vital to acknowledge, from this emergent theme, that emotional responses are

linked to suspension in Black boys. Moreover, recognizing that the repercussions of

suspension indicate a significant emotional turmoil, which can have enduring effects on

mental health and the psychological well-being of this population (Deighton et al., 2019;

Pyne, 2018). Recent literature has also highlighted that untreated mental health issues

serve as a notable precursor to the increasing rates of suicide among Black youth (Lindey

et al., 2017).

Analyzing this emergent theme through the context of CRT involves recognizing

the systemic racism embedded within disciplinary practices and its effects on the

psychological well-being of Black boys. CRT acknowledges the concept of racial trauma, wherein experiences of racism and discrimination contribute to psychological distress (Dixson et al., 2018). Parents may perceive suspension as a form of racialized punishment that exacerbates their son's feelings of marginalization, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and trauma. CRT also emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing systemic injustices. Parents may perceive suspension as unjust and discriminatory, fueling feelings of anger, frustration, and helplessness in their son. This sense of injustice can contribute to feelings of alienation from the educational system and society at large (Anyon et al., 2017). Interpreting the findings from this theme reveals the interconnectedness of systemic racism, disciplinary practices, and mental health outcomes. It underscores the need for alternative approaches to support the psychological well-being of Black boys and dismantle oppressive systems within education.

Unjust Feelings of Suspension

While existing literature, (Allman & Slate, 2011; Gregory, 2017), predominantly addresses factors like grades, graduation rates, and dropout rates, this study delved into the emotional and psychological repercussions associated with this form of discipline. The theme unjust feelings of suspension surfaced from this study. All six participants in this study expressed concern about their son's feelings on suspension. All six participants used words such as, misunderstood, picked on, and not heard. Wester et al., (2016) stated that the feeling of being misunderstood implies a disconnect or lack of understanding, which is a familiar feeling when one is suspended. The feelings of being misunderstood

and picked on could indicate feelings of unfair treatment or bias (Wester et al., 2016). It could also exacerbate feelings of injustice and alienation from the school community.

Little and Tolbert (2018) examined how racial and gender stereotypes both impact the educational plight of Black boys and negatively influence key educational ideology, including teacher expectations, pedagogy, curricula, institutional climate/culture, student assessment, and disciplinary matters. Little and Tolbert further stated this can lead to distrust in the education system and authority figures. A sense of disconnection can hinder the development of a positive identity within the school, affecting the boy's willingness to participate in school activities and pursue academic goals (Little & Tolbert, 2018). The results from this study are consistent with prior research, exemplified by Noltemeyer et al. (2015), which asserted that an excessive number of suspensions has a detrimental impact on the academic achievement and school engagement of Black boys. Many studies on Black boys have concluded that disciplinary actions, such as suspension, have no positive impact and are seen as being punitive (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2017; Clements & Grenyer, 2017; Moore et al., 2016). These studies, however, have only examined grades, graduation rates, and dropout rates. Clements and Grenyer's natural study design offered an opportunity to explore the adverse effects of zero tolerance policies, particularly in their correlation with declining grades and subsequent higher dropout rates among Black boys. Carpenter and Ramirez's findings supported the notion that grades, graduation rates, and dropout rates are indeed influenced when suspension is employed as a disciplinary measure. Moore et al. reached the conclusion that suspension

yields no positive outcomes and suggested that it does more harm than its intended disciplinary purpose.

This research aligns with these previous studies, emphasizing the detrimental impact of suspension on Black boys. Interpreting the findings of this theme through the lens of CRT involves recognizing systemic racial biases and their impact on the parent's understanding of their child's experiences (Annamma et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT highlights how institutional practices perpetuate racial inequalities (Annamma et al., 2016). Parents may interpret their son's experiences of being picked on and misunderstood within the context of systemic racism within the educational system, where Black boys are often disproportionately targeted for disciplinary actions. CRT acknowledges the existence of racial microaggressions, subtle forms of discrimination that contribute to feelings of being misunderstood and unfairly targeted (Annamma et al., 2016). Parents may perceive their son's experiences as manifestations of racial microaggressions, reflecting broader patterns of racial bias and prejudice within society (Annamma et al., 2016). This theme illustrates the impact of being misunderstood and singled out on the emotional well-being of Black boys.

