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# The Intersection of Race, Gender and the School to Prison Pipeline: A Case Study on the Impact of Exclusionary Discipline on African American Girls

Karen Nicole Wallace  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Karen Wallace

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## Review Committee

Dr. Heather Mbaye, Committee Chairperson,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Robert Schaefer, Committee Member,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Michael Brewer, University Reviewer,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer  
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2017

Abstract

The Intersection of Race, Gender and the School to Prison Pipeline: A Case Study on the  
Impact of Exclusionary Discipline on African American Girls

by

Karen Wallace

MPA, Walden University, 2015

BA, James Madison University, 1997

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2017

## Abstract

Exclusionary discipline in school contributes to gender and racial disproportionality in the juvenile justice system and marginalizes African American girls. Using the social justice and rational choice theories as the foundation, the purpose of this case study was to explore the relationship between the criminalization of behavior in schools, racial bias, and gender stereotypes contribute to the overrepresentation of the school to prison pipeline in Virginia. The central research question focused on the relationship between the criminalization of behavior in schools, racial bias, and gender stereotypes on the overrepresentation of African American girls in the school to prison pipeline. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 8 African American women (ages 20-30) and surveys from 12 educators. Other data included school discipline and juvenile justice reports from the Virginia Department of Education and Office of Juvenile Justice. The interview data were coded and analyzed using matrix and thematic analysis. Three findings emerged from the thematic analysis from document data. First, participants perceive diversionary programs, community partnership and restorative justice programs create safe and positive learning environments. Second, there are opportunities for policymakers to use their influence to promote social equity. Finally, zero tolerance policies are ineffective. The positive social change implications from this study include recommendations to policymakers to implement restorative justice programs to ensure that all students learn in a positive environment. These actions will benefit all students in public schools and decrease racial disparities in schools and the juvenile justice system.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my family and close friends who supported me during my doctoral journey. I would like to thank my parents for their support and encouragement. I would like to thank my daughters for their patience and support when my time and attention was focused on completing my doctoral coursework and dissertation. I want to thank my sister for being my writing partner and accountability coach and motivating me to finish this journey. I am thankful to many people who encouraged me to stay focused and never give up on my dreams. Langston Hughes asked a question in one of his poems. "What happens to a dream deferred?" A dream deferred means that you are completing your journey in your own time and way. My journey has taken longer than anticipated but I am glad that it is finally complete. I want to dedicate my dissertation to all the dreamers.

## Acknowledgments

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Heather Mbaye for her patience and encouragement during my dissertation process. Likewise, additional gratitude and special appreciation is due to my committee members and U.R.R., Dr. Clive Tsuma, Dr. Schaefer and Dr. Michael Brewer.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

This qualitative research project will examine the impact of racial bias and gender stereotypes on educators' decisions to discipline students, the consequences of harsh discipline and how exclusionary discipline practices lead to the school to prison pipeline. This qualitative research project will examine the biases of race and gender stereotypes based on educators' decisions to discipline students, consequences of harsh discipline and the implications for African American girls. Education and public policy research fail to address how the criminalization of behavior in schools and increased exposure to law enforcement created a system which values incarceration over education. The research that is presented in the dissertation addressed a gap in understanding by focusing on the educational outcomes and experiences of African American girls. School to prison pipeline is a systemic problem in the education and criminal justice system, which requires intervention from policymakers and stakeholders. Chapter 1 will include the following sections: background, problem statement, purpose of study, research questions, theoretical foundation, nature of study, definitions, assumptions, scopes and delimitations, limitations and significance.

## **Background**

The Gun Safe Act of 1994 was signed in response to an increase in gun violence. Schools adopted zero tolerance policies, which criminalized behavior in schools in an attempt to create safe schools. Zero tolerance policies in schools contributed to the school to prison pipeline. The school to prison pipeline refers to disciplinary practices, which lead to criminalizing behavior in schools and result in contact with the juvenile justice system. An estimated 2 million students are suspended each year from secondary schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). African American youth (ages 12-14) are suspended about four times more often than their peers. The decision to discipline is more subjective for African American youth. Teachers are influenced by their own biases and perceptions of African American youth. African American girls face a statistically greater chance of suspension and expulsion compared to other students of the same gender (Crenshaw, Nanda & Ocen, 2015). According to the School Survey on Crime and Safety (2013), police in schools have a disproportionate effect on the outcomes of marginalized youth (Na & Gottfredson, 2013; Mowen & Brent, 2016). African American girls are more likely to be referred to school administration or law enforcement for disorderly conduct and fighting. According to US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2014), 20% of African-American boys and more than 12% of African American girls received out of school suspension during the 2013-2014 school year. (U.S. Department of Education, 2014, p. 3). African American girls represent the fastest-growing segment of the juvenile justice system in secure confinement.

Limited research exists that rigorously examines the intersections between race, gender, education and incarceration. George (2015) supports the notion that racial and gender stereotypes contribute to the choice to discipline African-American girls. A study conducted by Butler et al., (2012), revealed that gender, school level, and behavior help to predict the odds of being suspended or expelled from school. The current literature on school discipline does not consider the possibility of gender stereotypes and implicit bias as factors, which contribute to decisions to suspended students. African American girls do not fit “societal norms.” A Yale University study on early childhood educators revealed that teachers' implicit biases regarding race and gender influence their decisions to discipline their students. Exclusionary discipline policies and practices in schools adversely impact African American girls and influence their decisions to leave school and engage in delinquent behavior. As a result, African American girls are more likely to receive referrals to law enforcement, adjudication, and secure confinement.

The existing school to prison pipeline research on African American males will provide a foundation for the current study on the intersection between race, gender, and the school to prison pipeline. Graham (2014), recommended future research on whether not a relationship exists between educational outcomes and contact with the criminal justice system. Educational achievement indirectly and directly relates to recidivism across race and sex. Educational achievement for incarcerated youth can positively impact their reentry by increasing the likelihood of the return to school and decreasing recidivism. (Bloomberg, Bales & Piquero, 2012).

Suspensions and expulsions lead to student disengagement, grade retention and decreased graduation rates for African American girls. Exclusionary discipline such as suspension and expulsion lead to unintended consequences such as school push out and drop out. Zero tolerance policies in schools contribute to racial disparities in the classrooms and fuel the school to prison pipeline and criminal justice system. Educational and public policy research does not address the impact of the school to prison pipeline on minority girls. A research study on the impact of exclusionary discipline on African American girls will encourage policymakers to review, revise and replace existing disciplinary policies and practices.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Zero tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline practices (suspension and expulsion) have marginalized African American girls and created a “culture” which values incarceration over education. The U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Division (OCR) (2014) collects discipline data from every district in the country biennially. The report revealed that Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate higher three times greater than their White peers. Suspensions and expulsions create unintended consequences such as absenteeism, student disengagement, loss of educational opportunities and referrals to the juvenile justice system. Widespread implementation of zero tolerance policies in schools has led to an increased rate of school suspensions and expulsions in schools. Prior research on school discipline determined that a causal relationship exists between harsh discipline and student outcomes. Data collected from the UCLA Civil Rights Project in 2012, revealed that 10% of all students received out of school suspension during the 2011-2012 school year. 23% of the students suspended were African Americans, which supports prior research on racial disparities in schools. Multiple research studies focused on school discipline policies and the school to prison pipeline adversely affect African American males. Exclusionary discipline practices negatively impact African American girls, but existing research, data and public policies do not reflect gender disparities in the educational and justice systems.

Prior research on the school to prison pipeline revealed a need for future research on the intersection between race, gender and the school to prison pipeline. A literature gap exists which explains which social, economic and environmental factors funnel African American girls into to school to prison pipeline. The proposed qualitative study will examine the intersection between race, gender, and school to prison pipeline.

Prior research education and social science research conducted by The African American Family Policy Forum (2015) revealed that both African American girls and boys received more out of school suspensions and expulsions than their peers. Institutional racism is often blamed for zero tolerance programs and achievement gaps. Limited research exists which emphasizes the impact of the school to prison pipeline on African American girls. Morris (2015) suggests that policymakers and educators should prioritize dismantling policies that criminalize Black girls for noncriminal behavior. The Commonwealth of Virginia School Crime Report (2015) indicated that of the 4,156 long-term suspensions in the 2014- 2015 school year, behavior incidents (defiance, classroom/campus disruption demonstrations, minor physical altercation, using obscene languages and disrespect were the most reported. Finn, 2014; Servos, 2014; Morris, 2015, agree that African Americans are consistently represented in the school to prison pipeline due to implicit, and explicit bias by teachers for minor infractions and suspending students reduces instruction time and often results in those most in need of adult supervision being left unsupervised.

Prior research on the school to prison pipeline fails to address the intersectionality of race, gender, and discipline. (Haight, Kayama, Gibson, 2016; Morris, 2015).

The current research project examined the relationship between discipline and contact with the criminal justice system and the implications for African American girls.



## Purpose of Study

The central purpose of this study was to examine the implication of the school to prison pipeline on African- American girls. The secondary purpose of this study was to advance the understanding of how exclusionary discipline policies and practices, racial bias, and gender stereotypes marginalize African American girls and increase their exposure to the criminal justice system. The current research study improved understanding of how racial bias and stereotypes influence discipline practices and involvement with the juvenile justice system.

## Research Questions

For this qualitative case study, the relationship between exclusionary discipline and the school to prison pipeline will be examined. Thus, the critical issue framing this research is:

1. How does the criminalization of behavior in schools, racial bias, and gender stereotypes contribute to the overrepresentation of African American girls in the school to Prison pipeline?
2. How do exclusionary discipline policies and practices such as suspension and expulsion contribute to racial and gender disparities in school discipline?
3. How do exclusionary discipline practices such as zero tolerance policies fuel the school to prison pipeline?
4. How can policymakers and educators provide a fair and equitable Learning environment and address school discipline?

## Theoretical Framework

The social justice and institutional rational choice theories provided the foundation for this study. John Rawls formulated the social justice theory in 1971. Rawls (1971) identified two principles: justice as fairness and justice as the first “virtue” of society. Rawls (1971) believed that each person should have equal rights and enjoy the same liberties. According to Rawls (1971), the government is responsible for promoting an egalitarian concept of justice. Social justice is essentially defined as organizing society in the best interests of the least advantaged. The social justice theory is relevant to the current research study because African American girls are marginalized by society. African American girls face implicit bias in schools. Zero tolerance policies lead to racial disparities in discipline. As a result, African American girls are funneled into the school to prison pipeline. According to the Sentencing Project (2014), the number of African American women in prison is more than twice the rate of White women. The female incarceration rate has risen about 700% between 1980-2014 (Sentencing Project, 2014).

The rational choice theory is often used in criminal justice research to advance understanding of crime decision-making. Kahneman (2002) is associated with the

application of the rational choice perspective to criminology. According to Pogarsky, Roche & Pickett (2017), crime decisions are multi-dimensional and that offenders weigh the opportunity costs before committing a crime. The same theory can be applied to harsh disciplinary policies and practices in schools. Schools use zero tolerance policies to ensure that all students have a safe learning environment. Teachers, administrators and school safety and security must identify the opportunity cost of punishing students. Students must weigh the potential consequences of not following school rules. The rational choice theory can be applied to the current research study because educators have a responsibility to provide a safe and secure. Educators will consider the severity of the punishment based on the perception of the student as a deviant or “troublemaker.” The rational choice and social justice theories will answer the research questions about how exclusionary discipline practices contribute to racial and gender disparities in schools and fuel the school to prison pipeline. A more detailed explanation of the social justice and rational choice theories will be presented in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of Study**

A qualitative case study will be used for the research study. According to Stake (1995) and Yin (2003), a case study should be used to explore the “essence” of phenomenon, promote collaboration between researchers and participants and enable participants to tell their stories. The purpose of a case study is to answer how and why a phenomenon occurred in its real-life context. The phenomenon that was investigated in this research study is the intersection of race, gender and the school to prison pipeline and how exclusionary discipline affects African American girls. African American women (Ages 25-30), teachers and administrators will be interviewed for the purpose of this research study. Other data such as document analysis; focus group and questionnaires will be used for the research analysis. Data will be collected and maintained through NVivo. Transcripts, archival data, field notes and observations will be analyzed through word frequency query to determine common themes and patterns. An analysis of responses will be transcribed in Chapter IV.

## Operational Definitions and Terms

African American: "A person having origins in any origins of the Black racial groups of Africa."\*(National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015, para. 5).

Critical Race Theory- "Race is a social construction that exists for separation and stratification of the dominant group." (Crichlow, 2015).

Disproportionate Minority Contact- "The disproportionate representation of minority youth in the juvenile justice system" (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2016).

Exclusionary Discipline- "Creating practices that remove students from instruction such as suspensions and expulsions." (United States Department of Education 2015).

Intersectionality- "The complex of reciprocal attachments and sometimes polarizing conflicts that confront both individuals and movements as they navigate among the raced, gendered and class-based dimensions of political and social life." (University of California, 2012).

Expulsion- banning a student for at least one calendar year. (Justice Policy Institute, 2015).

Juvenile- "A person who has not attained his [or her] 18<sup>th</sup> birthday" (United States Department of Justice, 2015, para. 1).

Positive Behavior Intervention- "A framework which provides the systems and tools for establishing a continuum of evidence-based practices regardless of whether the setting is a general, special education, lockdown correctional facility or alternative program for youth." (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013).

Rational Choice Theory- "An agent's preferences over relevant fundamental objects (possible worlds, states, outcomes) depend on the reason that motivates him or her and may vary with changes in them." (Nilsson, 2015).

School to Prison Pipeline- "Disparate treatment in schools that may result in criminal sanctions." (Snap & Hoeing, 2015).

Social Justice Theory- "The idea that all social values, liberty, and opportunity, income and wealth should be distributed evenly by self-respect unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values, is to everyone's advantage." (Rawls, 1971).

Suspension- "Banning a student from school for 10-364 days." (Langburg & Cioli, 2016).

Zero Tolerance – "Mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses." (United States Department of Education and Department of Justice, 1999 app.A.)

### **Assumptions**

A relationship exists between punitive disciplinary practices and the criminal justice system. Punitive school policies have an adverse effect on minority students. The consequences of the exclusionary discipline are low student achievement, school push out, school drop out, and involvement with the criminal justice system. Prior research on the school to prison pipeline identified African American males as an at-risk group for suspension and expulsion in schools. Policymakers have designed interventions, which address the school to prison pipeline in terms of African American males. Stakeholders assume that African American girls are not an at-risk group although school discipline statistics support the need for further investigation. According to Morris (2015), the school to prison pipeline exposes African American girls to violence, arrest and suspension (Morris, 2015, p. 5).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This research study will examine the effect of exclusionary discipline on the school to prison pipeline through the lens of the social justice and rational choice theories. The research focus is African American girls because of prior research in the criminal justice and education fields, which identify African American girls as an at-risk population. Theories such as the critical race and racial threat theories have been used in previous studies on the school to prison pipeline. The critical race theory analyzes institutional racism as a mechanism to marginalize minorities. The racial threat theory is often used as a theoretical lens in school to prison pipeline research. Educational institutions apply zero tolerance policies in school because of the perception of African Americans as a threat to the learning environment. The current research study analyzed how racial bias and gender stereotypes contribute to negative perceptions of African American girls lead to punitive consequences in schools and society. The social justice and rational choice theories will provide a foundation for pipeline research from a sociological perspective. The research will be limited to African American women in Virginia within a specific age range (25-30). According to the UCLA Civil Rights Report (2016), Virginia public schools have the highest suspension rate in the country. An analysis of African American girls in Northern Virginia would provide unique insight on their experiences. The demographics in Northern Virginia are constantly changing due to immigration and families moving into suburban areas. Future research could be conducted on Hispanic females in Northern Virginia due to the increasing immigrant population in several counties close to Washington, D.C.



### **Limitations**

A potential limitation in this research study is oversaturation. A specific group within a population will be studied. An innumerable amount of research exists on the school to prison pipeline in terms of African Americans. The current study will focus on a specific group of African American women in a geographical area. Surveys will be distributed to educators, administrators, parents and school safety officers in the Northern Virginia. Data will be derived from several sources including the Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Juvenile Justice Services and provide a framework for future research on the research problem. The limitations to this study will be discussed in Chapter 5. The research study generated reliable data because the researcher used triangulation and examined several data sources.

### **Significance of Study**

This qualitative case study will encourage policymakers to assess discipline practices in schools. The Legal Justice Center (2015) published a report on suspension of students in Virginia. The data in *Suspended Progress* is consistent with other pipeline research, which identifies racial disparities in disciplinary practices. Virginia leads the country in the rate of student referrals to law enforcement, which is three times the national average. According to Langberg (2015), “the biggest things local governments can do is increase funding for prevention and positive alternatives and promote socio-economic diversity (Powell, 2012, p. 5). Racial disparities in school discipline and the juvenile justice system in Virginia represents a national trend, which values exclusionary discipline instead of student achievement. A qualitative study on the pipeline from the perspective of young women of color will provide insight into why this problem exists and the impact on their lives after high school. The problem is finding solutions, which address the racial disparities and stop the pipeline. This research study will impact social change because policymakers will consider policies and best practices, which benefit all students regardless of race or gender.

**Summary**

The purpose of Chapter 1 was to introduce the research problem and focus. The first chapter contained the background, problem statement, purpose of study, Research questions, theoretical framework, nature of the study, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations and significance. Chapter 2 will introduce existing research on the school to prison pipeline, which identifies a literature gap. The literature gap will be addressed with current research project.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

This qualitative research study examined the intersection of race, gender, and the school to prison pipeline and the implications for African American girls. Limited research exists on the intersection of race, gender, and the pipeline. Although African American males and females are affected by exclusionary discipline, African American girls face a greater chance of suspension and expulsion than their peers (Crenshaw, Nanda, Ocen, 2015). The Commonwealth of Virginia School Survey on Crime and Safety (2013), reports that police presence in schools have a disproportionate effect on the outcomes for marginalized groups such as African Americans (Gottfredson, 2013). The literature on the school to prison pipeline suggests that Black girls face higher risks of the suspension and expulsion for subjective behavioral infractions. Girls who are suspended of face a significantly greater chance of low academic achievement. Researchers suggest that African American girls are suspended because of educators view them as “unruly, loud and unmanageable” (Morris, 2015).

