(Bad) Girls: Black Girls' and School Administrators' Perceptions of Re-Entry after Exclusionary Discipline through a Womanist Approach to Narrative Inquiry

Erica B. Edwards
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/eps_diss

Recommended Citation
doi: https://doi.org/10.57709/11226996

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Educational Policy Studies at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Educational Policy Studies Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.
This dissertation, (BAD) GIRLS: BLACK GIRLS’ AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RE-ENTRY AFTER EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE THROUGH A WOMANIST APPROACH TO NARRATIVE INQUIRY, by ERICA B. EDWARDS, was prepared under the direction of the candidate’s Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student’s Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

Janice B. Fournillier, Ph.D.  Jennifer Esposito, Ph.D.
Committee Chair  Committee Member

Layli Maparyan, Ph.D.  Joyce King, Ph.D.
Committee Member  Committee Member

Date

William Curlette, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Department of Educational Policy Studies

Paul A. Alberto, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Education and Human Development
AUTHOR’S STATEMENT

By presenting this dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the advanced degree from Georgia State University, I agree that the library of Georgia State University shall make it available for inspection and circulation in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I agree that permission to quote, to copy from, or to publish this dissertation may be granted by the professor under whose direction it was written, by the College of Education and Human Development’s Director of Graduate Studies, or by me. Such quoting, copying, or publishing must be solely for scholarly purposes and will not involve potential financial gain. It is understood that any copying from or publication of this dissertation which involves potential financial gain will not be allowed without my written permission.

_________________________________
ERICA B. EDWARDS
NOTICE TO BORROWERS

All dissertations deposited in the Georgia State University library must be used in accordance with the stipulations prescribed by the author in the preceding statement. The author of this dissertation is:

Erica B. Edwards
Educational Policy Studies
College of Education and Human Development
Georgia State University

The director of this dissertation is:

Janice B. Fournillier
Department of Educational Policy Studies
College of Education and Human Development
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30303
Curriculum Vitae

Erica B. Edwards

EDUCATION
Ph.D. Educational Policy Studies, Georgia State University, December 2017

M.S. Ed. Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, 2006

B.A. History Spelman College, 2004

PUBLICATIONS


CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS


(BAD) GIRLS:
BLACK GIRLS’ AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RE-ENTRY AFTER EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE THROUGH A WOMANIST APPROACH TO NARRATIVE INQUIRY

by

ERICA B. EDWARDS

Under the Direction of Dr. Janice B. Fournillier

ABSTRACT

Black girls are over-represented among suspended, expelled, or arrested youth (Blake 2011; Perry & Morris, 2017) and are punished more harshly for the same misbehaviors other girls and non-Black boys commit. Still, their experiences are under-explored in the literature. Recognizing that school to confinement processes are multiple and complex (Morris, 2016; American Bar Association, 2016), this study focused on school re-entry after exclusionary discipline to understand the on-going role schools play in Black girls’ disciplinary experience. Rather than addressing why and how Black girls enter the school/prison nexus, this study worked to understand the effects of a (bad) girl reputation in the long-term. Using narrative inquiry through a womanist worldview, the school re-entry experiences of five Black girls were collected and com-
pared to the perspectives of five school leaders. Thematic analysis showed the stigmatizing effects of a (bad) reputation, their sense of personal resignation in a (bad) girl performance, and certain “null” experiences that had no effect on their educational well-being. These results are in contradistinction to the perceptions of the administrators who described their interventions as caring. They also shared their reluctance to use and considerable power to resist exclusionary discipline. The tension between perceptions suggests that further work in research, policy, and practice will ensure the creation of safe and engaged learning communities for Black girls who show behavioral difference. This study adds to the literature documenting the harmful effects of exclusionary discipline and thus, calls for the need to abolish the practice.

INDEX WORDS: Black girls, Urban administrators, Exclusionary discipline, School re-entry, School/Prison nexus, School-to-Confinement processes
(BAD) GIRLS: BLACK GIRLS’ AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE THROUGH A WOMANIST APPROACH TO NARRATIVE INQUIRY

by

ERICA B. EDWARDS

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Research, Measurement & Statistics

in

Educational Policy Studies

in

the College of Education and Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2017
DEDICATION

For God.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Dr. Janice Fournillier: Thank you for coming to my rescue when I was unsure if I could go on. Thank you for seeing me, for sharing yourself with me, and for teaching me how to trust myself and others. Thank you for your careful and encouraging feedback throughout my doctoral process. I have truly learned how to make my work a representation of my highest self through your mentorship. I am a better researcher, writer and person because of you. You are a true gift.

To Dr. Jennifer Esposito: Thank you for your constant encouragement, for seeing things in me that I could not see in myself, and for teaching me the writing process. I am so grateful for the many opportunities you have trusted me with! Thank you, also, for having my back and for being there for me whenever I needed you. You are a wonderful friend. To Dr. Joyce King: I have learned who I am, where I come from, and what I want to do through your work. Your example gives me the courage to walk in truth and excellence. Thank you for showing me how to keep pressing in this journey for justice. To Dr. Layli Maparyan: Thank you for The Womanist Reader and The Womanist Idea. Without them, I would not have learned how to name my experience. It is an honor that you would review my work.

I am forever grateful to the beautiful young women who trusted me with their stories. It took great courage for you to share some of the most intimate details of your experience with me. I am in awe of your resilience! Thank you for caring as much about this project as I did and for being willing to share your stories so that other (Bad) girls can have loving, understanding and supportive school experiences. To the school leaders who shared their expertise: Thank you for your honesty on serving (Bad) girls and for putting love first in your practice. Your work offers great hope that we might advance justice for and with them. I did my best to steward your words well.

To Dr. Deron Boyles: Thank you for leading me to womanist and Black feminist epistemologies and for teaching me how to improve the quality of my arguments so that my ideas will be taken seriously. If I learned from only half of your wit and brilliance, I am destined for greatness. To Drs. Nicole Patton-Terry, Gary Bingham, and Julie Washington: Thank you for the exemplary work you are doing in the Urban Child Study Center and for teaching me how to do community-engaged educational research. My experience with you has been invaluable. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to bring my interests to the lab and for cheering me on.

To my friends: Dr. Sherell McArthur, Dr. Latoya Russel Owens, Dr. Michael Bartone, Dr. Kelly Henderson-Taylor, Dr. Shadonna Davis, and Dr. Bettina Love - thank you for the many incredible conversations we have had about theory, justice and power and for your insightful feedback on my ideas. You inspired me to work hard and helped me have fun in the process. I am so fortunate to have traveled through this journey with you. To Amber Mason, Mario Pickens and Dr. Ryan Lee-James, thank you for being there for me in the end stages. Your kind words and encouragement pushed me across the finish line.

To my very best sista-friends: Dr. Alexis S. Hammond, Lt. Cdr. Niya Williams, Dr. Aundrea Lane, Shana-Gay Jones, Mia Sifford, Suneye Holmes, and Keli Jackson: Thank you for never letting me lose sight of myself. Thank you for girls’ weekends, shoulders to cry-on, loving advice, praying for me, and 17 years of good solid friendship. Y’all are my good good girlfriends and I cannot do without you.
To my in-laws, Rev. Dr. Dennis and Susan Edwards: Knowing that the two of you weathered this experience with your marriage and four children intact has been a constant source of inspiration. Thank you for the example of faith, hope and love you model for our family. To my Auntie and Uncle, Mildred and Norman Harris: Thank you for being in my corner since before I knew I had one. I am grateful for all the love, laughter, and affirmation you have given me throughout my life. Thank you for being with me every step of the way. To my Dad, Rolando Phillips: Thank you for introducing me to the Lord. Without Him, this would not have been possible. Thank you, also, for teaching me how to stand up for working people, for keeping Detroit at the center of my heart, and for teaching me that we are always growing and becoming better people. To my Jannie, Jan Nelson, and my Mommy, Mary DeBardeleben: I cannot begin to thank you enough for the many many sacrifices you have endured. Thank you for ensuring that I have every good thing and for being there, without question, whenever I ever have or ever will need you. I love you both beyond words.

Jannie: thank you for encouraging me to go back to school, for teaching me that “I can do it,” and for traveling to take care of our family so this dream could become a reality. I was able to finish because you came on a moment’s notice to help keep Mays. Thank you for your unconditional and tireless love. Mommy: thank you for keeping our family connected and for reminding me that I am not allowed to quit because our ancestors never did. The stories you keep alive keep me alive. I am motivated to be great because of you.

Lastly, to my family, my home, my partner, my best-friend Jonathan: Thank you for seeing this thing through with me. Thank you for teaching me my worth, for providing for me, for asking if there is more, for going at my pace, for showing me that I am loved, for talking everything through, for being my first audience, for asking good questions, for making me laugh, and for always being on my side. I am a stronger, smarter woman because of you. Thank you for saying yes to this adventure over and over and over again; and thank you for our beautiful son, Mays. To my Mays: everything I ever do is for you. You are my first smile in the morning and my deepest prayer before sleep. Thank you for the joy you bring to my heart. Every day is brighter because you are in the world. I will work every day for it to be a safe, healthy, and peaceful place for you to grow and love in. And to our beloved dog Sula: thank you for sitting by my side for every page of this journey and for not holding it against me that I don’t walk you enough. You all are my heart.
Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................... vi

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION ........................................................................... 1
   Research Questions................................................................................................ 2
   Purpose of the Study............................................................................................... 2
   Significance of the Study......................................................................................... 3
   Who is a (bad) girl?................................................................................................ 6
   Subjectivity Statement............................................................................................ 9
   Assumptions & Limitations.................................................................................... 13
   Overview of the Study........................................................................................... 14

CHAPTER TWO – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .................................................. 16
   Ideologies Driving the Criminalization of Black Girls........................................ 16
   Policies Driving the Criminalization of Black Youth........................................... 20
   Relevant Theses on Black Girls’ School Re-entry Experiences............................ 26
   School Re-entry Literature.................................................................................... 30
   Theories of Educational Leadership...................................................................... 33
   Conclusion............................................................................................................. 37

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY ................................................................................. 39
   Animating Ethos: Womanist Worldview.............................................................. 39
   The Study’s Connection to Black Feminism......................................................... 46
   Methodological Paradigm...................................................................................... 49
   Participants............................................................................................................ 52
   Methods of data collection.................................................................................... 59
   Approach to Analysis............................................................................................. 66
   Ethics..................................................................................................................... 70
   Qualitative Notions of “Validity”.......................................................................... 75
   Conclusion............................................................................................................. 76

CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS ................................................................................... 77
   The Stigmatizing Re-entry Experience................................................................. 80
   Playing (Bad)......................................................................................................... 90
   Re-entry Intervention as Null Experiences........................................................... 96
   Administrators as Caring Agents ......................................................................... 105
   Principal Power and Re-entry Interventions......................................................... 113
   Conclusion............................................................................................................. 119

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION ............................................................................... 120
   The Social Effects of Exclusionary Discipline in Black Girls’ Lives..................... 120
   Competing Notions of Effective Re-entry Interventions...................................... 122
   Sources of the Tension between Narratives......................................................... 124
   Policy Implications: Toward the Abolition of Exclusionary Discipline............... 128
   Future Directions in Education Research.............................................................. 133
   Conclusion............................................................................................................. 136
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Methods.................................................................................................................. 60
Table 2: Code Map.................................................................................................................. 69
Table 3: Epigraph.................................................................................................................... 79
Table 4: Theme Definition – Stigmatization......................................................................... 80
Table 5: Strategies for Supporting Black Girls Who Resist School Norms.......................... 89
Table 6: Theme Definition – Playing (Bad).......................................................................... 91
Table 7: Theme Definition – Null Experiences.................................................................... 96
Table 8: Theme Definition – Administrators as Caring Agents........................................... 105
Table 9: Theme Definition – Principal Power...................................................................... 113
CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

On October 26, 2015, at Spring Valley High School in Columbia, South Carolina, a school resource officer violently slammed a Black girl who was using her cell phone in math class to the ground. He then dragged her across the floor, pinned her to the ground with his knee in her back and arrested her (King, 2015). Her classmate, another Black girl, cried, prayed aloud, verbally defended and video-recorded the incident before also being arrested (Davidson, 2015). The video went viral, and an intensely polarized debate ensued. The officer’s supporters felt that the police have the right to handle students who defy authority in whatever manner they consider appropriate. Those outraged by the officer’s behavior made demands for his immediate dismissal and raised questions about the seeming apathy of the teacher and administrator who passively watched the assault.

Both sides of the debate point to a fundamental reality about schooling for Black girls in America. Schools perpetuate notions of Black youth criminality and, despite cultural assumptions to treat girls with gentility, Black girls are not exempt. Like Black males, they are subject to high rates of exclusionary discipline being most likely among girls of all racial groups to be suspended, expelled or arrested in school (Blake et al., 2011; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff & Ferron, 2002). They are subject to racial bias characterizing their gender performance and appearance as a threat to authority which results in higher rates of school dismissal for subjective infractions like “insubordination.” (Blake et al., 2011).

While the research on the reasons for school discipline disparity among Black girls is clear, less work probes the ongoing nature of school-to-confinement processes. This study works to examine this paucity by focusing specifically on Black girls’ re-entry experiences after exclusionary discipline. Doing so offers an opportunity to examine the interconnected ways in which
school policy, perceptions, and practices work together in Black girls’ disciplinary experiences. Such an approach invites researchers to move beyond “causal relationships [in order] to better understand the connection between systems and policies such that we can explore how Black girls are perceived as threats to public safety” (Morris, 2012, p. 7).

**Research Questions**

This study expands the literature on the criminalization of Black girls in schools, demonstrates the complexity of school-to-confinement processes, and articulates school administrator's role when Black girls return to school after suspension, expulsion, arrest, or time spent in youth detention. Two questions, in particular, guided this study:

- What are Black girls’ perceptions of the school re-entry experience after exclusionary discipline? and
- What role do administrators play when Black girls return to school after exclusionary discipline?

**Purpose of the Study**

The central purpose of this study was to understand Black girls’ experiences when they return to school after exclusionary discipline. Doing so captured processes in the school/prison nexus that highlight the complexity of school-to-confinement realities. Providing an explicit focus on Black girls expands the literature and addresses challenges associated with this phenomenon. Extensive research on Black boys has developed a popular consciousness of the systemic challenges Black men, and boys navigate (Howard, 2014; Brown & Donner, 2012; Noguera, 2008; Kunjufu, 2005; Ferguson, 2000). It has also developed policies and resources to provide
greater support and opportunities for and with them (The White House, 2016). This study supports a similar movement for Black girls and contributes to the body of evidence uncovering Black girls’ marginality. In so doing, it works toward developing solutions for their educational well-being.

Although the research points to systemic factors within schools as the cause of racial and gender disparity in suspension and expulsion (Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005; Blake et al., 2011, Morris, 2012; Morris, 2016), fewer research probes how these factors play out over time. Thus, we have a limited understanding of how school-to-confinement processes work. I will show that understanding the practices shaping disciplinary patterns makes visible how Black girls navigate the markers ascribed to them after exclusion from school.

**Significance of the Study**

Understanding the exclusionary discipline experiences of Black girls is a topic that has gained increased attention in the past five years (Crenshaw, Ocen & Nanda, 2015; Morris, 2012; Morris, 2016). Still, there is room for growth and expansion. Most of the literature focuses on the causes for Black girls' over-representation among youth pushed out of school, so focusing on re-entry offers an opportunity to consider the ongoing processes that sustain and develop school-to-confinement pathways.

This study also adds to research on re-entry. The literature mainly focuses on the experiences of youth returning to school after juvenile incarceration and does not use an intersectional framework to understand the structures associated with returning to school (Morris & Perry, 2017). This study expanded the definition of re-entry to include the experience of re-enrolling in school after suspension, expulsion and school-based arrest. Doing so took into account the complexity of disciplinary processes by acknowledging that girls may have several experiences with
re-entry after exclusion. It also added depth to our understanding of the school/prison nexus through its ability to probe how having a reputation as a (bad) girl played out in their experiences over time.

Additionally, racial justice is a contemporary issue at the forefront of politics and the media. The #BlackLivesMatter movement has raised public consciousness of how racism shapes policies, perceptions and practices and the injustices inherent in a society that sanctions state violence against Black people. A consistent message at the core of the #BlackLivesMatter movement is ensuring that the public and people in power understand how stereotypes and negative controlling images of Black people dehumanize us and places us in danger of the very systems meant for our protection. When the media, for example, overwhelmingly portray Black people regarding the social problems we face and promote meritocratic narratives, it reifies racist historical notions of Black deviance, and the larger society is led to believe that we are inherently dysfunctional. This process furthers discourse operating on the assumption that Black people pose a "racial threat" to society and invokes the sense that it is ethically imperative to contain the risk we pose through punitive action (Farmers, 2010; Welch & Payne, 2011). #BlackLivesMatter activists invoke this theory in their resistance to police brutality by asserting that the police are also affected by this construct; and because they have the power to use deadly force, they disproportionately kill us without consequence.

This study connects the issue of exclusionary discipline to the humanizing ethos of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The literature has established that the problem of exclusionary discipline among Black males also occurs through racial threat (Morris, 2012). Black boys are often perceived by their teachers as dangerous, demands are commonly made to take a harsh and proactive stance to ensure their behavioral reform, and as a result, they are subject to harsher
punishment than any other group. Less research, however, explores how racial threat affects Black girls despite the fact that they also experience it (Morris, 2012). Thus, a study on Black girls’ school re-entry experiences after exclusionary discipline is significant because it expands the conversation on racial threat to include a more thorough analysis of gender in schools. This study found that Black girls face the very same social risks Black males do, although in different ways.

What’s more, although overwhelming data demonstrate that racial threat, moral panic, and implicit bias are significant causal factors of Black student over-representation in suspension and expulsion; the phenomena has persisted for at least 40 years. Skiba et al. (2002) raises important, albeit rhetorical, questions to this point:

…many of the important questions that remain to be addressed may be less a function of data than of attitude and perception. It might be fruitful, for example, to explore why disciplinary inequity continues in our nation’s schools despite…consistent documentation. Why must advocates for students of color prove that African American students do not deserve unequal treatment? One might well ask whether the data will ever be sufficient to constitute convincing proof of racial bias for those who believe that discrimination is no longer an issue in American society. Most important, what will it take to persuade the American public in general, and policymakers in particular, that the time has come to eradicate racial disparities in public education and ensure equal access to educational opportunity for all children, regardless of the color of their skin?” (p. 338).

Although over a decade ago, Skiba et al. (2002) called for recognition and action affirming that #BlackLivesMatter in schools, too. This study is significant because it addresses why these disparities persist, lays out additional evidence showing the harmful effects of exclusionary discipline, and advances an argument to strengthen political will toward ending the practice.

Finally, this study is significant because it centers Black girls’ voices. Brown (2008) asserts that Black girls occupy a liminal place of hyper-visibility and invisibility in academic research. Indeed, scholars like Evans-Winters & Esposito (2010) found that Black girls’ experiences are widely represented through deficit-orientations. Studies on Black girlhood rarely show
how they resist, adapt to and overcome social and political situations where their identities are constrained. This reliance on a deficit perspective in research has led to a base of literature examining Black girls through the problems they face and rarely if ever, frames their challenges within the context of the systems shaping their experiences (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Black girls are described as academic under-achievers, sexually irresponsible, and aggressive without accounting for how they take on complex familial roles, assert their independence, claim their beauty and defend their humanity (Tolman, 1996; Harris-Perry, 2011). This study attended to Black girls' re-entry experiences by fully accounting for the complexity and nuance coloring their choices and regarded their perspectives with as much authority as any expert on the subject.

**Who is a (bad) girl?**

This study will show how Black girls navigate having a (bad) reputation in school. As so, it is important to define how I characterize what it means to embody a (bad) girl performance. Collins (2005) asserts that “all women engage an ideology that deems middle-class, heterosexual, White femininity as normative” (p. 193). Black women, as their binary opposite in the Western caste system, are thus inadequately feminine. Their appearance and cultural norms are unwelcome or “strange,” and there are certain expectations that they alter their appearance and behavior to attain acceptable levels of “lady-like” comportment. Black girls are subject to this same level of scrutiny. Thus, “good” Black girls are those who embody White, middle-class, heterosexual norms for feminine behavior. They “indicate an acceptance of fundamental elements of mainstream femininity and Black respectability” (Jones, 2009, p. 12) and are defined more by what they do not do than what they do. Jones (2009) says:

*Good girls do not look or act like men or boys. Good girls do not run wild in the streets; instead, they spend the majority of their time in controlled settings: family, school, home, or church. Good girls are appropriately deferential to the men in their lives. Good*
girls are not sexually promiscuous, nor are they anything other than heterosexual. Good girls grow up to be ladies and once they have achieved this special-status position they become committed to putting the needs of their family first. (p. 49).

This limited construct defines (bad) girls as those who defy these hegemonic laws of femininity. She may dress, talk, or behave like men or boys. She may prefer the adventures of the street over the domesticity of the home. She may defy the expectations of men, explore her sexuality, or show indifference to notions of Black respectability. White supremacist patriarchy exacts great consequences for such behavior. As the opening of this chapter demonstrates, (bad) girls are harshly handled and summarily pushed-out of spaces where their conformity is required.

Black women intellectuals, however, have long troubled the feminine ideal (Cooper, 2017). Sojourner Truth’s 1851 speech at a women’s rights gathering in Akron, Ohio eloquently relays the limitations of hegemonic femininity. She said:

Dat man ober dar say dat womin needs to be helped into carriages and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gib me any best place! And a’n’t I a woman? Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And a’n’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear de lash as well! And a’n’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen chilern, and seen ’em mos all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And a’n’t I a woman? (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 36)

Though some may characterize this portion of Truth’s speech as an appeal to her humanity, I read it as a statement of how she lives in the full expression of it. Where White women’s femininity is to be treated with gentility, Truth shows her resilience and self-sufficiency in the face of brutal oppression. She is not a “good” girl nor would being one serve her well. Throughout history, Black women’s survival depended upon our ability to be more than just “good.” We have had to fight – physically, emotionally, politically, intellectually, and spiritually – to hold onto ourselves and our people.
Further, the word “bad” is culturally situated. It is a contemporary African-American colloquialism meaning that a person’s appearance and demeanor are “good.” The first definition in the urban dictionary reads: “What Michael Jackson told us he was all along: ‘You know I’m bad. I’m bad. You know it. Shum-on.’” I equate the term with the Yoruba notion of *itutu*. That is a palpable sense of certainty conferred by good character and the Spirit within. To put it colloquially, a person is “cool” and thus, are so good, they are bad. Thompson asserts that this power or “coolness” gives “the confidence to cope with all kinds of situations” (Thompson, 1983, p. 16). As in Truth’s case, being (bad) holds power to see one through. (Bad) girls, both historically and in the present moment, live outside the boundaries of hegemonic femininity and as so, show great promise for moving beyond it.

Regarding (bad) girls as those who know is essential to a project seeking justice for and with them. We cannot develop supportive solutions to redress Black girls’ over-representation among youth disciplined in school without hearing from them. Bringing their voices to bear on the issue, as illustrated by this study, demonstrates the socially contested and subjective experience characterizing (bad) girls’ experiences in schools. (Bad) girl behaviors do not exist in a vacuum. Schooling as a system, and educators in particular, play a role when Black girls come into institutional conflict. I do not offer this point to suggest that (bad) girls should not be held accountable for their actions, particularly when people and communities have been seriously harmed, but rather that understanding the complexity of playing (bad) offers critical insight on an individual’s internal state and a school community’s well-being. Through this reframing, (bad) behavior is situated within the larger social systems with which it is always in relationship. Richie (2012) has shown how imprisoned women’s crimes, no matter how heinous, are steeped in interlocking systems of racism, sexism, and poverty. Consequently, some women are more
vulnerable to crime and the persistent threat of imprisonment. Applying this finding to the behavior of (bad) girls, the question changes from “How (bad) is too (bad)?” to “What conditions influence socially unacceptable behavior?” When we ask the latter, we are implored to take a deeper look at the sociality of behavioral performativity. This allows educators to take responsibility for how we are complicit in Black girls’ marginalization and from there, begin to envision new ways of being that are restorative through their intention to heal rather than punish. I believe that (bad) girls offer great promise for redefining femininity because of this. When we take a deeper, non-judgmental look at the ways in which their behaviors seem to offend, we may be moved to understand the particularities of experience that challenge surface level assumptions about Black girlhood.

**Subjectivity Statement**

My desire to study Black girls' re-entry experiences is rooted in both my personal and professional experience. As a Black woman, I know well the liminality of Black girlhood. The resultant angst I felt as a youth could have very well resulted in my suspension or expulsion from school, especially because my generation was among the first to experience the institutional relationships between schools and prisons. When I became a teacher, though, I experienced first-hand the inequitable educational experiences Black girls navigate. My first job after college was through Teach for America, where I taught middle school in an impoverished North Central Philadelphia neighborhood. It was the most formative experience of my life and established my desire to bring educational equity, indeed freedom, for Black urban youth.

My students often fought one another, would deface classroom materials, and once set off firecrackers in my classroom trashcan. Even though I sincerely wanted the best for them and
worked hard to be caring and culturally competent, I met student resistance with punitive authority—often issuing referrals for suspension or sending my students to the Dean of Students. Despite a constant police presence, I did not have a consciousness of how my role and punitive discipline introduced risk into the lives of my students. Instead, I saw my actions as natural consequences for misbehavior and my students as the sole arbiter of their choices.

In reality, the school was intimately linked to processes criminalizing Black youth. There were multiple armed school resource officers and security staff responsible for monitoring the hallways and forcibly restrain students who fought or acted out. Students entered the building through metal detectors before being pat down and searched with a handheld weapons scanner. Although the school had lockers, students were not allowed to use them. Instead, they could only carry their belongings in clear backpacks. On frequent occasions, the local police came to the school on suspicion of gang activity. They would chase, round up and arrest several students as they left the building for the day. One time, a police officer broke the rear window of my car by throwing a baton at a student.

Needless to say, when I fulfilled my two-year commitment with Teach for America, I felt unable to handle the emotional demands that came along with the job. I left to become an educational advocate for a social services agency in Washington, D.C. My work there centered on supporting homeless youth – particularly those who were coming out of juvenile detention – in the process of re-entering and completing school. Through this work, I was able to see very clearly how institutions erect barriers to educational attainment for vulnerable youth, the majority of whom are Black. I grew frustrated as I worked to obtain records that mysteriously vanished, determine credits, figure out grade placements and special education status, and support youth with tutoring as they struggled to keep up after extended periods of exclusion. In the process, I
watched many youth grow disillusioned by and ultimately leave school. To address this, I worked with a close friend to develop a support program to keep vulnerable youth in school. The program used critical pedagogical and therapeutic methods to unpack their experiences, develop critical consciousness, and extend programmatic power through youth-led community organizing.

The youth in this program decided that they wanted to have single-sex support groups to talk safely about their experiences and bond with one another. Through this work, I became aware of the unique needs of African American girls who had experienced exclusionary discipline. The program had a profoundly transformative impact on me as I learned how to separate Black girls from their mistakes, hear their truths, foster relationships that were cognizant of the power differentials between us, and create space for their creative power.

However, as beautiful as my work with re-entering Black girls was, it remained equally heartbreaking. Even when the girls could return to and finish high school, many could not sustain college enrollment. Entering for-profit "nursing" programs often became their only viable educational lifeline, which mired them in student-loan debt and relegated them to long-term entry-level employment. Some of the girls consistently struggled to maintain housing and stable family relationships; and some of our community organizing efforts were marginalized, causing the youth to become discouraged by the long hours and great effort they put into developing campaigns.