Dreadful Beliefs About Return

The third theme that emerged from this study was the dreadful beliefs about return. There is limited research involving parents and their perspectives of suspension in schools and parent's perspectives about the return to school experiences for their sons. All six participants discussed how their son felt picked on and misunderstood. Five out of

six participants stated that their son did not want to go back to school after the suspension. This feeling of not wanting to return corroborates with previous findings such as Barksdale et al. (2019). Barksdales et al. (2019) study indicated that negative experiences, such as being bullied, having no social support, and suspension all had a significant chain effect on adolescent's life and depression. Additionally, negative experiences can not only directly affect depressive emotions, but also indirectly affect depressive emotions by affecting ruminant thinking and perceived social support. The dread of returning to school due to negative experiences can create a state of constant anxiety and stress.

Consistent with the findings of Barksdales et al. (2019), this study suggests that there are implications associated with the return to school from suspension with this population. The fear and hesitation to return to school can lead to challenges in reintegration, potentially causing academic, social, emotional, and even psychological struggles. Based on the data, concerns for their sons were voiced by five out of six participants on the night before returning to school. Additionally, three out of six participants revealed that their sons expressed a desire to withdraw and enroll in another school. The state of constant anxiety and stress can lead to avoidance behaviors and reluctance to engage with the school environment (Barksdale et al., 2019). The anticipatory anxiety revealed in this theme is a critical area of concern. With all participants using phrases like "don't want to go back" and/or "it's going to happen again", this study revealed a fear and apprehension towards the educational environment

when their sons return to school from suspension. This builds a case of the necessity for schools to adopt more inclusive and supportive reintegration strategies for suspended students.

Interpreting the return to school experience and the son's reluctance to return or desire to transfer to another school through the lens of CRT involves understanding the broader context of systemic racism within the education and its impact on parental perceptions and decision-making. CRT acknowledges the racialized experiences of students within schools (Anyon et al., 2017; Dixson et al., 2018). Parents may perceive their son's reluctance to return to a school where they feel misunderstood or singled out as indicative of a hostile racial climate, where Black boys are marginalized or discriminated against. CRT also emphasizes the historical legacy of racism in education, where parents may consider the historical mistreatment of Black boys within the education system when evaluating their son's experiences and decision to return to school (Anyon et al., 2017; Dixson et al. 2018). This theme provides evidence that suspension adversely affects Black boys' willingness to return to school, leading to a negative experience for them.

Singled Out as a Black Boy

While existing literature indicates a connection between school suspension and racial inequalities, it lacks comprehensive research on its specific impact on Black boys. The theme singled out as a Black boy emerged from in this study. Participants expressed a sense that their sons were targeted, not listened to, and felt voiceless. Given the study's

concentration on the social and psychological repercussions of out-of-school suspension on Black middle school boys, it became clear that these experiences are not just deeply personal and emotional but also intricately intertwined within a broader social and racial framework.

The central focus of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how school suspension impacts Black boy's psychological and social well-being from their parent's perspective. Recent literature suggested that racial bias plays a role in the higher suspension rates for Black boys (Liu et al., 2022; Ward, 2014; Whitford et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2020). Liu et al. used novel data on disciplinary referrals to understand better the origins of racial disparities in out-of-school suspensions and of significant differences between Black and White boys in both referral rates and the rate at which referrals convert to suspensions. Gibson et al. (2014) found that 75% of caregivers answering they believed race played a role in suspension. In describing how race impacts suspensions, many caregivers emphasized educators' negative bias towards Black students. The outcomes of this study support the findings of Gibson et al., indicating that parents share the sentiment of their sons being singled out due to their Black identity.