Zero tolerance policies in schools have contributed to racial disparities in discipline. Urban schools are more likely to have School Resource Officers, harsher discipline practices and more referrals to law enforcement. Losen & Rumburger, 2016, conducted a study on racial disproportionality in school discipline. The study examined the "cost of exclusionary discipline. The study revealed that suspension and the economic impact of suspensions are disproportionate by race. Limited educational opportunities can contribute to the school to prison pipeline. African American girls are suspended based on implicit bias. School discipline policies and practices are subjective due to bias and stereotypes often held by teachers of other races. African American girls who speak out in the classroom receive negative experience from the teacher, especially if they are White (Fordham, 1997; Morris, 2012). The Virginia Department of Education School Safety Report, 2015, revealed that students were suspended most often for belligerence, disrespect, and disorderly conduct. Research from the Virginia Department of Education is consistent with current pipeline research, which revealed that school discipline is racially disproportionate. Buckingham (2013) agreed that unfair applications of disciplinary referrals impact a child's moral development and his or her respect for authority figures and society as a whole. Exclusionary discipline has created a climate where incarceration is valued over education. Exclusionary discipline leads to student disengagement, school push out, and dropout. As a result, African American girls are more likely to have contact with the criminal justice system. A relationship exists between exclusionary discipline and the school to prison pipeline.

The current study will add to an existing body of research on the school to prison pipeline by examining how racial bias and gender stereotypes contribute to educators' decisions to suspend or expel students. Morris (2015) explained that African American girls are marginalized and "invisible" in pipeline research. Chapter 2 addressed the following: prior research on the school to prison pipeline and exclusionary discipline, literature gap and why the school to prison pipeline research on African American girls is necessary.

### **Literature Strategy**

The literature search strategies included an in-depth search in Walden University Library research databases to include ProQuest and all EBSCOhost databases such as SAGE Premier, Political Science Complete, ERIC and ProQuest Criminal Justice. Also, archival data from Virginia Department of Education, Bureau of Justice Statistics and Department of Justice and Google Scholar were utilized. Search terms included school to prison pipeline, exclusionary discipline, juvenile justice, critical race theory, racial threat theory, alternatives to discipline, and African American women in prison. Additional articles were examined after reviewing the reference section from each article and dissertation. Articles on African American males and the School to Prison Pipeline were used to build a foundation for future research on the impact of the school to prison pipeline on African American females.

## Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework utilized to analyze the relationship between race, gender, and school discipline will be supported by two theories: Rawls Social Justice Theory (1971) and Kahneman's Rational Choice Theory. I discussed the theoretical propositions of these theories and had they have been applied previously in ways similar to this study. Chapter 3 (Methodology) will include the following subsections: overview, experience with social justice theory, experience with institutional rational choice (social science perspective) and theoretical and conceptual frameworks, which are related to social justice, and rational choice.

### Overview

The Rawls Social Theory follows Rousseau's Social Contract Theory and John Stuart Mill's Utilitarian theory, which implies that citizens engage in a contract with the government to protect their rights. Rawls argued that reasonable citizens want to belong to a society where political power is "legitimately used." Rawls (1971) described a "well-ordered society." in *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls (1971) believed that citizens are free and equal and entitled to a fair system of cooperation. Rawls' theory can be applied to this qualitative case study because zero tolerance policies contribute to DMC (Disproportionate Minority Contact) in the criminal justice system. Blader & Chen (2012) conducted a study entitled, *Power, Status, and Justice*. In their study, Blader & Chen (2012), argued that power is negatively related to justice and that high power individuals are less likely to treat other fairly (p. 3). The racial threat and critical race theories provided a foundation for prior research on the school to prison pipeline.



Heilbronn, Cornell & Lovegrove (2012), used the racial threat theory address concerns about racial disparities in school suspension rates in Virginia high schools. Heilbronn, Cornell & Lovegrove (2012), determined that principals' attitudes toward zero tolerance influence school disciplinary policies and practices. The social justice theory supports this study because Rawls believed that each person must have equal rights and the most extensive basic liberty compatible with similar liberty for others. According to Blader & Chen (2012), power creates distance and disassociation between the person that possesses power and their "lower power counterparts" which would lead the higher power people to treat their "lower power counterparts" unfairly. (p. 4). The idea of power creates inequality is relevant to school to prison pipeline research on racial disproportionality in exclusionary discipline.

The rational choice theory is used in criminal justice research to explain how an "actor" weighs the costs and benefits of their actions before engaging in deviant behavior.

Sabatier and Weible (2014) described institutional choice as to how "institutional rules alter the rational and strategic actors pursuing self-interested goals." Institutions such as schools would rather refer students to law enforcement instead of taking care of discipline problems in a school setting. The institutional rational choice theory can be applied to the proposed research study because students weight the costs and benefits of their actions before violating school policy. Voronov (2014) analyzed the link between emotions and institutional theory. Voronov (2014) discovered that prior research in institutional theory fails to support the idea that emotions play a more "expansive" role in institutional work.

Teachers and administrators use rational choice when considering whether or not to enforce suspension and expulsion. The social justice theory and institutional rational choice theory will provide the foundation for this study on racial and gender disparities in the application of school discipline.

### **Social Justice Theory**

The social justice theory is the fair and just relationship between the individual and society. Social justice theory is the idea that all social values are the basis of self-respect and should be distributed equally (Rawls 1971). Aull (2012) conducted a study on whether or not zero tolerance policies violated a student's constitutional rights. Aull (2012) conducted interviews with teachers, administrators, and students. The study revealed that "the new culture" of discipline added a layer of instability to a fragile learning environment in school. Aull (2012) suggests that education officials explore alternatives to exclusionary discipline to ensure student safety without harsh discriminatory practices. Rawls (1971) described two principles of justice in his research. The first principle is that each person is entitled to equal rights and fundamental liberty. The second principle is that injustice exists when people do not have the same opportunities. The disproportionate application of exclusionary discipline, adjudication, and confinement convey a message that education and courts "mistrusted" the children whom society should be attempting to educate about the value of Justice (Buckingham, 2013, p. 195). Previous research studies on the school to prison pipeline used the broken windows theory, critical race theory, and racial threat theory to explain why African American teens are more likely to be funneled from school and into the pipeline. The

social justice theory is another theory used in social science research to explain why injustices exist with an institution. Researchers agreed that zero tolerance policies do not provide educators and students with possible resolutions (Hernandez, 2016). The goal of maintaining in the school environment for those who want to learn should be the priority of every school. Prior research on zero tolerance revealed that policymakers find more efficient ways to educate all youth (Losen, D., 2013).

School administrators are responsible for maintaining safe and orderly schools. A review of student discipline and suspension revealed that student discipline and principals and educators bias contributes to their decision to punish students. Existing research conducted by the OCR (Office for Civil Rights, United States Department of Education), resulted in a national investigation of discipline referrals. The results of the study were the African American students were 3.78 times more likely to be referred to the office and receive expulsion or out of school suspension. According to Skiba et al. (2011), The data on racial bias provided evidence that student discipline was subjective and influenced by a student's ethnic background. Skiba et al. 2011, encouraged school leaders to become knowledgeable about the intersection between “racism, sexism, and classism.” The Social Justice theory Rawls (1971) believes that justice is fairness, which should answer to the demands of both freedom and equality. Administrators have a responsibility to treat students fairly.

## **Rational Choice Theory**

The rational choice theory is about how an individual weighs the means, costs, and benefits before making a choice. The rational choice theory provides a theoretical framework for social science research. The assumptions are: people are rational actors, people freely choose behavior and the government is responsible for maintaining law and order. The institutional rational choice theory explains why institutions make decisions. Voronov (2014) argued that it is important to understand the intersection of emotions and organizational behavior. The rational choice theory could be applicable in school to prison pipeline research. Coggshall, Osher, & Colombi (2013), assessed how educators' interactions with students contributed to the school to prison pipeline. Coggshall, Osher & Colombi (2013), determined that teachers directly impact children's trajectory through the school to prison pipeline. One of the four ways that educators affect children's path into the pipeline is through their responses to positive teacher-student relationships in schools. Positive interactions between teachers and students are central to positive academic and social outcomes and can, therefore, help prevent entrance into the pipeline.

Na & Gottfredson (2013) conducted a study based on the school survey on crime and safety. The research questions were: Does adding police to schools reduce crime? Do adding policies to schools increase formal processing of behavior? Does a law enforcement presence in schools increase the likelihood of harsh discipline practices? Na & Gottfredson (2013) concluded that having school resource officers in school did not increase school safety. Students made a rational choice of whether or not to obey law enforcement. The schools added SROs to their school to create a safe school and learning

environment. The institutional rational choice is about making the "correct" decision after weighing all the options. Na & Gottfredson (2013) reported that police in schools have a disproportionate effect on marginalized students. The rational choice theory applies to this study because administrators must make a decision whether or not to utilize police officers in schools.

### **Other theories related to Criminal Justice and Public Policy**

The implicit bias and social dominance theories have been used in sociological research to show how implicit racial stereotypes impact how members of ethnic groups respond to outsiders. Hutchinson (2015), studied disproportionate minority contact from a public policy perspective. The study focused on criminal statutes that disparately impact people of color. Hutchinson (2015) determined that implicit racial biases could limit the capacity of lawmakers to empathize with individuals of color. Hutchinson (2015), encouraged researchers to apply the implicit bias theory to provide an empirical foundation for racial justice advocacy. Theories such as implicit bias, social dominance, racial threat and critical race theory address different aspects of school to prison pipeline research and provide support for the argument that implicit bias and stereotypes have contributed to the marginalization of people of color.

### **Significance of Theoretical Framework**

The institutional rational choice theory is used in public policy research to show how policymakers and stakeholders make decisions about opportunity costs. Policymakers make decisions based on which policy or program will benefit the most people. The school to prison pipeline is a systemic problem. Policymakers must make a rational choice on how to provide safe and secure schools without marginalizing students based on their racial background or gender identity. Rawls (1971) discusses the “veil of ignorance” in *Theory of Justice*. Rawls (1971) believes that four primary goods exist: rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth and conditions for self-respect (Follesdal, 2014, p. 1). Rawls Social Justice Theory can be used to support pipeline research because policymakers, educators and stakeholders make decisions for the “greater good” without considering the impact on minority groups. The current research study will explore the implications of making policies, which do not benefit all students regardless of their circumstances.

## **Introduction**

Numerous studies have explored the impact of the zero tolerance policies on minority youth specifically African American males (e.g. Servos, 2012; Townsend-Walker, 2014, Busby, Lamber, & Lalongo, 2013, Ganao, Silvestre, Glenn; 2013, Buckingham, 2013). According to Townsend-Walker, 2014, racial disparities in suspension led to discriminatory policies and practices in schools and halted progress made as a result of *Brown vs. the Board of Education* which required schools to treat all students fairly.

In this literature review, I explored zero tolerance policies, exclusionary discipline, the school to prison pipeline and the impact of discriminatory policies in education and the criminal justice system. The literature review contains the following sections: zero tolerance, school to prison pipeline, exclusionary discipline, race, gender and school to prison pipeline, alternatives to punishment, and social change.

### **Zero Tolerance Policies**

Exclusionary discipline policies such as zero tolerance have created a pipeline between school and the criminal justice system. Several researchers determined that zero tolerance policies contribute to disparate discipline in schools (Busby, Lambert & Lalongo, 2013; Curtis, 2015). According to Busby, Lambert & Lalongo (2013), a connection exists between harsh disciplinary practices in schools, referrals to law enforcement and contact with the criminal justice system, particularly when they handle minor crimes and violations of zero tolerance policies. Curtis (2015) criticized zero tolerance policies for doing little to deter violence in schools. Zero tolerance policies have disproportionately adverse effects on minority students and contribute to high rates of recidivism (Busby, Lambert & Lalongo (2013); Curtis, 2015).

Schools adopted zero tolerance policies in schools in response to the 1980s, "War on Drugs." The Broken Windows theory of crime (1997) contributed to the application of zero tolerance in schools. The Broken Windows theory equates a surge in crime with broken windows. Broken windows require repairs, or more damage may occur. Zero tolerance policies are supposed to protect all students and provide a positive school climate. Zero tolerance policies are beginning to criminalize minor infractions in schools such as disrespect, disorderly conduct, and belligerence. Researchers agree that frequent use of suspension is not educationally necessary and justifiable. Zero tolerance policies adversely affect African American learners in school settings. Losen (2013) concluded that suspending students reduces instruction time and adult supervision.



Townsend-Walker (2014) concurs with other scholars who fault the education system for fueling the school to prison pipeline. The failure of zero tolerance in schools has influenced policy makers to reevaluate current discipline practices. The Commonwealth of Virginia General Assembly (2017) is considering a bill (HB 1534), which limits out of school suspensions from 365 to 45 days unless "aggravating circumstances" exists. (Virginia General Assembly, 2017). Widespread implementation of zero tolerance policies contributes to increased rates of school suspension and expulsion which has placed minority youth at risk for contact with the juvenile justice system (Buckingham, 2013; Monahan, 2014).

Zero tolerance policies have created a need to reassess school discipline policies and practices. Rates of suspension and expulsion vary dramatically across schools and school district but data compiled by the U.S. Department of Education (2016), determined that school suspension and expulsions adversely affect students of color and students with disabilities. No data exists to show that out of school suspensions, and expulsions reduce disruption or improve school climate. A study conducted by Skiba (2013) concluded that zero tolerance policies as implemented failed to achieve the goals of an efficient system of school discipline. Hernandez (2016), continued research on the zero tolerance when she conducted a study on how punitive measures disproportionately affect students of color specifically Chicana/o students in California. Hernandez (2016), agreed with other researchers who believe that zero tolerance policies have not provided educators and students with positive resolutions to discipline problems.

Hernandez (2016), advised stakeholders to put pressure on policymakers, administrators, and teachers to create policies that will help them create safe and healthy learning environments for all students.

Zero tolerance policies contribute to the school to prison pipeline. The school to prison pipeline refers to the phenomenon where students are funneled out of school into the prison pipeline. Wolf (2013) conducted a study about the use of arrest in response to student behavior in Delaware. According to the study, a disproportionate number of African American students faced arrests and females seemed to experience differential treatment. Wolf (2013) analyzed archival data from the Delaware Department of Education, which was disaggregated by race and gender. The disproportionate arrest rate for African American students in Delaware is consistent with the number of students who are suspended or expelled. The data revealed that Black juveniles in the state were three times more likely to be arrested than White youths. Wolf (2013) research is consistent with existing school to prison pipeline research, which shows that harsh discipline policies affect minority young people and African American girls in particular receive differential treatment in schools and the criminal justice system.

Zero tolerance policies and the school to prison pipeline have far-reaching implications. Zero tolerance policies in school lead to contact with the juvenile justice system, recidivism, school push-out and drop out. Beck & Muschkin (2012) conducted a study on three types of factors, which shape different educational opportunities and outcomes for students of different races.

The study focused on the linkages between academic and behavioral outcomes, proposing that many of the explanations in the achievement gap also contribute to understanding differences in student behavior in schools. The researchers used archival data on seventh graders attending schools in North Carolina. Beck & Muschkin (2012) contributed to research on the impact of racial discrimination on the achievement gap in schools. The study provided evidence that the United States educational system has to address racial disparities in schools. According to Beck and Muschkin (2012), race disparities in achievement and behavior will decrease if the government addressed discipline policies and practices that lead to high levels of grade retention among African American students.

### **School to prison pipeline**

The American Psychological Association (2014) defines the school to prison pipeline as practices, which hinder academic achievement for all students and increase the rates of retention, dropout, and involvement with the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The school to prison pipeline refers to discipline practices, which criminalize behavior. The consequences of the school to prison pipeline are academic disengagement, high dropout rates, increased criminal activity, and contact with the criminal justice system. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2014), African American girls represent the fastest-growing segment of the youth population in secure confinement. School to prison pipeline research focuses on African American males because data from the United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights identified racial disparities in suspension for African-Americans and students with disabilities. Research on zero tolerance policies and the school to prison pipeline show that exclusionary discipline policies and practices limit the educational and life outcomes of students of color.

The purpose of zero tolerance policies was to create a safe and positive learning environment. The critical race and racial threat theories provide a foundation for previous and current school to prison pipeline and zero tolerance policies, which determined that racial bias and stereotypes directly relate to a teacher's decision to discipline students. Mallet (2016), concluded that keeping students in school improves not only the individual success outcomes but also makes schools safer and learning environment more productive for all students.

Hernandez (2016) criticized the use of zero tolerance and exclusionary discipline as ineffective due to its contributions to juvenile arrests. According to Losen & Martinez (2013), the majority of suspensions are for minor infractions such as disorderly conduct rather than for serious offenses. Data disparities caused by "unsound" and unjustified policies or practices can violate minority students' civil rights. Data on exclusionary discipline and school to prison pipeline is limited because states and districts are not required to report disaggregated data which the number of students suspended publicly, the number of incidents, reasons for out of school suspensions and days of lost instruction. Losen & Martinez (2013), encourage schools to ensure reports include race/ethnicity, gender, ELL (Limited English Proficiency), and disability status because the educational system marginalizes this group of students.

The school to prison pipeline leads to decreased educational opportunities and increases the likelihood that students will not complete high school. Langberg & Fedders (2013), encouraged researchers to conduct quantitative research on the importance of stakeholder's interaction with juvenile offenders. Fedders & Langberg (2013) concurred with previous criminal justice research on how education attainment influences life outcomes. When school administrators suspend or expel students, the result may be severe consequences such as lower achievement in school and direct involvement with the court system.

Racial disproportionality in prison is related to racial disparities in the application of discipline in schools. According to Graham 2014, a trajectory exists through education that leads to problems in school, to exclusion from school and prison (Graham, 2014). Heilbronn, Cornell & Lovegrove conducted research on the school to prison pipeline in Virginia using the Zero Tolerance Attitudes Scale (ZTA). Heilbronn, Cornell & Lovegrove (2015), research is consistent with pipeline research in other states. This finding is "troubling" because suspension rates are associated with high dropout rates and juvenile crimes (Suh, et al., 2007). Heilbronn, Cornell & Lovegrove recommended future research on whether gender and other individual-level characteristics inform principals' attitudes toward zero tolerance.

Teacher and administrator perceptions of misbehavior contribute to their discipline policies and practices. Lewis, Romi & Roache (2012), the study on exclusionary discipline examined excluded students' perceptions of their teacher's behavior towards them before, during and after being sent from class. The majority of excluded students reported that one of the reasons they were sent out is because they made the teacher angry. 45% of students claimed that the teacher's opinion influenced whether or not the student received suspension or expulsion. Lewis, Romi & Roche (2015), believe that administrators should encourage teachers to use alternatives to punishment before excluding students from the classroom. Skiba (2013) recommends implementing strategies that reduce disruption and increase the safety of students in schools.

The consequences of the zero tolerance policies and the school to prison pipeline are the entry into juvenile and criminal justice systems and recidivism. Researchers agree that the school to prison pipeline and zero tolerance policies in school widen racial disparities in the percentage of students recommended for expulsion and the severity of the punishment. A study conducted by Hoffman (2014), focused on suspension and expulsion in the District of Columbia from 2005-2009. The study contributed to a growing body of research discouraging zero tolerance policies in schools. LaMarche (2011), encouraged school districts to end zero tolerance policies. Hoffman (2014), analysis resulted in the following opinions: the practices of mandating predetermined disciplinary consequences for students does not appear to serve as a deterrent for students, and zero tolerance policies do not create safe and secure schools. Reimagining the 'pipeline' can improve possible outcomes for students of color and young women with disabilities.