As I reflect upon my experience as a teacher, educational advocate, and youth organizer, I realize that my desire to pursue graduate studies has, in part, been to escape the heartbreak that comes along with fighting for justice. I grew exhausted of taking two steps forward, only to take one step back and the significant elements of the work – the parts that I identified with and sustained me – were not as valued within the profession. Both the educational and non-profit sectors
are bound to the neoliberal propensity to demonstrate a return on investment. I felt, however, that the relationships built during our work, the love, and the safe space we created together were the most important outcomes we made even though they were difficult to measure and communicate to funders. Philanthropists and school district officials are not pleased when you report that the youth you are funded to serve continue to struggle with high-school completion, but feel safe and loved. I came to graduate school, then, to escape the tension inherent to a desire to care for vulnerable youth while in the business of “fixing” them. So far, I have learned that this struggle is deeply rooted in the larger systemic problem of dehumanization or, the predilection in social research and practice to associate youth with their perceived problems and to concentrate efforts on developing interventions without their expertise.

I also realize that the strategies for reaching and teaching youth that I learned outside of the classroom could have helped me stay in the classroom as a teacher. I was not trained to see, hear, and make space for my students; nor was I aware of how my power as a teacher both comes in conflict with and can be leveraged to place youth at the center, increase their agency in the classroom, and build genuine relationships. My work in the community was very experimental and as a result, was fun. I wish that I had viewed my role as a teacher in the same way.

My ultimate ambition is to support both traditional and community-based educators through humanizing approaches to the development of loving, dialogic, critically conscious and empathetic spaces for the youth they serve. Starting this work with Black girls who are returning to school after periods of exclusion, the population I have worked with most intimately throughout my career, allows me to move toward this goal. It is also my hope that this study will show educators the role they play and the power they have to establish institutional changes that are cognizant of the effect exclusionary discipline has in Black girls’ lives.
**Assumptions & Limitations**

This study operated under the assumption that Black girls who have been in trouble with school and the law deserve the opportunity to share their stories. Black girls’ marginalization in research is in part because of its refusal to view Black girls as experts on their own experience (Brown, 2013). This study resisted this perspective by centering the girls’ voices and valuing their perspectives with the same authority and respect extended to the participating adults.

This study also resisted individualistic and meritocratic assumptions by operating from the perspective that behavior is socially constituted (Vygotsky, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Black girls in schools are social beings in a social setting. Their experiences are not without context, culture, and interactions with others who also carry complex subjectivities. Because of this, it is hard for me to accept that the decisions they made were without reason or, even, that their experiences were entirely of their choosing.

No research paradigm is without limitations. This study used narrative inquiry through a womanist worldview as its methodological approach. Womanism holds that Black women’s everyday experiences offer solutions to both the personal and communal challenges we face. Our common knowledge is the basis for envisioning and enacting change (Collins, 2000). Using a Womanist frame can be limiting, however, in that its anti-oppressionist, vernacular, non-ideological, communitarian and spiritualized (Phillips, 2006) claim can blur the line between research and activism.

I use narrative inquiry, then, to operationalize my womanist worldview through its methodological focus on human experience. It is an approach based on establishing and maintaining relationships, centering participants’ voices, and engaging in reflexive practice. It is also attentive to both the participants’ stories and their narrative context (Riessman, 2008). Thus,
narrative inquiry is highly compatible with a womanist ethos. Still, the paradigm is critiqued as offering more therapeutic value than analytical power (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Without careful attention paid to context, the approach would be mere story collecting. It runs the risk of being ineffectual or unproductive, as the stories collected offer no basis for commentary or usefulness toward addressing social problems. To address this, I situate my findings in relation to the extant literature, demonstrating how the girls' experiences should inform the effort to ensure equitable school experiences for Black girls.

Another limitation lies in the methodological frame's ability to claim authenticity. Narrative researchers have presented stories as if they were emblematic of a singular truth about a phenomenon. Experience, however, is constructed through various forms of narrative (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). Narratives are shifting and multiple. As a result, the stories I collected do not produce a typography or model for addressing Black girls' school re-entry issues. To avoid representing the results as a singular essential experience, I was careful to limit the results to the girls' experiences who participated in this study. I did not generalize my findings to suggest that all Black girls experience re-entry in the same way. Despite these limitations, I appreciate the many advantages the frame offers. Namely that narrative inquiry infuses the research process with care, it foregrounds participants' experiences over the theorizations of the researcher and offers the ability to both clarify and interrupt the narratives surrounding human experience.

**Overview of the Study**

The following chapters offer Black girls’ and school administrators’ perceptions of re-entry after exclusionary discipline. In chapter 2, I review the literature on Black girls’ school-based criminalization, their re-entry experiences after exclusionary discipline, and contemporary theories of educational leadership informing their disciplinary experiences. I do this by situating
contemporary research within a theoretical discussion on the ideologies and policies under-girding Black girls' schooling experiences. From this grounding, I demonstrate in chapter 3 how a womanist approach to narrative inquiry guided the research process. In chapter 4, I represent the data in thematic form, with a section devoted to each theme emerging from the data. I also address the results to Alice Walker’s (2003) poem “Be Nobody’s Darling.” I feel that doing so helps demonstrates the complexity of a (bad) girl performance in ways that resist fixating on the problems Black girls face. Finally, in chapter 5 I address the findings to the literature. There, I advance the argument that the time has come to consider the abolition of suspension, expulsion, and punitive responses to in-school behavior.
CHAPTER TWO – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review will show how Black girls' school re-entry experiences are situated within ideological and institutional processes influencing their dismissal and determining their return. To do this, I provide background on the ideological workings and specific policies exacerbating their likelihood of dismissal. This grounding demonstrates the complexity of school-to-confinement processes and provides the rationale for my use of the term "school/prison nexus." I also articulate how these ideological and policy convergences shaped the design of this study. From there, I relay relevant theses articulating the most recent studies on Black girls’ disciplinary and school re-entry experiences. The conclusion shows how my study builds upon these areas of paucity by exploring the ongoing nature of school-to-confinement pathways through Black girls' re-entry stories.

Ideologies Driving the Criminalization of Black Girls

Ideology is constructed through values, beliefs, and assumptions about individuals and interacts with governments to shape policy (Althusser, 1972). As so, ideological workings are on display when Black girls are over-represented among youth disciplined in school. This section will review ideologies contributing to the disciplinary experiences of Black youth to demonstrate how punitive discipline becomes an over-used response to Black girls' behavior. Specifically, it will discuss how schools for Black children were constructed to maintain the subservient roles they fulfilled during slavery and how this system perpetuates in the contemporary moment. The following overview of works shows that inadequate education, the media, and neoliberal educational theory unfairly influence perceptions of Black girls' behavior.

Black youth over-representation among students disciplined in school is a consequence of U.S. history (Discipline Disparities Research to Practice Collaborative, 2014). There is a long
tradition of education being used to maintain Black subjugation in the United States. In his history of Black education in the South, James Anderson (1998) documented how industrial schooling co-opted the freedmen’s call for self-determination through education. Backed by white philanthropists, this system sought to maintain Black economic and political subordination from the period of Reconstruction until the mid-1930s. Black upward mobility was viewed as a threat to the white supremacist social order so early formations of schooling for Black people relegated them to the service and industrial economies. This historical imprint continues to impact the schooling experiences of Black youth today as it marked ideologically, the quality of school Black people were thought to deserve (Duncan, 2000). Black students continue to face separate and unequal accommodations; and attend schools characterized by discipline and control over intellectual rigor, resulting in their over-representation among those under-educated and under-employed (Duncan, 2000; Donnor & Dixson, 2013).

The media is another powerful ideological apparatus influencing the schooling experiences of Black youth because it introduces and shapes the issues Americans think about and policies they call for (Heitzeg, 2014). Since the late 1980s, the news grossly over-represents Black people in criminal contexts. Doing so reifies racist historical notions of Black hyper-criminality and maintains a "culture of fear" (Glassner, 1999) justifying containment through mass incarceration. In the 1990s, these ideological workings developed social policies with distinct criminalizing effects on Black youth. Despite the fact that juvenile crime was on the decline at that time (Fuentes, 2014), John DiLulio (1995) coined the racially coded term “youth super-predator” to refer to the so-called Black juvenile hyper-criminals portrayed in the media. As the label grew in recognition, harsh punishment became a logical, common-sense response to the perceived threat
they posed to society (Farmers, 2010). Girls were not exempt (Collins, 2004; Stephens & Philips, 2003). This ideological movement catalyzed a wave of educational policies meant to control Black youth.

The specific policies shaping Black girls’ containment at the hands of the media will be discussed in detail shortly, but before doing so, it is relevant to note that neoliberal educational ideologies were advanced to solve the problem of school “failure” in the same historical moment when hyper-criminality discourse swelled. Neoliberal educational ideology holds that the purpose of education is to both prepare workers for and to engage the economy by opening educational systems to the free market (Apple, 2001). It invites the rules of the free-market, or cost reduction, privatization, and individualism in public schools (Ross & Gibson, 2007) and is conditionally dependent upon "failure" to introduce profit strategies for change.

Neoliberalism walks hand in hand with the notion that Black youth are in need of increased discipline and control. It does so, however, from a different vantage point. The idea that Black people are undeserving and hyper-criminal is rooted in racist historical notions of Black deficiency. To the converse, neoliberal ideology functions upon the rhetoric of Black victimization. It asserts that Black and impoverished communities are the victims of economically wasteful institutions that respond to the demands of the professionals who depend on them over the needs of the community (Apple, 2001). This narrative creates the sense that neoliberal ideas bring social justice. In practice, however, these ideas sustain the same negative processes previously discussed. For example, the notion of "accountability" is one of the frame's central strategies for eliminating racial disparity. Through academic standards and high-stakes testing, schools are given a benchmark for quality and communities gain transparency on school performance.
This system is thought to offer parents the ability to make informed choices about their educational options (Koyama & Kania, 2014).

While this argument appears to make common sense, they have had deleterious effects on Black communities. A system of “creative destruction” has resulted with schools competing for limited public funds, regularly closing and being restructured (Saltman, 2012). These processes have destabilized schools as educators, students and parents are forced to navigate processes that complicate teaching and learning. Accountability measures cause teachers to narrow the curriculum (Kozol, 2005) and high-stakes tests create stressful school cultures, with educators being lead toward dishonesty through the pressure to achieve (Thompson & Allen, 2012). As districts in the neoliberal context work to reduce costs, class sizes grow, faculty sizes decrease, school libraries close, and subjects deemed peripheral to tests, like social studies and foreign language, are removed from the curriculum (Kozol, 2005).

These processes are particularly germane for understanding Black girls' disciplinary experiences. Although all public school students operate in a neoliberal context, the adverse effects of the ideology are most widely used and deeply felt in impoverished communities of color (Lipman, 1998). Some of the girls who participated in this study articulated the stressors associated with "achievement," and other processes of school destabilization signaling neoliberal ideology in play. Understanding the context of their schooling experiences was critical to both the design and analysis of this study. Doing so helped me resist meritocratic notions of behavior by acknowledging the ideological workings underpinning educational policies. I, instead, viewed behavior as a mutual constitution because Black girls’ behaviors are steeped in practices created and sustained by neoliberal ideology.
I assert that, together, the ideologies reviewed: Black schooling for second-class citizenship, the social construction of Black hyper-criminality through the media, and Black schools as opportunities for profit, shape and justify the creation of educational and social policies designed to control, contain and criminalize Black youth in schools. These ideas undergird Black girls' public school experiences.

**Policies Driving the Criminalization of Black Youth**

The ideological work perpetuated through historical process, the media and neoliberal education reform ushered a wave of harsh policies on school safety during the 1990s. This section will demonstrate how zero tolerance and achievement policies make it easier for educators to respond punitively to perceived misbehavior. In so doing, I articulate how educational policies intended to be in the best interest of students often develop hostile school experiences for Black youth.

Despite the fact that school crime was stable to declining during the 1990s, school and community leaders were caught in the rhetoric of the period, publicly expressing concern that schools were continually at-risk for gang-related violence by youth “super-predators” (Heitzig, 2014). California, New York, and Kentucky were the first states to use the term zero tolerance and created school policies mandating immediate expulsion for drugs, fighting, and gang-related activities. School districts across the country picked up on this trend and in many states, was expanded to include smoking and school disruption. The Clinton Administration, which promised a "get tough on crime" policy stance, supported this growth by signing the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (GFSA). GFSA requires schools receiving federal funds to hand down a mandatory one-year expulsion and report to the local police for any student found with a firearm in a school
zone (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). This law was the first to formally establish the institutional relationship between education and juvenile justice systems.

Since its establishment, GFSA broadened to include fighting, threats, and swearing and applied to minor and non-violent school-based violations (Heaviside et al., 1998). According to the American Bar Association (2001), zero tolerance policies do not distinguish between violent and non-violent offenses or take into consideration mitigating circumstances. As Heitzeg (2014) asserts they, “target students for minor infractions, increasingly focus on young elementary and preschool students, and often rely on force and arrest for relatively minor disciplinary issues” (p. 21). What is more, these harsh penalties for school misbehavior have proliferated without evidence that they improve school safety or deter student misconduct. In fact, Russell Skiba (2001) found that severe punishment may exacerbate student misbehavior. Students who know they will be suspended or expelled without question may commit more serious or additional offenses because they know that dismissal is imminent.

The "tough on crime" educational policy stance taken during the 1990s also brought resources to schools. The Safe Schools Act of 1994 and an amendment made in 1998 to the Omnibus Crime Control and the Safe Streets Act provide funding for school resource officers (Raymond, 2010) and equip school staff with security devices (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009). These enhanced security measures considerably expanded in response to the fear incited by the 1999 mass school shooting at Columbine High School. However, despite the fact that most school shootings since Columbine have taken place in predominantly White suburban schools, these funding sources are used most in under-resourced urban schools with high percentages of students of color (Justice Policy Institute, 2011; Na & Gottfredson, 2011; Skiba, 2001).
These policies are relevant to this study because they provide the means and justification for Black girls' school removal. Through administrators, they imbue schools with considerable power to determine the intent and severity of an infraction and establish a host of processes influencing the terms by which students can return to school. Black girls' re-entry experiences are dependent upon them.

In addition to zero-tolerance policies, certain neoliberal achievement policies also contribute to Black students’ criminalization in school. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which required States and local districts to close or restructure schools not meeting predetermined levels of academic proficiency (Scott, 2011), had particularly racialized effects. Because NCLB depended upon standardized testing and value-added teacher assessment to demonstrate school effectiveness, it offered powerful incentives for educators to weed out students who posed challenges to classroom management and do not perform well on standardized tests (Fuentes, 2014; Advancement Project, 2010). The soft extension of zero tolerance policies to non-violent offenses offered a fast and efficient way to dismiss students from school.

In 2015 the Senate passed the Every Child Achieves Act (ECAA), which ended some of the most problematic of NCLB's policies. These included Adequate Yearly Progress, reducing the federal role in local education, and reducing the high stakes attached to student test scores. However, ECAA requires States to develop accountability systems tied to measurable student and teacher performance, maintaining the ideological commitments outlined in NCLB.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is yet another curricular policy working in concert with zero tolerance policies to stigmatize and push-out students. IDEA ensures funding for specially trained educators and professionals who can provide specialized resources and services for children and youth with physical, cognitive, and emotional (dis)abilities. It has created
a system of special education meant to protect the needs of students who are differently-abled. Adams & Meiners (2014) assert that doing so has done little more than mask school-based segregation and practices pushing students out of school. Black students in special education are over-represented among those labeled “mentally retarded” and “severely emotionally disturbed” (Garda, 2005), and contrary to their intent, the effect of these classifications tend to be negative. Differently-abled Black students often attend classes that do not prepare them for high school completion or post-secondary education; are suspended and expelled at higher rates than students without these classifications; and are over-represented in juvenile justice systems and prisons (Harry & Klingner, 2006; McNally, 2003). They are also 16 percentage points more likely to be suspended from school than White students who are similarly labeled (Losen & Gillespie, 2012) and are most likely among all groups to receive harsh school punishment (Adams & Meiners, 2014).

Understanding achievement policy is central to this study. NCLB/ECAA and IDEA frame school context by holding educators to certain performance standards. While they intend to protect the educational rights of students, they also show negative material consequences in Black students' schooling experiences. I used this understanding to develop my research protocol to address how Black girls’ experiences with curriculum and instruction interacted with disciplinary processes. Toward that end, I was certain to ask the girls as much about in-school experiences as re-entry experiences. I also probed the administrators to share how curricular matters support the educational well-being of Black girls while they are in school both before and after disciplinary events. This line of questioning helped me to identify the systemic processes at play in Black girls' school re-entry experience.
The confluence of ideology and policy produce distinct disciplinary outcomes among Black youth. Black students are three and a half times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White peers (Lewin, 2012). Although they make up only 18% of public school students, Black students account for 35% of those suspended once, 46% of those suspended more than once, and 39% of all expulsions (Advancement Project, 2012). In 2010, Black students constituted 74% of students arrested in schools (Kaba & Edwards, 2012). These outcomes signal an urgent crisis as they are directly related to higher rates of high school incompletion and the over-representation of Black youth in the legal system (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012).

Over 25 years of research conducted by Russell Skiba shows that these outcomes are the result of implicit bias (Skiba et al., 2000). His work indicates that Black youth are racially profiled in school (Skiba et al, 2011). Studies on implicit bias corroborate these results showing that teachers are more likely to perceive Black students as low achievers, overly aggressive, and underestimated regarding ability (Neal et al., 2003; McKown & Weinstein, 2002).

Nolan (2011) shows that zero tolerance and achievement policies normalize prison culture in urban schools. Schools "lock-down" the building, perform "hall-sweeps," and use prison behavioral intervention strategies (e.g., walking in lines through hallways, silent lunch periods, work detail, etc.). Students are also required to wear uniforms, are subject to search and seizure, and are often given explicit instruction for acceptable ways of moving around the building and responding to teachers, administrators, and classmates. In short, zero-tolerance and achievement policies have distinct criminalizing effects that blur the lines between school and prison culture. I
assert that this, paired with the implicit bias educators carry about Black youth, serves as the conduit by which educators both consciously and unconsciously criminalize Black students and cause their over-representation in suspension, expulsion and school-based arrests.

The literature reviewed points to a more complex understanding of Black youth and school push-out. It showed that zero tolerance and achievement policies work in tandem with ideological factors to make suspension, expulsion and arrest rational responses to student “misbehavior.” Erica Meiners (2007) asserts that these processes create "public enemies" out of students. She argues that "calling this process a ‘school to prison pipeline’ or ‘schoolhouse to jailhouse track’ is not as accurate as conceiving of the phenomenon in terms of a school/prison nexus because it fails to attend to the "historic, systemic, and multifaceted nature of the intersections of education and incarceration" (p. 32).

Understanding the material effects of zero-tolerance and achievement policies is important to this study because it cautioned me to be attendant to the complexity of the school/prison nexus. I was sure to make clear Black girls’ disciplinary and re-entry experiences in a way that resisted over-simplifying how school works. I kept this grounding at the forefront of my mind, particularly during the analysis and re-presentation phases. I had to be sure to attend as much to the structural processes at work in the girls' lives as I was to the areas in they had agency. Doing so helped prevent me from relying on either/or dualisms that determine experience and erase context. For example, as much as the girls' behavioral choices implicate school processes, I did not want to suggest that schools were solely to blame. Also, as much as I realize that the girls were responsible for their behavior, I did not want to suggest that their patterns were entirely of their choosing. I had to be attendant to how both parties mutually constitute each other by honoring all perspectives and analyzing them in relationship to each other.
Relevant Theses on Black Girls’ School Re-entry Experiences

The intersectional literature on Black youth and school criminalization primarily focuses on Black boys. These findings are understandable given that Black males constitute the largest population of youth detained in the juvenile justice system (Childtrends, 2013; Sickmund et al., 2015) and are at greatest risk among all populations for suspension and expulsion (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010).

Still, Black girls’ risk for facing school to confinement processes are also high (Inniss-Thompson, 2017; The Civil Rights Project, 2012; Wallace et al., 2008). While girls enjoy more educational success and support than boys (Sommers, 2000; Mickelson, 2003; Riordan, 2003), it is important not to marginalize their risk factors through the assumption that girls are doing just fine. Most of the literature on educational disparity (Bottiani, Bradshaw & Mendelson, 2017; Carter, Skiba & Arredondo, 2017; Hoffman, 2014; Morris & Perry, 2017), for example, focus either on elements of race or class. Very few studies focus on how these markers intersect to create educational experiences (Morris & Perry, 2017). As a result, Black girls' experiences are often made invisible within the larger body of research that is only attendant to gender. The national average suspension rate for Black girls, however, is over seven times that of White girls (Inniss-Thompson, 2017) and in 2012, was twice the rate of White males (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). When educational research fails to attend to the intersectional ways in which disparity occurs, we miss opportunities to achieve equity, and certain groups remain marginalized.

I do not include these statistics to suggest that intersectional studies on the educational experiences of Black youth should battle over a hierarchy of oppressions. It instead points to the
need to understand how Black boys and girls experience the phenomenon of a racial over-representation in school discipline differently. For example, Morris (2012) shows that Black students’ disproportionate outcomes among those suspended and expelled from school are due to racial threat, or the notion that Black youth pose real or imagined threats to school order. However, because the literature focuses on Black males, studying racial threat is done through the lens of Black masculinity. These studies (Welch & Payne, 2012; Brown & Becket, 2006) erase the fact that Black girls are also subject to racial threat, albeit in different, yet equally concerning ways (Morris, 2012). As a result, Black girls’ experiences with exclusionary discipline are underexplored in the literature. A limited number of studies exist on the topic despite the fact that their rates of exclusionary discipline parallel those of Black boys (Blake et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008).

Xie, Famer & Cairns (2003) claimed that Black girls exhibit greater levels of disruptive school behavior, suggesting that their over-representation among those dismissed from school is because they behave more poorly than others. I assert, however, that this finding was made through a deficit perspective on Black girls because it does not probe the factors contributing to their perceived misbehavior. In contrast, studies taking a structural approach have found that Black girls are subject to stigmas marginalizing their gender performance and the causes of their school-based behaviors are often ignored (Jones, 2009; Blake et al., 2011; E. Morris, 2007; M.W., Morris, 2012; Crenshaw, Ocen & Nanda, 2015; Epstein, Blake & Gonzalez, 2017). In an ethnographic investigation of African American girls and their experiences with violence, Nikki Jones (2009), for example, found that Black girls navigate a liminal space of prescribed acceptable Black femininity. She describes this space as “between ‘good’ and ‘ghetto,’ where Black
girls are expected by society to fall into one of these polarized identities. Blake et al. (2011) corroborate Jones’ position. They found that their "elevated referral rates for physical aggression, defiance, and profanity are a result of Black girls' failure to adhere to traditional standards of femininity" (p. 101). These findings are in line with a wider body of theoretical literature attesting to the hegemonic nature of femininity and its impact on Black girls. Patricia Hill Collins (2004), for example, has argued that Black women and girls are held to narrow notions of femininity prescribed by White middle-class standards of normativity. These prescriptions have criminalizing effects in schools, as Black girls who do not conform to these ways of being are more readily subject to harsh punitive discipline (Morris, 2007; Blake et al., 2011).

In fact, Morris (2007) found that teachers often perceive Black girls as an unruly student group and are often over-associated with loudness and disrespect. As a result, their behaviors are scrutinized by higher expectations that they act and become "ladylike." This finding is in line with outcomes showing that Black girls are more likely to be excluded from school for offenses that are subjective such as "willful defiance" or even for wearing their hair naturally (Blake et al., 2011; Smith-Evans et al., 2014; George, 2015). Further, studies (Hannon, Defina & Bruch, 2013; Blake et al., 2016) have found that the scrutiny Black girls face in school is subject to colorism, or the historical phenomenon ascribing more value and beauty to people who have lighter skin. These studies show that dark-skinned African-American girls are more likely than those with lighter skin to be suspended from school (Hannon, Defina, & Bruch, 2013; Blake et al., 2016). Also, a recent study found that when compared to White girls, Black girls are perceived as being in less need of nurturance, protection, support, and comfort and, as with Black boys, are com-
monly adultified (Epstein, Blake & Gonzalez, 2017; Ferguson, 2000). Taken together, the literature demonstrates a persistent racial and gender discrimination criminalizing Black girls in school.

Black girls are often penalized for the very characteristics contributing to high achievement in school. For example, certain studies (Ladner, 1979; Orenstein, 1994; Taylor et al., 1995; Morris, 2007) characterize Black girls as assertive, independent, and resilient which are all characteristics that allow them to maintain self-esteem and voice despite systemic educational neglect. These very characteristics, however, are misconstrued as willfulness, defiance, and disrespect and contribute to Black girls’ over-representation in exclusionary discipline.

Beyond their lives in school, Black girls are among the most vulnerable in U.S. society. They constitute 35% of children living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), are at increased risk of death by homicide (Centers for Disease Control, 2011), are disproportionately represented among commercially sexually trafficked and exploited children (U.S. Department of Justice, 2013), and have the highest rate of intimate partner violence among girls aged 12 and older (Catalano, 2012; Miller, 2008). Morris’ (2016) book is the only to date focusing on Black girls’ criminalization in school. She highlights that these risk factors have a significant impact on their school performance and disciplinary experiences. Through narrative inquiry, she interviewed Black girls in public schools and juvenile detention centers across the United States. Her results show that abused, neglected and exploited girls attend public schools, but find themselves alienated by institutional responses that do not take these factors into account (Morris, 2016). Morris asserts that the behaviors of girls facing significant hardship are justified responses, “[y]et when girls strike back against this fatigue, society casts them as deviant—as disruptive to the order of a
(supposedly race- and gender-neutral) social structure without consideration of what might be fueling their agitation” (Morris, 2016, p. 22).

Punitive discipline exacerbates problems in Black girls’ lives, particularly among those who have been victimized. The research also shows that when youth are over-referred for disciplinary action, they are at greater risk of experiencing academic and psychosocial problems throughout their lives (Hemphill et al. 2014; Rausch, Skiba & Simmons, 2004; Sprague & Hill, 2000). Among Black girls, exclusionary discipline is correlated with increased risk of early pregnancy (Clark et al., 2003), grade retention, high school incompletion and contact with the juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al., 2004). These factors coincide with the fact that African American girls are currently the fastest growing population in the juvenile justice system (Sherman, 2012). In 2009-2010 African American girls made up less than 17% of all female students, but represented 31% of all girls referred to law enforcement and approximately 43% of girls arrested in school (Smith-Evans et al., 2014).

This literature review shows how ideology and educational policy play out in Black girls’ lives. Applying harsh penalties to girls who are not dangerous, but instead, need support to remain engaged in school only serves to more deeply entrench them in patterns of institutional neglect and reifies their over-representation among youth pushed out of school. Still, (bad) girls do not easily give up on school. They also navigate processes that will allow them to return. As so, I now turn to review the literature on school re-entry.

School Re-entry Literature
While the web of risk pushing Black girls out of schools is evident, a less explored phenomenon in the literature is what happens when they return to school after exclusion. The Advancement Project (2005) asserts that the consequences of exclusionary discipline long outlive students’ youth, especially when it results in entry in the juvenile detention system.

Once many of these youth are in “the system,” they never get back on the academic track. Sometimes, schools refuse to readmit them; and even if these students do return to school, they are often labeled and targeted for close monitoring by school staff and police. Consequently, many become demoralized, drop out, and fall deeper and deeper into the juvenile or criminal justice systems. Those who do not drop out may find that their discipline and juvenile or criminal records haunt them when they apply to college or for a scholarship or government grant, or try to enlist in the military or find employment (p.12).

Still, research shows that youth who successfully re-enter school after juvenile placement demonstrate reduced rates of recidivism (Blomberg et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Justice, 2004). School re-entry, then, offers a critical opportunity to return to school in ways that are healthy and supportive.