When viewed through the lens of CRT these sentiments may imply a perceived racial bias in disciplinary actions and a feeling of marginalization based on their racial identity. This racialization of discipline has profound implications. It can reinforce negative racial stereotypes, perpetuate systemic inequalities, and influence the boys' self-perception and identity. It also highlights the need to critically examine disciplinary

policies and practices in schools to ensure they are equitable and do not disproportionately impact students based on race (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Limitations of Study

The main limitation of this study was its limited sample size, which is a common challenge in qualitative research (Mason, 2010; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). With only six participants, the study achieved saturation through the repetition of similar descriptions and experiences among the participants, aligning with the criteria of phenomenological research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldana, 2016). Phenomenological research centers on participant's experiences rather than raw data, therefore the transferability of the research results was hindered (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldana, 2016). The gender of the participants being six females was also a limitation in the research. Although the interviews were supposed to last 60 minutes, they ranged from 35 to 50 minutes. This range in interview time limited the amount of information I was able to obtain from each participant.

Another limitation associated with this chosen approach to this study was participant misinformation, researcher bias, and potential inaccuracies in interpretation of findings (Letiche, 2017; Patton, 2015; Smith et al, 2009). I implemented several strategies to mitigate this risk and ensure a reliable interpretation of the data. I used a triangulation process, including member-checking, allowing participants to validate, correct, or comment on my interpretation of their answers. I used questions of clarification and reframing to establish a precise portrayal of participant experiences.

Lastly, I incorporated IPA and the lens of CRT throughout each stage of the analysis and interpretation process to minimize researcher bias.

Recommendations

There are numerous avenues for additional research regarding the impact of suspension on the mental well-being of Black boys in. The findings of this study revealed that Black boys are experiencing emotional and psychological distress from suspension. This research underscores the insufficient knowledge, research, and best practices that are available to assist this population and support them once they are suspended. Undertaking a follow-up study with Black boys as direct participants, rather than relying on their parents, would contribute additional valuable data. While parents can provide valuable insights into their son's mental well-being, there might be limitations in accurately capturing the boys' actual feelings. If the boys themselves can articulate their experiences, it would offer a direct and firsthand perspective.

This study exclusively represents the viewpoints of Black parents whose sons experienced suspension in middle school. To bolster the study's credibility, I recommend future research that includes Black parents with sons in both elementary and high school. This broader approach would allow for the validation or contradiction of the current findings and facilitate the generalization of results beyond the middle school context. Furthermore, I suggest integrating diverse male perspectives, given that all participants in this study were women. Incorporating the viewpoints of Black fathers would enhance the study, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences associated with

school suspensions. Another recommendation would be to interview more than six participants. Although qualitative studies can vary between 6-10 participants, increasing sample size would provide stronger and more reliable results that could be generalized for the population. A final recommendation would be to conduct a quantitative study. This would be beneficial in that it could enhance rigor and depth and offer a more robust understanding of this topic and its implications.

Implications

The findings and results of this study are poised to contribute significantly to social change by serving as a valuable resource in understanding how out-of-school suspension impacts middle school Black boys' social and psychological well-bring. This research will inform and inspire educational stakeholders working with this demographic to collaborate with parents, seeking their perspectives on the impact of suspension and the most effective ways to support their sons upon their return. The study unequivocally demonstrates the emotional and psychological toll that suspension takes on Black boys, adding crucial insights to the existing literature and providing valuable guidance for school counselors. This newfound understanding will equip counselors to better support this population through diverse approaches and tools rooted in best practices during the reentry process. To foster social change, there is a need to broaden the focus of suspension discussions beyond the purely academic consequences, especially concerning Black boys.