### **Exclusionary Discipline**

Exclusionary discipline is the suspension, expulsion and other disciplinary actions leading to a student's removal from the regular education setting. According to Monahanik et al. (2014), described exclusionary discipline and the school to prison pipeline as contributing to persistent offending academic failure, retention, high school dropout, reduced earnings and unemployment. Marchbanks et al. (2014) research on exclusionary discipline identified the economic costs associated with school discipline. Marchbanks et al. (2014), recommends that education agencies explore the financial burden that exclusionary discipline places on society as a whole. Gagnon, Jaffey & Kennedy (2016), called the school to prison pipeline an intended consequence of zero tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline. Gagnon, Jaffey & Kennedy (2016), cited a study of Ninth grade students in Florida from 2000-2008. The dropout rate of students among students with no suspensions was 16% compared to 53% of students with four or more suspensions. Research on exclusionary discipline is consistent with a school to prison pipeline and zero tolerance study which faults exclusionary discipline for creating the pipeline.

Suspensions and expulsions impact student perceptions of educators and authority figures. According to Buckingham (2013), the improper application of discipline referrals and sanctions affect a child's moral development and respect for authority. Suspensions during middle school lead to greater disparities in the achievement gap and higher rates of interaction with the juvenile delinquency system (Marrus, 2015).



Lost educational opportunities will impact an excluded student for the rest of their lives. If students do not receive appropriate educational services, they are likely to drop out of school and face involvement with the criminal justice system. Trauma, participation in the Child Welfare system and disciplinary actions increases a child's odds of future with the administration of juvenile justice. (Marrus, 2015, p. 34).

A negative relationship exists between race and exclusionary discipline. Skiba et al. (2014) conducted a study on exclusionary discipline in schools using a hierarchical linear approach. Skiba et al. (2014) hypothesized that the use of more severe disciplinary consequences of out of school suspension and expulsion would result in eventual contact with the juvenile justice system. The study resulted in two conclusions: Black students were significantly more likely to receive out of school suspension versus in-school suspension and racial disparities in the use of out of school suspension is influenced by a range of school variables including principals' perspectives on discipline. Skiba et al. (2014) recommended future analysis on the entirety of the discipline process including infractions, teacher tolerance, and classroom management. Mcelderry, & Cheng (2014); Marrus; (2014), encourage researchers to examine why African American boys are affected by exclusionary discipline more than their peers and find evidence-based practices that support African American students.

### **Race, Gender and the School to Prison Pipeline**

School to prison pipeline research has primarily focused on how African-American males are affected by school discipline and the juvenile justice system. Limited research exists on how African American girls about the impact of policies and practices, which contribute to the education to the prison pipeline. According to Klingbeil & Van Norman (2014), The students most at risk for harsh discipline are African American, male and special education students and students who are on free and reduced lunch. Young women of color and with disabilities marginalized" students because of the increasing of students' educated in secure confinement. (Annamma, 2014). Crenshaw (2015), conducted research on the school to prison pipeline for the African American Family Policy Forum. The study focused on how harsh disciplinary practices funnels African American girls into the school to prison pipeline. Crenshaw (2015) identified several "struggling" points. First, increased levels of law enforcement and security personnel within a school sometimes make students feel unsafe and less likely to attend school. Second, Punitive rather restorative responses to conflict control contribute to the separation of girls from school and their "disproportionate" involvement in the juvenile justice system. Finally, at risk young women describe zero tolerance schools as "chaotic" environments in which discipline is more relevant than educational attainment. According to Morris (2015), race has figured prominently in the critique of zero tolerance programs and the achievement gap, but gender has operated at a more discrete level. Morris (2015), described African American girls as "invisible" in zero tolerance research.

Morris (2015) recommends the expansion of school-based restorative justice efforts to support learning and community building.

Haight, Kayama, Gibson (2016), criticize school to prison pipeline research for not contributing to the intersection of race, gender experienced by Black girls, including sexual harassment by male students and inadequate protection from educators. Crenshaw, Nanda & Ocen (2015), view the school to prison pipeline from a sociological perspective. Crenshaw, Nanda & Ocen (2015), observed that African American girls face a statistically greater chance of suspension or expulsion compared to students of the same gender. The researchers recommended that policymakers review and revise policies that funnel girls into the juvenile justice system and develop best practices to ensure that school personnel enforced all students' rights to an environment free of sexual harassment and bullying. Racial bias and stereotypes influence teachers' decisions to discipline students. According to Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas (2012), race is a factor that influences disproportionate disciplinary practices. Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin & Moore-Thomas (2012) recommend examining the effectiveness of systemic and gap reducing intervention to address disproportionalities in school discipline. Hannon, Defina & Bruch (2013), analyzed the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to determine whether or not skin color influences whether or not a student is disciplined. The findings of this study suggest that skin color matters for the more likelihood of suspension. The impact of these outcomes is more discernable for African females than males.

A recent study by Yale University on implicit bias revealed that a relationship exists between race, gender, and recommendations for the exclusionary discipline such as expulsions and suspensions. Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accaviti & Shich (2016), determined that preschool expulsion and suspensions cause young children to lose early educational placement or time in care. This school "push out" phenomenon is consistent with other research, which identified teacher bias as a reason for racial disparities in the application of discipline. Black preschoolers are 3.6 times as likely to receive one or more suspensions about White preschoolers. Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accaviti & Shich (2016), recommend that additional research focus on why boys and African American preschoolers are at a greater risk for expulsion. Sex and race disparities in suspensions should be explored because limited research exists at this level. The Yale University Study (2016) also identified factors such as bias, discriminatory practices, school racial climate and inadequate education and training for teachers as contributors to racial disproportionality in education.

Exclusionary discipline, implicit bias, and stereotypes contribute to African American girls' exposure to the juvenile and criminal justice system. Baker, Amin, Dhungana & Bedard (2015) conducted a study on whether or not the shared racial identification with court actors impacted female perceptions of court procedural justice and their obligation to obey the law. Analyses revealed that a shared race/ethnicity with prosecutors was the second strongest indicator of female inmates' perception of court procedural justice. Baker, Amin, Dhungana & Bedard (2015), encouraged future studies on why race/ethnicity matters more about some court actors.

Crenshaw, Nanda & Ocen (2015), suggested that teachers sometimes exercised disciplinary measures against Black girls because African American girls do not display "acceptable" qualities of femininity. African American girls do not typically represent societal and institutional norms. Researchers who study school discipline suggest that implicit bias; stereotyping and other cultural factors may play a role in disproportionality in discipline.

### **Alternatives to punishment**

Zero tolerance policies have funneled students into the school to prison pipeline and created racial and gender disparities in the application of discipline. The purpose of zero tolerance policy is to create positive school environments. However, the school to prison pipeline has created a society which values incarceration over education. Social science researchers are examining existing school policies and practices to determine how to serve students and encourage restorative justice policies, which keep students in school and out of the juvenile justice system. Irby & Clough (2015), help administrators and teachers to find a more efficient way to approach discipline. School discipline is about helping students cultivate and remain self-motivated learners. Punitive restorative responses to discipline contribute to separation of girls from school and disproportionate involvement in the juvenile justice system. Restorative justice programs such as PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Supports) provide alternatives to exclusionary discipline, keep students in school and increase educational opportunities.

Mallet (2016) recommends that a student code of conduct be focused on rehabilitation of the student, have possible graduated responses and not an automatic discipline referral to an administrator. Mallet (2016), suggests that teachers need professional training on how to manage difficult students, cultural competency and the use of PLCs (professional learning communities) to improve teacher performance, classroom safety, and student inclusion.

Lewis, Romi & Roache (2012), agrees with scholars who discourage exclusionary discipline practices and encourage teachers to provide hints, warning, and series of consequences before excluding a student from a classroom. Servos (2015), studied the relationship between school security and parent and student perceptions of safety at the school. The analyses revealed that school security is not related to low levels of student behavior and high-security schools tend to serve student populations that are otherwise at risk for negative school outcomes. Servos (2015), expressed the need to turn to other techniques for the assurance of safety and management of student behavior because school security measures are largely ineffective.

Haight, Kayama & Gibson (2016) study on understanding the intersection of race and gender and school discipline suggested that successful interventions to reduce suspensions targeting Black students should involve working relationships between Black families and educators. Irby & Clough (2015) identified that consistency in the enforcement of rules, consistency of expectations and the need for consistent application of preset consequences as effective ways to approach discipline. According to Irby & Clough (2015), students will follow the rules if they know the rules and practices are consistent and not open to interpretation. Sullivan, Klingbeil, Van Norman (2014), encourage schools to adopt policies which reduce reliance on exclusionary procedures as the response to students' behavioral infractions mainly minor and subjective offenses. Hoffman (2014) discourages the use of zero tolerance policies as an approach to discipline.

According to Hoffman (2014), ending zero tolerance policies can play a significant role in solving the discipline gap in schools and provide students with tools to be successful in life.



### **Implications for Social Change**

According to Buckingham (2014), students face "double punishment" from the school and juvenile justice system for minor infractions. Crenshaw (2015), helps all stakeholders, researchers, funders and concerned member of the public to start a conversation on how exclusionary discipline practices adversely affect youth of color and commit to reviewing, revising and creating policies which ensure gender and racial bias will not factor in decisions to suspend or expel. According to Yull (2014), the educational administrator must find ways to make teachers in the field and in training aware of the need for educational practices and policies that contribute to more meaningful opportunities for marginalized students in schools. Research on the intersection of gender, race, and discipline will add to growing body of literature on how the school to prison pipeline adversely affects youth of color. Future research should explore why African American girls are disciplined more their peers and strategies to provide fair and equitable education to all students.

### **Summary**

The literature review (Chapter 2) explored the following themes zero tolerance, school to prison pipeline, exclusionary discipline, race, gender and the school to prison pipeline, alternatives to punishment and social change. Zero tolerance policies were identified as the cause of the school to prison pipeline. Racial disparities exist in school suspension and expulsion rates. Exclusionary discipline leads to unintended consequences such as grade retention, student drop out and detention in a juvenile or adult facility. Prior research on the school to prison pipeline focused on African American males due to statistical data, which reveals a higher suspension among African Americans. African American girls are not featured independently in most pipeline research. The present study will examine the implications of exclusionary discipline and why African American girls seem to be more affected than their peers.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to understand the phenomenon of the school to prison pipeline as experienced by African American females. The nature of this inquiry will be a qualitative case study. Qualitative research is about exploring an individual's relationship with a central phenomenon. The central phenomenon related to this research study is the school to prison pipeline. The proposed research study will explore how racial bias and gender stereotypes contribute to discriminatory discipline practices in schools and the overrepresentation of African American girls in the juvenile justice system through an analytical lens of the social justice theory and institutional rational choice theories. The major sections in chapter 3 will be research rationale, research questions, and role of researcher, methodology, instrumentation, trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do exclusionary discipline policies and practices such as suspension and expulsion contribute to racial and gender disparities in school discipline?
2. How do exclusionary discipline practices such as zero tolerance policies fuel the school to prison pipeline?
3. How can policymakers and educators provide a fair and equitable learning environment and address school discipline?

### **Research Rationale**

The current research study will answer the question: How does criminalization of behavior in schools, racial bias, and gender stereotypes contribute to the overrepresentation of African American girls in the school to prison pipeline? A case study approach will be utilized to gain insight on the experiences of African American girls in public schools and the implications of exclusionary discipline policies such as zero tolerance. The case study is appropriate because case studies allow researchers to tell a story based on the experiences of their participants.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role in this research project will be non-participant observer I will not be interviewing current high school students or colleagues for the purpose of this research project. I will interview young women who attended high school in Prince William County Virginia to limit bias and ensure that no power dynamics exists. I will create a survey to gain knowledge about how teachers decide to use exclusionary discipline practices. I will survey educators from the neighboring school districts. The purpose of interviewing teachers outside of School System A is to address ethical concerns of interviewing colleagues in my own workplace. The inclusion of educators from other school districts will expand knowledge of disciplinary practices that most teachers experience on a daily basis.

## Setting

The setting for this research study is a middle school and high school in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The total enrollment is 7,242 students. The racial breakdown for School A is 56.1% Hispanic, 21.7% White, 12.7% African-American, 4.7% Asian, and 4.1% Two or more races. (Virginia Department of Education, 2016). The high school published a Continuous School Improvement Plan. Measurable Goal #7: is to decrease the number of out of school suspensions will reduce the number of suspensions by 10%. The total number of student is 2,150 students. During the 2015-2016, 388 students received OSS (Out of School Suspension). The percent of school population with OSS was 15%. The percent of students will more than 1 OSS is 2.09%. The focus of this research study will be students from ages 13-17 because students in this age demographic are more likely to be impacted by their educational experiences. Findings from previous research studies revealed that there is a strong correlation between contact with the criminal justice system, failure to complete high school, student disengagement, and disparate racial discipline. (Morris, 2015). The data provided by the school system revealed an urgent need for research on school disciplinary practices at the secondary level and school system as a whole.

## Participants

The participants in this research study will be educational stakeholders. The participants in this case study will include teachers, support staff, administrators, and school safety and security from school districts with similar demographic data as the school system in this research project. Twelve educational stakeholders were surveyed for this research project. Eight individual interviews were conducted. The researcher chose this sample size to prevent oversaturation. The interview participants were various ages from 25-30 years old. Miles and Huberman (2012), advise researchers to create a sample, which will generate rich information on the phenomena, which needs to be studied.

This sampling method for this research study was stratified purposeful. The purpose of stratified purposeful sampling is to illustrate characteristics of particular subgroups to facilitate comparisons. The participants in this qualitative study have knowledge of how school discipline affects African American girls. The case will include ten African American women (ages 25-30). The following inclusion criteria will be used: African American woman (ages 25-30) who completed high school in Northern Virginia. Eight interviews were conducted with African American women. The experiences of the African American women will be the focus of this case study. The women have first hand knowledge of the impact of exclusionary discipline on African American girls.

Educational stakeholders will be answer questions on the school to prison pipeline through a survey distributed through e-mail as a Google form. The inclusion of stakeholders ensured that the data is reliable and effectively answers the research questions.



### **Data Collection**

Case study research involves studying a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. Yin (1984), recommends using multiple sources and techniques in the data collection process to provide evidence to answer research questions and increase validity. Several methods were utilized during this research study. The researcher used the following data sources: interviews, document analysis, archival data and surveys. Gail, Borg, & Gall (1986), assert that the purpose of qualitative research is to discover the meanings and interpretations by exploring cases intensively in a natural setting and subjecting the resulting data to "analytical induction." The target population for this research study was under 18 years, which was a vulnerable population. The researcher took a different approach to examining the experiences of African American girls with discipline and how the experiences influenced life outcomes. The researcher used surveys from education stakeholders and interviews from African American woman who attended middle and high school in the school system to gain understanding of the challenges African American girls face while attending secondary school. Archival data was collected from the Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice that provided statistical data about school discipline and juvenile justice by region, race, gender and legal status (confinement, probation, and adjudication). The following documents were analyzed: School system Code of Conduct, Virginia School Quality Reports and Balanced Scorecard.

## Instrumentation

Standardized open-ended interviewing was the instrumentation chosen for this study. According to Patton (2015), strength of standardized open-ended questioning is, "respondents answer the same questions, thus increasing the comparability of responses; data are complete for each person on the topics addressed by the research" (p. 438). Questions were designed to provide accurate data and information regarding how school disciplinary policies and practices contribute to the school to prison pipeline and adversely affect African American girls. A semi-structured interview uses structured and open-ended questions. The purpose of a semi-structured interview in a qualitative case study is to use conversation, discussion as well as questioning to provide insight on stakeholders' perspectives. The success of an interview is determined by how effective the communication is between researcher and participants. Punch (2001) stated, "To understand other persons' constructions of reality" (Newton, 2010). A researcher should design and use an interview protocol that includes research questions and possible probes. An interviewer should be prepared, stay within the stated time limit, listen carefully and use a conversational tone of voice, take notes and thank the participant for the interviewing. Interviewers should create a comfortable atmosphere, which encourages the participant to share more about their experiences. Interviewing is about eliciting information that is useful to a research project. A researcher must be detail oriented and ask questions that are relevant to their research focus. Oakley (1981) said, "Interviewing is rather like a marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and behind each closed door is a world of secrets."

The researcher conducted surveys via Google forms. The School to Prison Pipeline survey was e-mailed to educational stakeholders. Each participant answered twelve questions about discipline, zero tolerance, school to prison pipeline and alternatives to punishment.

## Procedures

Data was collected from multiple sources. The researcher conducted interviews with African American women (ages 25-30) to address the first research question about which factors contribute to the overrepresentation of girls in the school to prison pipeline. Research question 2 will be answered through the use of archival data. The researcher used data from the Virginia Department of Education, Virginia Threat Assessment and Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice. Research question 3, 4 was answered through surveys. Educational stakeholders will provide feedback into why the pipeline exists and which interventions should be used before students are punished. Interviews were conducted in person, over Face Time and Skype. The in person interviews will be audio-recorded transcribed and stored in NVivo. The researcher will write field notes and reflective journals and refer to the journals often. The field notes will help the researcher keep track of observations, identify common themes and make connections. The researcher will meet with participants after the initial interviews and allow them to preview their transcript. The researcher will use this opportunity to validate research and gain feedback on the research process. The community partner and participants will receive a one page debrief over e-mail after the research is completed.

## Data Analysis

The following steps were used during this research project:

1. Raw data was collected and maintained through NVivo. A copy of the interview guide, transcript of responses, the interviewer's personal notes, journal articles, reports and archival data will be retained.
2. Transcripts were reviewed and analyzed. Open-ended coding allowed the researcher to analyze each question and identify common themes and concepts.
3. A transcript was created with a summary of responses for each question. The researcher identified common themes through the use of text query and word frequency query.
4. The researcher used the common themes and characteristics to create parent and child nodes in NVivo. The following themes were identified: Parental Involvement, Building positive relationships, Consistency and Transparency, Alternatives to exclusionary discipline, Accountability, Importance of stakeholders/policymakers, responsibility of stakeholders/policymakers and school to prison pipeline (how to dismantle the pipeline).
5. The researcher will analyze summaries and word trees generated from word query in NVivo.
6. An analysis will be transcribed in Chapter IV of this case study.
7. A narrative summary will be written detailing the key findings.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), the four elements of trustworthiness are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Denzin (1978) & Patton (1999) identified four types of triangulation. The four types are methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation, and theory/perspective triangulation. The current research study showed triangulation through examining the consistency of data from multiple sources within the same method and using more than one theoretical perspective to examine and interpret data. The researcher will use multiple sources to demonstrate all perspectives on the school to prison pipeline. The researcher will transcribe all data from interviews and allow members to validate their statements before including them in the study. The researcher will debrief the community partner and participant by providing a one-page write-up via e-mail.