Many institutional barriers to re-entry exist, however, making it hard for youth returning citizens to re-acclimate to community life. The U.S. Department of Justice (2004) reports that more than two-thirds of high school age returning citizens do not return to school. Part of the source of the problem is that juvenile justice and education systems do not work in coordinated fashion to support them. "Judges mandate school attendance," they report, "but the community lacks an effective system for reenrolling students" (p.1). Also, schools require many enrollment documents, including those establishing residency, age, and immunization status. Often, the juvenile justice system fails to forward this information or make it accessible to the student, causing significant delays with re-enrolling in school (Feierman et al., 2009).

These problems compound other institutional problems, such as the fact that many youth returning to high school have missed significant amounts of school because of their detention
and attained few if any, high school credits (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004). When youth returners have earned credits through schooling offered in custody, some school districts will not accept them or will only provide partial credit toward their high school diploma (Feierman et al., 2009). Many court-involved youths also have special needs which may or may not be known or taken into consideration upon their return (Wald & Losen, 2003). These institutional barriers can cause many youth returning citizens to feel alienated from school as they may be asked to enter a grade several years behind their age level. Youth returners also may have histories of school exclusion in the form of truancy, suspension, and expulsion and are not provided with the social and academic support to ensure their successful re-acclimation in the classroom setting, further exacerbating their risk of alienation and school push-out (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004).

Feierman et al. (2009) show that youth returning citizens also face enrollment discrimination as schools fear that they may pose a safety threat to the school community. Schools also feel pressure to exclude re-entering youth out of concern that they will perform poorly on standardized tests. Returning young people are often encouraged to leave school, pursue a General Equivalency Diploma or enroll in an alternative education program (Feierman et al., 2009). As a result, more than 66% of youth in custody are pushed out of school after release (Feierman et al., 2009). When disaggregated to look at particular localities, these rates can be even higher. In Philadelphia, for example, 90% of students who experienced juvenile placement were ultimately pushed out of school (Neild & Balfanz, 2006).

Meiners’ (2007) asserts that this experience results in a sort of "civil death" for youth caught in the school/prison nexus. She claims that:

> the consequences of these relationships between schools and jails are not simply school failure and underemployment, but potentially a lifetime of diminished basic human rights, or loss of life. By reproducing ways of knowing that contain significant blindspots,
and animating a disciplinary framework that frequently erases its gendered and white supremacist origins, the profession of teaching...is complicit in the construction and maintenance of systems of structural violence, and a kind of “soft extension” of the security or the prison state (p.4-5).

Meiners’ (2007) asserts that researchers should respond to such violence by considering “not just how our schools’ physical structures resemble prisons...but also the tentacles in policies, practices, and informal knowledges that support, naturalize and extend relationships between incarceration and schools” (p.4). This dissertation extends the notion of re-entry beyond the experiences of youth who return to school after juvenile incarceration to be attendant to the multiple and simultaneous projects framing Black girls’ re-entry experience. As this literature review has demonstrated, the school/prison nexus works through complex processes that converge around ideologies, policies, perceptions, and practices. At times, students’ school to confinement experience is linear – with an infraction ushering them directly to jail – but on other occasions, their experiences are multiple or cyclical with students being removed from school and returning. This dissertation defines re-entry with the latter experience in mind, describing experiences with re-entry after suspension and expulsion as well as after juvenile detention. Doing so addresses how re-entry is under-explored in the literature and moves toward informing policy interventions that may interrupt school-to-confinement processes for Black girls.

Theories of Educational Leadership

The second question guiding this study focuses on administrators’ role in Black girls’ school re-entry experiences. Principals are responsible for maintaining a safe and orderly learning environment (Ylimaki, Jacobson, and Drysdale, 2007) and in that role become the “gatekeepers” of students’ disciplinary experiences. This literature review implicates educator bias in Black girls’ over-representation among disciplined students. Thus, a holistic understanding of the
theoretical assumptions framing their work unveils the organizational priorities administrators can elect to uphold.

Three educational leadership theories dominate the field: Transactional leadership theory, transformational leadership theory, and transformative or social justice leadership theory (Shields, 2010). These theories are tied to neoliberal educational processes and operate in response to accountability demands for achievement. They borrow from or respond to the logic of business and industry historically underpinning the formation of U.S. public schools.

Industry priorities have influenced public education since the early 20th century (Spring 1990). Business and labor leaders advanced an ideological agenda that the purpose of schooling is to prepare workers for the economy and; because of the surge in industry and immigration in the U.S. at that time, called upon schools to help manage the rapid societal change characteristic of the period (Spring, 1990). As schools grew in size and organizational processes became complex, business managerial theories were adapted to meet their needs (Taylor, 1911). Since then, educators have drawn from corporate organizational theories to increase efficiency and achievement (Anderson, 2017).

Transactional leadership theory is one such paradigm invoked to develop highly structured and orderly school communities. It is premised upon exchange (Miller and Miller, 2001). Organizational participants agree to follow the leader in exchange for a position, and their compliance is valued over working toward consensus. Systems are maintained through rewards and punishment (Podsakoff et al., 1984; Crawford & Strohkirch, 2004), and power is centralized in the leader. Thus, the leader’s vision and values are superior to others’ and followers are expected to do what they are told. In schools, the administrator’s agenda is always in the organization’s
best interest (Northouse, 2013). I assert that transactional leadership styles are evident in educational leadership practices that stress conformity, corporeal control, and zero-tolerance. When schools use exclusionary discipline, they make certain exchanges. Proponents of the practice stress that without harsh punishment, chaos will ruin the learning environment for students who meet behavioral expectations. Thus, transactional leaders exchange the educational well-being of students who do not conform for those who do.

The centralized source of power in transactional school leadership fails to inspire teacher and student commitment, intrinsic motivation, productivity or achievement because followers are not invited to invest in organizational processes or change (Anderson, 2017). Transformational leadership theory, in contrast, holds that effective leaders develop the capacities of organizational members (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999) and thus, inspires their active participation and increased productivity (Bush, 2007). Transformational leaders provide a clear vision for all to follow, model best-practices, and create group goals. They give individual support, provide intellectual stimulation to followers and hold high expectations of them (MacKenzie, Podaskoff & Rich, 2001).

Transformational theory is the preferred leadership model in the contemporary U.S. education system (Anderson, 2017). The ever-increasing demand for achievement through accountability depends upon leaders who develop conviction in shared goals and develop teacher and student capacities to reach them. They need a certain “ideal influence” or ability to inspire productivity through coaching, mentoring, and providing constructive feedback in a positive manner (Bass, 1985). Districts site the success of transformational leadership on teacher performance and job satisfaction (Dumay & Galand, 2012), student achievement (Valentine & Prater, 2011), and
school restructuring initiatives (Leithwood, 1994) and it is the theory most commonly advanced in principal preparation programs (Leithwood, 1994).

However, the frame has been criticized for inadequately addressing systemic inequality because of its emphasis on improving, rather than changing, the current educational system (Quantz et al., 1991; DeMatthews, 2016; DeMatthews, Mungal, and Carrola, 2015). In response, a social justice theory of leadership, also known as “transformative leadership theory,” is increasingly cited as a frame best suited to address racial equity matters (DeMatthews, 2016; DeMatthews et al., 2015). Theoharis (2007) defined social justice leadership as how “principals make [an] issue of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership, practice, and vision” (p. 223). Social justice educational leaders study school policies and practices in relation to their function in the reproduction of social inequality (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). They develop school systems, values, and strategies resisting marginalization both in the schools they lead and in the wider community (DeMatthews, Mungal, & Carrola, 2015).

While educational leaders most commonly invoke transactional, transformational, and social justice frames, they are not the only ones. Scholars advance and critique post-modern, contingent, moral, instructional, and managerial theories as well (Bush, 2007). There are also culturally-situated educational leadership frames. Leaders in African diasporic contexts utilize such African models as Ubuntu (Mbiga, 1997; Fournillier, 2017), which emphasizes collective personhood and morality. It works to develop systems that recognize the interconnectedness of people and endeavors to inspire trust toward developing a vision in the best interest of all people (Mbiga, 1997). I assert that school leaders operating from this framework may negotiate the use of any or all of the frames outlined here, depending on the nature of the challenge presented. The
idea is to develop whatever strategy is necessary given the circumstance so long as doing so is in line with the holistic well-being of every person in the school community.

In conclusion, educational leadership theory undergirds administrators’ perceptions and practice. Thus, it is called up in their approach discipline. For example, a transactional leader may place more emphasis on eliciting an exchange between the school and a student who is in trouble (e.g., The student receives a reward in exchange for improved behavior). A transformational leader may place more emphasis on building the leadership capacities of students who are in trouble (e.g., The student is asked to develop and work toward a vision for improved behavior). A social justice leader may place more emphasis on dismantling oppressive structures contributing to students’ reasons for getting into trouble (e.g., Administrators may find alternatives to exclusionary discipline), and an Ubuntu administrator may draw from any of these approaches given the circumstances. This dissertation engages school principals in understanding their theories of leadership about their role in Black girls’ re-entry experience. In so doing, I identify both the good faith and limitations that prevailing theories of leadership have in Black girls’ disciplinary experience.

Conclusion

This literature review addressed how the confluence of educational ideology and policy exacerbates the likelihood of exclusionary events in Black girls’ educational experiences. It also shows the reasons why Black girls face excessive levels of school discipline, what the literature suggests about their return to school after dismissal, and the educational leadership theories the “gatekeepers” of their experience invoke in the midst of these processes. Still, the research on re-entry does not address Black girls’ specific experiences by focusing mainly on youth, in general, who return to school after a period in corrections. To build upon this foundation, this study
probes the complexity of school-to-confinement processes among Black girls by expanding the definition of re-entry to include returning to school after in-school disciplinary events (i.e., suspension, expulsion, school-based arrest and youth detention). Doing so sheds interesting and much-needed light on how schools can interrupt school-to-confinement processes even before they result in Black girls’ imprisonment.
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This study reflects the 8th moment of qualitative research, which asserts that inquiry can and should serve as a conduit for the realization of justice. This claim particularly applies to the social sciences because the issues researchers interrogate are made complex through the interplay between ideology, power and, individual's lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative researchers study how social experience is created and given meaning and in so doing, can advance claims that name, interrupt, or dismantle oppression (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Chapter 2 demonstrated the socially constructed nature of Black girls' school/prison nexus experience and the imperative with which they need justice. Thus, a qualitative study is most appropriate for exploring Black girls' school re-entry experiences.

This chapter will relay how I used qualitative research to shed light on Black girls’ experiences with school-to-confinement processes. It begins with the study’s foundation in the animating ethos of womanism, showing how personal experience and Black feminist political terminology converge to shape how I framed this study. I then move to discuss how I operationalized womanism through narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) by relaying the assumptions, principles, and procedures (Schwandt, 2015) that framed the research. I explain how narrative inquiry is compatible with the study's womanist ethos and positioned me to address my research questions. I also demonstrate how ethnographic methods and thematic analysis were used to carry out this research in ways that were ethical and rigorous.

Animating Ethos: Womanist Worldview

Emanating from Black women’s resilience in the face of oppression, Phillips (2006) asserts that:

womanism is an ethnically and culturally situated (although not bounded) perspective
that does not seek to negate difference through transcending it. Rather...womanism seeks to harmonize and coordinate difference so that difference does not become irreconcilable and dissolve into violent destruction (xxii).

I use this particular worldview (Maparyan, 2012) to guide my work because it reflects my upbringing and values. I am a woman-centered person because my family is comprised of women of different races who nurtured me, my sisters and an extended family of nearly all women and girls. Although womanism is often confused as a "version" of feminism or conflated with Black feminism, it has its own ethos (Phillips, 2006). For example, my mothers, grandmother, and aunts were not feminists. They only ever knew the value of hard work and they loved men who relied equally upon them. They did not emphasize fighting for women's justice, but they did teach me to speak up when something is wrong and to take the initiative to solve my own (and by extension others') problems. They built me up to be "womanish" (Walker, 2004), by including my voice at the “kitchen-table," affirming me as smart, and pushing me to accomplish more than their circumstances allowed them to. My great Aunt B would always say: One monkey don’t stop no show, meaning that my purpose is far greater than whatever obstacles I face. So, like the Little Engine that Could (Piper, 1930), I was raised to climb the mountain and persevere telling myself: “I think I can. I know I can.”

Also, how the women in my life loved on one another taught me to be loyal to other women, to stand in the gap for them when they are in need, and to share, listen and care. As a result, I have many “Aunties” and “cousins” who are of no blood relation to me because we believe that our families are the ones we make, not the ones into which we are born. This worldview, handed down to them from their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers are what lead me to care for those who find themselves on the "outside." I was taught to believe, and I do, that everyone has a place. Though subtle in difference from feminisms of all kinds, these ways of being
are consistent with womanism in that I learned to be “triply concerned with [myself], other Black women, and the entire Black race, female and male—but also all humanity, showing an ever-expanding and ultimately universal arc of political concern, empathy and activism” (Maparyan, 2006, p. xxiii).

There are diverse articulations of womanism varying in degree of conservative positionality (Walker, 2004; Ogunyemi, 2006; Hudson-Weems, 2004). Still, at the core of the ethos is a commitment to resist all forms of oppression, to be accessible, open, community-minded and spiritual (Phillips, 2006). I resonate most deeply with the definition set forth by Alice Walker (2004), which claims the serious disposition, loving, inclusive, dialogic and restorative features of the frame. For this study, I draw from the first of her four-part definition. It reads:

Womanist

1. From womanish. (Opp. Of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “You acting womanish,” i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. Serious. (2004, p. xi)

This ethos is at the core of this work because it describes both myself and the girls who participated in positive and understanding ways. As a young person, I too had a predilection for things that were beyond my years, and I still have work to do to focus my audacious energy. However, the difference between myself and the girls is that my family and community protect, understand, and love me regardless. Considering the discipline disparities previously outlined, many Black girls are not so similarly privileged.

Womanism requires that I extend the light within myself toward the realization of a more just world. Indeed, I believe that “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48, King James Version). Therefore, I consider it my duty to use my privilege
toward fulfilling this decree. Reading across expressions, Phillips (2006) shows five over-arching characteristics of the worldview: "(1) It is antioppressionist, (2) it is vernacular, (3) it is non-ideological, (4) it is communitarian, and (5) it is spiritualized" (p. xxiv). The following articulate how I express these values in this research:

**Womanism is Anti-Oppressionist**

Sylvia Wynter (2003) has shown that Western-man is grossly over-represented as the standard for humanity. This injustice creates an understanding of self through a binary logic ascribing value to certain people over others (Wynter, 2003). Contemporary consciousness ascribes Whites more value than Blacks, men more value than women, and the rich more value than the poor. Despite the diversity of culture and ethnicity that constitute the beauty of human experience (Walker, 2004), people still think of themselves in these limited binary terms. This “either/or” dualistic thinking maintains systems of domination (hooks, 1984) and makes it difficult to imagine ourselves as more than the labels that mark our “place.” I believe that it is hard to resist hegemony because we only know ourselves based upon what we are not instead of what we are or could be. Because it is hard to imagine new ways of being, becoming defeated by the nature of contemporary consciousness is easy.

This point is especially salient among Black girls who have been excluded from mainstream social and cultural norms. The liminality Black girls "in trouble" face is steeped in this ordering and continues to mark them in ways that justify their treatment. In addition to measuring themselves against the violent dualisms previously mentioned, they are also asked to be either “good” or “bad” (Jones, 2009). This limited construction of behavior makes it difficult for Black girls to see themselves and be seen wholly.
Phillips asserts that "Indeed, womanism seeks to enable people to transcend the relations of domination and oppression altogether" (p. xxiv). So, as I will explain in greater detail later, I designed this study to encourage the people who participated to think beyond Black girls' labeling in order to recognize them as full beings who know. Speaking of Black Southern women domestic workers, I follow Morton (2016) who asks: “how can we see these women beyond the painful and tragic stereotypes of the mammy/matriarch and begin to understand that within their experiences is knowledge that can be mined for valuable insight about pedagogy, theory, and research?” (p. 745). This study resonates with the intention in Morton’s (2016) question by looking beyond the girls' perceived limitations and valuing their knowledge as fundamental to a project seeking justice for Black girls.

**Womanism is Vernacular**

Womanism identifies with everyday experiences. It resists elitism, preferring instead to focus on the fundamental ways in which life can be made more harmonious for people. This means that its justice orientation is applicable in both organized political work and in individuals' everyday lives (Phillips, 2006). Sharing a meal with a single person is just as valuable as coordinating meals for an entire community. Thus, womanists start where they are and do what they can to take one step forward, recognizing that in the end, every good deed contributes to wellness and wholeness.

This study worked in the vernacular. Although I hope that it will help promote the use of holistically restorative approaches to school discipline and re-entry, I acknowledge that justice is not only achieved through such grand efforts (Quashie, 2012). There is no certainty that policy change will result in liberation (Baszille, 2017). Instead, womanists simply start where they are and do what they can to move the needle forward and to genuinely see, hear and love on people.
So while my policy orientation and goals under-gird this work, I found the ethical commitment to protect the people who participated in this study and their everyday realities more important. They live the experiences I merely impart here. Therefore, I was more cognizant of how the research would play out in their actual lives than I was about what the work might ultimately accomplish.

**Womanism is Nonideological**

Womanism is not governed by rules to advance any particular ideology. Instead, it is structured by inclusion and positive inter-relationship and as so, creates space for difference and tension (Phillips, p. xxv). This way afforded me the freedom to engage the process reflexively. Though I created a research protocol, my womanist commitment did not bind me to it. More important was that I take each happening as it came and adjusted my approach in response to the needs of the participants in real time. This practice was significant to the methods I used as, throughout the process, I challenged myself to revisit my approach in response to the people who participated.

Secondly, given how ideology negatively impacts Black girls, it was important for me to resist "what is known" about Black girls in popular and research contexts. This avoidance does not mean that I somehow tried to be objective as I worked through this study. But, to the extent possible, I abstained from the literature while I was in the field. I wanted to see the people who participated as they wanted to be seen and not through the lens of ideology produced through other people's work.

**Womanism is Communitarian**

Considering that Black women face hardship of all kinds, improving their conditions advances the well-being and commonweal of all (Phillips, 2006, p. xxv). This study demonstrates
this commitment through the belief that Black girls' liberation from punitive school treatment is in the best interest of all students. Policies and practices that understand the mutual construction of in-school behavior and that are sensitive to the disparate circumstances some Black girls face offer the potential to address these same needs among other affected groups.

Also, womanist work desires reconciliation (Phillips, 2012) on three levels: between people from different groups, people and the environment, and people and spirit. For the sake of the scope of this study, I operated mainly on the first level. As will be shown in my description of methods, I intended to support the girls in reconciling their experiences with themselves and among one another. I asked them to "talk back" to the gatekeepers of their experience so that their perspectives can be used to develop theories, strategies, and momentum for change. I see this as the first step in fulfilling the other two reconciliatory acts. I believe that when we honor Black girls' perspectives as legitimate funds of knowledge about disciplinary processes, strategies can be developed to restore them to their school environments and provide the peace necessary to attend to the challenges presented therein.

**Womanism is Spiritual**

Phillips (2006) asserts that “For womanists, [the spiritual] realm is actual and palpable, and the relationship between it and humans is neither abstract nor insignificant to politics” (p. xxvi). Womanism does not espouse a particular religious’ orientation but does acknowledge the mysterious power beyond ourselves that moves us to act in ways that honor the great wonder we are as human beings. This dissertation was a spiritual exercise in that it seeks to understand what is happening beyond human behavior. Hamlet reminds us (2006) that:

Human behavior is spirit made evident and readily perceived by the senses. Through their behavior, people are revealing to you what is in their consciousness, what thoughts and emotions are in it, and how they interact within their conceptual framework (p. 220).
I used this guidance to foreground the girls’ humanity, despite whatever challenges they may have presented in their past. This dissertation holds that behavior is a cue into the internal state. Thus, I do not believe that the negative things people do are who they are. Instead, it offers insight into a person’s well-being and thus, can be a helpful tool for meeting their personal and communal needs.

Although it is not uncommon for womanists to do so, I did not invoke my spirituality in corporate ways throughout this study. I did not invite the people who participated to join me in spiritual practices. However, it framed how I viewed the girls as special and their stories as sacred. My spirituality was also a method to prepare myself to engage everyone who participated. I would pray for God to guide and use me according to His will. Also, the methods of data collection this study employed have spiritual properties in that they engaged in careful and compassionate listening and worked to visualize alternatives to Black girls’ challenges.

**The Study’s Connection to Black Feminism**

As mentioned previously, womanism is often conflated with Black feminism. Considering that both frames have their origins in Black women’s lived experiences, it is easy to see the two as one in the same. They differ, however, concerning politics because Black feminist theory holds that, "the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy (Combahee River Collective, 2015, p. 16). A womanist, in contrast, can be decidedly a-political even though they engage what Black feminists might call political work. A womanist does not operate with the explicit goal of dismantling socio-political structures. Womanists, instead, do whatever is necessary to do what is right.
For example, the church mothers in the congregation I attended as a child would cook enough food for every person at church and also for members of the community to eat after service. Our church was in a socio-economically distressed part of town, so although one could argue that their service constituted a direct political action, they may not characterize it that way. I would claim that the church mothers fed everyone because it was the right thing to do. You never know what a person is going through, so instead of giving false charity, it is better to invite as many people as you can to share at the table. This kind of community work could be considered Black feminist. However, I doubt the women would call it that or say they intended to dismantle specific systems of oppression.

I am a womanist and Black feminist. As so, this dissertation reflects my commitment to resist oppression and harmful ideology and work in the vernacular through the spirit the realization of educational justice for Black women and girls. I am as committed to cultivating harmonious spaces for Black girlhood as I am to the political task of dismantling systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism in public education.

This study engages Black feminist educational politics by contributing to the growing body of literature documenting Black girls' treatment in schools. It resisted essentialized notions of Black girlhood by inviting anyone who considered themselves to be Black and a girl (cis and trans) to join the study. Re-entry was also defined broadly, as returning to school after a period of dismissal for disciplinary reasons was the only criteria in that regard. As a result, the experiences reflected in this study are diverse. Some girls have multiple and significant experiences with the structural processes of suspension, expulsion, and school-based arrest, while others have few with varying degrees of severity regarding their return. I collected the data through a rela-
tional and conversational tone and my approach to analysis challenged taken for granted assumptions about school discipline. By contributing to the literature on Black girlhood studies in education, resisting essentialist notions of Black girls "in trouble," and offering practical guidance toward change, this study ultimately presents an example of Black feminist political work.

There were also ethical considerations that Black feminist literature helped me think through. A study with Black girls at the school/prison nexus is delicate work. Even in our efforts to address their needs, research about Black women and girls have historically relied on pathologies of dysfunction (Bell-Scott, 2015). It is easy to lean on Black girls' hardships to find their humanity. As Tuck and Yang (2014) assert, “pain compels.” A Black feminist political orientation rejects this attitude by adopting a strengths-based position. It holds that Black girls have the fortitude to (re)member – or re-assemble, re-learn, and re-orient – the cultural memories fostering healing and connection (Dillard, 2012). At the core of this study is the insistence that through telling their stories, excluded Black girls offer the wisdom and knowledge needed to dismantle the oppressive educational structures maintaining their marginalization.

The animating ethos of womanism allowed me to operationalize the Black feminist political work of collecting stories about Black girls’ school re-entry experiences after exclusionary discipline. This study resisted oppression, stayed grounded in every-day experience, engaged in reflexive practice, worked toward reconciliation, and invoked the spirit to address the distinct political problem of Black girls' over-representation among those harshly disciplined in school. The following sections describe how I operationalized a particular methodological paradigm: narrative inquiry, in ways that are compatible with this framing. In so doing, I was able to develop the grounds to argue for liberatory conceptions of public schooling premised upon the abolition of exclusionary discipline.
**Methodological Paradigm**

This study used narrative inquiry for the basis of its design. Narrative inquiry works to understand human experience through stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Connelly & Clandinin (2006) characterize it this way:

> Story, in the current idiom, [is] a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience (p.375).

Barthes (1977) says that narrative is “simply there, like life itself (p. 79). The fact that we are beings in time marks us in ways that allow us to know and be known in the world. Our stories, then, convey the meaning in that experience. They describe what and how we know ourselves and the world around us and leads us into the future (Cody, 1989).

Such a methodology is consistent with womanist epistemology and social transformation methods. Womanist epistemology looks to Black women’s everyday experiences to identify solutions to their problems. Doing so is premised upon four distinct areas: 1) lived experience as the criterion for meaning, 2) the role of dialog in assessing knowledge claims; 3) an ethic of care, and 4) an ethic of personal responsibility (Collins, 2000; Banks-Wallace, 2006; Hamlet, 2006). Narrative inquiry is compatible with these epistemological priorities because it works to investigate lived experience, use dialog as the foundational method for collecting data (and thus, make knowledge claims), embody care through an intentional focus on self and others, and acknowledge the co-constructed nature of storytelling and story collecting. Thus, the frame was best suited to operationalize the animating ethos of this study.
Story-telling and story-collecting are dialogic activities that allow speaking parties to honor, recognize and connect with each other (Maparyan, 2012). It reflects in the imagery of the "kitchen table." Maparyan (2006) writes:

The kitchen table is an informal, woman-centered space where all are welcome and all can participate. The table is an invitation to become part of a group amicably comprised of heterogenous elements and unified by the pleasure of nourishment of food and drink. At the table, people can come and go, agree or disagree, take turns talking or speak all at once, and laugh, shout, complain or counsel—even be present in silence. It is a space where the language is accessible and the ambiance casual. At the kitchen table, people share truths of their lives on equal footing and learn through face-to-face conversation. When the kitchen table metaphor is applied to political problem-solving situations, the relations of domination and subordination breakdown in favor of more egalitarian, interpersonal processes (p. xxvii).

In my personal life, the "kitchen table" experience is the cornerstone of my culture. It is the space and time my family uses to talk, eat and be together freely. It is how I know I am home and where I feel most like myself. I drew upon this approach to help me relax with participants, to see them as important and valuable, and to honor them before the needs of the study. In this way, I was able to collect rich stories that were full of the complexity of living at the intersections of race, class, gender, ideology, and policy.

Narrative inquiry has many variations, with approaches drawing from different positions (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). There are variable-centered approaches where researchers are objective, evidence-based story collectors and there are case-based approaches that, in contrast, acknowledge the embodied, dialogic and collaborative nature of story-collecting, story-telling, and re-storying (Riessman, 2008; Mishler, 1996). Considering my womanist worldview and the sensitive nature of the stories I collected, I found a case-based approach appropriate for this study. The distinguishing features of this way are that the researcher and participants are collaborators in a mutual process of listening, conversing, questioning, and constructing narratives.
Time, relationship, space and voice are central elements of the process, allowing participants to feel cared for and open with their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) further explain that “the focus of narrative inquiry is not only on individuals’ experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted” (p.42-43). Case-based narrative inquirers acknowledge that stories are contextually bound. They must attend not only to the experience in question but also to the surrounding factors that allow stories to emerge. Doing so situates narratives and re-tells them in ways that speak fully to the experience.

Also the “ancestral tendency to think aloud through narrative is a living inheritance” that has supported and sustained Black people throughout the diaspora (Fournillier and Lewis, 2010). The Black storytelling tradition has been a way to resist racial oppression, articulate oppositional identities, and foster healing since the days of slavery (Hamlet, 2011). Its tie to African heritage and culture offers a site that can be called “home” as Black people relate freely to one another through personal expression and (re)membering (Dillard, 2012). Storytelling through narrative inquiry as a methodological frame, then, offered space for the girls to bring their words to the fore, to clarify their position, and to relay their experience through a familiar and supportive approach. This methodology, then, also offers a culturally situated way of researching with Black girls. It invites them to talk freely and without the expectation that they give the "right" answers.