Conclusion

Black boys deserve recognition, a voice, and support. While it's widely acknowledged in education that Black boys face disproportionate suspension rates compared to other racial and gender groups, existing research primarily focuses on their academic impact. But what about their mental well-being? In an era where mental health awareness is growing, this crucial aspect is often overlooked for this population. However, their parents see, hear, and support them, as evidenced by this study where parents have spoken on their behalf. The research underscores that the social and psychological well-being of Black boys is indeed affected by suspension. It is imperative that these boys receive the necessary help and support they deserve upon reentering school post-suspension, as their lives could depend on it.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

Introduction

Good (morning/afternoon)! My name is Christopher Kemp, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am in the Counselor Education and Supervision program. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to interview you as part of a qualitative research study for my dissertation. My research is centered around the research question: What are the lived experiences of parents of Black middle school boys and the social and psychological impact of school suspension? Your responses will be recorded and used in the research. Although direct quotes may be used in the study and article, any identifying information will be kept anonymous. Are there any questions?

I would like to acknowledge that we are recording this interview. After it is transcribed, you will have an opportunity to review a hard copy of the transcription to correct any misconceptions. Do you consent to me recording this interview?
As we begin, I would also like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. You received and acknowledged my email, which contained information about the study. Your participation in this interview is 100% voluntary, and if you wish to discontinue at any time, you may do so. Do you have any questions before we begin? With your permission, we will begin the interview.

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about what led to your son's suspension from school?

2. How did you initially react and respond once you learned about the suspension?

    a. How did your son express his feelings and concerns?

3. Did your son offer any explanation or perspective on his actions that led to the suspension?

    a. After hearing his explanation and perspective, how did you, as a parent, feel about the consequences of suspension being used?

4. During your son's suspension, was there any changes in his behavior, attitude, and/or interaction with family/friends?

5. What were your perceptions of your son's emotional well-being during the time he was suspended?

6. What were your thoughts and feelings about your son returning back to school after being suspended?

    a. What were your son's thoughts and feelings about returning to school after the suspension period was over?

7. From your personal experience, do you feel suspension helped or harmed the overall well-being of your son? Please explain.

Closing

Thank you for your time and for sharing your lived experiences. Should you have any questions or concerns in the meantime, please feel free to contact me via email at

███████████████████

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Subject line:

Research study on Black parents of Black boys who have been suspended from middle

school

Email message:

There is a new study about how out-of-school suspension impacts middle school Black

boy's social and psychological well-being that could help school counselors, teachers,

administrators, and policymakers better understand and help this population, specifically

regarding discipline. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences as

parents of Black middle school boys who have been suspended from middle school.

<u>About the study:</u>

- One <u>60-minute, confidential </u>interview (zoom option available) that will be audio recorded (no videorecording)
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

<u>Volunteers must meet these requirements:</u>

- self-identify as Black
- have a son in middle school (grade 6-8)
- have a son who has been suspended from school at least one time

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Christopher Kemp, a Ph.D. student at

Walden University. Interviews will take place during <u>October</u>.

Please email ████████████████████████ to let the researcher know of your interest.

You are welcome to forward it to others who might be interested.

Appendix C: Advertising Flyer

Research Opportunity:

Research study on Black parents of Black boys who have been suspended from

middle school

There is a new study about how out-of-school suspension impacts middle school Black

boy's social and psychological well-being that could help school counselors, teachers,

administrators, and policymakers better understand and help this population, specifically

regarding discipline. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences as

parents of Black middle school boys who have been suspended from middle school.

About the study:

- One 60-minute, confidential interview (zoom option available) that will be audio recorded (no videorecording)

- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

<u>Volunteers must meet these requirements:</u>

- self-identify as Black
- have a son in middle school (grade 6-8)
- have a son who has been suspended from school at least one time

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Christopher Kemp, a Ph.D. student at

Walden University. Interviews will take place during <u>October</u>.

Please email Christopher Kemp privately to let him know of your interest!!!