### **Transferability**

The current research study can be used as a foundation for future research on the school to prison pipeline. The research could be applied to the experiences of girls of color (Hispanic, American Indian, Middle Eastern) to show how institutional racism extends to other cultures within American society. A quantitative study could be used to compare the similarities and differences of the experiences of girls of color at the middle and high school levels.

### **Dependability**

The researcher will keep an audit trail. A peer reviewer will periodically review field notes, archives and report. The researcher will ensure that participants are treated ethically. Participants will be given the opportunity to react to the data, which is recorded. The researcher used member checking to allow participants to review transcripts and validate their interview responses. The researcher will address a meaningful problem and provide evidence and logic to support the decision to conduct the research project. The researcher will use triangulation to ensure validity and reliability. The researcher will use multiple sources and analyze multiple perspectives even if the data is different from the original hypothesis or research question. Reliability, validity and triangulation will establish trustworthiness.

### **Confirmability**

The researcher revisited the research on a daily basis. The researcher kept a reflective journal, which detailed new insight from interviews and document analysis. The researcher included field notes for each interview and reflections on how the data was connected to the research questions. Reflexibility allows researchers to interact with their research and determine whether or not bias and preconceived notions influenced the findings.

### **Informed Consent and Ethical Considerations**

The study was conducted within the parameters established by Walden University IRB to ensure the ethical protection of research participants. I took all steps necessary to protect the rights of research participants. Participants in this study were a purposive sample of educational stakeholders (teachers, administrators, school safety and security and support staff) and African American women ages 25-30). A letter of cooperation was obtained from the community partner. The researcher sent copies of informed consent forms for the survey and interviews and letter of cooperation for the community partner to Walden University IRB. The researcher completed NIH (National Institute of Health) training and submitted the certificate. Data collection began after approval from Walden University's IRB. The researcher identified educators through a forum called Black Educators Rock. The survey included educators from school systems similar to the school system, which is featured in this research project. The use of educators outside of my work environment eliminated conflict of interest, power differentials, and justification from the use of incentives. The letter of cooperation from the community partner granted permission for the researcher to survey administrators within the school system. The surveys were distributed by e-mail with a link to a Google Form. The participants remained anonymous because only the responses were recorded. A summary of individual and group responses was available to the researcher on her Google drive and saved on a secure USB drive.



### **Ethical Procedures**

The participants in the study were advised of the risks involved. The study involved minimal risks and did not pose a threat to safety or wellbeing. Participants were advised that there would be no payment, thank you gifts, or reimbursements provided for participation. The information provided was kept confidential. The researcher did not use personal information for purposes outside of the research project. The researcher was kept secure by the researcher. The research data was maintained in NVivo and saved on a password protected USB drive. Data will be kept for a period of 5 years. The participants were advised that the study was voluntary and that she was not required to participate. The researcher will be the only person with access to data collected and analyzed during this research project.

## Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine how exclusionary discipline affected the future outcomes of African American girls. The research focus was the implications of the school to prison pipeline for African American girls. The researcher used the following data collection methods: interviews, surveys, and archival data and document analysis. Data was stored and maintained in NVivo. The researcher used NVivo to identify common characteristics and themes, which allowed the research to categorize and code data. The study was conducted in accordance with Walden University IRB ethical standards. A purposive sample of 20 participants was used. Eight interviews were conducted and 12 surveys were completed. On the consent form, participants were provided with contact information of the Walden University representative with whom they could talk privately about their rights as participants.

In Chapter 3, I included research design and rationale, methodology, data collection, data analysis plan, threats to validity and reliability informed consent, ethical consideration, ethical procedures and summary. In Chapter 4, I include the introduction, data collection, results, and a summary. In Chapter 5, I include the introduction, interpretation of findings, limitations of study, recommendations, implications and a conclusion.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine how exclusionary discipline policies and practices in schools influence the future outcomes of African American girls. The focus of the research project was the school to prison pipeline and implications for African American girls. The central research question was: How does the criminalization of behavior in schools, racial bias, and gender stereotypes contribute to the overrepresentation of African American girls in the school to prison pipeline? Sub questions included: (a) How do exclusionary discipline policies and practices such as suspension and expulsion contribute to racial and gender disparities in school discipline? (b) How do exclusionary discipline practices such as zero tolerance policies fuel the school to prison pipeline? (c) How can policymakers and educators provide a fair and equitable learning environment and address school discipline?

During interviews, African American women expressed their personal experiences with discipline in terms of their race and gender. I collected and analyzed data. They also discussed how other educational stakeholders could help dismantle the school to prison pipeline. Surveys were distributed to teachers, administrators, support staff, and school safety and security. Educational stakeholders were asked to define discipline in their schools, discuss the role of school resource officers (SRO), discuss the impact of parental involvement, alternative to punishment and how educators could help dismantle the school to prison pipeline.

The research findings in this chapter will include an analysis of the following data sources: semi-structured interviews, surveys, and document analysis.

## Demographics

The participants in the study were eight African American women aged 25-30 from Northern Virginia. The African American women were interviewed based on their experiences with discipline in secondary school. A survey of twelve educators was administered. The survey was distributed to 15 educators. Twelve educators completed the survey. The educators had a minimum of ten years working in the education field, worked at various grade levels and in school systems similar to the community partner mentioned in this research project. Education stakeholders were surveyed as part of this research project. Principals, school safety and security and support staff added their insight to research project. Interviewees and survey participants contributed different amounts of knowledge to the five themes. Thus, all stakeholders' voices and views were represented in this study.

## Data Collection

The following data was collected for this research study: interviews, archival data, document analysis and surveys. Semi-structured interview guides were used for data collection. The researcher asked the same interview questions of each participant. However, participants were allowed to elaborate and provide more insight at the conclusion of the interview. The interview guide included open-ended questions to ensure that the interviews yielded reliable, comparable qualitative data. The interviews were conducted in person, Skype and Face time. According to Rubin & Rubin, 2012, “Interviews provide researchers will rich and detailed qualitative data for understanding participants’ experiences, how they describe those experiences, and the meaning they make of those experiences” (Castillo-Montoya, 2016, p. 811). The interviews took about 35-45 minutes. The interviewer used a paper interview guide and recorded conversations for transcription. The interviewer sent a copy of the transcript for each interview for member checking. The participants verified their responses to questions and informed the researcher if the transcript did not reflect their responses to the questions.

Surveys were e-mailed to educational stakeholders. The e-mail contained a link to a Google form with the survey questions. The Google form did not record personal information. The researcher was provided with a summary of individual and collective responses for each question. The researcher allowed two weeks for survey completion. The survey was e-mailed to 15 educational stakeholders. Eleven stakeholders completed the survey.

The archival data and document analysis was conducted via the Internet. The researcher used data from the Virginia Department of Education, Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice and Code of Conduct. All archival data was obtained through government websites. The community partner outlined specific guidelines for which information could be used in the final project. The researcher was allowed to use the strategic plan, school improvement plan, balanced report card and code of conduct which were obtained from the school system website. The researcher was not allowed to identify the schools or school system in the research project. The researcher used the documents mentioned above and used the survey results from Google forms.

## Data Analysis

Raw data was imported into NVivo. The researcher imported audio files, transcripts, interview notes, archival data, documents, journal articles and survey results into NVivo. The researcher used a text query to identify specific themes and create nodes. Keyword search included: zero tolerance, criminalization, behavior intervention, Black girls in education, criminal justice system, exclusionary discipline (suspension and expulsion), and disproportionate minority contact. The researcher generated child nodes from the results of the text query. The researcher analyzed the summary and word tree for each query. The researcher identified five themes as a result of coding. The themes were: Theme 1: Zero tolerance and exclusionary discipline, Theme 2: Parental involvement in school discipline, Theme 3: Alternatives to punishment, Theme 4: Stakeholders and Theme 5: School to prison pipeline. The researcher used the identified themes to hand code the survey data. The themes were assigned different color flags. Theme 1 was represented by green. Theme 2 was represented by blue. Theme 3 was represented by yellow. Theme 4 was represented by orange. Theme 5 was represented by pink. The researcher used flags to indicate which responses were relevant to a specific theme. It is important to mention that my interaction with the data helped me to have an informed opinion and conclusions about the responses from the participants. The themes, which emerged from coding the data, are essential in answering the research questions. Miller & Crabtree (1999) described qualitative data analysis as a dance. When the researcher reads the text literally then the text leads the dance. When the researcher reads reflexively then the researcher leads the dance.



Finally, the researcher constructs her interpretation of the text” (Patton, 2015, p. 324).

Table 1 details each research question and which sources and themes supported each question.

Figure 1: Research Question and Themes

Research Question	Source	Theme
How does the criminalization of behavior in schools, racial bias, and gender stereotypes contribute to the overrepresentation of African American girls in the school to prison pipeline?	Interview Questions- 6, 7, 9, 10  Survey Question 1	Theme 1 – Zero tolerance/Exclusionary Discipline  Theme 5- School to Prison Pipeline
How do exclusionary discipline policies such as suspension and expulsion contribute to racial and gender disparities in school discipline?	Interview questions- 2, 3, 4, 9  Survey Questions: 2, 3, 10	Theme 1- Zero tolerance  Theme 5- School to prison pipeline
How do exclusionary discipline practices such as zero tolerance policies fuel the school to prison pipeline?	Interview questions- 5, 7, 8, 10  Survey Question: 1	Theme 1: Zero tolerance and Exclusionary Discipline  Theme 5: School to prison pipeline
How can policymakers and educators provide a fair and equitable learning environment and address school discipline?	Interview Questions: 8, 11, 12  Survey Questions: 3 - 10	Theme 2: Parental discipline/ Involvement  Theme 3: Alternatives to punishment  Theme 4: Stakeholders

## Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is defined by four characteristics.

Credibility is related to internal validity, which is where a researcher ensures that the study yielded the desired results. According to Merriam (n.d.), credibility deals with the concept of, “How congruent are the findings with reality” (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability refers to external/validity and generalizability. Transferability is about replicating the current study. According to Merriam (n.d.), transferability is concerned with how the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. Dependability in qualitative research is about reliability. Dependability is the same as reliability in quantitative research. According to Shenton (2004), a qualitative researcher addresses reliability through reflexivity. A researcher must employ techniques to show that if the work were repeated then similar results would be obtained. Confirmability refers to objectivity. Confirmability ensures that research is free of bias and that the researcher recognizes his/her “predispositions.” According to Patton (n.d.), objectivity is associated with the use of instruments that are not dependent on human skill and perception.

### Credibility

The research project was conducted according to Walden IRB ethical standards. The researcher used purposive sampling to identify research participants. The survey was administered to a random sample of educators and education stakeholders. According to Preece (1994), random sampling helps to ensure that, “any unknown influences are distributed evenly within a sample” (Shenton, 2004, p. 65). Purposive sampling was used for interview recruitment. The researcher chose young women within a specific age range (25-30) who attended school in Northern Virginia. According to Stake (n.d.), purposive sampling creates a “collective case study” in which multiple voices are sought to gain knowledge of a larger group. Triangulation was used in this study. The researcher used several sources to ensure reliability. Member checks were used to ensure the accuracy of the data. The research used multiple methods to establish trustworthiness and ensure credibility.

### Transferability

The purpose of this research project was to study how exclusionary discipline contributed to the school to prison pipeline. The research focus was African American girls. This research study could be replicated for other girls of color. According to data from the Virginia Department of Education (2016), Hispanics are disciplined at higher rate than their White peers. Virginia is becoming more culturally diverse due to immigration from Latin America, Africa and the Middle East. A future quantitative research study could compare the implications of exclusionary discipline for all girls of color. The current research study can provide a baseline for research on intersectionality.

### Dependability

Dependability is about reliability. Can the research be replicated? This research project can be replicated. The researcher explained the recruitment and research process. The researcher created an audit trail of field notes, archives and reports. The researcher interacted with the research daily. A reflective journal included an assessment of the research process and thoughts on data collection and emerging themes. The research focused on a meaningful problem or issue. The qualitative inquiry was appropriate because the researcher focused on a systemic problem. The researcher followed guidelines for ethical treatment. Participants were treated ethically. Interviewees were given the opportunity to interact with the research through member checking. The researcher ensured that all steps were taken to protect the identities of research participants.

### Confirmability

The researcher used triangulation to reduce effects of investigator bias. The researcher used multiple data sources to ensure confirmability. The survey was conducted with educators from school systems which had a similar demographic to the community partner. The researcher was objective because she did not know the race or gender of the participants that completed the survey. The researcher studied multiple documents from Virginia Department of Education and Department of Juvenile Justice to see if the intersectionality of race, gender and the school to prison pipeline was unique to Northern Virginia or relevant to the Commonwealth as a whole. The researcher maintained an audit trail and a peer reviewer periodically looked at the data to ensure the integrity of the study.

## Results

The central research question is: How does the criminalization of behavior in schools, racial bias, and gender stereotypes contribute to the overrepresentation of African American girls in the school to prison pipeline? This research question can be answered by multiple sources: interview questions, survey, and document analysis. The themes associated with research question 1 are: Theme 1 (Zero tolerance and Exclusionary Discipline) and Theme 5 (School to Prison Pipeline).

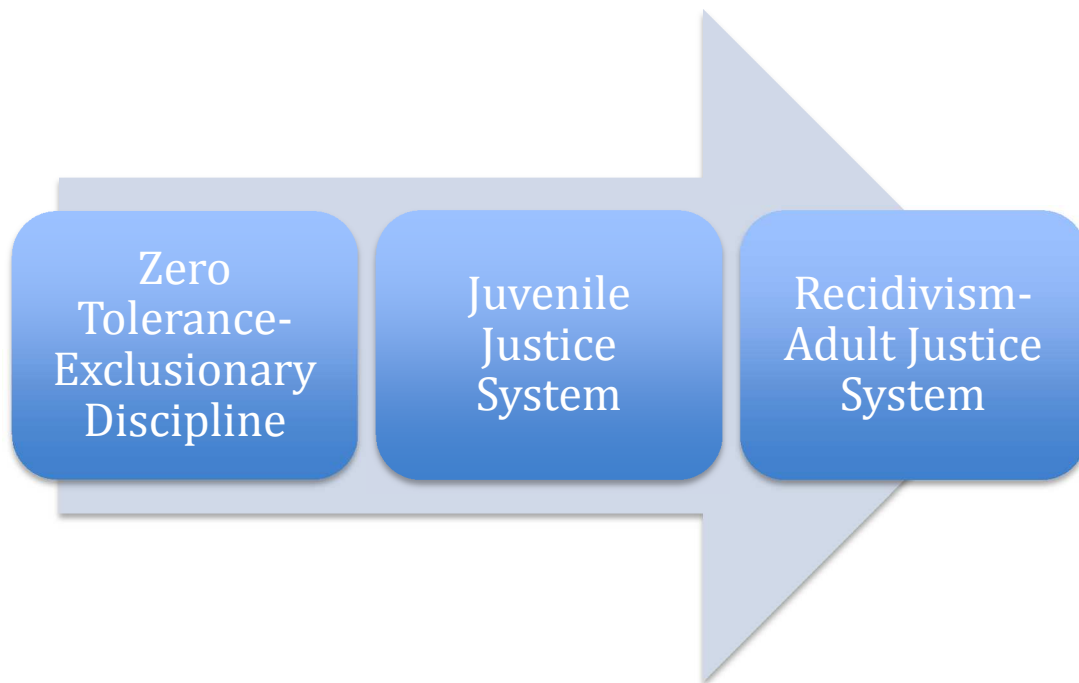


Figure 2: The impact of exclusionary discipline



## Juvenile Justice System

According to the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (2015), the juvenile population in Virginia is 49.8% African American. The female population is 30.1%. The juvenile population aged 14-18 increased from 4.1% to 27.4% in fiscal year 2015. The highest percentages of total admissions were felonies (23.4%) for robbery and 19.5% for assault. A report from the Justice Policy Institute (2015), explained why Virginia ranked number 1 in the country for the school to prison pipeline. According to the Bradford (2015), “Virginia continues to struggle with how to effectively respond to unwanted behavior by youth.” Bradford (2015), implied that zero tolerance policies, the Truth in Sentencing laws and the commission of status offenses for behavior driven by mental health issues leads to unintended consequences for youth.

## School Discipline

The Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Education publishes a report of discipline, crime and violence for each school year. The report dated August 2015 analyzed data for the 2014-2015 school year. Region 4 reported 19,220 incidents. Region 4 includes school systems in Northern Virginia. The four most reported offenses were defiance, altercations, and disrespect and classroom disruptions. According to the Legal Aid Justice Center (2016), Virginia schools disproportionately suspended African American students. African Americans make up 23% of the student population but were subjected to 58% of short-term suspensions, 60% of long-term suspensions, and 55% of expulsions. The American Bar Association published a report on School to Prison Pipeline. The American Bar Association (2016), identified factors, which contribute the racial disproportionality in the school to prison pipeline. The characteristics that contribute to racial disproportionality in the school to prison pipeline are: lower achievers who lack basic reading skills, damaged lower expectations, grade retention, subject to more frequent and harsher punishment, place in alternative school, referred to law enforcement or subject to school related arrest and pushed or dropped out of school.

### School System A: Discipline

The Virginia Department of Education publishes a school quality report to measure school climate during each school year. The 2016 report measured school climate for the 2015-2016 school year. The researcher analyzed the School Quality Report for Schools A, B. The researcher used pseudonyms for the school system and schools, which are the subject of this research project. School A represents the high school and School B represents the middle school. School A reported other offenses against persons and disorderly conduct as the top offenses for students. In school year 2015-2016, African Americans made up 12.1% of the population and 27.5% of the short-term suspensions. The data is consistent with VDOE (Virginia Department of Education), which identified disorderly conduct as the main reason for suspensions in schools. Hispanics who attend School A represent 55.6% of the population and 63% of suspensions. Students of color are adversely impacted by exclusionary discipline at school A. No African American students were expelled in 2015-2016. However, Hispanics represented 75% of expulsions. School B identified other offenses against persons and disorderly conduct as reasons for high suspension rates. School B is 13.8% African American. 27% of African American received short-term suspensions. Principal turnover during a three-year period contributed to rising suspension rates among students of color. Hispanics made up 100% of long-term suspensions and 50% of expulsions during the 2015-2016. The VDOE and School System A's data prove that racial disproportionality exists in discipline practices and policies in Virginia.

## Interviews

Interview questions 6, 7, 9 and 10 support research question 1, which is: How does the criminalization of behavior in schools, racial bias and gender stereotypes contribute to the overrepresentation of African American girls in the school to prison pipeline?

Interview Question 6: Do you believe stereotypes and racial bias contribute to a teacher or administrator to discipline students?