Narratology, or the theory of narrative, however, overlooks aspects of African diasporic culture in the precedents it sets forth as “proper” approaches to narrative inquiry. Specifically, stories that count as eligible for analysis are those structured linearly – with a definite beginning, middle, and end (Clandinin & Connely, 2000). However, narrative inquirers of color have long
troubled this notion, citing the circular, dialogic, multiple vocal patterns, remembrances, and even silence that serve as essential elements in the storytelling and story collecting process (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Fournillier, 2017). This dissertation study follows this tradition and includes stories giving primacy to feelings, that do not tell stories linearly, and that also explicate the lessons girls learn through others' stories.

**Participants**

This study unfolded in two phases over a 9-month period. The first phase took 4-months and included recruiting the girls through purposeful selection (Patton, 2002), conducting three interviews with each, sharing transcripts for approval with each girl, and conducting two group conversations with four of the five girls. The second phase took place over a five-month period during which I wrote narratives of each girls' re-entry experience based on their interview data and submitted the narratives to the girls for approval. I also recruited middle and high school administrators through snowball sampling, conducted one interview with each, transcribed the data, and wrote and shared a profile for their approval during that time.

**The Girls**

Five youth between the ages of 15 and 17 who identified as Black and cis-girls participated in this study. They were non-disabled, English and African-American Vernacular English speakers. Four of the girls' experiences describe being part of the working class. Their parents worked in the service and domestic economy, they had endured periods of financial hardship including homelessness and described social experiences with peers where their inability to participate in designer trends caused significant stress in school. One of the girls described being part of the middle class with her parents providing for her material needs without stress. She was
given a car for her 16th birthday and participated in designer trends regularly (i.e., having her hair and nails done by a professional on a bi-weekly basis, wearing designer clothes, shoes and accessories, and having multiple devices of the latest technology). One of the girls identified a period where she questioned her sexuality and experienced familial conflict as a result. The others identified as heterosexual. Two of the girls described being considered for special education services but did not disclose whether a learning difference was diagnosed.

I recruited the girls through community organizations working specifically with court-involved youth in the metropolitan area of a large Southeastern city in the United States. One of the organizations provides free legal representation to court-involved youth and the other provides supportive services to youth on probation. I established relationships with both groups through a brief internship with a State governmental agency. My supervisor during that project was supportive of my desire to learn more about the school/court experiences of Black girls and introduced me to key staff members at these organizations. The girls were all on or had previously been on probation at the time of their recruitment. The girls had experienced a range of school-to-confinement processes with some having multiple suspensions, expulsions, arrests or periods of incarceration and others having only one of those experiences. All of the girls had experiences with school re-entry after exclusionary discipline.

The following profiles give a brief overview of each girls' background. The names used are pseudonyms chosen by the girls. I wrote the profiles based on each girls' interview data. The girls edited and approved the profiles that I created and show here:
Julia was 15 years old and in the 9th grade when she joined the study. Although she considered school boring, she did not consider it a terrible experience. She attended many different elementary and middle schools because her family frequently moved while her mother searched for job stability. She was on probation for truancy – having missed 120 days of the previous school year because she was pregnant. Her pregnancy often left her exhausted and her mother, a daycare worker, was unable to see her off to school because she had to leave for work at 5:00am. When we met, she was cautious about returning to school because she was concerned that educators might stigmatize her because she was a young mother. She was also concerned about the rumors her peers may have been spreading about her. Despite these challenges, she credits her daughter, Princess, as the source of her inspiration and successfully completed her 9th grade year.

Ayanna was 15 years old and in the 10th grade when she joined the study. She opened up to me right away, sharing some of the hard times she experienced when she was younger. She spent her elementary school years in foster care before being reunited with her mother and siblings in middle school. During that time, however, she was sexually abused and a witness to community violence. School offered no respite. She was bullied relentlessly about her short hair, dark skin, and inability to buy expensive clothes and shoes. To protect herself and make friends, she became a fighter and would skip school to avoid being “lame.” She described the school she attended as violent. She shared several stories about school resource officers using pepper spray on students who both watched and participated in fights. Substitute teachers taught most of her classes and she was rarely provided with a course schedule reflecting the credits she needed to graduate. As
much as skipping school was about fitting in, it was also about avoiding an unpleasant environment. Still, she missed 9 weeks of school at the beginning of 9th grade and as a result, was assigned one year of probation.

Emily was 17 years old and had recently earned her GED when she joined the study. She was very busy working two jobs: one at a fast food restaurant and another at a package delivery service. She spent most of her middle and early high school years under court supervision after an abrupt change in her home life caused her to act out in school. Her Aunt raised her from birth, but became ill and sent her to live with her Mother and sisters. The change made her scared that her Aunt would not recover and lonely during her adjustment to living with her Mom. In response to those feelings, she started to act out in school. She was suspended from school many times, expelled from traditional school twice and arrested and sent to youth detention three times. Her final arrest, which took place in alternative school, resulted in a 72-day remanding to youth detention and a period of house arrest. An argument ensued after she felt harassed by her principal. The principal handed down a suspension as a result and made her wait in a conference room to be written up. While there, she wrote on a piece of paper that she wished she could blow up the school. The principal took the empty threat seriously and called the school resource officers for her arrest. Emily ran and the officer chased her - tackling her to the ground and taking her to jail. The judge sentenced her harshly because of her previous record, but in light of her good behavior, allowed her to finish her sentence under the supervision of a residential military academy. She credits her turn-around with her experience there. She now works on the maintenance staff at a hospital and hopes to start college so that she can become a probation officer.
Isis

In our first interview, Isis explained that she was a very polite girl who had never really been in trouble before. She was a high school senior, an honor student, played violin in her schools’ orchestra and soccer for a private club. She also had an after-school job at a smoothie bar. She described her home life as happy and stable and because of these things, felt very out of place being on probation. The trouble started when her former boyfriend’s ex-girlfriend started bullying her on social media. The girl came to her house to try to fight her on multiple occasions and posted threats and rude comments about her online. Still, Isis ignored and avoided her. After 5 months, the girl transferred to the school Isis was attending where the harassment continued. Finally, Isis had all she could take. The girls fought in the hallway as they were changing classes. It was the first fight Isis had ever been in, but her principal showed no mercy. He tried to take her cell phone and searched her locker and car – finding mace that her Mom gave her for late nights after work in the glove box. She did not use the mace in the fight nor threaten to use it, but the principal expelled her, had her assigned to alternative school, and brought up on public disturbance charges. Despite, 5 months of evidence detailing the conflict between the girls and her clean record, the judge sentenced her to 9 months of probation. To avoid future contact with the girl, Isis transferred to another school. She recently graduated from high school and will attend college to become a physical therapist.

Ti-Ti

Ti-Ti recently moved to the metropolitan area from another State when she joined the study. She is bi-racial – her Mother is white and her Father is Black – but she considers herself Black because she feels that she fits in better with that group. She was 16, in the 8th grade and described her schooling experience as difficult. The trouble began when she was in 3rd grade. Her mother
went to prison on drug charges that year and she was sent to live between her two oldest sisters – one of whom was still in high school and the other who struggled with addiction. She described the transition as causing her to grow up fast. She did not have someone to help her get ready for school and her feelings of loneliness and abandonment made her angry. She was retained that year and after that, found it difficult to concentrate or contain her feelings when she was in school. She was suspended more than 32 times in elementary school and was first arrested in the 6th grade while she was in school. She felt that she had been unfairly assigned lunch detention and as she argued against going, the conflict escalated until the school resource officer was called. He tried to physically escort her to detention, but she resisted by holding on to a table. He slammed her into the lunch room door before taking her to the county jail. In 7th grade, she said that she tried to drop out. She was in constant conflict with her mother over her behavior in school, her sister was struggling with drug addiction – often leaving her 5 children with Ti-Ti – and she was having trouble understanding or completing her school work. She described the streets as freedom from the stress in her life, but after while she grew tired of running. Leaving her home State provided some respite, but she ended up on probation after she argued with her principal about wanting to go home. When he wouldn’t let her, her anger got the best of her and she wiped all of the Principal’s belongings off of his desk and onto the floor. The act landed her 6 months of probation. By the end of our time together, Ti-Ti successfully completed the terms of her probation and returned to her home State.

**The Administrators**

After a preliminary analysis in the first phase of research, it became apparent that school administrators serve as gatekeepers to the girls’ re-entry experiences. Because of that, I decided to include their perspectives to understand their role and the policies shaping the decisions they
make. I recruited five administrators from an urban school district through snowball sampling. I contacted school leaders at every middle and high school in the district most of the girls had or were currently attending. Two administrators responded, and through referral, I recruited three more for participation. Only one of the girls in the study attended the same school as an administrator. One girl never attended schools in the same district as the administrators; however, one of the administrators spent a significant portion of their career working in her school district. All of the administrators lead schools serving predominately Black students. Still, their settings were diverse in terms of socio-economic status, racial demographics, and levels of achievement. The following profiles provide a brief overview of each administrator’s context and leadership philosophy. The names used are pseudonyms chosen by each administrator. I wrote the profiles based upon their interview data. The school leaders edited and approved the following before including here:

Mr. Mabaruti is an assistant principal in a large, predominately Black, comprehensive high school serving an impoverished community. He describes himself as a product of the school district he currently serves, having graduated from a high school in the district, and conducts his relationships with students through a spirit of love. He asserts, “I am their champion….”

Mr. Owen is an assistant principal of a high-performing, socio-economically and racially diverse high school with low rates of exclusionary discipline. He described his role as an administrator as a “balancing act” that requires one to be politically astute and aware of the ways in which code words mask tracking and in-school racial segregation. He joined the study out of concern for a recent rise in the number of fights among Black girls that have occurred at his school.
Mr. Igziabeher is the lead Principal of a high-performing, socio-economically and racially diverse charter middle school with low rates of exclusionary discipline. He also has many years of experience working in an administrative capacity in under-resourced schools where challenges with discipline were common. He considers his job as an administrator to “develop the whole teacher” – which includes supporting them in developing empathy for children’s challenges and welcoming, understanding, and appreciating children’s cultures.

Dr. Maurice is an assistant principal leading the 9th grade floor of a large comprehensive high school serving predominately Black working class youth. His school has a very low rate of suspension among students in special education. He describes himself as consistent in his approach to work with students and takes a proactive stance on discipline. His goal is to prevent instructional challenges before they occur by ensuring that the “right adults” are paired with students, through establishing relationships, and by supporting students with finding their passion.

Ms. Baker was the lead Principal of a middle school serving predominately Black children living in a neighborhood with several challenges to access and equity. She was invited to take on the role as Principal in the two years before the school was scheduled to be closed. Her priority as an administrator was to foster a culture of care by providing support and opportunities for children and their families. Although the school closed, the tight-knit community that was formed successfully organized to re-open a public neighborhood school on the same campus.

Methods of data collection

I used semi-structured interviews and group conversations through the invocation of the kitchen table to collect stories about the girls’ general schooling, disciplinary, and re-entry experiences. I also made use of my research journal to record my perceptions of and contextual factors related to the research process (i.e., where we interviewed, happenings that were not audio
recorded, participant affect, etc.). Three semi-structured transformative interviews and two group conversations were held with the girls, one semi-structured interview was conducted with each school leader; and my research journal was used throughout to collect data that would adequately address my research questions (See Table 1).

Table 1: Methods of data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the school re-entry experiences of Black girls who have experienced exclusionary discipline?</td>
<td>• 3 Semi-structured Transformative Interviews with Black girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2 Group Conversations with Black girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Research Journaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What role do administrators play when Black girls return to school after exclusionary discipline?</td>
<td>• 1 Semi-structured Interview with Middle and High School Administrators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My interview protocol used open-ended questions to elicit data (see Appendices B, C, & D). Semi-structured interviews are not wholly reliant upon an interview guide, however, so I often probed for additional and more detailed information and followed my participants’ lead as conversations unfolded (Roulston, 2010). The conversational tone also supported me in developing relationships with participants. Although I foregrounded the girls’ stories in this dissertation, I also shared aspects of myself with them and with the administrators. Such an approach is central to meeting at the kitchen table. I believe that erasing myself from these conversations would have been violent. Doing so was fair and appropriate considering that I asked my participants to reveal themselves to me.

For example, during recruitment, I engaged potential participants conversationally about myself, my professional experiences, and when appropriate, my personal experiences. During the data collection process, I ended interviews with an opportunity for participants to ask me questions. The girls would often ask me about myself, including why I cared about Black girls, what my life was like as a teenager, what it is like to be a wife and mother, and how I experience the
metropolitan area where they are from as a person who is not originally from there. These conversations were also recorded and transcribed. The administrators usually declined to ask me about myself at the end of the interview, but throughout the process, I revealed my educational background, social affiliations, professional experience, and interests.

**Overview of Interview Design with the Girls**

Considering the girls' vulnerabilities, I drew from transformative interviewing technique to support me in developing the research protocol. This approach encourages participants to develop a critical consciousness about their experience and is common in narrative inquiry (Briggs, 2002; Hones, 1997). I felt that doing so was important because I wanted to offer opportunities for them to discuss their experiences without relying on pathology. Transformative interviewing offers participants an opportunity to engage “new subjective possibilities” (Wolgemuth & Donohue, 2006). I did not want to craft questions that unintentionally gave primacy to the experience of “getting in trouble.” To do this, I asked the girls to reflect upon and share their school re-entry experience, to identify the role schools played in that experience, and to talk about the tension between who they know themselves to be and how they felt they were treated. I also tried to find ways to infuse the process with joy and affirmation. The girls chose transcript review meeting places that were fun and relaxing. For example, Julia and I met once with our children at a park. Ayanna and I met with our dogs at a dog park. Emily and I met for frozen yogurt. Isis and I met at a coffee shop that she liked and I went with Ti-Ti to a restaurant that reminded her of home. During that time, our conversations surpassed the research project, and as a result, we talked about all sorts of things – from the type of music they enjoy to their hopes, dreams and challenges.
During our interviews and group conversations, I tried to find the balance between hard and soft questions. For example, in the same interview where I talked with Ayanna about her experiences with bullying, fighting, and skipping school, I also asked her to talk about what she liked about school:

Erica: Ok. Um, so tell me what the schools were like that you went to. What were they like?

Ayanna: They was good.

Erica: What was good about them?

Ayanna: I mean, it was like a regular school.

Erica: What is a regular school like?

Ayanna: Like, doing work, projects or something.

Erica: Mhm. Do you like school?

Ayanna: Mhm. Because it's fun. Some, and, and, and sometimes when you don't want to be home, you just go to school. My friends, when we be having pep rallies and stuff. And when we can work together and stuff. Talk.

Erica: Mhm. Ok. So you like that it's like, social. Ok. Um, what would you say that school is like - the schools that you've been to, what would you say that they're like for Black girls?

Ayanna: They good! Because you don't really see a lot of white teachers in places. You see, like, maybe 1 or 2, that's it. Mainly, mainly Black teachers and everybody get along.

This example shows how I also took an interest in experiences that were relevant, but not as emotionally charged and reveals how doing so adds richness to the data. Merely focusing on
Ayanna's school re-entry experiences, which were challenging and painful, would mask the fact that, overall, she enjoyed school.

I also offered affirmative and restorative activities to encourage positivity in the midst of discussing significant challenges. For example, I shared historical information on Black warrior queens who rose to greatness through defiance (See Appendix C) and used art and other hands-on activities to prompt discussion (Freeman, 2006) (See Appendix C). Lastly, I used my research journal to engage in reflexive practice. Doing this helped me customize each girls' interview protocol as I learned more about her. Through reflexive practice, I would re-write questions based on aspects of her experience I found out in the previous interview.

My intention in drawing from transformative interviewing techniques was not to make the girls change in some way. I did not operate on the assumption that who they are or what they had done was wrong. Instead, I used the approach to help the girls clarify their position and stand by their words. Maisha Winn’s (2011) performance ethnography with incarcerated Black girls is particularly useful as an example in this regard. Through writing and performing plays, the girls in her study were able to create and try on new identities. Winn found that doing so facilitated “creative survival” and a “performance of possibilities” which allowed the girls to imagine and visualize a new self and then rehearse that new identity. The process allowed the students to challenge the prison discourse that shaped their understanding of self. Namely that “(1) I was born; (2) I mysteriously turned bad…; (3) I deserved my punishment and now I am going to ‘be good’ or ‘do good’ again” (Winn, 2011, p. 72). As a result, many of the girls became committed to becoming skillful readers and writers and also began to challenge “the idea that one had choices” (Winn, 2011, p. 91) when they made the decisions leading to their incarceration.
Though I did not use the performing arts to support the girls in telling their stories, I used the interviews and group conversations to concentrate as much on life history and envisioning future possibilities as the girls' school re-entry experiences. Of the three interviews, the first invited the girls to re-tell where they come from, how they define themselves and how they came to these definitions. The second interview focused on their exclusionary discipline, and school re-entry experiences and the third focused on exploring possibilities for their lives; that is, asking the girls to envision their future and begin to think through the implications their vision suggests.

The group conversations also offered a supportive and culturally relevant approach to discussing the girls' re-entry experiences. Consistent with traditional Black oral art forms at the cornerstone of our heritage and culture (Hurston, 1935), group conversations provide a positive and affirmative space to have difficult conversations. King & Mitchell (1995) assert that group conversations offer "a way of apprehending or becoming more critically aware of the collective Black Experience through reflexive examination of their own reality" (p.3). They also invite communal, spiritual, and holistic perspectives and practices (King & Mitchell, 1995) to use the research process toward healing and fostering harmony (Maparyan, 2012). Lastly, group conversation is also consistent with the narrative framework in that it relies on storytelling or “testifyin” (Smitherman, 1986) to reveal knowledge.

In addition to the cultural relevance of the group conversation method, this way of researching also addressed the girls' context. Richardson (1990) asserts, “People make sense of their lives through the stories that are available to them, and they attempt to fit their lives into the available stories" (p. 129). The group conversations allowed the girls to examine their personal experiences in relation to the discourse surrounding them. In the first group conversation, we discussed the liminality and criminalization Black girls experience—looking at how Black girls find
their identities constrained between notions of being a "good" or "bad" girl. We also explored the consequences of these narratives in their experiences with returning to school. Considering the ethical commitment to ending interviews on a positive note (Josselson, 2007), the second group conversation concentrated on privileging the girls as experts on their own experience. I asked them to discuss what school communities can do to make schools safe for Black girls and offered through art an opportunity for the girls to discuss what others could not see when they were getting in trouble (See Appendix C). I structured the group conversations in this way to resist pathology and reliance on pain narratives (Tuck & Yang, 2014) in qualitative research.

Overview of Interview Design with the Administrators

The interview that I conducted with each administrator did not require as extensive an approach to design because I conducted only one relatively brief (one-hour) interview. Still, the same ethical considerations I took in developing the girls' interviews were in play when I wrote the administrators' interview questions (See Appendix D). I intended to gain an understanding of each school leader's context, their perceptions of Black girls, and their philosophy and approach to leadership and discipline. My conversations with administrators also included a more explicit policy orientation. As the holders of disciplinary power, I wanted to know what policies come into play when disciplinary action is necessary, each administrator's perspectives on exercising it, and whether or not intersectional perspectives are needed or applicable in disciplinary situations. Still, the nature and tone of these interviews were not very different from those I had with the girls. They were relaxed conversations that included as much policy talk as the administrators’ personal experiences with using them.
Whether with the girls or leaders, my intention in using interviews, group conversations and research journaling in the ways described was to use qualitative research as humanizing practice. In this task, I heeded the words of Fournillier (2009) who asserts that this work is:

[A] complex, complicated, and muddy task but one that I can begin to accomplish if I am willing to (a) put aside my agenda and truly listen to the voices of those who know, (b) expect the unexpected, (c) be open and willing to become the ‘worker’ at one time, leader at another, and learner/student ethnographer at yet another, and (d) enter into dialogue with the text, self, and Other” (p, 760).

This guidance was the foundation upon which my work stands.

**Approach to Analysis**

There are two ways to analyze narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995): ‘narrative analysis' and ‘analysis of narratives.' Narrative analysis presents individual cases after ordering story elements in the data into a biographical account (Polkinghorne, 1995; Clandinin & Murphy, 2007). The intention is to tell stories that are "open to the specific and unique elements that make the new episode different from all that have gone before" (Polkinghorne, 1995, pp. 11-12) and produces lengthy accounts that provide all of the relevant detail on an experience. The ‘analysis of narratives' approach collects many short stories and focuses on their content by coding for themes. I used both approaches to crystallize the results presented in Chapters 4 and 5 (Ellingson, 2009).

At the end of the first phase of the study, I conducted a narrative analysis. I developed a first-person chronological account of each girls' experience with school re-entry, developed codes identifying what each narrative was about and then compared each girls' account to identify themes that were salient to them all (See Appendix A). These narratives were assembled from the girls’ verbatim interview data in the following process: 1) I collapsed their initial and follow-up responses to each interview question into a single narrative episode; 2) I identified the
topic of each narrative episode; 3) I grouped common episode topics and assigned a code that described the content of the topic group; 4) I paired the codes with the research question they best addressed; 5) listed each code’s related narrative episode; 6) selected the episodes that followed a chronological arc in relationship to my research questions and; 7) organized them to tell a story in each girls’ own words (Appendix A shows the results of this process).

Through this process, I found that the most common theme across all of their narratives was the centrality of the role educators played as gatekeepers in their re-entry experience. Because of this, I decided to include administrators' perspectives to contextualize the girls' experiences further. I also learned in this process that narrative analysis is more appropriate in single-case studies, as each story I produced was very long. Using this approach would have made it difficult for me to address each case within the scope of the dissertation and also in relation to the data provided by the administrators.

After I interviewed each administrator, it became apparent that an analysis of the narratives would be more manageable and appropriate. Ewick and Silbey’s (2003) study of citizen resistance served as an example where "The ‘story' here refers to a brief, bounded segment of interview text, rather than an extended biographical account" (Riessman, 2008, p. 61). Following this lead, I used Atlas TI8 computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to organize the data and coded it in three rounds. In the first round, I used In Vivo coding to develop initial codes. In Vivo coding honors and preserves participants' words by developing initial codes through words taken verbatim from interview transcripts. Saldaña (2013) asserts that In Vivo coding is particularly useful in educational research with youth as it "enhances and deepens adult's understanding of [youth] cultures and worldviews" (p. 91). Stringer (1999) asserts it focuses the researcher’s interpretation on terms “that participants use in their everyday lives, rather than in terms derived
from the academic disciplines or professional practices” (p. 91). This way of working with the data was important to me because I acknowledge the differences in social location between myself and the participants. I was never excluded from school, so I did not feel comfortable assigning terms to describe the experience until I understood how my participants did. Using this approach produced 715 In Vivo codes in the girls’ data and 207 codes in the administrator data. Each code connected to a quotation in the data that illustrated its definition.

In the second round, I used focused coding to refine the In Vivo codes into code groups that were similar in content. Saldaña (2013) asserts that the "goal of this method is to develop categories without distracted attention…to their properties and dimensions" (p. 213). It is a way of grouping codes toward identifying categories within the data. It also allows you to weed out initial codes that do not address your research questions. The second round refined the girls’ data into 16 categories and the administrator data into 11 categories.

In the third and final round, I further refined the categories until themes emerged. I returned to the quotations that were linked to each initial code in a category, asking myself "What is this story about?" until I was able to collapse them further until themes emerged. Of the 16 categories produced in the girls’ data, three emerged as themes. Three categories in the girls’ data (disruption of familial relationships, supportive experiences, and academic costs) did not collapse into the themes. Though the topics were salient to the research questions, they either did not surface in most of the girls’ data or were not as tightly linked to my research questions as the others. Of the five categories produced in the administrators’ data, two emerged as themes in the same fashion. After the themes emerged, I compared those emerging from both groups’ data to identify whether or not their respective conceptualizations of the re-entry experience were in relationship. Table 2 offers a code map illustrating the process.
The findings are represented in thematic form and are situated in relationship to Alice Walker’s (1970/2003) poem, “Be Nobody’s Darling” which best demonstrates my commitment to articulate challenging circumstances in strengths-based ways.

Table 2: Code Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Round 2 Categories</th>
<th>Round 3 Themes/Code Maps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls’ Data</td>
<td>• Stigmatization</td>
<td>Classroom Dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Losing Credibility</td>
<td>Cost Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Losing Relationships</td>
<td>Questioned Credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Changing Classroom Dynamics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Surveillance/Control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal Resignation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sense of Affirmation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Searching for relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Responding to punishment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Systemic disconnection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Null Experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ineffective Interventions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uncaring Interventions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Disruption of familial relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supportive experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Academic costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This study took a relational approach to data collection. Although doing so produces rich data, Ellis (2007) asserts that it raises certain ethical considerations. Relational ethics, or the unique circumstances surfacing as the relationship between researcher and participant changes over time, also became a factor in this study. Before I started the process, I anticipated that this would be the case, so I prepared myself by finding a community resource guide providing contact information for an array of social services.

The community resource guide proved helpful on a few occasions with one of the girls' mothers, in particular. As the weeks unfolded and I grew closer to Ayanna, there were times when her mother began to reach out to me, calling me her daughter’s mentor and asking me to support her in finding resources to pay rent, buy Christmas gifts, and find housing. I assume that her willingness to open up to me about her needs was rooted in the relationship I established with her daughter, my privilege as a highly educated person with social service experience, and the

**Ethics**
access to resources seemingly afforded to me through the University. In each instance, I reminded her that I was conducting research, that becoming Ayanna’s mentor is a commitment we could discuss when the study was complete, and that although I empathized, I was not the right person to ask for support. I gave her the community resource guide and encouraged her to reach out to someone who would be better equipped to help.

Constructing narratives from component parts of the interview data is common in narrative research (Ayres, 2008). However, doing so lends itself to certain ethical issues. Namely, what constitutes significance in the stories collected and who gets to make such a determination? Also, whose voice is centered in the creation of narrative representations and what will the representations do beyond their creation? As a womanist and Black feminist, I operated from the premise that the intersectional nature of oppression Black girls face requires that I center their voices throughout the analysis process (Evans-Winters, 2015). To do this, I extended the constructed nature of narrative inquiry right through the representation of the data. I included participants at each stage of the analysis process and was careful to manage myself (Lillrank, 2012) so that I was sensitive to their needs, perspectives, time and emotions. I provided them with a full copy of the interview transcript to ensure that they were clear on what was recorded. I also highlighted a few shorter parts of the transcript that stood out because they are especially sensitive or raised pertinent questions, and I discussed the transcripts with them when we met in-between interviews to review them. At the subsequent interview, I checked-in with each participant to ensure their comfort with the process, to get clarity about the stories they were willing to record and to ensure their comfort with continuing through the process. As the process came to a close, I obtained approval from each participant before including the narratives I wrote about them in this study and invited them to make any relevant changes.
Working in this way was particularly useful with interviewing Julia, Emily and Ti-Ti who each demonstrated reservations about the process at different points throughout. Julia would be very open with me about her life whenever we were working together without the audio-recorder, but when it was time to interview formally, she would become closed, giving short answers to open-ended questions or repeating her original response even when probed for more explanation. After Emily's second interview where we talked about her many experiences with getting in trouble in school, she told me that it was hard for her to talk about her hard times and that she wanted to stay focused on the future in our next interview. In Ti-Ti's final interview, which I had considered the most hopeful, easy, and positive; she became very emotional. She told me that she was having a hard time identifying with the strengths that I saw in her and began to cry. In each of these instances, I decided to let the study take a backseat to their needs. With Julia, I continually checked in with her about her comfort level with the questions I was asking and did not push her to say more when she made it clear to me that she said all she needed to. With Emily, I did not ask her more about getting in trouble after her second interview, even though I had more questions about her experiences. With Ti-Ti, I stopped the interview altogether when she became upset, listened and held space with her while she vented, and affirmed how I saw her as a resilient, kind, loving and positive person.