Participant 1: Depends on the teacher and student

Participant 2: Sometimes. Yes. Black girls are loud. Guys are not focused. Stereotypes.

Participant 3: Administrators do it to teachers. They will do it to students. I have not witnessed students being treated differently.

Participant 4: Black students are treated differently. White girls were treated differently. Athletes were definitely treated differently.

Participant 5: Yes. It boils down to race and gender. Affects us today. People were supportive of me.

Participant 6: I can't stand in front of a class and be treated like I am nothing.

Participant 7: In some counties you could say that. Everyone got into trouble. More diverse school.

Participant 8: Yes I do. I unfortunately see this even in Kuwait. Some White teachers and administrators will come here with the same racist mentalities and "White privilege" stance as in the U.S. We have a completely Arab school, so it chaotic all of the time with discipline.

Interview Question 7: Do you think zero tolerance policies in school have created an environment which values incarceration over education?

Participant 1: I think no. Zero tolerance policies create a structure that you know as rules. Have to be consistent. Not listening could get you suspended. Sister was expelled. She had to go to PACE West for three years. She had behavioral and mental health issues. People were always looking for something wrong. Negatively impacted her.

Participant 2: Yes. Because students are arrested.

Participant 3: Depends on policies. Suspend students and explain to them. Depends on the situation. I have not seen instances of the school to prison pipeline operating in schools.

Participant 4: Teachers judge students. New age teachers listen more. Teachers are looking more at consequences than students. Stereotypes not just Black. Black = not good enough.

Participant 5: Yes. You can't penalize someone for a minor infraction. Yes. I saw it freshman year when Gladys fought the SRO and was escorted out of the school in handcuffs.

Participant 6: Yes. Growing up Black and Lesbian contributed to administrators' reason to discipline me. Zero tolerance punishes students for minor infractions and causes students to give up on school and get in trouble.

Participant 7: I feel like zero tolerance has created a culture of incarceration over education. Takes away instruction time. Take away from other students.

Participant 8: Zero tolerance to me cannot exist. We have some flexibility in all areas of life. The prisons are already overcrowded, and it does nothing to serve the child's development into a well functioning adult member of society. I have not seen instances for myself due to teaching internationally, but I have heard many horror stories of my colleague's experiences working in South Carolina.

Question 9: Why do you think students of color are likely to receive harsh punishments for misbehavior? What about children with special needs? Have to seen evidence of disparate treatment in your own life?

Participant 1: I did not see it as a race thing. Special Education students do not know what is going on. Teachers need to understand the needs of each student. I cannot say that I have experienced disparate treatment in my life.

Participant 2: Because of the outside world. Teachers do not understand special education students and think they are being disrespectful and breaking rules. I have experienced disparate treatment in my life. I have been followed around the gas station and store. My boyfriend has tattoos and people may consider him a thug.

Participant 3: Goes back in time. Caucasians are brought up differently. Racism. It is all about how you were brought up. Why do special needs get into trouble? Need to have conversations with special education students. Most teachers will not take the time. Each person should have some type of knowledge with students. Communication and keeping students engaged in the learning process. Once students lose their focus then it is hard to get them back. I have experienced disparate treatment at work. I am manager. Men are leaders. Women are incapable of being leaders according to men.

Participant 4: I blame Black people. If you do what you have to do then you have a leg to stand on. Special education is a disability that you are born with. Some teachers treat disabled students like they are regular. Teacher wants to set standard on discipline. Everyone should be treated equally. Some students are rewarded for misbehavior. Teachers should set a standard on discipline.

Participant 5: History, stereotypes, naturally loud, troublemakers. Special education students cannot defend themselves. Disciplining because of their disabilities. I have seen evidence of disparate treatment in the South. Black people look at me because I am the product of an interracial relationship.

Participant 6: I feel like I experienced racism on a daily basis. I hated school and decided to go to Job Corps.

Participant 7: Caucasians are privileged and students of color fear punishment. White students are not disciplined. Preconceived notions that people are not participating in raising their children. Special education- people do not handle students with special needs appropriately. Children with special education need awareness. It is all about what people care about. Teachers should prioritize their students and take an active role in trying to understand what motivates them.

Participant 8: Being Black and a woman automatically makes it harder because we have to work harder because we have to work harder to get where we want due to the disparate treatment. I feel like I have to prove myself every single day. Students of color always experience harsher punishments because they are stereotyped as poor, suspicious, gang bangers, rap culture, angry, have children out of wedlock, don't care about school, reckless, aggressive, etc. It's very unfortunate.

Question 10: A consequence of the school to prison pipeline is school push-out and dropout. Why do you think students become disengaged in the learning process as a result?

Participant 1: Missing work. What is the point? This is your life. Uninterested in your outcomes. Nothing matters. Student that was unruly and the teacher gives up. I am done.



Participant 2: Feel like I would not be able to learn. Students will stop trying and dropout.

Participant 3: Students have stories. Teachers need to understand the stories before discipline is applied. Some students drop out because they have a family to support. Under a lot of stress. Teacher does not have their attention. Parents think they are failures. They give up.

Participant 4: Teachers are about the check. Teachers cannot learn with is best for students. Kids are disrespectful or bored. Teachers worry about students' trajectory. Students dropout of school because they do not have stability at home. There is more than schoolwork. Many factors contribute to school push out and drop out.

Participant 5: Pushing out- why would you want to deal with anything else. Suspension and expulsion is not creating safe schools.

Participant 6: Talk to people school does not want to spend time helping.

Participant 7: Kids feel like they are not heard. Feels like people with give up on them. Give student opportunities. Education system failed students. I always wanted a teacher of color. White teachers cannot relate. I did not feel supported. Students are fearful of continuing school. A student will give up because their support system does not believe in them. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If someone tells you that you are stupid, worthless and a troublemaker then you will believe that you are and continue to get in trouble.

Participant 8: Well I can speak from my own experience. I hated high school. I loved the concept of school, just not everything that I was experiencing socially and with administrators. I went to my counselor frustrated and said I could not do this anymore. Either I dropped out or find ways to get out early. Thankfully, I was able to graduate early with some very hard work and focus. So, I can really see how students who do not care for school could be pushed out. They feel like whatever they do, it is never right, so what's the point. In regards to the subject, I think that the American education system has left out too much history and it's biased, so it is not relatable to certain students.

## Survey

Survey Question 1 is another question, which supports research question 1. Question 1 is:

The school to prison pipeline is defined as policies or procedures in schools, which funnel students from schools to the criminal justice system. What are your thoughts on school discipline? Do you think exclusionary discipline creates a pipeline between schools and the criminal justice system?

- Yes. I do believe that there is a connection between the needs of the school to control the behavior of the student and the student's response. The school needs to have recourses for the behavior of the student- especially if they are injuring others but idle hands and lack of support can give a student opportunity to find themselves dropping out of school and getting into trouble with the law.
- School discipline needs to be consistent and fair. Student punishment and consequences should be connected to their action. Exclusionary discipline should have a component of rehabilitation in addition to exclusion.
- I think the disciplinary procedures our school practices are largely ineffective and unfairly applied. I'm not certain about the interplay between exclusionary discipline and the justice system.
- I believe school discipline is effective if consequences are logical and consistent. I do not think exclusionary discipline creates a pipeline between school and the criminal justice system.
- I think expulsions and suspensions are ineffective forms of discipline. Removing students from suspension take away the opportunity to guide and support them.

- I feel like school discipline is far too lenient and little to no accountability is placed on the students and students are very aware of this. Exclusionary discipline is necessary in order to assist teachers, who have limited power/authority to maintain control and teacher those who want to learn in a non-threatening environment. I disagree with rewarding students for displaying positive behavior. We are teaching students to hustle to get what they want and then the negative behavior resumes. Why reward students for what they are supposed to do?
- I believe that school discipline should be designed to teach appropriate behaviors. When suspension and expulsion are used based on generic ideologies, these practices are not effective. When suspensions are used negatively, it can produce a pipeline especially for students with no support.
- There are certain times when suspension/expulsion are appropriate (violence in school, for example). However, I read more and more about suspensions in elementary schools. That's wrong. Elementary school kids are too young, and suspensions are truly isolating. Younger students need to be redirected and encouraged in the classroom.

Research Question 2: How do exclusionary discipline policies contribute to racial and gender disparities in in school discipline?

Research Question 2 can be supported by data from the following: VDOE (Virginia Department of Education), U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data, American Bar Association, Justice Policy Institute and African American Policy Forum.

## Exclusionary Discipline: Race and Gender

The University of Richmond (2016) collected data from VDOE and a report issued by the Center for Public Integrity. According to University of Richmond (2016), Virginia is tops the national average for referrals of students to law enforcement. Virginia suspension rates are three times the national average. The report noted that students with disabilities and students of color are more likely to be referred. In Virginia, 25.3 Black students were referred for every 1,000 students. The city of Richmond (Virginia's capital city) has the highest rates of suspensions and expulsions in the state. In 2015, Richmond City had the lowest on time graduation rate and the highest dropout rate among Virginia schools. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2014), near one in five girls of colors with disabilities receives an out of school. The OCR (Office of Civil Rights) data revealed disproportionate suspensions of girls of color exist. While boys receive more than two out of three suspension. African American girls are suspended at higher rate (12%) than girls of any other race and most boys. (p. 1). In Virginia, the suspension rate for African American girls 10% which is below the national average. However, states such as Delaware, Florida, Alabama, Ohio and Pennsylvania are above the national average.

A report published by University of Pennsylvania (2015), revealed that African American girls make up 45% of girls suspended and 42% of students expelled. Racial and gender disparities in Southern states were also reported. Black girls represented 56% of suspensions and 45% of expulsions. School System A is featured in this report because Virginia is a southern state. According to Smith & Harper (2015), School System A's total enrollment is 7,160 students. School System A reported 426 suspensions. The Black enrollment is 14.5%. Black students accounted for 25.6% of suspensions. The disproportionate impact is 1.8x. The neighboring school districts reported similar suspension statistics. The disproportionate impact was 1.9x. The neighboring school districts have similar demographic backgrounds as School System A. Future research could focus on if the disproportionality exists because the minority population in larger or is due to institutional racism.

Interview questions 2,3, 4 and 9 answer research question 2: How do exclusionary discipline policies such as suspension and expulsion contribute to racial and gender disparities in school discipline?

Interview question 2 is: What was your experience with discipline in school?

Participant 1: Discipline was fair and reasonable

Participant 2: I never got in trouble. I never got a referral. I was a good student.

Participant 3: I received after school detention because slapped a girl. The girl kissed her.

I could see the differences in how minorities were treated. I feel that I was treated

differently because I am mixed race but look more Caucasian.

Participant 4: I did not get into trouble until I got to OHS. A teacher targeted me. Labeled

me as promiscuous. I was raped in middle school. No one did anything about it. I was a

victim of bullying. I was treated unfairly. I was bullied and suspended. I was in trouble

and was not able to do was in a mental hospital for addiction to opiates and depression.

The school did not provide appropriate support.

Participant 5: I was rebellious. I got in trouble on costume day because I wore a

Strawberry shortcake costume. The costume was considered too risqué for school.

Participant 6: I did not like being told what to do. I dropped out and went to Job Corps.

Participant 7: I got into trouble for talking. My friends were suspended because they liked to fight or not keep their mouths closed. Discipline was not consistent. Favoritism was shown to certain groups. I was an athlete. Administrators were more lenient on athletes and good students. Athletes were not getting referrals. Athletes and good students should be held to higher standard. Some worked hard and others used the title as an excuse or pass.

Participant 8: I did not have any regular or major problems in school. I made sure I had a good relationship with the teachers, staff and administrators as much as possible. It helped me maintain a good reputation, which is what I knew I needed to help me get ahead or just stay out of trouble. I felt like being a person of color required that I should be in survival mode at all times. There were, of course, a few instances that I came across trouble.

Interview question 3 was another question, which answered Research Question 2:

Interview 3 question is: Do you think that you were treated unfairly based on your race, gender or socio economic status?

Participant 1: I don't think so. No one treated me differently. My administrator changed when I was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. She was African American and more lenient.

Participant 2: No, everyone was treated the same



Participant 3: Yes. People thought I was White even though I was mixed race. People judge you on your skin color. Everyone is treated differently. People treat other based on how they were raised. If a person is raised with tolerance then he/she will treat everyone fairly.

Participant 4: Yes. Going to OHS was like being in Compton. I was in the top 10% in my high school honors program. I came to OHS and was treated like I was not important. White girls bullied me. I was suspended. I could not go to teachers and administrators. I wish I had more structure. My mom was missing from my life. It brought on other issues.

Participant 5: Yes, Other students wore skimpy outfits and got a slap on the wrist. I got in trouble.

Participant 6: I got in trouble all the time based on my race and because I did not fit gender stereotypes.

Participant 7: I was not treated unfairly until my senior year because of my race. I was a 1<sup>st</sup> generation to go to college. Career counselor was not supportive. The career counselor

said that I should not pursue post secondary education because of my GPA. I applied to college and was accepted. My parents supported my journal. I started out at one college and left due to personal circumstances. I was motivated to finish school. The best revenge is to prove someone wrong.

Participant 8: Of course. My experiences growing up in the U.S. in the south (North Carolina), there have been many incidents, most of them so covert that I did not even understand that I was being discriminated against until I thought about it later. I have also been the “only one” in classes, place of work, organizations, programs etc. Until this day, I feel that I have been the only Black person or minority in various situations, which makes me a target or isolated. Being international is also difficult because the perspectives of people around the world, specifically for Black people, are what they get from media. We know that the media does not portray us in the best light. Same thing for Latinos and Hispanics. They know virtually nothing about them, even Native Americans except what they have learned in history. I guess you can say the same for the reverse situation. I do not think most Americans know anything honest and worthwhile about Arabs, which is discrimination as well.

Interview question 4 supports Research Question 2. Interview question 4 is: Have you ever been suspended? How did this impact your educational or personal growth?

Participant 1: Yes. I was suspended. It was a harsh punishment. ISS (In School Suspension) was more beneficial. OSS (Out of School Suspension) was wrong. ISS is better because students are still in school and able to complete assignments.

Participant 2: I was never suspended. I think colleges would look at your behavior and it may be harder to get into college. The concern is if you get into trouble that it may affect your future. Colleges and jobs make look at your behavior.

Participant 3: No. I was discipline because I punched someone in the face, which I believe was sexual assault. I think being suspended affects students' grades. Could not pass SOL (Standards of Learning) or classes. Students who get suspended lose valuable class time and continue to fall behind.

Participant 4: Yes. It was difficult. You are labeled. Treated differently. Teacher did not support me. Being suspended can lead to unintended consequences.

Participant 5: Yes. I was suspended and expelled in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I was isolated from other students. I lit a roll of toilet paper on fire. The bathroom caught on fire. Someone

snitched. The school would not let me take my SOLS which I needed to progress to the next grade. My mom got permission for me to take them.

Participant 6: Yes. It did not affect me. Got suspended for not wearing appropriate clothing because I dressed more masculine.

Participant 7: I have never been suspended. I work in an afterschool program. Behavior is stemming from being at home. ISD is better because some students cannot go home. Set up time with a counselor if a child is causing a problem. We do not take the time to address them, as we should.

Participant 8: Yes. I was in middle school in North Carolina, I had no behavior record, was one day wrongly accused by a White administrator of being involved in a food fight.

I had a one-day in school suspension. After that, I never stopped bothering that administrator and became his top student. However, the feeling of being imprisoned (our in school suspension room/procedures were no joke) traumatized me. For the second incident, I was almost suspended when I was accused of fighting with and leaving out a student from my feminist club. This student had a history of discipline problems and I had none. It was a White administrator and I was graduating from high school one year early. This incident affected me the most because I felt like he was targeting me just to get me in trouble. He disrupted my class that day for a second time because I had told him the incident “too calmly.” I never received any disciplinary action at the end when he was firmly spoken to by my mother, but that was my first real encounter with discrimination that could have affected my record and it disturbed me.

Interview question 9 is another question which answers Research Question 2: How do exclusionary discipline policies and practices such as suspension and expulsion contribute to racial and gender disparities in school discipline?

Interview Question 9 is: Why do you think students of color are more likely to receive harsh punishments for misbehavior? What about children with special needs? Have you seen evidence of disparate treatment in your life?

Participant 1: I do not see it as a race thing. Special education students do not know what is going on. I think it is a misunderstanding. I cannot say that I have.

Participant 2: Because of the outside world. Teachers do not understand them. Yes. Followed in the store. My boyfriend has a tattoo and some people may consider him a thug. The outside world perpetuates stereotypes of which Black people are. People expect Black people to steal and follow them around the store.

Participant 3: Goes back into time. Caucasians are brought up differently. Racism. How you are brought up. Why do students with special needs get into trouble? Need to have a conversation with the special needs students. Each person should have some type of knowledge with students. Communication and keeping students engaged in the learning process. Once students lose their focus then it is hard to get them back. I have been

discriminated at work. I am a manager. Men are leaders. Many believe women are incapable of being leaders.

Participant 4: I blame Black people. If you do what you have to do then you have a leg to stand on. Special Ed- disability is something that you are born with. Treated disabled students like they are regular. Teacher wants to set standard on discipline.

Participant 5: History, stereotypes, naturally loud, troublemakers. Can't defend themselves. Disciplining because of their disabilities. More in the South. Black people look at me like I am an abomination. Product of interracial relationship.

Participant 6: I feel like I experienced racism on a daily basis. I hated school and decided to go to Job Corps.

Participant 7: Caucasians are privileged and students of color fear punishment. White students are not disciplined. Preconceived notions that people are not participating in raising their children. Special education- people do not handle students with special needs. A child with special education needs awareness. All about what people care about.

Teachers should prioritize their students and take an active role in understanding what motivates them.

Participant 8: Being Black and a woman automatically makes it harder because we have to work harder to get when we want due to disparate treatment. I feel like I have to prove myself every single day. Students of color always experience harsher punishments because they are stereotyped as poor, suspicious, gang bangers, rap culture, angry, have children out of wedlock, don't care about school, reckless aggressive, etc. It's very unfortunate.

## Survey

Educators participated in a survey on school discipline. Several questions supported Research Question 2: How do exclusionary discipline policies and practices



such as suspension and expulsion contribute to racial and gender disparities in school discipline?

Question 2: How do you approach discipline in your school?

- Parents are supposed to be involved in the situation from the beginning. Our school tries counseling and in school suspension before moving to suspension.
- Natural consequences to the behaviors. There are positive and negative consequences to the actions that are our kids have. They may not like it, but its reality.
- Inconsistent and weak
- Disorganized
- My school is a “PBIS” school where positive behavior is rewarded and negative behavior results in logical consequences. We use color chars and daily behavior reports to allow students to monitor their own behavior (Purple/Pink – Excellent to Red-Parent Contact).
- I teach in an elementary school and discipline is not an issue at our school. Most behaviors are successfully redirected with a conversation between student and teacher. If not, parents and admin are called in for support.
- My principal is generally supportive when it comes to discipline. However, even with a reward system in place, students are given too many chances before something is done.

- Discipline is very relaxed for the majority of students (white). Discipline seems harsher and more frequent toward Blacks and Hispanics especially males.
- My school has no lower level forms of discipline. Either there are no consequences or the student is suspended. When detention is chosen as a third option, it is usually because the parent fights suspension. The detention is not effective because it takes 3 weeks to carry out.

Survey question 3: What does discipline look like in your school?

- Suspension is supposed to be a last resort; and this year, I believe there have been fewer expulsions than in previous years.

- Discipline is a heart issue. We look at the heart of our child. We understand that most of the discipline issues at our homeschool is based upon frustration at temporary events. We stop and we remind our kids that we do not want to make permanent or life choices while involved in temporary emotion. We do the same. It's hard. So often we want to lash out in anger and frustration when many times it's a cry for help that we're dealing with.
- I try to be fair and caring and treat students like they are my own children.
- In my classroom, I give students at least 2 verbal warning before implementing the color chart. If behavior persists, student changes their color on a chart. Yellow- 3<sup>rd</sup> offense (Final warning)/Orange- 4<sup>th</sup> offense (Time Out)/Red- 5<sup>th</sup> offense (Parent Contact) Possible behavior referral to counselor, if persistent behavior.
- I approach discipline as an opportunity to assist my students with problems they may be having and offering alternatives
- I have a zero tolerance from day and then ease into leniency as students show they have earned it by showing respect and accountability.
- I discipline at the classroom level, where kids are worked with fairly and firmly, but with more understanding of the holistic child.
- I believe in effective classroom management and swift discipline when necessary. I establish classroom rules and my students understand consequences. It can vary from timeout within my classroom to a dictionary assignment.

Question 12 is another survey question which supports Research Question 2: How do exclusionary discipline policies such as suspension and expulsion contribute to racial and gender disparities in school discipline?

Question 12: Would you like to share anything about your approach to discipline?

- Student discipline is not about waiting for them to fall and then wag a finger at them because they have. Partnering with school, families and students is key as well as helping to develop the character of the child. Not make robots. Help them enjoy the learning process and meet them at the point of need.
- One discipline assembly at the beginning of the year is not enough. Students like adults need to be reminded about expectations on a regular basis. Students should be taught the vision of their school so they understand why we have rules. Kids don't like rules but they like to know what to expect.
- I deal with my students individually, handling a majority of behavior issues on my own.
- I mentioned consistency in several of my responses. The only thing that I would like to share is that I wish my entire school implemented PBIS consistently so that once a child is promoted to the next grade level, they will already know is expected.
- Consider the student and the cause of behavior instead of blind consequences.

Research Question 3 is: How does exclusionary discipline practices such as zero tolerance policies fuel the school to prison pipeline? This research question will be answered using local, state and federal guidelines about exclusionary discipline, interview questions (5, 7, 8, 10) and survey question 1.

The United State Department of Education

The United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) (2014), determined that racial and gender disparities in exclusionary discipline are a systemic problem. The U.S. Departments of Education and Justice jointly issued disciplinary guidelines to assist K-12 schools in administering non-discriminatory student discipline policies and practices. According to the OCR (2015), “Title IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibit public schools from implementing student disciplinary policies that discriminate on the basis of race, national origin and color” (National Women’s Law Center, 2014). A report on African American Girls’ Share of Female Students, Overall and by School Discipline revealed that African American girls make up 17% of school enrollment, receive 31% referrals to law enforcement and represent 43% of school related arrests. A relationship exists between racial and gender bias, exclusionary discipline and the juvenile justice system. According to the National Women’s Law Center (2014), it is imperative that policymakers understand the how African American girls experience with harassment, trauma and violence compromises African American girls’ educational experience and outcomes.

#### U.S. Department Education and Virginia Law

The U.S. Department of Education released a document entitled *Virginia Compilation of School Discipline Laws and Regulations*. The document links behavior in schools to laws in the Code of Virginia. Virginia law permits school to suspend and expel students for “sufficient cause” defined by the school board. Several offenses can result in expulsion. School boards are required by law to expel students who bring firearms or

“destructive” devices to school as defined by the Federal Gun Free Schools Act and bringing drugs, imitation drugs or marijuana on school property or to a school sponsored event. School officials must refer students to law enforcement for the following infractions: assault and battery, sexual assault, malicious wounding, murder, stalking, conduct involving a controlled substance, carrying a firearm onto school property and any threats against school personnel. The Code of Virginia allows principals and local school boards to develop policies for their schools. A principal must report anything that may constitute a criminal offense to law enforcement. However, delinquency charges are not required and schools can deal with specific school based offenses through graduated sanctions or educational programming before a delinquency charge is filed in juvenile court. Virginia Tech is conducting a study on the school to prison pipeline.

According to the Center for Public Integrity (2015), Virginia was referring 16 students per 1,000 to police or courts. Out of all students who were “referred to law enforcement” only 14% of the students went before a judge. The Virginia Tech study revealed that students with disabilities and African Americans were adversely affected by exclusionary discipline and referrals to law enforcement. According to data from the VDOE (Virginia Department of Education (2016), African Americans represent 49.4% of referrals to juvenile courts from schools.

Interview questions 5, 7, 8, and 10 answer Research Question 3. Research Question 3 is:  
How does exclusionary discipline practices such as zero tolerance policies fuel the school to prison pipeline?

Interview question 5: Should children ever be arrested at schools? If so, when? Should disorderly conduct or disruptive behavior be enough to warrant arrest?

Participant 1: It depends on the situation. For safety. If it threatens safety. No excessive force. No not at all. Sticks and stones may break my bones.

Participant 2: No. You should have warning or referral. Disorderly conduct should not be enough to warrant arrest. Students should be given warnings, referrals and support.

Participant 3: Not in front of everyone. If they are endangering someone then arrest that person. Talk it out if less. Students should be arrested if they are harming themselves or others. Administrators and teachers should try talking to students first and then evaluate whether or not more punishment is necessary.



Participant 4: No. Children should not be arrested. Children who kill should be imprisoned. Reform or rehabilitation does not work. No. I would have been arrested. I do not think it is ok to arrest students. They should have investigated it. When do we take responsibility for our babies? Alternative discipline methods should be explored before punitive discipline.

Participant 5: No, Parents should be contacted first unless child is a threat.

Participant 6: No, children should not be arrested at school.

Participant 7: Children should not be arrested at school. Should be safe. We are not proactive about what the student needs. You should listen and give them a chance to explain. A first time offender. Conversation. Repeat offender- take action.

Participant 8: No, children who are a threat to others should be arrested outside of schools. Actually, an arrest should be arrested outside of schools. Actually, an arrest should be the last resort. It sends a horrible message to the student population. Disorderly conduct and behavior do not warrant an arrest; otherwise, most of the children I teach should be arrested every day!

Question 7: Do you think zero tolerance policies in schools have created an environment which values incarceration over education? Have you every seen any instances of the school to prison pipeline operating in schools?

Participant 1: I think no. Creates a structure that you know it is the rules. Have to be consistent. Not listening could get suspended. Sister was expelled. Had to go to PACE West for 3 years for behavior and mental issues.

Participant 2: Yes. Because students were arrested.

Participant 3: Depends on zero tolerance policy. Suspend students and explain to them. Depends on the situation. Tough love is the hardest love. You don't realize it until after you are in school.

Participant 4: Teachers judge students. New age teachers listen more. Teachers are looking more at consequences and not students. Stereotypes not just Black. Black = not good enough.

Participant 5: Yes. Can't penalize someone for a minor infraction.

Participant 6: Zero tolerance policies do not work.

Participant 7: I feel like zero tolerance has created a culture of incarceration over education. Takes time away from instruction time. Take away from other students. Zero tolerance increases disengagement in the learning process. Students lose instruction time when they are suspended. Students do not benefit from excessive discipline.

Participant 8: Zero tolerance to me cannot exist. We have to have some flexibility in all areas of life. The prisons are overcrowded, and it does nothing to serve the child's development into a well-functioning adult and member of society. I have not seen these instances for myself due to teaching internationally, but I have heard many horror stories of my colleague's experiences working in South Carolina.

Interview question 8 supports Research Question 3: How does exclusionary discipline practices such as zero tolerance policies fuel the school to prison pipeline?

Interview question 8 refers to School Resource Officers. School Resource Officers are police officers that are based in schools. Interview question 8 is: What training should police officers receive before they are deployed to work with children?

Participant 1: Sensitivity training and understanding home life. I lacked attention at home. Know how to handle different situations. Children have needs. Always an excuse for everything.

Participant 2: Classes about children. Early childhood education. SROs need to be accessible and understand students. I did not know the SRO.

Participant 3: Communication is key. If you yell at one student then you might receive a strong reaction. Some students know how to turn the other cheek. Tone and body language. Communication is necessary. Conflicts can be avoided.

Participant 4: Receive child develop training, restraint training, handle with care and learn how to work with students. SROs needs training. Where did you get training to work with children? Need to understand problem. I had a good relationship with the SRO. I was raped on camera. Police followed me to class and the bus stop. Video was sold. Officer Rodriguez supported me. The person who assaulted me threatened to cut me up.

Participant 5: SRO should receive Compassionate training.

Participant 6: Understand other backgrounds. Have no idea about situations.

Participant 7: Gun control. Good understanding of triggers. Do not know what triggers kids. Aggressive force. Does not warrant aggressive discipline. SRO needs to understand student behavior. You must know school policies and protocols. SROs do not make a difference in schools. Kids are afraid of the SRO. The SRO was one of my favorite people. The SRO scares kids into compliance.

Participant 8: The same training teachers get regarding handling students should be obligatory for police officers so they can develop dual perspectives of dealing with children in a school environment. They also need to have cultural sensitivity training. All of my experiences with the school officer have been pleasant and I noticed that they really tried their best to form positive relationships with the students and teachers.

Interview Question 10 is another question, which supports Research Question 3. Question 10 is: A consequence of the school to prison pipeline is school push-out and dropout. Why do you think students become disengaged in the learning process as a result?

Participant 1: Missing work. What is the point? This is your life. Uninterested in your outcomes. Nothing matters. Student that was unruly and teacher gives up and says I am done.

Participant 2: Feel like I would not be able to learn. Students will stop trying and dropout. Students are unable to learn and their opportunities are limited they do not think anyone cares and they drop out of school.

Participant 3: Suspension. Drop out because they have a family to support. Under a lot of stress. Teachers do not have their attention. Parents think they are failures. Student engagement is key.

Participant 4: Teachers are about the check. Teachers cannot learn what is best for them. Kids are disrespectful or bored. Teachers worry about students' trajectory. Students drop out of school because they do not have stability at home.

Participant 5: Pushing out- why would you want to deal with anything else. Suspension and expulsion is not creating safe schools.

Participant 6: Talk to people. School does not want to spend time helping.

Participant 7: Kids feel like they are not heard. Feels like people will give up on them. Give students opportunities. Education system failed students. Always wanted a teacher of color. White teachers cannot relate. Not supported. Students are fearful of continuing school. A student will give up because their support system does not believe in them. It is self-fulfilling prophecy. If someone tells you that you are stupid, worthless and a troublemaker then you will believe that are you are and continue to get into trouble.

Participant 8: Well I can speak from my own experience. I hated high school. I loved the concept of school, just not everything that I was experiencing socially and with administration. I went to my counselor frustrated and said I could not do this anymore. Either I dropped out or find a way to get out early. Thankfully, I was able to graduate early with some very hard work and focus. So, I can really see how students who really do not care for school could be pushed out. They feel like whatever they do, it is never right. So what's the point? In regards to the subject, I think that the American education system has left out too much history and it's biased, so it is not relatable to certain groups of people.

Survey question 1 discussed the school to prison pipeline in depth. Survey question 1 supports research question 3: How does exclusionary discipline practices such as zero tolerance policies fuel the school to prison pipeline?

Survey Question 1 is: What are your thoughts on school discipline? Do you think exclusionary discipline such as suspension and expulsion creates a pipeline between schools and the criminal justice system?

- There are certain times when suspension/expulsion are appropriate (violence in school, for example). However, I read more and more about suspensions in elementary schools. That's wrong. Elementary kids are too young, and suspensions are truly isolating. Younger students need to be redirected and encouraged within the classroom.
- Yes, I do believe that is a connection between the need of the school to control the behavior of the student and the student's response. The school needs to have recourse for the behavior of the student. Especially if they are injuring others, but idle hands and lack of support can give a student opportunity to find themselves dropping out of school and getting in trouble with the law.
- School discipline needs to be consistent and fair. Student punishment/consequences should be connected to their action. Exclusionary discipline should have a component of rehabilitation in addition to exclusion.



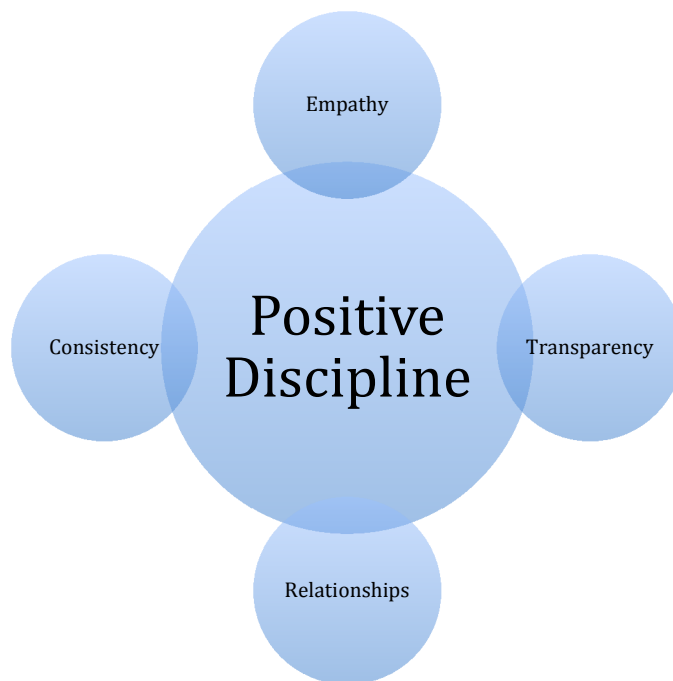
- I think the disciplinary procedures our school practices are largely ineffective and unfairly applied. I'm not certain about the interplay between exclusionary discipline and the justice system.
- I believe school discipline is effective if consequences are logical and consistent. I do not think exclusionary discipline creates a pipeline between school and the criminal justice system.
- I think expulsion and suspensions are ineffective forms of discipline. Removing students from school takes away the opportunity to guide them and support them.
- I feel that school discipline is far too lenient and little to no accountability is placed on the students and students are very aware of this. Exclusionary discipline is necessary in order to assist teachers, who have limited power/authority to maintain control and teach those who want to learn in a non-threatening environment. I disagree with rewarding students for displaying positive behavior. We are teaching students to hustle to get what they want and then the negative behavior resumes. Why reward students for what they are supposed to do?
- I believe that school discipline should be designed to teach appropriate behaviors. When suspension or expulsions are used based on generic ideologies, these practices are not effective. When suspensions are used negatively, it can produce a pipeline, especially for students with no support.

Research question 4 is: How can policymakers and educators provide a fair and equitable learning environment and address school discipline. Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), collaboration between private and public partnerships and stakeholders, positive interaction between educators and students, and student engagement are elements which could dismantle the school to prison pipeline. Research Question 4 is supported by the following themes: Theme 2: Parental Involvement, Theme 3: Alternatives to Punishment, and Theme 4: Stakeholders. The following sources will support question 4. Interview questions 8, 11, 12, Survey questions 3-11, *U.S. Department of Education resource guide for improving school climate and Discipline* and *Unlocking Opportunity for African American Girls* by the National Women's Law Center.

## Public Policy

The U.S. Department of Education encouraged schools to create a school climate, which is both safe and supportive for effective learning to take place. The U.S. Department of Education advised schools to form partnerships with local agencies including community based mental health agencies and social services to support students and avoid unintended consequences. According to U.S. Department of Education (2014), Codes of Conduct should have clear, and appropriate, consistently applied expectations and consequences. Schools should strive to create positive climates that support all learners while holding students to high standards. The National Women's Law Center (2015), advised policymakers to practice accountability and transparency. Policies should be enacted which require annual reporting of school discipline which is disaggregated by race, gender and disability. Policymakers should implement positive behavior intervention strategies. The National Women's Law Center (2015) encourages policymakers to implement culturally responsive supports, peer mediation, conflict resolution and restorative justice programs. The U.S. Department of Education and National Women's Law Center agreed that school personnel should be trained to recognize signs of trauma and appropriately respond to student behavior.

Figure 3: Positive Behavior Intervention



## Interviews

Interview questions 8, 11, 12 and survey questions 3-11 support Research Question 4 which is: How can policymakers and educators provide a fair and equitable learning environment and address school discipline? Stakeholders (parents, teachers, administrators and school resource officers) should play an active role in ensuring a fair and equitable learning environment.

Interview question 8: What training should police officers receive before they are deployed to work with children?

Participant 1: Sensitivity training. Understanding home life. Lacked attention from Mom. Know how to handle different situation. Children have different needs. There is always an excuse for everything.

Participant 2: Classes about children. Early childhood education. SROS need early childhood education course to understand students. SROs need to be accessible and understand students.

Participant 3: Communication is key. If you yell at one student then you might receive a strong reaction. Some students know how to turn the other cheek. Tone and Body Language. Communication is necessary.

Participant 4: Receive child development training, restraint training, handle with care; learn how to work with students. SRO needs training. Where did you get your training to work with children? Need to understand problem. SRO- I had a good relationship. I was raped on camera. Police followed me to the class and the bus stop. Video was sold. Officer Rodriguez helped me. My attacker threatened to cut me up. Police officers should take child development classes and get training which is necessary to work with students SRO should be supportive and students should feel like they can trust that person.

Participant 5: SRO- Compassionate training

Participant 6: They do not understand other backgrounds. Have no idea about situations.

Participant 7: Gun control. Good understanding of triggers. Do not know what triggers kids. Aggressive force. Does not warrant aggressive discipline. SRO is not a behavior analyst. You must know the school policies and protocols. SROs do not make a difference in schools. Kids are afraid of the SRO. SRO was one of my favorite people. Scaring them to compliance.

Participant 8: The same training teachers get regarding handling students should be obligatory for police officers so they can develop dual perspectives of dealing with children in a school environment. They also need to have cultural sensitivity training. All of my experiences with the school officer has been, pleasant, and I noticed that they really tried their best to form positive relationships with the students AND the teachers.