I acknowledge, however, that this way of approaching the co-constructed nature of narrative production is not without certain underlying power tensions. It is not my intention to pretend as if my social location as a highly educated, middle-class, U.S. born, heterosexual, Black woman does not impact the research process or mark how I think, act, and speak about the girls. Though we are spiritual equals, I am not the social, political or economic equal to the girls and as a result, my "interpretation is omnipresent" (Josselson, 2007, p. 549) no matter the degree to
which I collaborate with them. My position as a doctoral student afforded me the time, ability, and resources to determine "who gets a life" (Couser, 1997, p. 77). This reality does not mean that my position is more important than my participants, but it does signal that our roles are fundamentally different (Smythe & Murray, 2000). As a researcher, I am responsible for connecting the girls’ stories to the theoretical and sociological premises underpinning their experience, to determine the implications of the findings and to relay the lessons learned to the academy. The participants’ roles were to share their narratives, but I did not expect anything beyond that. For example, I invited the girls to share their thoughts and perspectives through art and writing in our group conversations, but I did not require them to do so. Most of the girls preferred to participate by talking to tell their stories. Although I created opportunities to produce and welcomed any materials that deepened my understanding of their schooling experiences, I did not require them to give anything more than they were willing to.

I also worked in this way to imbue the research process with care, to work in ways that resist positivist attempts to pry into peoples' lives (Kvale, 2006), and to represent narratives in ways capturing Black girls' re-entry experiences instead of exploiting them. Kvale (2006) cautions, however, that attempts to develop egalitarian, dialogic relationships in qualitative research often fails to acknowledge that the research relationship has an inherently asymmetrical power dynamic. Even though I was able to establish a positive rapport and trusting relationships with the girls, the purpose of those relationships was to inform this study. This reality positioned me with more power than the girls and explains why research journaling was central to the project. I used journal writing both to capture my reflections and impressions on the interviews, transcript review meetings, and group conversations, but also to interrogate the power dynamics that are inherent to the process as the study evolved. Kvale (2006) argues that this kind of interrogation is
often missing in qualitative research causing researchers to offer misleading representations by suggesting that a purely democratic research process took place.

Although my work with the administrators was less lengthy, I held regard for their perspectives and appreciated that they would be so forthcoming about their experiences. I applied these same ethical commitments to their stories, too.

I was careful to work in this way because the dissertation is a matter of public record and the data will be used in publications beyond it. This, symbolically speaking, etches participants’ words in stone. Josselson (2007) notes that for this reason:

we must take care in our written reports to maintain our respect for the dignity of our participants as individuals, recognizing that what we are treating as an exemplar that illustrates a conceptual or theoretical point is a very personal narrative to the person whose story it is (p.550).

Adams (2008) asserts that acknowledging these privileges "motivates us to discern who we might hurt or silence in telling stories as well as whose stories we do not (and may not ever hear)" (p. 181). He maintains that because participants cannot respond to what is said about them "[a]n ethical life writer is someone who responsibly reflects on these issues, not someone who irresponsibly rambles about life's "difficulties" (Adams, 2008, p. 181). His point is particularly important to me. Black girls who are or have been in trouble with school and juvenile justice systems are mainly known for the mistakes they have made. An ethical approach to understanding the full extent of their school re-entry stories asks me to attend to my privilege so that I do not create or reify limited perceptions of them. Although I organized the narratives thematically, I shared what I recorded and wrote about my participants and asked them to help me be confident that I represented them as they intended to represent themselves.

Finally, leaving the research site was another ethical consideration that I had to attend to in the analysis process. I did not want the participants, the girls in particular, to feel as though I
abandoned them when it was time to write. To prevent this, I further followed Josselson’s (2007) advice that:

We must be prepared to stay in relationship with the participant, to explain our purposes as fully as we can, to make transparent our choices in as kind a way as possible, and to be prepared to contain whatever responses the participant may have (p. 551).

I remain in touch with several of the participants in this study and have committed to sharing the results with some of them. Ultimately, the experiences that I share belong to the participants and the interpretation I made speaks back to their personal lives. For those reasons, it was important to me to design a transparent, supportive, and relational process as a matter of ethical import.

**Qualitative Notions of “Validity”**

I used Ellingson's (2009) conception of crystallization to ensure rigor. She asserts that nuance and complexity emerge when we interrogate our research from multiple angles. Instead of using documents, interviews and observations as the fixed points of data that make our research valid, crystallization:

combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers’ vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them (Ellingson, 2009, p.4).

Venus Evans-Winters (2015) asserts that this way of interrogating truth is consistent with the theoretical premises of Black feminist research. Considering that claims of “objective” research have marginalized Black girls’ experiences, Black feminist research is skeptical of paradigms adhering to positivist theoretical assumptions. Social science research designed to find a singular, fundamental (T)ruth is often conducted at the participants' expense, ignoring the complexity of
experience deemed peripheral to the research. Black feminist research, to the converse, leans toward the post-modern conception of (t)ruth Ellingson (2005) proposes. Evans-Winters (2015) asserts:

Black feminists have always proclaimed, for personal and political reasons, that objectivity in the critique of society is neither desirable or feasible in ongoing efforts to employ systematic investigation methods in combating White supremacy and male domination. Black feminism maintains that research with women and racial/ethnic minorities at the center of analysis is necessarily subjective, with the intent of promoting social change, self-knowledge and empowerment, or community uplift (p.135).

This work does not intend to provide firm answers to the questions it addresses (as positivist paradigms seek). Instead, it draws from a mosaic of approaches to demonstrate rigor. In particular: clarity in describing a dialogical process, textual multiplicity, and the use of theory and praxis in an on-going fashion to center Black girls' experiences, regard them as knowers, and ensure that their stories advance justice for them.

Conclusion

This womanist study used narrative inquiry to understand five Black girls' school re-entry experiences after exclusionary discipline. The girls' narratives were elicited through interviews, group conversations and field-notes and were compared to the perspectives of five administrators leading schools in the urban district most were attending. By centering the girls’ voices and representing them in comparison to those who are the gatekeepers of their experience, I offer policy implications and avenues for further research toward the development of liberatory schooling experiences for Black girls.
CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS

Research about Black girls rarely include their voices (Brown, 2013; Evans-Winters, 2011). This erasure is highly problematic because “good knowledge is knowledge that helps people and other living beings, promoting both balance and well-being within Creation” (Maparyan, 2012, p. 37). This womanist epistemological view suggests that research inadequately addresses the problem of Black girls’ over-representation among those pushed out of school when we do not hear from them. Also, we exploit their experiences when we “mine” their stories for data and neglect their needs (i.e., intellectual, physical, and spiritual) in the process. Chapter 3 relayed how I operationalized this kind of resistance in educational research. This chapter will show the results of my invocation of the “kitchen table” through narrative inquiry to ensure that the girls’ were seen, heard and honored.

I wanted to learn: 1) Black girls’ perceptions of school re-entry after exclusionary discipline and; 2) school administrators’ role in that experience. This chapter will show how Julia, Ayanna, Emily, Isis & Ti-Ti’s stories reveal shared experiences of stigmatization and playing (bad). Respectively, these themes refer to the material effects of the girls’ reputations and how their experiences caused them to give in to a (bad) girl performance. In response to the administrator’s role in their re-entry experience, the girls shared what I call null experiences. This theme describes re-entry interventions that had no significant impact on their school-based decision-making. The administrators describe themselves as caring agents in Black girls’ re-entry experience, showing their guiding theory and approach to encourage re-entering girls to adopt institutional norms. They also describe the considerable amount of principal power they have to both mete out and prevent exclusionary discipline.
This chapter represents these findings in five sections with each devoted to a theme. The girl's findings are relayed first, followed by the administrators'. The following themes address research question 1: What are Black girls’ perceptions of the school re-entry experience after exclusionary discipline? (See Tables 4, 6 & 8)

   a) The Stigmatizing Re-entry Experience;

   b) Playing (Bad); and

   c) Administrators as Caring Agents.

The following themes address research question 2: What role do administrators play when Black girls return to school after exclusionary discipline? (See Tables 7 & 9)

   a) Re-entry Intervention as Null Experiences

   b) Principal Power and Re-entry Interventions

I discuss these results in relation to Alice Walker’s (2003) poem “Be Nobody’s Darling,” which I feel best situates the girls’ and administrators’ perceptions and difficult circumstances positively (See Table 3). Doing so also reflects the womanist value of seeing the good in every living thing and thus, resists framing the girls and their stories through a deficit lens. I conclude the chapter by comparing the girls’ and administrators’ perspectives, showing the evident differences between their positions.
BE NOBODY’S DARLING

for Julius Lester

Be nobody’s darling;  
Be an outcast.  
Take the contradictions  
Of your life  
And wrap around  
You like a shawl,  
To parry stones  
To keep you warm.

Watch the people succumb  
To madness  
With ample cheer;  
Let them look askance at you  
And you askance reply.

Be an outcast;  
Be pleased to walk alone  
(Uncool)  
Or line the crowded  
River beds  
With other impetuous  
Fools.

Make a merry gathering  
On the bank  
Where thousands perished  
For brave hurt words  
They said.

Be nobody’s darling;  
Be an outcast.  
Qualified to live  
Among your dead.

(Walker, 2003, p. 193-194)
The Stigmatizing Re-entry Experience

Julia, Ayanna, Emily, Isis, and Ti-Ti’s stories show that being suspended, expelled, arrested or on probation caused them to gain a (bad) girl reputation. They describe the material effects of this labeling as stigmatizing in that they experienced a shift in treatment while in school. This shift occurred across social spaces including the classroom, among their peers and in the wider school community. Ayanna best defined the theme when she said, “…but the person who looking at you from the outside think you bad,” meaning that a (bad) girl reputation precedes them and, as the following examples demonstrate, influenced their treatment. Stories reflecting three categories show how the girls experienced stigmatization in different ways. Namely regarding Classroom Dynamics, Cost Relationships, and Questioned Credibility (See Table 4).

Table 4: Theme Definition - Stigmatization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Categories within the Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are Black girls’ perceptions of school re-entry after exclusionary discipline?</td>
<td>The Girls</td>
<td>Stigmatization</td>
<td>“…but the person who looking at you from the outside think you bad.” ~ Ayanna</td>
<td>Classroom Dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The material effects of Black girls’ (bad) reputation.</td>
<td>Cost Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Questioned Credibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Classroom Dynamics

Emily, Isis, and Ti-Ti shared that their (bad) girl reputation caused their teachers to change how they treated or viewed them. They said:

Emily: Well after the first time, [my teachers] really didn’t say anything, but like, after it continuously keep happening they would always think I’m doing something. They always call me out for something. Like, if I even look like I’m talking, the teacher would really just call me out.

Isis: I feel like I embarrassed myself because I let myself get out of character and I’m not that kind of person. Like, a bad, violent person. Like, a trouble-maker and I’m
not that at all. Like, I’m a very smart person. My grades are very good, so, but [the bullying] just took over. And people, like, just saw me as that kind of person after that happened. That was my first fight ever and…I’m pretty sure, like, my teachers that I was close with and stuff, they looked at me different and stuff like that.

Ti-Ti: Um, it would be, like, the teacher would be waiting for you to mess up again. Like, looking for the smallest thing cuz everything I do, she would say something – like, I could get up sharpen my pencil – “Don’t get up!” I have to sharpen my pencil. It’s just, like, little things. But, if another person, or somebody else did that, she wouldn’t say anything. She literally wouldn’t.

In the first group conversation during an activity where the girls were asked to move to certain areas of the room to indicate whether they agreed with a statement, the girls further discussed their treatment:

Erica: Ok. Teachers really know their students. [Erica paused while participants moved around the room]. Ok. Um, one person is neutral. Why are you neutral Emily?

Emily: Because, like, I know there was this one teacher that really, really, really knew me. But, like, the rest of the teachers - they thought they knew me, but they didn't. So, like, if I got mad, she already knew, like, what I would do or what to do when I'm mad. So...

Erica: So you're saying that because you had some teachers that knew about you and cared about you and because of that experience you're kind of neutral on that one.

Emily: Mhm.

Erica: Ok.

Ayanna: I'm neutral because, like, you got some teachers that know what's going on or you got some teachers that know your situation and sometimes they know how to handle it. Like, they know how to calm you down and stuff. And then you got some teachers that just don't care. Like, you fight, "Oh, you fin' to go home!" or if you cuss, "You fin' to go home." But then you got some teachers that actually know what's going on and they know what you going through and, like, they just know.

Erica: Ok. What about the disagree group?

Isis: I disagree because, like, they judge you just because you're Black.

Erica: How do you know you're being judged?
Isis: You could tell, like, when you're in a class with other white people and they're just like so happy when they talk to them and then their mood just change when they talk to you. You could tell. Like, you could feel when you're not wanted. Not that I care, but you could still feel it.

Erica: Ok. Why do you strongly disagree, Ti-Ti?

Ti-Ti: Because some people might have some stuff going on at home and then they might, like, have that same emotion at school and they're not gon' know anything. Like, the teachers - they know me from last year and they love me, but it's just like they don't know anything about me. They don't know if I'm having a bad day and I could just [snapped fingers to signal going off], but...

Erica: Do you feel like the school should know things about you?

Ti-Ti: Honestly, they just judge you by your records. Because when they see my records, they start looking at me different. After I got suspended one time, they all looked at my record and then it was just like they all gave me a whole different vibe.

In this conversation, Ayanna and Emily express that the stigmatization they experience is not totalizing. In their experience, they were able to find supportive spaces with teachers who could handle their behaviors. It would seem therefore that the stigmatization the girls’ experienced was not in every classroom or with every teacher even though most of them acknowledged that it still occurred. Isis and Ti-Ti describe classroom stigmatization as linked to their race and reputation. Isis felt that her teachers’ perception of her was different from her white peers in a negative sense. Ti-Ti on the other hand described her feelings of stigmatization coming after her teachers became aware of her past.

**Cost Relationships**

Emily, Ti-Ti, and Julia shared that they also felt a sense of stigmatization as it related to developing friendships. Emily shared two stories in particular, one about returning to class after her first In-School Suspension when she transferred to a predominately white school. The other, which occurred at the same school, was about a time when she tried to start playing sports:
Emily: My last day of [In-School Suspension], I went back to class the next day, but I know, like the people were like, “Oh, she’s bad. Don’t talk to her, guys.” I really do remember that because it’s what I heard for that whole class period. And I was like, “I don’t care! Blah, blah, blah, blah.” Like I had, like a really smart mouth. But actually, I did [care]. Because I tried, I tried to be friends with some of them, but I guess, I guess that situation made them not want to be my friend. Cuz, you know, none of them really got in trouble like that and if they did, it was probably just for talking in class and that’s it.

Emily: [Getting in trouble] wasn’t a good look in that space, cuz like, you’ll try to, like I tried to do something productive. Like I tried to be on the basketball team and the track team and like, I remember one time I was in the locker room and somebody was like, “Oh, that’s that girl that’s always getting in trouble. What’s her name? What’s her name?” Like, I remember that. So, like, ok…Um, cuz you really didn’t see the white people getting in trouble. So, like, I don’t know. I just…

In these stories, Emily describes a sense of alienation that occurred as a result of her (bad) girl reputation. In the months leading up to her first in-school suspension, when she was new at her school and trying to make a fresh start, she described feeling pressure to look and talk like her white peers. Emily shared:

I felt like I had to fit in there. Like, I had to change who I was to fit in there and it wasn't working. I thought I had to dress like them, talk like them, and all that stuff. But, I didn't like how I was. It was like they were preppy and you can't be, I couldn't be preppy. I tried, well, first, I tried to dress like one of the little white girls, but it failed cuz I didn't pull it off. Then I tried to talk proper. And I couldn't do it. They were always quiet in class, so I tried to be quiet in class. But I just had to talk to somebody! They acted really, really, like you had to spell every word right. You had to pronounce every word, spell every word right and all that stuff. Like, they didn't use "finna" or any of that. I really was [trying to start over], but then, I got caught cheating on a test and one of them told on me and I got mad and I cursed them out and, from there I got 3 days of ISS.

These stories describe how Emily started to disconnect from school even before she began resisting school norms.

Ti-Ti and Julia also talked about how their reputation got in the way of establishing relationships with peers although in different ways. They were both new to the schools they were attending and shared their reluctance to open up to their classmates:
Ti-Ti: Cuz, it, I see, I see all these other people in other people business talking about them and it’s not, it’s just like, nobody knows nothing about me. If they knew my past, then they would be like, “Oh…Da Da Da” and I don’t want nobody trying to judge the people on their past. Cuz I’m not that type. So it’s just like, I don’t, I just didn’t have no time for all that. Like, the people at my school, they’re just, like, some of them are, a lot of them are very judgmental.

Julia: I don’t want to go [to my new school] but I gots to. Cuz I don’t like people and people be all wanting to ask questions, be in my face and this and that. And I don’t got time for all that. Cuz they be texting me trying ask me and stuff and I ignore them. And I don’t have time for all that. [They text me] probably cuz I got a baby. They just want to be in your business and be nosey. Cuz that’s how kids at [my school] is.

Both girls describe being mistrustful of their peers. Such an experience is, like Emily’s, also alienating. The girls describe how difficult it was for them to make connections because they had been in trouble. Emily’s (bad) girl reputation caused some of her peers to avoid her, particularly those doing positive things that she wanted to join. In a similar vein, Ti-Ti and Julia also describe interruptions with peers. In addition to their testimonies above, Ti-Ti and Julia described not having friends across all of our research activities and more than any of the other girls. They would instead characterize the peers they socialized with as “associates” to indicate that they kept a certain distance from others.

**Questioned Credibility**

The girls also describe how their reputation caused their credibility to come into question. Julia shared why she felt that it was important for her to act mature:

Julia: I have a baby and you gotta act mature because sometime people ain’t gon’ take you serious. So you gotta act mature. And just in general, you act immature, people not gon’ take you serious sometimes cause they gon’ think you just a joke.

Here, Julia describes her need to present herself in a way that conveys that she is mature enough to care for her baby. She describes an awareness of the stigma associated with young motherhood and positions herself to resist this perception. Julia brought her daughter, Princess, to all of
our research activities and I witnessed how careful and loving she was with her. I also saw her navigate misperceptions of young motherhood. My field notes from our first transcript review meeting capture one such encounter:

As we were talking, Julia told me that she changes Princess’ diaper 3-4 times per day, but she mistakenly said, “I let her go 3-4 times when I change her” before correcting herself. Just then, the server – a woman who appeared to be much older than me – started telling her how bad it is to let a baby sit in an unclean diaper. She started to lecture her on the dangers of keeping a baby in a dirty diaper. I watched as Julia started to get upset. Her face became stern and serious, but she didn’t say anything in response. I defended her by telling the woman what she meant (the woman started lecturing before she heard her say, “I mean, I change her…”). The woman then started telling us about her grown children and grandchildren and questioned us on our orders…. Julia then told me how much she can’t stand being treated as if she doesn’t know what she is doing. (Field Notes, 10/4/2016)

I include this story to illustrate that both in school and in the community Julia has to defend her credibility.

Emily also described the loss of credibility that comes along with being stigmatized as a (bad) girl. She described times at school where she would break the rules with other people, but because of her reputation, was the only one to get in trouble. She said:

Emily: But, it really, I feel, when I got suspended I really feel like a bad person because, like, I don’t see anybody else getting suspended. But I’m the only person. Well, I would do stuff with other kids, but they wouldn’t get in trouble. I would because I – they’re gonna believe them because I have a record. Like, just to get suspended is crazy, so…

Here, Emily describes both the material and emotional effects of having a (bad) girl reputation. She talks about internalizing an identity as troubled because she was in an environment where resisting institutional norms was uncommon. Even though she was not the only person to break the rules, she describes being hyper-visible and more likely to experience exclusionary consequences than others.
Isis also described a sense of lost credibility. After receiving the maximum consequence for her first and only school fight, she was required through her school district’s policy to attend a tribunal hearing. At the hearing, the tribunal judges would decide whether the offense warranted expulsion to an alternative school. She said:

Isis: [Tribunal] was bad. Um, um, it’s just…you’re in a room with officers and stuff like that. And the people of the, little court thing – tribunal court. And when we went in there we knew that we didn’t have a chance because the man was White. Like, he just looked at us like, “Oh, they’re Black, like, I know why she’s here – probably fighting or something like that.” Like, I could tell, like the way they were looking at me, it was just so embarrassing. I explained [my situation] to them. We had evidence, um, I even told them how they came to my house even after the fight after school that day trying to fight. Um, um, they didn’t even feel bad. I mean, it was a – there were like four judges. One lady was Black, and the rest were White. Like you could tell, like, [the Black lady] was feeling sorry for me and knew that I didn’t belong there. And then the other ones were just like, “Oh, she fought. She’s here. She’s gonna get expelled” stuff like that. They all, like, went to the back room or whatever and, like, it doesn’t even look like they had a conversation – they just came out, like…Like, my Mom spoke. My Dad spoke. My Mom was a wreck. She was crying…everything. I just feel bad for putting [my Mom] through that.

Despite having an attorney, months’ worth of text messages and social media posts, and her parents’ testimony describing how they advised their daughter to avoid the conflict, Isis describes the tribunal judges as unwilling to consider mitigating circumstances. Like Emily, she also describes an internal element to the stigmatizing experience of school discipline. She felt guilty about her mother’s anguish over a situation that was very difficult to avoid. She goes on to say:

Isis: [I’m] embarrassed. I know I keep saying that, but it’s so embarrassing. Like, nobody’s gonna take someone serious who’s on probation. Like, it just looks bad. Even though people have their reasons and stuff like that. Like, I try to come [to the probation office] as less as possible cuz when I see people in there, like, I just feel like they just label me. Like, if the other kids out there on probation see me walking or something like that, they probably look at me, like, “Oh, she’s in here probably for drugs or fighting” or something, cuz that’s what Black people are known for. I just feel bad.

Here, she describes how her sense of lost credibility made her feel like a bad person.
At the first group conversation, the girls addressed the (bad) girl label. They defined “bad” as someone who disrespects their parents, does not listen, is loud, half-dressed, “ghetto,” stupid and skips school. They then negotiate these behaviors by pointing to the interiority of the experience:

Emily: I don't like to say that somebody is a bad kid. I just think they didn't have guidance.

Ayanna: Yeah. That. Cuz you got some kids like me. Like, I didn't talk to my mother or my sister so I wasn't telling anybody what was going on with me so they couldn't give me advice on what to do or how to handle it. So I was really, like, stuck. Like, so whatever happened to me, it happened cuz I didn't have it [guidance].

[The conversation shifted to talk about girls who disrespect their parents and are sexually promiscuous, but Emily brought the group back to address her point.]

Emily: Like, I was really trying to say, like, I don't think anybody is a bad kid.

Ayanna: Yeah. You're just misunderstood.

Erica: So how does this definition of a good girl influence girls? Like, do we have to be this?

Ayanna: No, cuz you could be that [pointing to list of behaviors defining a “bad” girl] and still be a good person.

Emily: Cuz deep down inside...you know what? I just thought of something. So, like, deep down inside you could be, like, the sweetest person, but like, you give off the wrong attitude or, like, you do some of that stuff [pointing to the bad girl list] but you'll go out of your way to do stuff for people you love. Or like, you'll see people on the street and you'll go out your way to do something for them. That's a good person.

Erica: So that leads me to ask, is there a such thing as a good girl and a bad girl?

Participants: No!

Isis: We're girls.

Ayanna: Some girls are just different. Some girls just do different stuff than what other girls do. It's all about opinion because you might not think you bad, but the person who looking at you from the outside think you bad. But you know what you can do and what you are.
This conversation points to the complexity of returning to school after the outside world perceives Black girls as (bad). Each of the girls had reasons for their behavior: Julia’s pregnancy, Ayanna’s search for meaningful relationships, Emily’s grief over the change in her family structure, Isis’ long-term experience with cyber-bullying, and Ti-Ti’s significant home life challenges. Still, their testimonies show how a (bad) girl lens obfuscates these significant challenges and disrupts their experiences in the classroom, their relationships with peers, and their credibility as members of a school community.

This tension harkens back to the first stanza of Alice Walker’s (1970/2003) poem. She writes:

Be nobody’s darling;
   Be an outcast
Take the contradictions of your life
   And wrap around
You like a shawl,
   To parry stones
To keep you warm.
   (p. 193)

Walker articulates the strength we also find among Black girls caught in the school/prison nexus. By nature of the fact that Julia, Ayanna, Emily, Isis & Ti-Ti have been “in trouble” at school shows that they did not meet the hegemonic standard of femininity Western society prescribes. Further, their experiences with stigmatization suggest that they are, indeed, “nobody’s darling.” Walker finds hope in this position, however, through her advice that being an outsider finds room for the many identities comprising Black girlhood. She asserts that it is in the process of embracing our contradictions that we find nurturance and protection.

I attempted to engage the girls in the practice of embracing the many pieces of themselves by inviting them to the kitchen table (See Appendices B, C & D). In the second group
conversation, they offered several strategies school communities can use to support Black girls who resist school norms (see Table 5).

Table 5: Strategies for supporting Black girls who resist school norms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Group</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Teachers                | • Slow down  
                          | • Be welcoming  
                          | • Stop favoritism  
                          | • Don’t judge  
                          | • Leave your frustration at home  
                          | • See the good in girls who play (bad)  
                          | • Don’t tell students other students’ business |
| Principals              | • Work with us  
                          | • Give us another chance  
                          | • Hire better teachers  
                          | • Listen to our side of the story  
                          | • Have a relationship with us  
                          | • Give us the help we need |
| Students                | • Mind your business  
                          | • Be friendly  
                          | • Don’t be two-faced  
                          | • Don’t hype each other up (instigate fights)  
                          | • Help them catch up on the work they missed  
                          | • Don’t be judgmental  
                          | • Stop exaggerating |
| School Resource Officers| • Be mellow  
                          | • Have a relationship with us  
                          | • Don’t treat us like criminals |
| Parents                 | • Believe us  
                          | • Be involved with your child other than when they are in trouble  
                          | • Have a good relationship with your kids  
                          | • Keep them on track in school |
| Support Workers         | • Counselors should focus on our life instead of just school stuff |

At the core of these recommendations is a call to see Black girls who have been in trouble as they are. Julia, Ayanna, Emily, Isis, and Ti-Ti call for school communities that see the totality of their being and reject notions that label them solely about what they have done. I assert that these recommendations are, indeed, good for all students.
In summary, the girls describe the school re-entry experience as stigmatizing. In the process of returning to school after a disciplinary infraction, they gained (bad) girl reputations. In effect, the girls became a target of blame for classroom disruptions, found their relationships with teachers interrupted, became alienated from peers, and lost their credibility. They also express that their stigmatization was not deterministic. Some of the girls were able to find safe spaces and teachers who knew their triggers and could effectively de-escalate problems. Still, re-entry experiences suggest that many factors outside of themselves made it difficult for them to adopt institutional norms.

**Playing (Bad)**

Three of the five girls describe embracing the performance of a (bad) girl, even when they disagreed with doing so. Emily best described this theme when she said:

> I was just always into something at school. Because it was like I didn't care. But I cared. I was showing that I didn't care, but I actually cared. Um...so, like, [when you’re suspended] like, I don't know. It's like people think you're okay, but you're really not okay so you have to pretend - like, play it off. And like, that wasn't really a good feeling. So I was like...Yeah, I was trying to be, like, all...I don't know…I really cared about everything, I just didn't want people to know that I actually cared. I was trying, I guess I was trying to play hard - play bad or something.

The girls describe different reasons for “playing (bad),” as Emily calls it. Three categories, in particular, emerged, with Ayanna, Emily and Ti-Ti discussing the performance as providing a sense of affirmation and fulfilling their search for relationships. They also discuss playing (bad) as a response to punishment (See Table 6).
Table 6: Theme Definition – Playing (bad)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Categories within the Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are Black girls’ perceptions of school re-entry after exclusionary discipline?</td>
<td>The Girls</td>
<td>Playing (bad)</td>
<td>“There’s no point in me doing good because I’m still end up here.” ~Emily</td>
<td>• Sense of Affirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls’ negotiation of hegemony after re-entry</td>
<td>• Searching for relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Responding to punishment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sense of Affirmation

Ayanna, Emily, and Ti-Ti shared that the consequences of exclusionary discipline were not always negative. They describe re-entry experiences where they also received positive responses from their peers when they returned to school. Their peers would celebrate them for winning a fight, take an interest in the circumstances surrounding their suspension, or the girls would become friends with others who were also in trouble.

Ayanna: Sometimes I was mad [during my suspension] because I couldn’t go to school…and I like school. [But when you get back], like, everybody be running up to you, be like, “oh, girl, you won that fight! Yeah! You beat her up!” and all that stuff. Just, after the first two days I got back, it went back to regular. Back then, it made you feel good. Like, anybody would feel good if they didn’t get beat up. But, now, when I really look at it, fighting don’t really solve anything. I don’t fight as much as I used to.

Emily: They would be like “Oh! Where’s Emily been?” “Oh, yes, girl!” Emily was suspended” and stuff…and then people would come up to me, “Why were you suspended? What did you do?” and stuff. And it would be people I didn’t like. I felt, I don’t know, I felt cool cuz everybody knew my name. Just, [long pause] I remember a lot of them, like, just calling me “bad” and all that stuff. But then, you know, other people, you know, people just like me, people – Black people, ok Black people. Um, ok, yeah, they’d be like, “Oh yeah, that’s that girl Emily. Yeah, don’t mess with her” and all that stuff. “If I ever need somebody to come fight me, fight with me, I got Emily.” And I’d just be like, “Yeah.” It felt really good. Yeah. I felt like I was doing something. Like, Like, I felt like I was known. Like, you know, doing something known.
Ti-Ti: [My friends will] be like, “Hey!” They be trying to hype me up and get me hype [when I come back to school]. They be like, “Yeah, you back! You back!” Like they’ll try to make me laugh. I just be like, I just laugh. Like they happy I’m back and this and that. Or sometimes they be surprised, “Oh, you came back. I thought you had a extra day off school.” Like…sometimes I be like, “Yeah, I’m back!” and sometimes I’m like, “No, I can’t get kicked out of here.”

In these stories, the girls describe the social capital they achieved in the re-entry experience. Despite the circumstances, their peers made them feel good about their (bad) girl performance. This point is not made to suggest that their peers (or youth in general) encourage (bad) behavior, but rather to point to how positive space can be made even in negative circumstances. If it was hard for them to adopt school norms because of their stigmatization, finding affirmation for playing (bad) among their friends made it easier for them to find spaces of acceptance.

**Searching for Relationships**

Playing (bad) also served the purpose of helping some of the girls find relationships. For Ayanna, this kind of affirmation was invaluable because her experience with bullying made having friends very important to her. She said:

Ayanna: I had to do something to make - to get friends and stuff like that. So, so like people felt like if you ain't skip school you lame. Like, like, some people is actually scared to skip school and stuff like that. But, at first I was scared too, but like, and then, like, when I first started skipping everybody wanted to be my friend. They'd always be like, "oh, you want to skip school with me?" and stuff. And I'll be like, "yeah." And then it got me more friends. But, it's not the kind of friends you actually looking for. Like, I was happy because I was getting friends, like, everybody wanted to hang around me and stuff. But I felt regret and like, deep, deep, down in my body, I felt like, "I know I'm a get in trouble, so why I'm doing it?" But I still wanted to do it because I wanted to go with my friends. And then, I knew, like, what if, like, "What if my Mama find out?" or something like that. Like, I knew I was gon' get in trouble, but it was more of a happy thing than a regret thing. It's not that I didn't want to go to school. It's just that I wanted to go with my friends. Like, like, if they didn't skip school, I probably would have been in school. Like, but if they did, I probably would've went with them. It wasn't about, “I didn't need to be there.” It was just that I wanted to be with my friends. I put my friends before I put school. Like, I would've chose to go with my friends before I chose to stay at school. Like, when I get up every morning, I be telling
myself, "Ok. I'm going to school." But then when I get there and my friend by like, "Oh, y'all want to go [a friend's] house?" stuff like that. I just be like, "Yeah. Why not?" So then we just go.

Here, Ayanna describes her need for friendship more than her need for school. She had mixed feelings: she did not want to get in trouble or miss school, but having friends outweighed the salience of school in her life. The context surrounding her schooling experience is also important here. Of all the girls, Ayanna attended the most under-resourced school. It has a long history of challenges with school violence, academic achievement, and high school completion. She described many unsettling and hostile experiences that occurred while she was in school. Considering this reality, along with her long history of being bullied, it is understandable why the school would have less appeal than making and keeping friends.

Ti-Ti also described the role of relationships in her decision to play (bad), although in a different way. She said:

Ti-Ti: [I support] myself. No one really [supports me]. I don't have no one to depend on. Like, no one be like – no one tells me, "I'm proud of you." No one be's like...or any of that stuff. I'm a say, I don't want [support]. I don't want it anymore. It's at the point where, like, I'm just giving - I keep giving up on myself, so...

Ti-Ti explains that because she could not find supportive relationships, she resigned herself to being (bad) or as she calls it, “giving up on myself.” Her description here is another side of the sociality of a (bad) girl performance. Because she feels that she has no one to depend on or anyone one who affirms her as (good), she does not see the need to be encouraged or persevere through school.

**Responding to Punishment**

Emily and Ti-Ti also describe playing (bad) as a response to punishment. Emily says:

Emily: So...I gave up cuz I made up in my mind that I didn’t want to get in trouble and I probably, I should’ve kept, like, going and keep trying not to get in trouble. I
know what it was, now! It was because if you get 3 or more days of [In-School Suspension], you can’t go on any field trips and it was a field trip. I think the field trip was Alabama or Savannah, one of those, and I couldn’t go and I think my Mom, she had put the money down for it. So, I couldn’t go, so I was like, I don’t even care anymore.

She describes a conscious decision to give up on adopting school norms because she was not allowed to go on a class trip. Her problems escalated from there until the school expelled her which ultimately led to her arrest and first commitment to youth detention. Emily describes how this experience deepened her commitment to play (bad).

Emily: And that’s when I was like, “Ok, well I might as well just do what I want to do anyway.” So, I just started doing what I wanted to do. Because I was just, like, I was hearing everybody else talk. They were like, they’d been in there for a long time. No matter what they do, they keep coming back. They try to do good. They keep coming back. I’m like, “Well, ok, there’s no point in me doing good because I’m still end up here. Because I’m already in the system, so it doesn’t matter. So I just started doing whatever I wanted to do.

After her final stay in youth detention, she had significant trouble transferring credits from the school she attended while in corrections to her neighborhood school. She said:

Emily: I did school while I was at [youth detention] but it didn’t transfer out. So that I was far behind. So I was really thinking about dropping out. I was like, I didn’t care about school. I thought about dropping out, but I went to the [military academy].

Fortunately, Emily was able to find a school that was a better fit for her. Although she originally did not like attending military school, she found inspiration among the sergeants (many of whom had also been in trouble in their youth). They challenged her in ways that motivated her to earn her GED and enter the workforce.

Ti-Ti also describes resigning herself to a (bad) performance because she had already met the worst possible consequences. She said:

Ti-Ti: I got kicked out [of school] again and got sent back to alternative school. And my behavior at alternative school – I did not care about nothing. Cuz I already was
there. I knew everybody. I was like, “I don’t want to be bothered.” Some days I’d skip school.

Of all five girls, Emily and Ti-Ti had the most extensive juvenile court involvement. Emily was arrested four times (3 times in the community and once at school), and Ti-Ti was arrested twice (Once in the community and once at school). In these cases, Emily and Ti-Ti describe punishment they received as an impetus for playing (bad). They did not see the need to adopt institutional norms because they already experienced the most severe forms of punishment.

The girls’ perceptions show that in addition to their sense of stigmatization, they were also lead to play (bad). Some earned acceptance from their peers and continued misbehaving to maintain friendships. Others gave up on meeting school expectations because they felt unsupported. Finally, some of the girls decided there was no need to conform because they already met the worst possible consequences. When schools do not see, value and affirm Black girls for who they are, particularly those who already face significant challenges both within and outside of school, they facilitate processes of alienation that push them out of school.

The two themes addressing the girls’ perceptions of school re-entry after exclusionary discipline: stigmatization and playing (bad) provide a glimpse into the long-term impact of exclusionary discipline in Black girls’ lives. The girls shared significant internalizing effects where they were made to feel that they were not only bad students but also bad people. Alice Walker (1970/2003) speaks to them in the second stanza of her poem when she writes:

Watch the people succumb
To madness
With ample cheer;
Let them look askance at you
And you askance reply.

(p. 193)
I read this portion of the poem to reveal how the status quo responds to the “outsider.” Walker’s (1970/2003) imagery parallels the contemporary educational policyscape. If policy-makers are “the people” we are reminded of the zeal with which zero-tolerance and achievement policies reduce them “to madness” (see Chapter 2). Julia, Ayanna, Emily, Isis, and Ti-Ti’s treatment shows how schools operate on the fantasy of an ideal student. Students who do not conform to the operating behavioral standard are “outcasts,” and schools view such aberrations with askance. Walker (1970/2003) articulates in poetic form how easily those who show difference are stigmatized and pushed out of school (see Chapter 2). Still, she ends hopefully by encouraging “outcasts,” again, to embrace their position by “letting them look.”

Re-entry Intervention as Null Experiences

Julia, Ayanna, Emily, Isis, and Ti-Ti shared that the interventions schools used to reform their behavior were ineffective. Some also described experiences where they felt that school leaders gave up on them or made it difficult for them to return. Taken together, I describe these stories as “null experiences.” That is efforts to encourage girls to meet behavioral expectations that had no significant impact on the decisions they made while they were in school. One category comprises the theme: Ineffective Interventions (See Table 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Categories within the Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What role do adminstrators play when Black girls return to school after exclusionary discipline?</td>
<td>The girls</td>
<td>Null Experiences</td>
<td>“Suspension is like nothing – a vacation.” ~ Julia School re-entry intervention experiences that have no significant impact on girls' school-based decision-making.</td>
<td>• Ineffective Interventions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ineffective Interventions

All of the girls describe interventions that did not address their problems. Julia equates her experience at court with school, saying that in both places adults spend a lot of time telling her what to do:

Julia: It’s [court] like nothing. School. People getting on your nerves. Cuz [they ask], "How you doing, Julia?" Asking me questions and you gotta sit there - wait all day! School, basically, yeah! [You have people] telling you what to do and what not to do and stuff. Sometimes I'm listening if they don't wear me out. Cuz if they wear me out it's going to go in one ear and out the other. [They wear me out] by just talking too much and just going on and on and on. And keep saying the same thing. So it's gon' go in one ear and out the other cuz I already heard it a billion times. They just always ask me how my baby doing. Tell me, um, stuff. Try to make me - try to tell me how they childhood was and all that stuff. Finish school and get a job and stuff like that. Yeah. And that wear me out cuz I heard it a thousand times. But if I'm listening, yeah. [I hear them] if they just say it one time and then go on to the next question. If they keep talking about it, it's gon' wear me out.

This description is reminiscent of Paulo Freire’s (2000) conception of banking education, where teachers view their role as depositors of information in students’ minds. Court officials and educators talk to Julia, instead of talking with her. As a result, she sometimes chose to tune out the professionals who wanted to see her behaviors change. Further, she also describes the structural practice of suspension as particularly ineffective:

Julia: [Suspension is like] nothing – a vacation. Nothing. It just feel like you be home on a regular day. Like you’re home on a weekend. It don’t feel no type of way. It’s boring, but, I don’t feel no type of way [about it]. [When you come back to school] it feel like you just coming back from the weekend – starting back school. It don’t feel like nothing.

Where the commonly held view is that suspension is an opportunity for students to experience the gravity of being unable to attend school, Julia describes the experience as having no effect. For her, suspension does not change her outlook on behavior. It only gives her time away before she starts school again.
Ayanna describes teachers who encourage her to respond to conflict in ways that are not possible:

Ayanna: [Teachers] treat you the same [after suspension]. Like, if they feel like you wasn’t wrong in the situation, they’ll treat you the same. But sometimes when, when you wrong, they’ll tell you you wrong. They be like, “You shouldn’t of did that” or something like that. All my teachers [tried to get through to me]. They would say, “They’re not worth it. Just walk away” and stuff like that. But back then, if you walk away, you’ll, everybody be like, “You scary! You a punk!” Like, they’ll call you out and stuff like that. So, that’s why people just fight…because they don’t want to be called a certain name.

Here, the teacher wants her to respond to fighting by walking away, but in Ayanna’s school context, that choice can exacerbate the problem. Her teachers’ response over-looks the complexity of students’ choice to fight. Isis echoed this point when she discussed her Mom’s recommendation that she see the school principal about her experience with cyber-bullying:

Isis: And, uh, I called my Mom and told her to come up here while they were talking to me and stuff like that. And she came up there and I already had told her everything that was happening and stuff and she was like, “Go to the principal. Go to the principal.” But the school doesn’t do anything. They just make the situation worse because, like, they’ll call the girls to the office and be like, “Oh, so and so said this.” That doesn’t do anything but make it worse. Cuz they’ll still talk about you even worse.

Ayanna’s story also illustrates this point. She says:

Ayanna: [School] was good. Um, most of the time. Sometimes it's not good when people be trying to make people laugh and all that - messing with people. It happens to me. Like, they'll snatch off my hat or touch me inappropriately...and stuff like that. Just to make people laugh. Because I got short hair. Because, you know, this generation, everybody about long hair with a weave and stuff. And I don't have that, so I guess they consider that ugly, like not to have hair and stuff. And like, they'll, you know how, like, sometimes when you're, um, when your little, your, um, butt crack be out some, they'll stick like a pencil or something in there. It's kinda weird.[long pause] I don't know [how to deal with it]. I just, I just forget about it. Or I write it up. Or I write it up and then I just let the school deal with it. [I’ll] go to the office and put in a incident report. So if something do happen, they'll already know. Because, the old me, I would've probably been got into a fight or something already so, if that time do come, they'll already be, like, they'll already know what the fight was for. [The office] don't do nothing. Like, they'll be like, "Ok. Y'all go talk" and then that's it. Like, like, they'll call the students up to
Here, Ayanna describes her attempts to document how she finds herself victimized by and in conflict with other students. She describes how she is pushed to protect her body and how she reaches out to administrators for help. However, like Isis, Ayanna describes her attempts to elicit support as ineffective. Getting administrators involved, in their experience, does not dissipate or even mitigate conflicts between youth.

Emily and Ti-Ti also describe ineffective interventions. The school referred Emily for counseling. However, her family was wary of mental health support services:

Emily: Oh, 7th grade, I know I got, uh, suspended for, well it was a lot of times I got suspended for fighting. And 7th grade, it's like, oh! It's like, so, I had anger problems. I don't have anger problems anymore, but this, um, this girl, she made me so mad. She said something. I don't know what she said. So, I just, you know how we had desks? Like, the little square desks? I, I, I picked it up and I was about to throw it at her. So, they were talking about expelling me, but they didn't. They were like, I need counseling and stuff, so my Mom she took me to counseling, but I wouldn't talk to her....well, my Grandma, I don't know, my Grandma always told us that, like, cuz she had to do counseling, too, but she always told us that they brainwash you. But I didn't feel comfortable talking to her. And [the counselor] tried to make me talk to her. Like, "you're not leaving here until you talk to me!" So I would eventually say "hey" and that's it. But, like, I really didn't talk to her or tell her what was, like, actually going on. So she suggested family counseling...and we did, we did family counseling, but I still didn't talk. I would just sit there. I just didn't feel comfortable opening up to, like, a complete stranger. Like, I didn't know you so why would I tell you my business?

And in a similar vein, Ti-Ti expressed the general difficulty she has with trusting people:

Ti-Ti: And like, I don’t have anything [at school] that I can actually trust. No one’s up here. Like a lot of people, it’s…a lot of people lost my trust back in the day. Like, my mother lost my trust. My father. Everyone. Like, so, I had to raise, like, I have to get, to get trust, to gain trust you have to give trust. So it’s like if someone trust me, it’s still gonna be hard for me to trust them. It’s just like, everywhere I go I feel like something is gonna maybe happen. Something sneaky. I can look around me, like, then the person right behind, it’s just like, it’s crazy. That’s the only problem. I never know when I’m gonna die. I never know anything. Sometimes I do [feel safe], sometimes I don’t. But I’m still ok.
Emily was uncomfortable with receiving counseling and resisted the opportunity to engage in it fully because of her Grandmother’s warning, and Ti-Ti held a general mistrust of people because of the challenges she experienced in her family life. These girls do not trust mental health approaches or those requiring a certain level of rapport (such as behavioral conferencing). Their experiences show that these types of interventions are not always appropriate or helpful, despite their common recognition as evidence of caring practice.

Lastly, Ti-Ti described adults who tried to appeal to her vanity to get her to change:

Ti-Ti: And a lot of people tell me “You're too pretty to get in trouble.” Like, "You’re too pretty to do this" and I'm just like, "ok." I be like, "Ok. I don't care. You can't tell me what to do" or this and that, like...Like, someone, someone, when I told somebody I was in alternative school they say, "You're too pretty to be in alternative school." I'm like [laughed]. I just laughed. They said, "You should be like a nurse or something." I was like...

Ti-Ti describes, here, people who tried to use traditional standards of femininity to encourage her to adopt school norms. They allude to the idea that “pretty” girls conform to institutional values and behaviors. They are nice, driven to achieve academically and stay out of conflict. Through the suggestion that she should become a nurse, they also seem to say that they want her to be more caring and patient. Ti-Ti suggests that this kind of appeal was not relevant to the choices she made and as so, had no bearing on whether or not she would adopt behaviors that were more amenable to school expectations.

Lastly, Ti-Ti’s first arrest experience described an intervention that was particularly harsh. It warrants telling at length:

Ti-Ti: First time [I got arrested] was in 6th grade when I didn't get up to go to lunch detention. [The officer] got aggravated so he just picked me up and arrested me. He wanted to say resistance of arrest. He said, you know, I wasn't resisting, I was just, like, I said, "What are you doing?" and then he was just, like, he, he, he got one of my hands and I hold on to the table. Well, I guess that is resisting. And then he slammed me to the door. He was like a redneck. [He was] very country
"You gon' do what I say!" This and that, like...I had, like, all the bruises right here on my arms and...I didn't want to go to lunch detention. That's the only reason. The lady had wrote it right in front of my face so I told her I'm not going because you wrote, you just wrote my name. And she was like, "you got lunch detention." I said, "No, I do not." Cuz my teachers would have told me. And then she had put the lunch detention paper right in front of my face and then she had wrote my name right there. She said, "you do have lunch detention see right there" and she wrote my name, like, right there in front of my face. I was like, everyone seen it, and I was just, like..."I'm not going!" She said, "I don't care." She called the assistant principal. He came. He said, if you don't go to lunch detention, I'ma have to call the officer." I said, "Go ahead, call him, because I'm not going to go! And I'm going to tell him exactly what I just saw and what you just did!" And then I told him what happened. I said, ok, I said, "Sir, I'm not going." I said, "I do not have lunch detention. I said she wrote it right there in my face" and everyone was right there and he said, "Y'all shut up! I'm not talking to y'all." They was making fun of him. They was like, "you want a donut" this and that, like. And he got in his feelings, I guess. And that's when he retired that year. After he arrested me, he retired that year. I really think, cuz, like, he seen...and I was gonna press charges cuz he had, I had bruises and everything and, like, he wasn't supposed to slam me like that in front of everyone. And so, I was gonna press charges on him. He took me to the county. To the jailhouse and they had did fingerprints and took pictures and this and that. They put me in a cell and I had to wait till my Mom came. I never went to youth detention. I just been to the jail house. I slept over there one time. It was, it was nothing to me. I was just laying down. I was just thinking about, like, what can I do in life...?

[When I came back to school] it’s just regular old me. Like, I guess, I guess it was like, “Hey, it’s me. I’m free.” I do sometimes [think about what happened]. I be like, I’m thinking, “I could’ve done better. I could’ve changed. I couldn’t have done that. I could’ve did something better with my actions” or whatever. I think about that sometimes. But, I can’t do nothing about the past so I stop thinking about it cuz it’s gon’ try to cause stress or something like that. Or pressure and all that and I don’t want that.

Ti-Ti’s arrest experience demonstrates that approaches to discipline that are severe can escalate problems, instead of ameliorating them. She felt slighted because she was assigned lunch detention in a manner that was inconsistent with the process she knew. As Ti-Ti protested, the adult involved an administrator, who upon Ti-Ti’s continued resistance, called the school resource officer. The resource officer, feeling slighted when her peers began teasing him (perhaps because they had taken her side), responded to her non-compliance by forcibly arresting her. I
acknowledge that this account only relays one side of the story. Still, it highlights how a rather inconsequential offense escalated into a situation where a resource officer abused a student and damaged her reputation through the authority of the school.

Ti-Ti’s story offers another example of the null experience in that other than reflecting on the incident, her arrest did not motivate her to adopt institutional norms. The next year, in 7th grade, Ti-Ti stopped going to school altogether which lead to a second grade retention. The school used an intervention akin to fighting fire with fire. In group conversation, Ti-Ti rhetorically asked:

Ti-Ti: Like, I'm going through stuff. Like, just, if I'm going through stuff and you could tell it by my actions and how I am, then why would you want to make me any worse? It's like you're testing me and see what I'm gonna do. And they still do that. They want me to get in trouble.

Ayanna and Emily second Ti-Ti’s sense that the schools they attended were unhelpful to the point of compounding problems. They assert:

Ayanna: Like, cuz, because, because you know, the school try to deal with so much and after you keep pushing it, pushing it, pushing it, that’s when they get the court involved. Because if they can’t do nothing, the court is going to do something about it. So once they get the court involved, they’re not responsible for you. Like, if you get in trouble, they calling the court. If you skip class, they calling the court. To some extent, they don’t even call your parents no more because they, cuz, cuz, like, when you, like, when you first being bad and they know, they know you not a bad person, they’ll call your Mama be like, “Oh, well, she keep doing this, she keep doing that, just talk to her” or something. And then, after they keep calling your parents, and your parents, and you still doing the same thing, they like, “Ok, we not gon’ call the parents, we gon’ get somebody else involved.” I did let it get that far. That’s why I had to go to court.

Emily: I feel like they saw it coming cuz I kept, cuz I kept getting in trouble. So, and like, you know how you keep, like, say you're a principal and, like, you know this girl keeps doing stuff and keeps doing stuff. You're not even going to say anything to her. You're not gonna try to help her do better. You're just gonna wait till she messes up again and just keep waiting. And then, when she hits that mark, just expel her. Like, nobody, well, I think I would’ve accepted the help, but I feel like nobody tried
to help. But my Aunt, she always told me. She was always there and she wanted me to do better and stuff. Like, I never sat down and had an actual heart-to-heart talk with any of them and like, they never asked "why do you do this?" They just give me my consequence and send me about my way.

In both experiences, the girls describe situations where school administrators make decisions that resign the girls to their perceived status as delinquents. In Ayanna’s case, the school ceded responsibility for her behavior to the juvenile courts. Emily perceived her school administrator as simply waiting for her expulsion, rather than offering interventions that sought to reach her holistically. She describes being willing to accept help, but that no one at her school offered her an opportunity.

The girls’ null-experiences suggest that their schools offered ineffective interventions that, in some cases, resign girls who get in trouble to their fate. Although exclusionary discipline intends to help students understand the weight of school separation, the girls did not describe interventions meeting this goal. Instead, they recall educators who tell them what to do and offer interventions that fail to change or exacerbate problems. When these interventions failed, the girls describe a system that marked them as delinquent, handed them over to the court system and did not facilitate pathways for them to return.

Walker’s (1970/2003) poem progresses in ways that are encouraging. The third and fourth stanzas, meant to be a response to the “madness” of “the people,” reads:

Be an outcast;  
Be pleased to walk alone  
(Uncool)  
Or line the crowded  
River beds  
With other impetuous  
Fools.  

Make a merry gathering  
On the bank  
Where thousands perished
Walker asserts that “outcasts” need not feel alone. Many offend the status quo (or are uncool). Applied to this study: Julia, Ayanna, Emily, Isis and Ti-Ti’s perceptions of stigmatization, playing (bad), and their null experiences with school re-entry after exclusionary discipline are just five of hundreds of thousands of other Black girls (Inniss-Thompson, 2017). Surely, there are many other girls treated as “impetuous fools” who, as these testimonies display, have much to offer from their position as an outcast. I think of Emily who said:

Emily: But if I were just, like, if I was a good kid, I probably, I'd still be in school. Like, I'd still be in high school right now. And, I wouldn't have a story to tell. Like, you know other people, other kids who get in trouble? I wouldn't have a story to tell them.

Emily re-iterated this point several times throughout the research process. She expressed that she would not be in the position to work, contribute to her family’s income, begin earning college credits, or help other incarcerated youth if she never went through difficult times. I certainly do not condone the treatment she endured to be able to do so, nor do I excuse the role she and the other girls played in disturbing their own and others’ peace. However, her point responds to Walker’s (1970/2003) concluding stanza:

Be nobody’s darling;
Be an outcast.
Qualified to live
Among your dead.

(p. 194)

Walker (1970/2003) asserts that conformity is not the gold standard, but difference is because our collective status as outcasts demonstrate our qualifications to teach those who are insensitive or, indeed, “dead.” The girls’ experiences position them to hold the esteemed status of “nobody’s
darling,” a place where white supremacist patriarchy is brought to heel through the unapologetic embrace of difference (Lorde, 1984).

I now turn to discuss the findings from the administrators’ interviews.

**Administrators as Caring Agents**

In contrast to how the girls characterize their experience, the administrators in this study described themselves as *caring agents* in Black girls’ re-entry experience. They explained how they work to establish caring school cultures rooted in relationships to prevent exclusionary discipline. When girls do get in trouble, they describe approaches to discipline that are tiered in nature and seek to understand and address the causes of behavior. Two categories, in particular, comprise the theme: Caring School Culture and Caring Interventions (See Table 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Categories within the Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What are Black girls’ perceptions of school re-entry after exclusionary discipline? | The Administrators | Caring Agents      | “…but where are we sending our children to? Who’s going to take care of them if we haven’t done all we can to take care of our students?” ~Ms. Baker Administrators guiding theory and approach to supporting re-entering girls is care. | • Caring School Culture  
• Caring Interventions                                           |

**Caring School Culture**

Dr. Maurice, Mr. Igziabeher and Mrs. Baker describe the centrality of establishing a culture of care in their schools:

Dr. Maurice: Your students have to feel that you care about them. Um, because they know between genuine, you know and "being fake." And so, that caring - if they know that you care about them, uh, then they're real less likely to get in trouble. And that is
big. They feel more compelled to actually open up and talk to you. If they don't see the caring, that's when they shut down and then that's when you start having the different, you know, outbursts, and them acting up, so to speak. Uh, if they feel that the love or the caring is not there. And that is big here with us. I think we have a staff that is nurturing from the top to the bottom. I mean, I think our custodians - I think everybody in our school actually really cares about our students and want to see our students actually thrive and actually win. You know, win on this thing we call life.