Interview question 11 is about parental involvement. A lack of parental involvement is one of the reasons that students do not perform well in school and get in trouble outside of school. The Virginia Department of Education published a document called, *A Parent's Guide to Understanding Student Discipline Policies and Practices in Virginia Public Schools*. The parent's guide was created by education stakeholders in Virginia such as the Virginia PTA, School Discipline Officer, Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals, Virginia School Boards Association, Administrators and the Virginia Department of Education. The parent's guide outlines parental rights and responsibility in terms of school discipline. Parental involvement is to ensuring a safe learning environment for all students.

Interview Question 11: How were your parents involved in the discipline process at school?

Participant 1: Elementary school- Mom was very active. Mom was working three jobs. Mom was more focused on Adrienne (sister). Mom was not involved. She did not support me.

Participant 2: Mom would go to school and make a scene. A boy slapped me in the face. My Uncle who was one year older beat the boy and got into trouble. He was defending his niece. The boy who hit me is in jail. He continued to disrespect girls.



Participant 3: My parents were not really supportive. Parents thought I was independent and did not help. Parental involvement is important. Teenagers need to feel safe and supported.

Participant 4: My dad tried to be there. School mattered. Parents were disappointed. Did not know how to be there. They traveled. Dad was always the cookie mom. I was always the star student. Students are treated differently if the parents are not involved. Parental involvement is important. Students are treated differently when parents are not supportive or present at school.

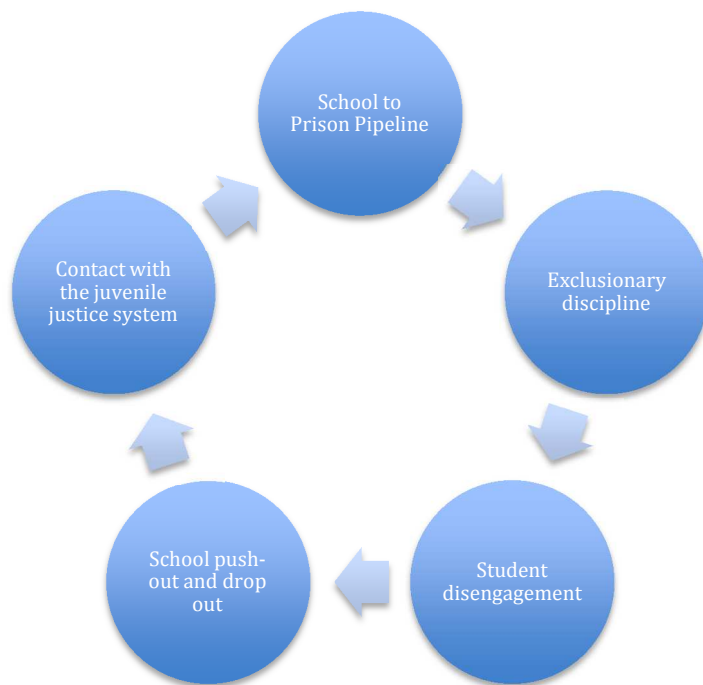
Participant 5: Mom did not discipline. Fought for testing and participation.

Participant 6: Mom was not involved in discipline. Took teacher's side or principal's side. I joined Job Corps to get support and learn a trade.

Participant 7: Parental involvement is important because parents should know what is going on. Her parents wanted to support her. Wanted what is best for me. Parents were invested. When parents are not present in the school system then treat them differently. If teacher and administrators do not see it then no one is there to support them. My grandmother would often support me in school.

Participant 8: Parents were called when needed. If you had a parent like mine, she could not attend PTA meetings and be involved, or even pick me up when I needed her. So I feel that parents are left out and just told that their child (ren) are receiving such and such discipline without a real say in it, and there is no opportunity to correct the behavior by other means. Always punishing a child leads to rebellion. You also have the cases in which parents feel like their child (ren) can do no wrong, which also makes the discipline process difficult.

Question 12 is about the school to prison pipeline. Question 12: How can you dismantle the pipeline? Question 12 is talking about alternatives to exclusionary discipline and answers Research Question 4. Research Question 4: How can policymakers and educators provide a fair and equitable learning environment and address school discipline?



Interview Question 12: How would you dismantle the school to prison pipeline?

Participant 1: Hold students accountable. Engage students in the process in schools.

Reward positive behavior. Give students ISS (In School Suspension) instead of Out of School because they can do their schoolwork.

Participant 2: Teachers need to work more with students and understand. My sister was in juvenile detention. I explained to her about the benefits of coming to school. Everyone needs to know that someone cares about him or her. A lot of kids come from low-income backgrounds. There is a program at Metz for troubled students. Kids want teachers to care about them and not come to work for a check.

Participant 3: Personally, I would want to sit down and talk to a student. Teachers need to find out their stories. Every negative situation can turn into a positive because it takes you even further. You could be 10 steps from falling apart. It is hard when you are trying to raise your siblings, work fulltime, and go to school. I paid for a household of 8 on minimum wage. If racism did not exist then ½ the issues would not be there. People are in gangs because of rivalry. About how you grow up and what you are brought into. You teach your kids and the cycle keeps going on. You have to do something to survive.

Participant 4: Teachers need to get to know circumstances. Teachers have to listen. Take a look at educators' training. Do you know how to talk to children? Needs someone who cares. Teachers need to be empathetic. Teachers need training to help them understand how to interact with children. I am scared for my son to go to school. Make America Great Again- We need to focus on us.

Participant 5: Giving them options. Giving them something to do.

Participant 6: Youth centers- for young adults. Leave times to do something wrong. Police, ministry, parents can't do everything.

Participant 7: You have to listen to kids. Simply pay attention. Kids are open books. You have to be empathetic. You have to listen. Let me help you. Help you while you are here. You need to listen and hear you. Listen to understand you. Ask questions to help you. Not going to feel comfortable. We forget who the people are who helped us. I remember people who poured into me. Be the best they can be. More positive intervention than negative. Have to be transparent. Educators need to be responsible and listen to students. Educators need to ask questions and discover the needs of each student. Positive intervention is more helpful than negative consequences. Students need to learn from their experiences. They need to feel loved and supported by someone. School may be the only safe place for these students. That's everything. Empathy is a huge part in children's upbringing. Never too late to start. There is always someone who can change your mind. If I can grab hold to your mind... that could change your life.

Participant 8: That's a heavy-loaded question. Since I have not worked in a U.S. Secondary School, I cannot honestly speak to this point. I will say that through my experience as an outsider looking in, the American education system has to change, but most importantly mindsets of those in charge have to change. Racism is unfortunately very institutional, so communities of people of color really have to take a stand and make it a priority to get involved in the education system and have their voice heard. Teachers also have to take a pivotal position to speak out against this system as well. There are no schools without us.

Survey questions 3-11 address the role of parental involvement, alternatives to punishment and the importance of stakeholders. Stakeholders are important to ensuring that discipline policies and practices provide a fair and equitable learning environment for all students. The school to prison pipeline starts at school. Education stakeholders must work together to dismantle the pipeline.

Question 3: How do you approach discipline at your school?

- Parents are supposed to be involved in the situation from the beginning. Our school tries counseling and in school suspension before moving to suspension
- Discipline is a heart issue. We look at the heart of our child. We understand that most of the discipline issues at our homeschool are based upon frustration at temporary events. We stop and we remind our kids that we do not want to make permanent or life choices while involved in temporary emotion. We do the same. It's hard. So often we want to lash out in anger and frustration when many times it's a cry for help that we're dealing with.
- I try to be fair and caring in my classroom and treat students like they are my own.
- In my classroom, I give students at least 2 verbal warnings before implementing the color chart. If behavior persists, student changes the color on the chart. Yellow- 3<sup>rd</sup> offense (Final warning)/Orange-4<sup>th</sup> offense (Time Out)/Red- 5<sup>th</sup> offense – Parent Contact (possible behavior referral to counselor, if persistent behavior).



- I approach discipline as an opportunity to assist my students with problems they may be having and offering alternatives.
- I have a zero tolerance from day one and then ease in leniency as students show they have earned it by showing respect and accountability.
- I discipline at the classroom level. Where kids are worked with fairly and firmly, but with more understanding of the holistic child.
- I believe in effective classroom management and swift discipline when necessary. I establish classroom rules and my students understand consequences. It can vary from timeout within my classroom to a dictionary assignment.

Question 4 is about parental involvement. The question is: How does parental involvement influence your decision to discipline students?

- Paramount- because we are their parents, our goal is to develop wise, talented, God-fearing and productive citizens in society. In order to do that we have to be in the trenches with our kids. Understanding their weaknesses and meeting them at their point of need.
- I try to handle most discipline within my classroom. If after-school detention is necessary, the student spends their time with me. I always notify the parents when there has been a situation. Most parents have been supportive; even if the parent is supportive or cannot be reached, I start with after school detention with me.
- All parents love their children but some are more capable of supporting their children. But as a teacher, I have to give the parents the opportunities to be involved in the process. Unfortunately, many parents have a difficult time understanding that we (me as the teacher and the school) want is the same thing as they (the parents and child) want. A well-run school where everyone has the opportunity to learn and grow.
- I think effective discipline depends on parental involvement.
- At the beginning of the school year, I ask parents to check their child's behavior report and have a conversation if their child does not have purple, blue or green. Sometimes parents are cooperative and reinforce the behavior system at home (i.e. rewards for purple days, etc.) However, the parents that have very little

involvement do not reinforce the behavior. If their child gets on yellow, orange or red, the child does not receive consequences at home. Some parents don't even look at the behavior reports. From my experience, this results in students repeating offenses.

- It doesn't influence my decisions at all.
- I have always taught in urban areas where there is little to no parental involvement. I do explain to my students they are still being held accountable for their actions, parental involvement or not. I try to connect these students with mentor to supplement the lack of positive behavior. Some students have involved parents with highly negative attitudes and behaviors.
- When parents are involved, I try to work with them. If not I still work with the kids in disciplining them.
- Parental involvement does not influence my decision to discipline. It is necessary to the success of my students that they understand their consequences and I do not play favorites. I base my decision on the needs of the student. Parental involvement is a bonus.

Question 5 is about stakeholders such as principals and the school board.

Question 5 is: Who is responsible for making discipline policies and practices?

- The discipline policies are developed by the schools and approved by the school board
- We both are, however because I am in the teacher and in “class” daily with our kids, I can get frustrated easily because I’ve “dealt with” the issues with the kids all day and my husband balances it out and vice versa.
- In my current role, I see how powerful the Principal is. Not Assistant Principals but Principals. Their vision for education (and discipline) is carried out by their staff. Teachers, assistant principals, guidance counselors, custodians and administrative support. When a principal can lead with clear vision, those schools tend to have the fewest issues
- The school district and principal
- Admin makes the policies, teachers do most of the practices
- District/Principal/Leadership team

Question 6 is about stakeholder and how stakeholders influence policies and practices. Question 6 is: How do stakeholders influence disciplinary policies and practices?

- Stakeholders can serve on the committee that develops and modifies the recommendations to the school board.
- We are the stakeholders. We come together at the end of the school year and discuss what worked what didn't work and the character traits that we want to instill in our kids over the next school year. We pray about what we are going to teach the kids and hope that we are effective. The goal for us is instilling character and not fear and frustration.
- Respectfully. Be involved. Put faces to situations. Educators want to be treated with respect and they have a difficult job. Sometimes, we get so frustrated (just like we do as parents) that we don't respect our roles and speak to students inappropriately. We need to acknowledge our mistakes. We also need to be PROACTIVE. For example, many students have never been to a live performance before or eaten in a restaurant before. So, before we put them in an unfamiliar situation, we need to teach them what behaviors are expected in these situations. We can't run schools without planning ahead for things like this. Stakeholders should help figure out ways for real world situations so that students understand why rules and consequences are so important.

- Some parents are cooperative, while others blame the teachers for their child's poor behavior and disagree with the teachers.
- Stakeholders primarily provide support and rewards for positive behavior and mentor students who need them.
- I can't say they do.
- Principals are required to follow the regulations set by school board/stakeholders.

Question 8 is about the SRO (School Resource Officer) as a stakeholder in the schools. Question 8 is: Do you have an SRO (School Resource Officer) in your school?

What is the purpose of the SRO?

- We do have an SRO. The officer serves as a liaison between the school and the police department. She works with the students, building positive relationships. Our security guards usually handle school discipline.
- Yes. Our SRO investigates crimes and acts as a liaison between schools and the community. He is involved in our school by coaching and has a presence in the hallways.
- Yes. I don't really know.
- Yes. He works with our Security officer in maintaining safety in our school building. Both the Security officer and SRO investigate theft, vandalism, & how to remedy the situation.
- Yes. I don't know honestly.
- Yes. His role is to be a deterrent, to make arrests or intervene for potential crimes. Unfortunately, he is often called in place of school security or when teachers have limited classroom management skills. This assists the prison pipeline mentality.

Question 11 is about alternative to punishment. Critics of the school to prison pipeline recommend exploring policies and practice, which support a positive learning environment. PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Supports), youth court, peer mediation, meditation and restorative justice have been effective in reducing the impact of the school to prison pipeline. Question 11 is: Do you use alternatives to discipline such as PBIS? How effective is PBIS in your school? Do you think alternatives to discipline help to create a fair and equitable learning environment?

- Our current approach is the PBIS model, which supports and encourages positive behavior and building relationships with students rather than punishment.
- I really am not familiar with PBIS, but I would expect that all schools should believe that positive behavior is the norm. I believe that should “catch” the student being good and praising them for those things. However, I don’t believe in a reward system because the goal isn’t developing the character of the student, rather it’s putting the carrot in front of a child’s face and have them want the reward, but does nothing to change the character of the student.
- Yes. I am not sure. I don’t think that it is implemented consistently to be effective.
- We are reorganizing and implementing PBIS next year. I’m not certain what “alternatives to discipline” means.
- In the Primary grade levels, I believe PBIS is effective, when implemented consistently. For the Intermediate and Middle School grade levels, I am unsure as to if PBIS is implemented effectively and consistently.



- Yes. PBIS has been extremely well received by our staff and students. It has given clearly defined expectations for behavior.
- Yes. We use PBIS. It is not effective at this school. The students have figured it out and have a “so what?” attitude towards it.
- Yes. Sometimes. Success is inconsistent, depends on the student.
- In the classroom or with my caseload, I use PBIS or alternative discipline. My school does not.

## Summary

The purpose of Chapter 4 was to answer the research questions presented at the beginning of the research study. The researcher used supporting data from documents, interviews and surveys to answer each question. The central question for this study was: How does the criminalization of behavior in schools, racial bias and gender stereotypes contribute to the overrepresentation of African American girls in the school to prison pipeline? Criminalization of behavior leads to unintended consequences for African American girls. Contact with the criminal justice system leads to lower lifetime income, high recidivism rates and trauma as girls drop out of schools.

Zero tolerance policies push students out of school as they become disengaged in the learning process. Research question 2 was: How do exclusionary discipline policies such as suspension and expulsion contribute to racial and gender disparities in school discipline? Exclusionary discipline policies adversely affect African American students and students with disabilities. African American students are forced into the school to prison pipeline because they do not meet societal norms. They are referred to law enforcement for minor infractions such as disorderly conduct in the classroom. Schools in Virginia have the power to implement disciplinary policies, which supersede the juvenile court. Schools can implement exclusionary discipline policies or send students to alternative school instead of referring students to law enforcement. Student referral to law enforcement is a continuous cycle, which creates a pipeline between school and prison.

Question 3 was: How do exclusionary discipline practices fuel the school to prison pipeline? African American students in Virginia represent 49.6% of suspensions and expulsions. African American students are referred to the law enforcement more than their peers. African Americans are present in large numbers in the juvenile and adult justice facilities in Virginia. The school to prison pipeline is a systemic problem in Virginia based on institutional racism. Teachers and administrators do not take time to understand the needs of the students and how their life experiences affect their behavior in schools. Misbehavior in school is related to trauma.

Question 4 was about stakeholders. Stakeholders play an important role in developing and implementing school policies and practices. Question 4 was answered through surveys, interviews and documents that shared the roles of teachers, administrators, School Resource Officers and parents in ensuring that the schools provide a fair and equitable learning environment. Alternatives to punitive discipline such as PBIS, youth court, mediation, and peer mediation and restorative justice were discussed. Education must be part of the discipline process if schools want a positive learning environment.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research study was to examine the effects of exclusionary discipline on African American girls and how racial bias and gender stereotypes contributed to decisions to suspend students. This research study was conducted because a systemic problem exists which funnels African American girls from school to the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Prior research on the school to prison pipeline addressed the impact of the pipeline on African American males. It is known that African American males make up a large percentage of the prison population. However, African American girls represent the largest growing segment of the juvenile justice system. Many factors contribute to misbehavior in school.

Recent research on the school to prison pipeline identified trauma as a reason why African American girls are not performing well in schools. The school to prison pipeline can be dismantled if stakeholders (parents, teachers, administrators, school resource officers, school boards and counselors) take an active role in crafting discipline policies and practices, which provide a fair and equitable environment for all students. The key to stopping the pipeline is learning why it exists and reevaluating policies and practices, which create gender and racial disparities in the classroom.

The central question, which is: How does the criminalization of behavior in schools, racial bias and gender stereotypes contribute to the overrepresentation of African American girls in the school to prison pipeline? The research study revealed that many behavioral issues are avoided if teachers, administrators, school safety and security and SROs (School Resource Officers) really get to know children and understand their stories. A reason may exist for why a student is acting out in class. The student could be seeking attention or may be facing trauma at home. Educators need to evaluate their decisions to discipline students. Disorderly conduct and disrespect are reasons that students are being referred to law enforcement. Implicit bias is factor, which influences teachers' decisions to suspend students. African American girls do not fit "societal norms." African American girls are considered loud, belligerent, assertive and aggressive. Teachers are more likely to assume that African American girls are trouble and refer them to the principal or School Resource Officer. The Virginia Department of Education, U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Office, National Women's Law Center and Justice Policy Institute revealed that African Americans make up 49% of school referrals to law enforcement in Virginia. Zero tolerance policies and truth in sentencing laws in Virginia have created a pipeline between school and prisons. Diversionary programs which provide mentorship and counseling through community partnerships could help dismantle the pipeline.

### Interpretation of Findings

I explored the following topics in my literature review: zero tolerance, school to prison pipeline, exclusionary discipline, race, gender and the school to prison pipeline, alternatives to punishment and social change. Prior literature revealed that zero tolerance created a phenomenon called the school to prison pipeline and contributed to disparate treatment in schools. The school to prison pipeline decreased educational opportunities and increases the likelihood that students will not complete high school. Suspensions and expulsions impact student perceptions of educators and authority figures. Racial bias and stereotypes influence teachers' decisions to discipline students. Zero tolerance policies do not provide safe, secure and positive learning environments. This is a summary of prior research from chapter 2. I will address each of the topics from Chapter 2 and what I learned as a result of my school to prison pipeline research.