Mrs. Baker: And so when students are in a caring and nurturing environment, you know, they don't always think about [misbehaving]. Whereas, if they're in an environment where they're getting bullied or they don't feel protected, they might make a choice, "Well, I have to do something because no other adult in this building is trying to protect me. So I'll take matters into my own hands." Right? So, the choices and the decisions that I had to make, I would say, I didn't always put myself in that position - or the children - to feel like they had to make decisions like that. True, we had fights, you know? But, children feeling unsafe in my school wasn't the case. And again, because I understand that there's nothing out there in the community that they can be doing more important than being at school and learning. So, if there was anything that I could do as a leader to manage - well, not manage but to create the culture in my building that makes students want to be there and not put themselves in that position. So, no, I'm not a by the book kind of person. Right? Within reason, you know?

Mr. Igziabeher: Even though we have some segments that have immense poverty, we instill that there is sort of a difference in behavior that is expected here. Uh, and um, and it doesn't always loom on the threat of, "Oh, we're gonna kick you out of here" because no, we don't. I have not kicked out one child from this school. I have not had any weapons brought into the school. So, we really try to make sure that we're developing that culture so children can have that understanding of what is right and what is wrong.

Here, the administrators describe their intent to ensure that their students know they care about them. Dr. Maurice and Mrs. Baker assert that the palpability of care is key. Being genuine, nurturing and ensuring that children feel safe is at the core of their philosophies. Mr. Igziabeher emphasizes that no matter a students’ socio-economic status, he does not premise behavioral expectations upon exclusionary discipline.

Mr. Mabaruti, Mr. Owen, and Dr. Maurice describe the centrality of relationships and empathy in establishing a caring school culture. They shared:
Mr. Mabaruti: I approach...it's, I guess it's important for me to say that I think I approach them the same way. I think I approach the boys and the girls pretty much the same and mine is a spirit of, um, spirit of love. I think it's paramount that students really do know that you have their best interest at heart - that you care about them. And from there, you can kind of begin to relate or establish a relationship to the point that, um, you're not a threat or perceived as the enemy and you can begin to kind of try to begin to make headway on helping them develop into great people.

Mr. Owen: [I approach discipline] the same, really, with all students. Now, how I draw that out, again, will be different as I kind talked in the beginning about knowing your kids. Um, knowing how they are, um, knowing their background or where they're coming from, or just listening to them. And a lot of times, for me, that will drive what words I'll choose to say or even what approach that I'll use.

Dr. Maurice: It's always an open door policy where they can go in, flood my office - [and ask] "Can I talk to you?" And [my secretary] always has an open ear. And so, I think it goes back to, again, some of the stuff starts at home, but you have to have the right people once they get to school - those caring people, not folks that just come in here for the check.

Mr. Mabaruti asserts that he premises relationships upon showing care. Mr. Owen shares that the relationships he has with students help him determine the most appropriate approach to discipline he will take and Dr. Maurice describes the importance of being available to his students and having a team that shows the same commitment. These testimonies suggest that in the schools these principals lead, Black girls are surrounded by nurturing adults who know them and care for the well-being. As suggested by Mr. Mabaruti and Mr. Owen’s testimony, they do not receive differential treatment when they are disciplined; and approachable administrators support them.

Caring Interventions

When girls resist the culture of care these administrators work to establish and find themselves in trouble; administrators describe interventions that respond appropriately to the infraction and attempt to prevent it from occurring again. In this way, the administrators articulate a
caring approach to discipline. Across all interviews, the administrators describe a tiered-approach to consequences, with interventions increasing in severity as behaviors escalate or repeat.

Mr. Owen most comprehensively described the process:

Mr. Owen: The first step is always - after you've kind of recognized it - you sit down with the student and you make them aware of what you've observed from them. So, for our student, let's say it was for a drug matter or chronic attendance at school or tardiness or skipping class, um, you may have a one-on-one conversation with the student as an administrator. And that is the warning.... Um, along with that is a contact with the parent to make them aware of our observations and that we've had a talk with their child. In some cases, we'd be calling the parent in and talking with the parent and the child about what we're seeing. In addition to that, as it moves up the tier, you would bring a counselor in to have a further discussion if this is something that's continuing.... Um, as it continues to be chronic and intense, it could lead to a student being withdrawn from school.... And then, again, there's referrals to the social worker. So, it's really kind of a tiered step as you first try to address and it's not being necessarily addressed by the student or their parent. Um, and of course like anything else, things build, and then there's greater consequences later on down the line. Um, as some form of intervention to try to correct the behavior or, if it can't be corrected, whatever services we have available at the school are not enough or are not supportive enough, then it's a recommendation that the student goes to a school or a place or an institution that can support, you know, what they're not able to do - or what we're not able to do here at [the school].

Here, Mr. Owen describes a familiar experience to the girls in this study. When they first begin to misbehave, administrators warn them about their behavior, may call their parents, and encourage them to adopt institutional norms. If their behaviors persist, the consequences increase. The administrators and girls in this study described detention, lunch detail or silent lunch, and Saturday school as less severe penalties that do not interrupt a students’ class attendance. If misbehavior continues, the student can be assigned a less severe form of exclusionary discipline, such as in-school suspension (ISS). Administrators consider ISS less severe because it does not reflect on an official school transcript. However, it does remove a student from their regular classes for a certain duration of time. If behaviors persist following an in-school suspension, administrators may suspend students for ten days or less. Infractions that warrant a suspension beyond
ten days go to tribunal (as in Isis, Emily, and Ti-Ti’s experiences) where a board of judges determines whether to expel the student. Certain non-negotiable infractions, such as bringing alcohol, drugs, or weapons to school, and truancy can invoke a zero-tolerance response and bypass the tiered system of discipline. This sends cases directly to a tribunal or juvenile court (as in Julia and Ayanna’s cases). If the tribunal judges carry out an expulsion, they assign the student to an alternative educational placement for a certain length of time. Upon completing the assigned term at an alternative school, students are then allowed to return to their traditional school.

The tiered system Mr. Owen and the administrators describe is meant to serve as a measure to prevent harsh and explicitly punitive approaches to discipline. Dr. Maurice describes it this way:

Dr. Maurice: You see, it's one thing just to suspend a child and suspend a child. But, then if you had - you know that's punitive. But what did you do to actually try to change the child? And so, that's what we try to do. We try to come up with measures to actually say well, "I talked to them. The counselor talked to them. We think this person might need to be referred to the psychologist. They might need some other type of intervention." Well that other person is here in the building and that psychologist can go to the house and that's not punitive. They're there to provide, you know, a service. And yeah, the parent has to have insurance and all that good stuff. But, it's another service. I mean, how can we help provide a service? This child looks like he need or she needs some type of service other than just being sent home.

The tiered-approach to discipline the administrators describe suggests that Black girls in institutional conflict experience the consequences of resisting school norms in ways that are gradual and that are responsive to the nature of the infraction.

The administrators also describe behavioral conferencing – or the conversations they have with parents and students in the midst of their tiered-approach to discipline – as another caring behavioral intervention. Across all of their interviews, the administrators describe the purpose of behavioral conferencing as an opportunity to articulate the care administrators have for
students who present concerns. Mr. Owen neatly summarizes the purpose when he said that the conference explains to the student: “It is a moment. It happened. We hope you learned from it. We don’t want to suspend you again. We don’t think suspension is the best thing for you. So, we expect you to behave a certain way and keep yourself out of that and now let’s move on.”

In addition to this general sentiment, the other administrators offered more specific goals they try to convey through behavioral conferences. Mr. Mabaruti sees it as an opportunity to dissipate conflicts:

Mr. Mabaruti: If it's a conflict, it's detrimental for us because the very thing that got them in a position to not be in school creates a situation where they come right back and...So what we have to do is a lot of, um, try and do a lot of conflict resolution and mediation on our part, um, we do the best we can. We sit down with both parties - all parties involved. We discuss other ways to handle situations. We discuss what consequences would look like if it doesn't subside. Um, we do stay away agreements. Which are in my definition, kind of like a school restraining order. But, just like in society a restraining order does not stop somebody from, you know, approaching you, it just puts something in place that if they do, there are some punitive measures there.

Mr. Owen uses behavioral conferences to gain an understanding of and to address the cause of the problem:

Mr. Owen: So, it's always listening to them and even giving them the benefit of the doubt - to assume, has something happened to them prior to them coming or getting themselves in that situation? Did you wake up this morning and your Mom and Dad got on your case? Did you lose some money? Is somebody picking on you? So that when you came to that room and the teacher said, "Ok, put the cell phone up and you just went off! Well, typically when you're in that class, the teacher always tells the kids to put their cell phone up, but today you went off. I know that had nothing to do with Ms. So-and-so. So tell me what happened to you? Why did you go off? What happened today? You know? And 80% of the time, it is something that happened prior to. So, they've already come with, you know, tension. And already come to defensive and so now you've said something to them that just, you know, struck a nerve that was already tender right now and you've caught the blunt of something that really had nothing to do with you. And so, we talk about that and we deal with it.
Dr. Maurice, along with others, uses conferencing to help the student commit to changed behavior. He includes signing a behavioral contract and uses them to help the student meaningfully connect with the wider school community. Here, he describes the conferencing process when a child returns after attending alternative school.

Dr. Maurice: So, if they go to [alternative school] we have a re-entry plan. Everyone has to talk to the [Student Support Technician] person and it's a document and guidelines...where it says, "Ok. I'm going to do this. I'm going to do this. I'm going to do this." We sign it, the school SST person signs it and their parent signs it. It's almost like a contract - a binding contract saying this is how we're going to behave coming back....I'm asking them, because like I told you earlier, "What are you going to get involved in? What do you like? What's your passion?" I also help them with their schedule and pairing them up with the right teachers is pivotal, you know, when they come back. It's big. You know, like, making sure, "Ok, well she can deal with you." And I know my teachers. So I know the ones that when I get someone that's coming back in from alternative school setting that will have the tolerance and can deal with this particular student and not just gonna be sending that child, you know, to the office....So we go through a slew of that. It's a compact form they sign. We ask the students "The reason that you went to [alternative school], is it here at [this school]? ...And if they say yes, you know, then I have to do something. I just can't sit there and just allow them to come on in. We've got to have some interventions started. "Are y'all still having problems with one another?" ...And if so, that's when we get those parties together - the parents, the students and say, "Hey, this is a new day, you've got a new chance at school." And, you know, we set those parameters for them.

Mr. Igziabeher utilizes his counselors to address the conflict and to develop the students’ social-emotional skills:

Mr. Igziabeher: So, I have 2 counselors that...so, our re-entry process is that if a girl was suspended from school for fighting or something along those lines, uh, we have a, um, a re-entry process where it is mandatory that they meet in small groups. If it was a conflict between girls, we have 2 counselors, um, both will work in small groups to resolve the immediate issue. But then, on the bigger picture, um, one of the counselors spends at least 1 hour a day working with small groups of children, uh, and not just conflict resolution, but in preparedness to uh receive or to listen to others arguments....[We don't give] an adaptive response. We try to do a little bit more of a constructive response to, uh, those issues around we're going to develop you to be able to elicit and appreciate what somebody else says and value what somebody else says as opposed to your own paradigm.
Mrs. Baker used behavioral conferencing as an opportunity to support students with reflexive practice, to demonstrate benevolence and, like Mr. Igziabeher, to support them in developing social-emotional skills.

Mrs. Baker: Well, I would say that if there were ever a time that I had to suspend a girl and she came back off of suspension, I would have a conversation with that student. Because I always feel like it's important for them to hear from the principal and to let them know that "We don't hold anything against you. What happened yesterday is in the past and it's gone. So let's start fresh." Right? And, um, that always helps. I don't really ever know and can think of a time when I had to suspend a girl for an action and she came back to school after that without having reflected on her actions. Because we don't send them out without giving them something to think about. And then to have that conversation when they return, I think that's, like, critical and important. Um, because I always try to think of myself as the child and put myself in their position and their situation. And even as an adult thinking about, like, you know, I would want someone to have mercy on me or forgive me or work with me or ask me a question or find out what's going on with me - especially if it's not something that I would normally do. And so, I was never quick to pass judgment and to make - "You fought. You were in a fight, you're out of here." It was just not that type of environment. And I honestly believe that if more educators embrace the notion of being more nurturing and caring for our children and understanding that they already have enough social ills that they're dealing with and so, "What can we do to teach them - because obviously they're not being taught it - a mechanism of coping?" You know, adults tend to learn coping strategies somewhere along the way - maybe they learned it at home - but if you don't have that adult in your life that's teaching you coping strategies on things that you're dealing with - just like the students may not be taught coping strategies - that's another teachable moment for us - to teach them coping strategies.

In summary, administrators see themselves as caring agents in Black girls’ re-entry experience. They work to establish a caring school culture and use caring interventions to be proactive about and responsive to disciplinary concerns. Mrs. Baker articulates that she does this out of concern for the larger socio-economic context her students navigated:

Mrs. Baker: Some administrators would be like, "Oh, if she's causing a problem in my building, she's got to go. You know? She's got to get out of here." Um, but where are we sending our children to? Who's going to take care of them if we haven't done all that we can do to take care of our students. You know?
The administrators’ testimonies assert that the Black girls they serve are in a context of care and that interventions are meted out in ways that are gradual, appropriate, and supportive. Their philosophy and approaches suggest that they are aware of the “madness” through which Black girls navigate and that they create space for girls like those who participated in this study to “Be an outcast” as Walker (1970/2003, p. 193) advocates.

**Principal Power and Re-entry Interventions**

The administrators’ testimonies described their power within the school system to mitigate Black girls’ re-entry experiences. They articulated a consciousness of the risk associated with exclusionary discipline and explained that they have the power to use their discretion when handing down consequences. Two categories, in particular, comprise the theme: Discretion and Leadership in Discipline (See Table 9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Categories within the Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What role do</td>
<td>The Adminis-</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>“…our goal is to graduate students – not to put students on a pipeline to go to jail.” –Dr. Maurice</td>
<td>Discretion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>administrators</td>
<td>trators</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Administrators’ authority to mete out and prevent exclusionary discipline.</td>
<td>Leadership in Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>play when Black</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>girls return to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school after</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exclusionary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discipline?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discretion**

Three of the five administrators who participated in this study articulated how they use their discretion when handing down discipline. Although all of the leaders did not discuss how they use their discretion with exclusionary discipline, I still felt that it was an important theme to
include because it shows that within their school district, all of the administrators have the lee-
way to decide when and how they will use suspension, expulsion and school-based arrest. I begin
with Mrs. Baker’s discussion where she describes how she did not always follow school district
policy:

Mrs. Baker: I bent a lot of school rules for my students. And - I wouldn’t say school rules - be-
cause they weren't my rules. I would say, district policies. Um, because I feel that
discipline policies are general and they don't always fit your demographic of stu-
dents. They don't always apply and so I based it on the circumstance and the situ-
ation. And I ran my school like that. You know? Just because we have certain pol-
icies in place, I wouldn't say that I used every policy the way that it was written.
Because I considered my students - whenever I made those types of decisions.

She went on to say:

Mrs. Baker: I would say that the principal is the gatekeeper to everything that happens in the
building and how you handle it makes all the difference in the world. Um, and be-
cause I had that leverage, I took the liberties to maybe not always follow. You
know, especially when it came to something like a fight.

Mr. Mabaruti echoes this sentiment by articulating how he uses the student’s circumstances as
the basis for the decisions he makes:

Mr. Mabaruti: I feel that it's not a cookie cutter remedy for correcting behavior because every
circumstance or situation really is different. Every child is different. Every child's
home life is different. And so as we establish relationships with children enough
to know, uh, some of the intricacies about them as a individual, um, it could vary
as to what really needs to happen.

Finally, Dr. Maurice articulates the power he has to control the amount of time a student spends
out of school:

Dr. Maurice: I tell people all the time, the only way I'm really going to suspend you…really, if
it's a fight…. But we as an administrator can control the days that they go home.
They can go home 1 day, they can go home 2 days, they can go home 3 days, they
can go home 10 days.
These administrators describe a considerable amount of power as it relates to exclusionary discipline. Although their district offers guidelines that relay very specific consequences for certain types of infractions, administrators can choose when and how they will exercise those policies.

**Leadership in Discipline**

The administrators also describe a sense of responsibility to use their leadership role to encourage caring disciplinary practices among their faculty and staff. In particular, they encourage the use of reflexive practice and social-emotional learning as preventative approaches to discipline problems. They encourage both themselves and their teachers to probe their subjectivities and develop empathy for students:

Mr. Owen: ...[To] me, this is just a microcosm of this world out here that we live in where there's clearly differences between Black people and white people as far as justice and opportunities come. So, again, for the administrator or any person, it is your love and value for yourself as a Black man or Black woman, a white man or white woman, or whatever race you are, how, how and what is your perception of Black people? Now I can look at our children and I can sit here with a student and say, "Hmmm. You've been suspended at least 4 times, that ain't good. What's going on with you? Right?" But I'm coming with love and care and coming with that second chance mind-set after talking further with that student to see where their mind is right now....

So, as the one who has the power and the authority to make the decision on the opportunity that the student should have, how do I see our children? Do I see myself as a Black man when I look at the little Black boy and the Black girl? Do I see family? Do I feel that connection? For me, it's yes. I don't know if that's the case, of course, with other Black folk. I like to think it is. And then for the white teacher, does the white teacher look at our children as they're looking at their own children? And say, "Children are children. You made a mistake. Did you learn from the mistake? I believe you learned. I want to see you do well. So, from this case let's go ahead on. Make me proud. Don't make me regret my decision by giving you this opportunity or providing this for you. So, um, it is all about perception of self. It is all about perception of the children that you are dealing with and how you feel about them and how you identify with them, that I believe makes the difference.

Mr. Igziabeher: There's a premise that you have to develop the whole teacher. My job as an administrator is to develop the whole teacher. Not only do I have to develop his or
her instructional practices or strategies and help them develop their curriculum, but then I also have to help them develop the characteristics of what is a good teacher. Right? Developing that piece for where you have empathy for children. Where you have understanding and appreciation of varying cultures - because like I mentioned to you before, there are a number of different cultures inside of this building. Right? And so, I have to help teachers and teachers have to be cognizant of - and even in something as simple as issuing homework - you have to make accommodations, you have to have the empathy piece around understanding if a child - If you told Timmy to go home and do his homework and you gave him 10 problems to do and he only came back with 2, uh, you have to understand that maybe Timmy's household is a little different than Jamal's. Jamal has space. He has a desk in his room. He has a computer in his room. Whereas Timmy might go home and there's a different man standing in his house with a red cup in his hand talking crazy. There may be different people or it might not be conducive to homework in his household. It might not even be furniture…So, that's the stark reality that teachers have to have an understanding of. And that helps them fulfill their whole purpose. So, becoming a master teacher around all of that, uh, is being able to guide children equally through all of that.

Mrs. Baker: Um, if it were something that - say, if the child used profanity against the teacher. You know? It was more so pressure from teachers to do an action, you know? Have an immediate action for a student and one that was what they would consider a necessary action to make it known that this is what the student did and they should have some severe consequences for this. So, it was more so pressure from teachers. In the teacher's mind it's "Something should be done about this!" You know? "This child should be suspended!" That is their first thought - "This child should be suspended." Um, but, I felt like it was my duty to even educate the teachers on understanding that we don't suspend for everything. We won't suspend for everything. There is a cause for a conversation to help the student - because every moment is a teachable moment. Even teaching students discipline is something that we do and you should do. And not the first action be to some severe consequence. You know? If it were an action that was repeated continuously, then I would have to make a different decision. But most of the time, in my experience, just by listening to that child and understanding and helping them to understand their own decision and to critically think about their actions and the consequences of their actions makes a difference. And it made a difference.

The administrators include fostering an intersectional understanding of students in their role and encourage their teachers to probe their subjectivities and develop empathy. Mr. Owen sees that work as being steeped in teachers’ and administrators’ self-understanding, Mr. Igziabeher encourages teachers to learn about their students beyond the classroom, and Mrs. Baker encourages teachers to back off of punitive perspectives. These administrators conceptualize the role of the
school district in Black girls’ lives as one that proactively works to understand and have empathy for them beyond the behaviors they present in school.

Some of the administrators also described an explicit emphasis on social-emotional learning as an arbiter of school discipline. Dr. Maurice and Mrs. Baker said:

Dr. Maurice: We do, like, SEL - Social-Emotional Learning – on Mondays and Thursdays where we're talking about those issues at home, those tough issues and things of that nature. And so a lot of that is done on the front end and students are able to talk about their problems to their teachers and in a group with other kids - to talk it out before they, you know what I'm saying, start. "I had a hard day at home." And so we know about those issues up front versus...

Mrs. Baker: And so, um, we would have conversations with the girls aside from the boys. The female teachers would have conversations with the girls aside from the boys and things like that seemed to help. You know? Having those personal conversations. Because for me as a principal in a community like that, uh, and the community that I served in, I knew that it was more than just books. You know, I wasn't driven - I wasn't one of those principals who was driven by test scores or who was driven by these mandates to have these amazing test scores. I knew that if we met the students where they were and we considered the educative types of experiences that they brought into our building and we embraced the whole child, then we could make a difference - that that could make a difference in how they performed academically. Right? And so, um, you know there were times when we may not have had science that day. We would alter our schedule so that we could do things and have conversations when we needed to…We would not be so concerned with total academics that we didn't take the time to have these healthy types of discussions about things that interested students or things that they were dealing with that they wanted to talk about in these small groups.

So, in addition to encouraging staff to probe their subjectivities and develop empathy, some of the administrators also provide opportunities for students to be supported emotionally in the structure of the school day. Doing this suggests that the administrators encourage girls to adopt institutional norms and develop their emotional health through curriculum and instruction.

Although he was the only administrator to do so, Dr. Maurice described his approach to staffing as another important factor in easing girls’ re-entry experiences. He explains:
Dr. Maurice: I also help them with their schedule and pairing them up with the right teachers is pivotal, you know, when they come back. It's big. You know, like, making sure, "Ok, well she can deal with you." And I know my teachers. So I know the ones that when I get someone that's coming back in from alternative school setting that will have the tolerance and can deal with this particular student and not just gonna be sending that child, you know, to the office. Because, you know, we're not just gon' have students sitting up there in the office. I mean that's just...the office is for parents, you know, and for guests. It's not for students to sit up there. And so, I need somebody that I can pair that child with that's gonna be able to teach this child and also, you know, what I'm saying, um, be compassionate and that likes kids and can redirect them prior to them sending them to me.

Here, Dr. Maurice suggests that administrators can develop positive school experiences by thoughtfully developing class rosters. Doing this serves as another example of how the administrators in this study use their leadership role to intervene in Black girls’ re-entry experiences.

In summary, the administrators use their power to extend their role as caring agents into the structure of schooling. Their testimonies suggest that they use discretion when administering discipline, making decisions based on the relationships they have with girls and the context surrounding an infraction. Some even describe turning a blind eye to district policy when they feel that particular mandates are too harsh or fail to take surrounding circumstances into account. Administrators also use their leadership role to prevent and address discipline issues. They encourage their teachers to engage in reflexive practice, include social-emotional learning as a regular aspect of the curriculum and, in the case of one principal, consider class roster development a key component. These testimonies suggest that principals use their power toward developing culturally relevant, supportive schooling environments. It is important to note here, that the administrators acknowledged that they met this ideal with varying degrees of success. However, the practices described represent how they attempt to ensure that girls who resist institutional norms navigate school cultures that are sensitive and responsive to their holistic needs. As a group, the administrators articulate a commitment to a social justice leadership orientation that resists racial
disparities in school discipline. As with their caring sentiment, these administrators articulate their ability and attempts to develop space for “outcast” thinking (Walker, 1970/2003).

**Conclusion**

The girls and administrators have markedly different perceptions of Black girls’ re-entry experiences. Julia, Ayanna, Emily, Isis and Ti-Ti describe it as stigmatizing while the administrators offer that Black girls in the schools they lead have many opportunities to establish relationships that alleviate institutional resistance. The administrators describe themselves as caring and use interventions that are responsive to the causes of girls’ infractions. Although the administrators assert that they use their power with discretion and their role as leaders to support students’ social-emotional growth, the girls describe interventions and larger school cultures that were uncaring and harsh. In response, most of the girls resigned themselves to play (bad), even when they did not want to.

This stark contrast suggests that there is a disconnection between administrators’ efforts and how girls experience them. What is clear is that the administrators’ conceptions of care are not in line with the girls.’ This tension suggests that some Black girls are passive parties in their re-entry experience as they remain subject to administrators’ practices, no matter the degree to which their interventions purport to be caring. The girls’ narratives evidence this point as each one talked about how conversations with well-meaning professionals were particularly ineffective. To begin to develop authentically supportive approaches to school re-entry for Black girls who find themselves in institutional conflict, we need to begin to move toward student-centered frameworks for social-emotional support that are as concerned with radically redeveloping school infrastructure as they are with behavior modification.
CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to describe Black girls’ re-entry experiences after exclusionary discipline. Two questions guided this work:

- What are Black girls’ perceptions of the school re-entry experience after exclusionary discipline? and
- What role do administrators play when Black girls return to school after exclusionary discipline?

This chapter will discuss my findings as they relate to existing research and will offer policy recommendations toward the construction of healing informed schools for Black girls who embody behavioral difference. Finally, I offer possibilities for future educational research.

The Social Effects of Exclusionary Discipline in Black Girls’ Lives

The girls’ descriptions of their re-entry experiences demonstrate the on-going social effects of exclusionary discipline. They describe social consequences in the classroom, among their peers, and in the wider school community. They became the target of blame when classroom disruptions occurred and described interruptions in their relationships with peers, teachers, and families. These findings are consistent with those documenting the effect of exclusionary discipline in students’ lives and also in Black girls’ schooling experiences. Suspension and expulsion have academic consequences (Pane & Rocco, 2014; The Advancement Project, 2005) and Black girls face scrutiny in school because of their racialized gender (Morris, 2007; Jones, 2009; Blake et al., 2011; Hannon, Defina & Bruch, 2013). The results of this study, then, offer additional evidence that “Black women and girls still have to negotiate pejorative assessments that are imposed on our bodies, which permeate the social world in which we live and learn” (Haynes, Stewart, & Allen, 2016, p. 382).
The girls’ narratives also demonstrate that the re-entry experience fosters personal resignation in a (bad) girl performance. As much as their reputation alienated some from their peers, it endeared them to others. Winning friendships by playing (bad) offered opportunities for them to find support in circumstances where they were otherwise rejected. In a similar vein, some of the girls continued to resist institutional norms after exclusion because they had few supportive relationships. They felt that there was no need to meet the schools’ behavioral expectations because they did not have people who affirmed them as (good).

These findings, which highlight the centrality of relationships in girls’ schooling experiences, are consistent with the literature. Research has shown that the effects of relational aggression (i.e., social exclusion, rumors, gossip) are more pronounced among girls (Crick, 1995) and is associated with depression and withdrawal (Platt et al., 2013). Given this, it is understandable how the social capital some of the girls earned or the disconnection they felt from others contributed to their decision to continue playing (bad). Lastly, the girls’ described staying in disciplinary cycles in response to punishment. Because they already met the worst possible consequences – having been suspended, expelled, arrested or committed to youth detention – they felt that adopting institutional norms was pointless. This finding is consistent with Mayer’s (1995) who found that punitive discipline is rarely effective among students who frequently get in trouble. As a whole, these findings are consistent with similar studies demonstrating that negative school experiences over time, even those that are minor, contribute to Black girls’ decisions to disconnect from school (Morris & Perry, 2017).

In stark contrast, the administrators perceive a caring re-entry experience in the schools they lead. They emphasize the necessity of establishing relationships with girls who resist institutional norms and stress being approachable and available to them. They frame certain behavioral
interventions, namely tiered disciplinary consequences and behavioral conferencing, as caring interventions meant to understand girls’ resistance. They use a relational approach to dissipate conflicts, address the causes of behaviors, and support girls in finding motivation and meaningful connections in school. They also engage girls in reflexive practice about their behavior by asking them to think about what they have done, envision new ways of being in school, and to pledge that they will not get in trouble again. In doing these things, they intend to provide girls with opportunities to connect with nurturing adults who know them well. Their goal is to support youth in understanding the value of adopting institutional norms, and they operate on the assumption that doing so is in the girls’ best interest. These perspectives and approaches differ greatly from how Daniel Losen and Jonathan Gillespie (2012) characterize urban administrators’ response to misbehavior. Their work shows that administrators, particularly those in high-poverty areas, see authoritarian leadership and exclusionary discipline as the preferred strategy for behavior management.