## Zero Tolerance

I conducted a survey of educators, school safety and security, support staff and administrators. I asked if zero tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline created a pipeline with the criminal justice system. The responses varied. The common response was that discipline needs to be fair and consistent and that student punishment and consequences should be connected to their action and exclusionary discipline should have a component of rehabilitation. Another educator said that school discipline is effective if consequences are logical and consistent. One educator felt that school discipline was too lenient and little to no accountability was placed on the students. She said exclusionary discipline was necessary to assist student who have limited power/authority to maintain control and maintain a non-threatening environment. The interviews with African American who were reflecting on their educational experiences agreed that transparency; consistency, accountability and student engagement is necessary for maintaining a positive learning environment. Students want to know that teachers care about them. Students who are suspended do not receive academic support and fall behind when they return to school. Interviewees encouraged educators to apply alternatives to out of school suspension and expulsion such as warnings, parent conference, counseling, after school detention and in school suspension where students continue to complete assignments and can ask teachers for help. According the Virginia Department Education (2016), The school has the power to recommend alternative discipline before referral to law enforcement or juvenile court.

Local school boards and school principals have autonomy when crafting code of conducts. The U.S. Department of Education (2009), encourages schools to have discipline policies and code of conduct which sets clear, appropriate and consistent expectations to improve student behavior and increase engagement. Consistency, transparency and accountability will contribute to maintaining a positive learning environment.



## School to Prison Pipeline

The school to prison pipeline refers to a phenomenon that creates a pipeline between schools and the juvenile justice system. Prior research on the school to prison pipeline revealed that pre-school and elementary school students are being suspended and expelled. One of the educators said, "There are certain times when suspension/expulsion are appropriate. However, I read more and more about suspensions in elementary schools. That's wrong. Elementary kids are too young, and suspensions are truly isolating." Another educator said that, "expulsions and suspensions are ineffective forms of punishment. Removing students from school takes away the opportunity to guide and support them." According to the Virginia Department of Education (2016), the primary reasons that students are suspended and expelled are: disorderly conduct, disrespect and assault against other persons. Referrals to the juvenile and adult justice create a continuous cycle of school push out, drop out, contact with the justice system and recidivism.

The Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (2017) reported that African American youth make up 20% of Virginia's population and account for 50% of all intakes and 70% of Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice direct admissions. The Virginia Departments of Education and Juvenile Justice agree that racial disparities exist in the schools and the juvenile justice system and action should be taken to dismantle the school to prison pipeline. Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice encourages all stakeholders to create action plans to reduce disparities and enhance equity for youth in the juvenile justice system. This research study adds to existing research, which acknowledges that racial disparities exist but does not propose solutions to decrease African American exposure to the juvenile justice system.

## Exclusionary Discipline

Suspension in Virginia is considered to be an exclusion from school for 1-364 days according the Code of Virginia, “An expulsion is the exclusion from school for violation of disciplinary probation, perpetrating repeated physical assault, assault of a staff member and substantive threats staff members” (Manassas City Public Schools Code of Conduct, 2016, p. 20). The Code of Conduct for Virginia Department of Education (2009), “states that school systems must inform juveniles 14 years of age and older, that under circumstances, juveniles may be prosecuted as adults” (p. 23). Parents must be active in school discipline hearings. Parents have the right to a hearing for suspensions and expulsions. Most students are suspended or expelled due to a lack of parental involvement. A Parent’s Guide to Understanding Student Discipline Policies and Practices in Virginia Public Schools is accessible via the VDOE website and the code of conduct for each school system is on the division’s website. The Codes of Conduct and Parent’s Guide to Understanding Student Discipline are public records. “The Code of Virginia states that school system must establish policies that promote an environment which is free of disruption, threats to people or property and supportive of individual rights” (Virginia Department of Education, p. 2). School boards in Virginia must include policies, which outlines parental responsibilities for reporting criminal convictions and delinquency adjudications for serious crimes. Schools, school systems, parents and stakeholders should know the mission and vision of the school and work collectively to ensure that the learning environment is safe, secure and equitable.

## Race, Gender and the School to Prison Pipeline

Titles IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibits public schools from implementing student disciplinary policies that discriminate on the basis of race, national origin or color (National Women's Law Center, 2015). The National Women's Law Center (2015), agrees that policymakers and schools should make a collective effort decrease discipline disparities in schools. National Women's Law Center (2015), encourages schools develop policies which include conflict resolution and restorative justice practices. The common thread in the interviews was that school systems need to look beyond consequences and develop an understanding of the holistic child, which is not based implicit bias and gender stereotypes. Educators who participated in the survey agreed with the National Women's Law Center, The Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Department of Justice. A participant in the study noted, " Stakeholders should help figure out ways for real world situations so that students understand why rules and consequences are important." Interviewees agreed that a double standard exists based on bias, which is not fair or equitable.

## Alternatives to Punishment

Alternatives to punishment should include Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS). Children should be aware of consequences for inappropriate behavior. However, students should be rewarded for good behavior. A survey participant said that she uses a color system and sticker chart. Students are responsible for changing the color on the chart if their behavior is unacceptable. The range is from purple to red. Purple is a minor behavior disruption. Red means a serious offense was committed and parent contact and intervention is needed. Alternatives to punishment can include meditation, yoga, and youth court and character dollars. Interview participants agreed that teachers should hold students accountable and reward them for positive behavior. School is about student engagement. Student engagement and buy-in could improve school climate.

The Social Justice and Rational Choice theories were used to support this study. Rawls argued that reasonable citizen want to belong to a society where political power is “legitimately used.” He called this a “well ordered society.” In the *Theory of Justice*, Rawls expressed the idea that citizens were entitled to a fair system of cooperation. The Rational Choice Theory is about how an individual weighs the means, costs and benefits before making a decision. The Institutional Rational Choice Theory is about making the “best” decision after weighing all options.

## Social Justice Theory

The school to prison pipeline is a systemic problem, which is fueled by implicit bias, institutional racism, harsh discipline, gender stereotypes and disparate treatment of minorities. The school to prison pipeline adversely affects minority students. Statistical data from the Virginia Department of Education, Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice, and U.S. Department of Education revealed that minorities were more likely to be funneled from school into the juvenile justice system. Exclusionary discipline is supposed to create a fair and equitable learning environment for all students. Exclusionary discipline and zero tolerance create “positive learning environments” at the expense of students of color. All students are entitled to a fair system of cooperation, which is free of bias and discipline is applied appropriately. If all citizens are truly free and entitled to fair and equitable treatment then why are more African Americans in prison in Virginia and many Southern states? Why are African American girls suspended more times than peers? Stakeholders (citizens) need to find ways to promote a fair and equitable learning environment and address discipline. The research project proved that justice is not being applied equally to all citizens. A “veil of ignorance” exists according to Rawls (1971), because people make choices based on their “moral considerations” because they are unable to make choices on their own “self or class-interests. A “veil of ignorance” is relevant to this study because stakeholders are looking at children as “consequences” and not investing in the holistic child. Schools and the juvenile justice system are operating in their own “best interests” instead of treating all citizens fairly.

## Institutional Rational Choice Theory

Institutional Rational Choice Theory is about weighing the costs and benefits before making a decision. The cost of exclusionary discipline is grade retention, student disengagement, school push out, school drop out and contact with the criminal justice system. The benefits of exclusionary discipline are providing a safe and secure environment. The question is whether or not exclusionary discipline practices provide a fair and equitable learning environment, while preserving safety and security. Data from the Virginia Department of Education, National Women's Law Center, Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice and U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights revealed that racial disparities exist in public education and the juvenile justice system. An institution (school) has the responsibility to provide students with an education in a positive learning environment. Schools and local school boards are given autonomy to craft their own school board policies and code of conduct. The code of conduct must include specific punishments for violations of the Code of Virginia such as assault, murder, weapons, drugs, and inciting a mob.

The U.S. Department of Education (2009) noted that a school board has the power to review the facts of a “particular situation” that special circumstances exist and no disciplinary action or alternative may be administered. The institution has the choice to what is necessary to promote safety and security and service the students in their school district. School systems should track and share effective school discipline policies and practices and adopt and implement practices, which school suspension and expulsion and the disproportionate impact of practices on students of color. Educators should be provided with gender and racial bias training to decrease discriminatory discipline practices and ensure the environment is positive for all students.



### Limitations of the study

The researcher interviewed participants who were reflecting on their middle and high school experiences. The interview produced meaningful data. However, some of the women did not experience any type of racism in school or had never been suspended. I asked them to reflect on their own observations. The addition of interviews from current high school students would allow the researcher to compare the educational experiences from a current perspective. The researcher did not choose current high school students due to power dynamics and conflict because of her experience as an educator in a high school setting. Another limitation was access to the participants in the sample. Two interviews were conducted via Face time and Skype. The interviews over Skype and Face time allowed the researcher to see the participants and read body language. However, the face-to-face interviews provided more opportunities to interact with participants and establish a rapport. The face-to-face interviews generated more data because interviewees were more willing to share their thoughts and provide the researcher with specific information about their experiences and how their educational experiences shaped their life outcomes.

## Recommendations

Future research should be conducted on the impact of exclusionary discipline on other girls of color. Data from the Department of Education, Virginia Department of Education and Justice Policy Institute revealed an increase in suspensions for Hispanic and American Indian girls. A quantitative study, which compares the impact of exclusionary discipline for all girls in urban environment, would be beneficial for understanding the intersection of race, gender and the school to prison pipeline. Educators should participate in professional development, which promotes cultural sensitivity and embraces multiculturalism. School resource officers should receive training such as child development courses, handle with care, and conflict mediation. Policymakers should maintain robust data on school discipline and use this data to implement policies, which are free of bias and discriminatory practices. Stakeholders need to play an active role in developing policies to ensure that fair and equitable is applied in schools. Schools should use alternatives to punishment when possible to provide students with equal opportunities to improve their behavior. Accountability, transparency and consistency should be included in school board policies and practices. School should not be viewed as a stepping-stone to the criminal justice system. Education is about providing a nurturing environment where students can learn and grow.

## Implications

Dismantling the school to prison pipeline has far reaching implications. Students will be able to learn in an environment, which is fair and equitable. All students will benefit from policies and practices, which promote appropriate consequences for disciplinary infractions. Stakeholders' investment in schools will bring access to important resources with school and community partnerships. Schools and the Commonwealth of Virginia will spend less money on grade retention, graduation rates will improve and funds for juvenile facilities can be reallocated to support diversion programs. School to prison pipeline research, which involves girls of color will support the Intersectionality theory that emphasizes that connection exists between identity and power. Social change is necessary to ensure justice for all citizens. The school to prison pipeline can be dismantled if stakeholders and policymakers use their influence to create policies and practices, which benefit all citizens.

## Conclusion

The school to prison pipeline is a phenomenon, which is motivated by institutional racism, stereotypes and implicit bias. Policymakers understand that racial and gender disparities exist in the criminal justice system. However, no legislation has been passed which addressed disproportionality in the juvenile and criminal justice system. Exclusionary discipline is necessary to maintain order in a school. Students know that there are rules and consequences. The problem is discipline is not applied in a consistent manner. African American, Hispanics and students with disabilities are more likely to be disciplined than their peers. The problem with the school to prison pipeline starts with schools. Stakeholders need to be part of the discipline process. Stakeholders SROs, and community partners should play a role in ensuring that schools are safe and secure and provide for the needs of all students. School systems should use restorative justice programs and positive behavior interventions to reward students for positive behavior instead of punishing them for minor infractions. Schools should form partnerships with community organizations, which provide mentorship, tutoring, counseling, and diversion programs to support students. Stakeholders and policymakers need to collaborate and focus on education rather incarceration.

## Appendix A: Informed Consent Survey

## Consent Form

## School to Prison Pipeline

You are invited to participate in a study on the school to prison pipeline and the implications for African American girls and young women.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Karen Wallace, who is a doctoral student at Walden University

## Background Information:

The purpose of this research is to examine how racial bias and gender stereotypes influence an educator's decision to discipline, the consequences of harsh discipline and how exclusionary discipline practices lead to the school to prison pipeline. The school to prison pipeline is defined as policies and practices, which funnel students from the classroom into the juvenile and criminal justice system. The researcher is seeking your input as an educator who has teaching experience in an urban environment.

## Inclusion Criteria:

Participants in the research study must meet the following inclusion criterion:

- Public School Educator
  - A minimum of 10 years experience
  - Teacher in an urban environment (at least 60% minority) •
- Minority = African American and Hispanic

## Voluntary Nature of Study:

I am requesting your participation, which will involve completing a survey about school discipline and the school to prison pipeline. The survey should take about 10- 15 minutes. The survey will remain open for 10 days. Your participation in this study is voluntary. The researcher will respect your decision of whether or not to participate in this study is voluntary. The researcher will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. If you decide to

join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

How the survey will be administered:

I will send a Google form which is entitled School to Prison Pipeline. The participant will answer the questions and return the document to the researcher via e-mail.

Research participants can contact the researcher via e-mail (Karen.Wallace@waldenu.edu) with any additional questions about the survey or research process.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study: Being in this type of study involves minimal risks. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. This study has the potential to improve the educational experience of minority students in public schools. It is aimed at encouraging policymakers and educators to evaluate existing policies and practices and focus on adopting positive behavior invention strategies.

Sample Questions:

- What is discipline?
- How do zero tolerance policies in schools contribute to harsh disciplinary practices and referrals to law enforcement?
- What is the impact of exclusionary discipline on minority students?

Payment:

There will be no payment, thank you gifts, or reimbursements provided for your participation in this study.

## Privacy

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you on study reports. Data will be kept secure by the researcher. She will keep all data collected throughout the research study locked away in a personal safe located at her residence on a password protected USB drive. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

## Contacts and Questions:

You may ask questions you have now. Or if you have any questions later, you may contact the researcher via mobile phone (571) 409-4852; email at [Karen.wallace@waldenu.edu](mailto:Karen.wallace@waldenu.edu). If you have questions about your right as a research participant, you are welcome to contact the Walden IRB at [irb@waldenu.edu](mailto:irb@waldenu.edu). The Walden University's approval number for this study is 06-06-17-0441322 and expires on June 5th, 2018.

The researcher will provide you with two copies of this form. Please sign and return one and keep the other for your record.

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Interview

### Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study about the implications of the school to prison pipeline for African American girls. The researcher is inviting women who meet the following criteria to participate in this research project.

- \_African American
- \_Ages 25-30
- \_Completed High School – 2005- 2010
- \_Completed high school in Prince William County, Virginia
- \_This study is being conducted by a researcher named Karen Wallace, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this research is to examine how racial bias and gender stereotypes influence an educator's decision to discipline, the consequences of harsh discipline and how exclusionary discipline practices lead to the school to prison pipeline.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- \_Participate in an individual interview session expected to last from 45 minutes to one hour that will be audio recorded.
- \_Provide some demographic information
- \_Participate in a members check session with the researcher to review the transcription of your interview sessions for verification purposes. This will entail a discussion about initial findings to ensure the data presented accurately reflects your thoughts and feelings.

Study participants will be provided a copy of the interview questions prior to the one on one interview. Here are some sample questions:

- \_What is discipline?
- \_How do zero tolerance policies in schools contribute to harsh disciplinary practices and referrals to law enforcement?
- \_What is the impact of exclusionary discipline on minority students?

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. The researcher will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. You are not required to participate in this study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

### **Time commitment:**

You will be invited to participate in an interview, which lasts 30-45 minutes. You will be given an opportunity to view your interview transcript at a debriefing meeting after the research has been recorded. This meeting will take 15-20 minutes. The debriefing meeting will give you the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:** Being in this type of study involves minimal



risks. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. This study has the potential to improve the educational experience of minority students in public schools. It is aimed at encouraging policymakers and educators to evaluate existing policies and practices and focus on adopting positive behavior invention strategies.

**Payment:**

There will be no payment, thank you gifts, or reimbursements provided for your participation in this study.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you on study reports. Data will be kept secure by the researcher. She will keep all data collected throughout the research study locked away in a personal safe located at her residence on a password protected USB drive. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask questions you have now. Or if you have any questions later, you may contact the researcher via mobile phone (571) 409-4852; email at Karen.wallace@waldenu.edu. If you have questions about your right as a research participant, you are welcome to contact the Walden IRB at [irb@waldenu.edu](mailto:irb@waldenu.edu). The Walden University's approval number for this study is 06-06-17-0441322 and expires on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

The researcher will provide you with two copies of this form. Please sign and return one and keep the other for your record.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel that I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix C: Interview Guide  
Individual Interview Protocol, Questions and Reflection Notes

My name is Karen Wallace. I am conducting a research study on the relationship between exclusionary discipline and the school to prison pipeline. I will be researching the implications of the school to prison pipeline for African American students. I am inviting stakeholders such as parents, teachers, administrators and high school graduates to participate in this study. I hope the data that I collect will influence policymakers to consider alternative methods of discipline in schools and promote fair and equitable learning environments. I will be asking you several questions related to how your educational experiences shaped your life outcomes.

The one on one interview will be audio recorded and should take 30- 45 minutes. Please be assured that all information will remain confidential. No one other than me will have access to the audiotape or any other data collected. Your identity will be kept confidential throughout the transcript and research manuscript in which real names will be replaced by numeric pseudonyms. You will be later asked to review the findings of the study for the purpose of member checking. If you have any questions during the interview please feel free to ask them. At any time you can choose not to answer a question. You can also choose to discontinue the interview at any time. Before I begin, do you have any questions?

Research question to be addressed in the study:

How does criminalization of behavior in schools, racial bias, and gender stereotypes contribute to the overrepresentation of African American girls in the school to prison pipeline?

Interviewee Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to the school \_\_\_\_\_

Graduation year: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Question	Response	Interviewer Notes
1. Tell me about your background?		
2. What was your experience with discipline in school?		
3. Do you think that you were treated unfairly based on your race, gender, or socio-economic status?		
4. Have you ever been suspended? How did this experience impact your educational or personal growth?		
5. Should children ever be arrested at schools? If so when? Should disorderly conduct or disruptive behavior be enough to warrant arrest?		
6. Do you believe that gender stereotypes and racial bias contribute to a teacher or administrator's decision to discipline students?		
7. Do you think zero tolerance policies in schools have created an environment which values incarceration over education? Have you ever seen any instances of the school to prison pipeline operating in schools?		
8. What training should police officers receive before they are deployed to work with children?		
9. Why do you think		

<p>students of color are more likely to receive harsh punishments for misbehavior? What about children with special needs? Have you seen evidence of disparate treatment in your own life?</p>		
<p>10. A consequence of the school to prison pipeline is school push-out and dropout? Why do you think students become disengaged in the learning process as a result?</p>		
<p>11. How were parents involved in the discipline process at schools?</p>		
<p>12. How would you dismantle the school to prison pipeline?</p>		

Is there anything you would like to share that I have not asked you?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.

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