**Competing Notions of Effective Re-entry Interventions**

As it relates to administrators’ role in Black girls’ re-entry experience, the girls describe certain “null experiences” or ineffective behavioral interventions educators used to encourage them to adopt institutional norms. They told stories about school and court professionals who lectured them on their behavior, who intervened with mental health approaches that conflicted with their personal histories, and who offered implausible strategies to stop conflicts. Some were also encouraged to change based on prescriptive standards of femininity, and for others, violence was used to force their compliance. Some of the girls also described feeling abandoned by school leaders by being written off as delinquents and left to the mercy of the courts. These re-entry interventions demonstrate how Black girls’ voices, cultural cues, social contexts and values can be
ignored when they break school rules. In addition to the classroom, where misread cultural cues and ignoring socio-historical context increase risk for school discipline (Irvine, 1990; Jones, 2009; Leff et al., 2015), these findings suggest that cultural irrelevance permeates the re-entry experience. The girls’ experiences show that they were stigmatized and treated like delinquents. They were not invited to share their perceptions of or willingness to accept help, and in some cases, the larger circumstances surrounding their behaviors were ignored or given inadequate consideration.

The administrators described the considerable amount of power they have in shaping girls’ disciplinary and re-entry experiences. Despite the school district’s clear disciplinary policy, they are free to use discretion in meting out consequences and have the authority to implement preventative measures to deter misbehavior. These findings are similar to others on administrator discretion in school discipline (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Findlay, 2015). Administrators are afforded wide latitude in how they respond to cases. How they choose to exercise power is based on their personal and professional values and certain external factors like context, expectations of stakeholders, and resources. The administrators in this study did not like exclusionary discipline or see it as helpful. However, they viewed it as a necessary evil and reserved its use in violent circumstances. This finding is also consistent with administrator perspectives in the literature, with some viewing exclusionary discipline “an essential aspect of knowledge developing and identity formation…” (Hawkes, 2011, p. 141). Still, at the core of their perspectives was an orientation toward social justice that implored them to do whatever was in their power to prevent pushing students out of school.
In service of this, the administrators described the importance of reflexive practice, social-emotional learning, and in one case, staffing as key mitigating factors in successfully re-acclimating girls to school life after a period of exclusion. Some of them use their role to support teachers in developing empathy for students, gaining an understanding of students’ home lives and resisting punitive consequences. Others value social-emotional learning and use curriculum and instruction as an opportunity to support girls when they return to school. These findings show that the administrators in this study work to create empathetic and supportive environments for girls to return to after exclusionary discipline. This finding is, again markedly different from how their role is characterized in the literature (Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

**Sources of the Tension between Narratives**

These findings further evidence the complexity of the school-to-prison pipeline (American Bar Association, 2016). Black girls who find themselves pushed out of school are not always ushered along a linear pathway through the use of zero-tolerance policies (Morris, 2016). There are also subtle experiences of alienation and unproductive attempts at intervention that invite them to give up on schooling. Being marked as (bad) has material effects that surpass an exclusionary event.

The administrators in this study demonstrate an awareness of this and describe an array of approaches intended to resist the school/prison nexus. Still, the girls describe educational settings where educators either did not or failed to implement these kinds of strategies. This point suggests that: 1) the level of critical consciousness about and strategies used to interrupt school to confinement pathways were not in play at the schools the girls attended or; 2) the approaches the administrators describe are not easily implemented or used across school settings.
Very little research probes administrators’ philosophies on discipline, making it difficult to address whether the administrators are in the minority (Smith & Hains, 2012). It has been documented, however, that principal preparation programs do not emphasize the salience of racial equity (Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Trujillo & Cooper, 2014). Also, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, which guide new administrators in their approach to leadership, does not adequately address school equity (DeMatthews, 2016). Given this, it is not unreasonable to assume that the caring ethos the administrators describe is in opposition to the status quo.

The neoliberal educational policy-scape is antagonistic to caring interventions seeking to reconnect (bad) girls with school. Thus, it is difficult to implement student-centered approaches to discipline. Corporeal control is a fundamental necessity when measuring achievement by standardized tests, and teacher quality by value-add performance (Fuentes, 2003; Fuentes, 2014). Exclusionary discipline offers a quick and easy way to be rid of students who distract from the task of demonstrating proficiency. Also, principals within the neoliberal context stretch in many different directions. They are subject to policies and initiatives impressed upon them by the school district, are forced to make decisions in the midst of stakeholder’s competing interests (i.e., private partnerships, philanthropy, parents, students, teachers), and spend a lot of time dealing with competing demands within the school community (Spillane et al., 2002; Johnson & Fauske, 2000; Greenfield, 1995; Cranston, et al, 2006; Theoharris, 2007). As a result, administrators tend to provide equity for some students, but struggle to do so for all (DeMatthews, Mungal & Carrola, 2015). Maintaining a philosophy of care and being able to realize it are two different things. As DeMatthews, Mungal & Carrola (2015) assert: “Thus, a principal’s social justice orientation or worldview is necessary and important to the creation of more socially just schools, but not sufficient given the complexity of schools and decisions” (p. 17).
Another factor that may account for the tension between narratives is a disconnection between systemic perceptions of care and girls’ perceptions of care. The administrators characterize tiered responses to behavior and behavioral conferencing as strategies used to understand and intervene in behaviors. However, these approaches do not mean that relationships are evident or that administrators hear girls’ voices. As many of the girls explained, some of the adults who tried to reach them thought they “knew” them, but in reality did not. It is important that educators avoid using behavioral conferences as proof of care. Doing so might be akin to coercing them into adopting institutional norms because they:

allow the educator to adopt a savior perspective and mistakenly see his or her role as saving the poor student by extirpating him or her from a culture of pathology and then remaking him or her into the image of the educator = savior (Cammarota, 2011, p. 252).

This point is not made to suggest that administrators and teachers knowingly enact a sense of false generosity (Friere, 2001). They, too, are subject to the hegemonic nature of the neoliberal educational system. As so, part of their responsibility is to manage and, perhaps in futility, attempt to correct the disparities neoliberal educational policies and practices produce (Cammarota, 2011). Still, the discourse of deficiency surrounding Black girls thrusts educators, particularly those in urban schools, into a line of thinking suggesting that they need to save students who do not conform. Educators are not saviors, but they can be conduits of critical thinking who invite girls to become active agents in their educational experiences, especially in moments when their behaviors come into conflict with the mission of the school.

It is important to acknowledge here, though, that the girls’ reasons for “misbehavior” were valid responses to the larger difficulties they faced in their lives. Instead of viewing their resistance as anti-social behavior, it should have been seen as a response to conditions that did not work for them in a given moment. Doing would have allowed educators to respond in ways
that are culturally sensitive, makes room for girls’ agency, and frames their behavior in terms of difference instead of disorder. Punishment erased Julia and Ayanna’s longing for connection, Emily’s grief, Isis’ self-defense, and Ti-Ti’s feelings of abandonment. Instead of finding space for these emotions, schools reduced them to the deficit perspective that they made bad decisions and placed the onus on them to reform. This meritocratic notion absolves schools from facing the institutional factors that are also at play in “misbehavior.” I do not make this point to suggest that girls should not be held accountable for decisions they make that harm the school community, but to show that girls and schools are actors in a mutual relationship. School behavior is mutually constituted (Vygotsky, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Efforts to develop harmonious and intellectually engaged school communities must acknowledge and address the behaviors of both the student and the school.

The girls faced immense pressures in both their home and school lives. They were in active resistance in multiple ways as some fought against poverty, others persisted through the pain of past abandonment and abuse, and all were working to be seen, heard and loved. Experiencing rejection from school (in the many ways they described) offered another site of struggle in situations that were already challenging. From this perspective, their behaviors are not surprising or unwarranted. Why should girls conform to patterns and processes that do not know or recognize theirs? Defiance is not always bad. It is a strategy and response that has preserved and sustained Black women throughout herstory (Lerner, 1972; Hunter, 1997; Morris, 2016). Educators should view resistance as valuable feedback to inform practice instead of a threat to performance. The girls’ experiences show as Morris (2016) asserts, that “when the way of the world includes a
general lack of cultural competence and an aversion to valuing the unique considerations of gender, these survival characteristics are degraded and punished rather than recognized as tools of resilience” (p. 19-20).

This study adds to the existing research documenting Black girls’ school-to-confinement pathway experiences and builds upon it by articulating re-entry experiences in specificity. The girls’ stigmatization and personal resignation evidence the alienating and internalized effects of exclusionary discipline. The girls’ null experiences demonstrate unhelpful responses to complex life situations that play out in school. The administrators’ conceptions of care in school discipline demonstrate a consciousness of the salience of social justice orientations in school leadership. However, the tension between narratives, suggests that further work in both policy and practice needs to be done to ensure the creation of safe and engaging learning communities for Black girls who show behavioral differences.

Policy Implications: Toward the Abolition of Exclusionary Discipline

The administrators in this study acknowledge the harmful effects of exclusionary discipline through their unanimous assertion that they are reluctant to use the practice and, at times, ignore discipline policies. Still, they use removal processes in circumstances where they feel doing so is warranted. The girls’ experiences assert, however, that being removed from school disconnected them from the promise and possibility of education and in some cases, worsened the problem.

Administrators who suspend, expel or arrest students, even with reluctance, rely on the assumption that the inherent importance of school is valuable enough to make students want to be there. This logic erases the values, context, and needs of students whose difference, behavioral or otherwise, comes into conflict with the schools. It also overlooks the consistent pattern of
results in educational research documenting the harmful effects of exclusionary discipline (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Kirk & Sampson, 2013; Perry and Morris, 2014). Considering these things, schools and school systems should consider approaches moving beyond school removal by acknowledging the co-constructed nature of behavior and offering youth-centered and restorative approaches to student engagement. Morris (2016b) asserts:

“We can shift this paradigm. Education is a critical protective factor against involvement with the criminal and juvenile legal systems, and schools can be powerful agents in the successful life trajectories of black students. But safety cannot be implemented; it must be co-constructed. Schools can operate in ways that respond better to the needs of black girls by intentionally creating healing-informed learning spaces” (p. 51)

Youth-centered education and restorative models of behavioral intervention are central to ensuring Black girls’ health and well-being. Particularly among those who have experienced trauma and hardship. Also, policy-makers and educators should actively resist zero-tolerance policies and others working to criminalize Black girls in school. In doing so, they acknowledge the close institutional relationship between schools and prisons (Davis, 2003) and begin to unpack the taken-for-granted assumption that exclusionary discipline is a “natural” response to behavioral difference.

In light of this, some U.S. school districts have developed policy responses to misbehavior that move away from pushing students out of school. California, Connecticut, Florida, New York, and Oregon banned suspensions for minor infractions and in some states, altogether among very young children (Shah, 2013; ACLU, 2014; Megan, 2015; Associated Press, 2015; Dominus, 2016; Williams, 2016; Allen, 2013; New York City Department of Education, 2016). There is also a growing commitment to decriminalize student misbehavior through restorative justice and other alternative behavioral approaches (Ashley & Burke, 2016). However, policy reform to reduce exclusionary discipline rates but still maintain the practice is not enough. Simone
Ispa-Landa (2017), for example, has shown that schools maintain multiple channels of discipline that often counter one another. She asserts that “rather than supplanting authoritarian and punitive practices, restorative justice practices tend to coexist with them” (Ispa-Landa, 2017, p.2). Considering that this study is consistent with others demonstrating that exclusionary discipline is stigmatizing, causes students to give up on themselves, and has no meaningful effect on their choices, abandoning the practice is a reasonable policy solution.

Extending Angela Davis’ (2003) argument for prison abolition is useful here. The same history that makes life without prisons unthinkable is also in play in school to confinement processes. White hetero-patriarchal supremacy determines who is deserving of participation in civil society without regard for the multiple factors influencing people’s decisions and, in some cases, need to commit crime. Further, prisons fail to rehabilitate and thus, reify and exacerbate crime and its related social problems. Davis (2003) argues that prisons are obsolete because they maintain social and economic systems that rely on human subjugation without producing a safer, more just society.

In parallel, educators also uphold rules specifying who is entitled to an education. As evidenced by this study, disciplinary decisions are, at times, made without regard for the larger influences at play in “misbehavior.” Also, exclusionary discipline is ineffective and as evidenced by the girls’ resignation in a (bad) girl performance, reifies and exacerbates misbehavior. Considering that exclusionary discipline does not remedy Black girls’ over-representation among students pushed out of school, is personally and academically harmful and increases their likelihood of contact with law enforcement, its obsolescence is also clear.

Abolishing exclusionary discipline is not only just through its ability to disrupt the school/prison nexus but also troubles the common-sense logic upon which the practice stands.
The U.S. premises punishment upon individual rights (Davis, 2003). If a person has rights, then taking them away is just. This logic is also in play in school discipline. However, when the structure of schooling communicates that you have no rights, then removal serves no purpose. You cannot take away something unpossessed. In contexts where students are not empowered, exclusionary discipline only serves the school’s interests. As this study demonstrates, (mis)behavior is more complex than simply breaking the rules. Realizing this will allow educators to see behavioral issues as they are and address them appropriately.

The abolitionist project is one that contests the relationships upholding processes of confinement and offers alternatives by pulling those relationships apart (Davis, 2003). In the case of exclusionary discipline, this would require school communities to unpack how community context, ideology, curriculum, instruction, and other practices that are specific to their location shape Black girls’ criminalization. This kind of engagement would allow schools to move beyond spaces designed solely for preparing youth to enter the economy and would shift, instead toward creating institutions that participate in and uphold democracy. In an abolitionist project, schools would work to understand the needs of its community, listen to and center the voices of inadequately represented students, examine how power functions within the school, and organize actions that attend to the needs and experiences of its students.

In addition to developing supportive and socially just spaces that resist the school/prison nexus and redress racial and gender disparity, abolishing exclusionary discipline may also serve as a key strategy to resist U.S. mass incarceration. Davis (2003) asserts:

Schools can therefore be seen as the most powerful alternative to jails and prisons. Unless the current structures of violence are eliminated from schools in impoverished communities of color – including the presence of armed security guards and police – and unless schools become places that encourage the joy of learning, these schools will remain the major conduits to prisons. The alternative would be to transform schools into vehicles for de-carceration (p. 108).
In light of the considerable power the administrators in this study describe, they are in the best position to begin dismantling the institutional ties between schools and jails/prisons. As school-based policy makers and policy agents of school systems, they can and should leverage their position to resist school to confinement pathways. This study demonstrates that they have the authority to abolish the practice of exclusionary discipline, to implement programs offering restorative models, and to develop context-specific initiatives that reveal and untangle school to confinement processes.

Rather than pushing girls out who perform behavior differently, educational policymakers should begin freedom dreaming (Kelly, 2002) toward new conceptions of schooling that offer a true social safety net. We should wrap Black girls and, indeed, all students in more support, not less, by offering policy responses that teach and affirm their value to a school community. Exclusionary discipline does not serve this purpose. If educators are serious about the well-being of all students, then it stands to reason that they should develop approaches that prevent the likelihood of negative life outcomes for the youth they serve.

I acknowledge, however, that it may seem far-fetched to call for the complete abolition of exclusionary discipline. However, the results of this study corroborate evidence that the practice is inadequate and harmful. Educators must be willing to examine, dismantle, and rebuild structures toward Black girls’ visibility to offer them a robust schooling experience. As Asa Hilliard (1997) charges, “Revolution, not reform, is required to release the power of teaching…. We can’t get to that point by tinkering with a broken system. We must change our intellectual structures, definitions and assumptions; then we can release teacher power” (p. 33). This dissertation sug-
gests that we must commit to resisting exclusionary discipline in both policy and practice and develop healing-informed and restorative responses to school conflict if we hope to develop healthy school communities for educators and Black girls’ alike.

**Future Directions in Education Research**

This study has provided a general sense of the tension between Black girls who embody behavioral difference and the school systems they navigate. Still, limitations occurred that further research can address. First, most of the girls did not attend the same school as the administrators because of recruitment limitations. I contacted all of the girls’ administrators (without identifying the girls), but only one elected to participate. The perspectives of the administrators, therefore, were not completely indicative of the philosophies and approaches that came to bear in the girls’ experiences.

Also, the nature of this study did not allow me to see the experiences the girls described as they played out in school. I recorded their stories and the administrators’ philosophies without seeing them in action. Together, these limitations suggest a need for critical ethnographic work on Black girls’ experiences with school discipline. Doing so would help us understand how socio-cultural factors after exclusionary discipline shape schooling experiences among Black girls. It would also help me learn the feasibility of implementing the social justice approach to school leadership the Principals in this study describe. In particular, this study raises the following additional questions:

- Why and how do Black girls play (bad) in school?
- How do educators respond to Black girls who play (bad)?
- How do urban administrators use their disciplinary power?
- How can exclusionary discipline be resisted in policy and practice?
These questions would help us more adequately understand the on-going nature of school to confinement processes among Black girls. In addition to investigating specific disciplinary processes (such as re-entry, tiered interventions, behavioral conferencing, and social-emotional learning), a critical ethnography would allow me to address Black girls’ experiences with exclusionary discipline holistically by expanding the scope of the study to include curriculum and instruction, peer relationships, educator-student relationships, and the role of school support staff. This would offer an understanding of the extent to which the overall school environment addresses Black girls’ needs. Studying curriculum and instruction ethnographically is of particular interest because of its ability to ascertain the extent to which the purpose and function of schooling plays a role in Black girls’ disciplinary experience. It would also heed Pane & Rocco’s (2014) call that: “More classroom research is needed to understand and eliminate bias, suspensions, and expulsions, which lead to the disproportional discipline gap and school-to-prison pipeline” (p. 7).

Also, a critical ethnography (Thomas, 1992; Carspecken, 1996; Madison, 2011) would provide an understanding of power in cultural practice. It would reveal how school discipline works on and through Black girls and would show the mutual constitution of behavior in school. Lastly, critical ethnography can also be used to challenge or change the structures it interrogates (Madison, 2005; Noblit, Flores and Murillo, 2004). In addition to learning how school discipline works in Black girls’ lives, this framework would also provide an opportunity to advance collaborative approaches toward the abolition of exclusionary discipline. Morris (2016b) asserts that “There’s little attention to developing a continuum of responses, including restorative and healing practices that allow young people to co-construct responses to situations in which they have harmed or been harmed” (p. xx). Critical ethnographic work could also be used to support Black
girls and the adults who serve them in developing supportive, culturally relevant, and democratic responses to behavioral conflict in school.

In keeping with the womanist commitments this study sets forth, I also intend to engage communities serving (bad) girls around the findings of this study. I want to do this by making narratives of (bad) girlhood accessible to the general public. The administrators show that girls like Julia, Ayanna, Emily, Isis, and Ti-Ti are often supported through frames that make assumptions about them. Understanding the complexity of their experiences, however, demonstrates that (bad) girls are more resilient, vulnerable, searching, self-aware, and whole than we give them credit for. Celebrating their narratives offers an opportunity to tangibly begin reframing what it means for Black women and girls to be adequately feminine.

To do this, I plan to build a digital media platform called “BAAAD GRLS” that foregrounds the stories, perspectives and initiatives of Black women and girls who are emerging or standing in the fullness of their self-definition. My intention in doing so is to create a dedicated space working to actively change the dominant narrative on Black girlhood. The platform will be a website that hosts a visual blog and podcast using Instagram to conduct one question interviews and take street-style portraits of Black women and girls. The portraits will be accompanied by participants’ responses to the interview question. It is my hope that taking these interview portraits will invite followers to reflect and comment on their own experience in relationship.

The podcast will invite Black women and girls to engage in inter-generational dialogue on contemporary topics facing the Black community in general, and Black girls in particular. It will invite scholars, practitioners, activists, parents, and girls who are affected by a particular phenomenon to think through the intersections of research, practice and real girls’ lives. The
podcast will begin with a discussion on Black girls and the school/prison nexus, but I hope that it will grow to include a range of topics where black girls need celebration.

Finally, out of concern for the technological divide, I also hope to make “BAAAD GRLS” content accessible through community events. These events would bring resources and recreation for Black women and girls in communities where their identities and experiences are marginalized or constrained. Each one will concentrate on self-care and the social determinants of health by bringing Black equity organizations, Black practitioners, and Black entrepreneurs together to serve Black women and girls. As it relates to this study, the tension between perspectives signals that there is a critical need to re-examine our assumptions about Black girls and their behaviors. It is my hope that developing a digital media platform will amplify Black girls’ voices, bring people in positions of power into dialogue with them, and provide opportunities for Black women and girls to find hope, healing and connection.

**Conclusion**

This study offers hopeful possibilities for addressing the issue of Black girls’ over-representation among students who experience exclusionary discipline. It identifies a specific educational policy interruption strategy, and future possibilities in research by analyzing Black girls perceptions of the school re-entry experience in comparison with those who are gatekeepers of the experience. I assert that the participating administrators offered incredibly hopeful stances on the issue through their articulation of how they actively work to see, hear and support Black girls. Their perceptions indicate that there are administrators who genuinely care about Black girls’ over-representation among students dismissed from school and are mindful of school-to-confinement realities. Within the limiting structures of the contemporary neoliberal policy-scape, this fundamental start is full of good faith and possibility.
Julia, Ayanna, Emily, Isis, and Ti-Ti’s testimonies show, however, that much work remains to ensure that Black girls are made visible when they find themselves in institutional conflict. We must develop policy solutions that resist a predilection for violence when students’ experiences do not match school priorities. As this study shows, even in our attempts to be caring, educators can assign consequences that are irrelevant to Black girls’ needs and context. I assert that decriminalizing perceived “misbehavior” by abolishing exclusionary discipline will push educators to work collaboratively with (bad) girls and others like them to develop solutions that meet both groups’ holistic needs. This premise has been accepted in schools serving pre-school age children. This study shows, however, that this same kind of grace and understanding should be extended to youth at all levels of P-12 education.
REFERENCES


school factors associated with school suspension: A multilevel analysis of students in Victoria, Australia and Washington State, United States. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 40, 301-318


Skiba, R.J., Michael, R.S., Nardo, A.C., & Peterson, R.L. (2000). *The color of discipline:...*


Trujillo, T., and R. Cooper, 2014. Framing social justice leadership in a university-based


I went to a lot of elementary schools. A lot. Because we stayed moving when my Mama get a new job and she try to get us closer, so [we kept] transferring schools. I am a...I'm a good student and then, I could be a class clown. I can {be} sometimes, but I don't want to cut it out. [Elementary school was] fun because every teacher loved me and they'll give me they num-ber...and I still talk to all my teachers from school. Like, that always happened. Because like, every time I go to school, my teacher fall in love with me and then we get closer. I have a lot of those teachers I still talk to, so...A lot! Because they help me out when I need them to be there. Like, this lady, I went to school with her. She liked me and then when we was fin' to move, she gave me her number and then my Mama just start letting me go over there and I've been knowing her since I was 5.

[School now] it's...it's really...it's fun, really. The classes, the people, the teachers, just fun. I don't [want to go there], but, I gots to. Cuz, I don't like people and people be all wanting to ask questions, probably cuz I got a baby, be in my face, and this and that. And I don't got time for all that. They just want to be in your business and be nosey. Cuz that's how kids at [my school] is. [Students are] immature and childih. Cuz they still got they middle school - elementary mentality. They didn’t mature for high school over the summer, yet. It make me think of my nieces and nephew. That irks my nerves, cuz I told you they play too much and I be tired during school. So it just look like a whole bunch of five and four and one year olds walking around. I tune them out like I tune my nieces and nephew out - act like they not there.

I don't like being in the company of other people. It be boring and then them kids be getting on my nerves. I just don't like seeing, looking at other people children. I'm like, oh my God! They make me exhausted. I don't know [why]. [It comes from] my age from when I was growing up with people. I matured. They change different age, but still act the same. They don't grow up. They still act immature. I have a baby and, you gotta act mature because sometime people ain’t gon’ take you serious. And just in general, you act immature, people not gon' take you serious sometimes cause they gon’ think you just a joke. When you have a child, things change, you gotta grow up. You can't act like a child no more if you have a child of your own. [Before Princess] I was immature. I was goofy. I would think everything funny. I could get in trouble. It be funny. Everything was just funny to me. If somebody get in trouble or I get in trouble, get yelled at. Somebody fall. I just think everything funny! I still do sometimes, but I might just don’t laugh at it. I don’t know [why]. I just [used to] think everything funny. [People would tell me] "You gotta take stuff serious sometimes. It's not - everything not funny." [But now I know] that everything is not funny.

[Having Princess], it's really fun. She’s like a doll I could play with. I dress her up and change her sometimes...because she could barely fit stuff, so. Yeah, she’s like a doll. A real...like a real Baby Alive [doll]. I hope that she go to school, finish, get a good job and stuff. Yeah. [I] got more responsibilities and um, a real person to take care of now. My life changed, so whatever I do effect on her, so I got to be a example for her. Go to school, get a job and stuff so she can learn to do the same.
[When I found out I was pregnant] I had spent the night over JB’s house and my stomach was hurting and I was crying in my sleep. He was like, “What is wrong with you?” I was like, “My stomach hurt and I didn’t get my period.” So I told him to buy me a pregnancy test and then we bought 8 of them and all of them said the same thing. And then I told my sister and I told my Mama and they took me to the doctor and they said I was pregnant. I was shocked. I was, like...shocked. Cuz we had talked about having a baby, but not when we was - like, when we get older. Older, older. Like able to live in our own house and stuff. And then when we talked about it, it seemed like it just happened. So I was like, “Oh! We shouldn’t have talked about that this early.” I was mad cuz I wasn’t ready and I didn’t want no baby. But now I’m in love with her, so...I’m not mad anymore.

[Being a Mom and student is] tiring cuz you got to go to school, do work, then go home and take care of the baby. Then, keep doing it all over and all over and all over. I can finish [school] if I want to. Yeah. I’m gonna finish. I don’t need nobody to tell me, “Julia!” I don’t need nobody to tell me that. I make my own choices. [Being a Mom is] like, teach you to mature up. Learn to take care of your responsibilities and stuff. [It’s good that I] have somebody to take care of because it’s your own baby. Telling somebody what to do. Seeing how it feels - how your Mom do you. Seeing how it feels to do somebody else. [It’s hard] not having a job - trying to buy her stuff, take care of her - trying to buy her milk and stuff like that. Oh! It’s not hard to provide for her! I can provide for her. I’m just saying an example. Like, some Moms they won’t have a baby Daddy in they life and they don’t have a job and it be hard for them to take care of them by they self. But, no, Princess getting – her, she have all her stuff together cuz her Grandma, my Dad, her Dad and stuff. So whenever I need something, all I gotta do is call them and they get it for her. Princess is a blessing. You’ll have somebody there for you to take care of you when you die and get old and stuff. And stuff like that.

[The greatest blessing from having her is] changing. [Having] somebody to talk to. Somebody to care for and take care of. I’m not with all that drama stuff. I used to be, I could be real petty. And, you know, I changed the people who I hang around. Really. And the drama. I don’t like to fight and stuff. Changed. Yeah. I just be like, “Ok,” and let it go because I have Princess...somebody...a child to take care of and I ain’t got time for that fighting and stuff. So, if I don’t feel that, I’m like, “Ok” and just keep it moving.

I don’t get suspended less I get into a fight. I be getting - maybe ISS - cuz, I told you, the people love me, so...I get favoritism. I was about to get suspended, but I didn’t. I didn’t get into fights in school, just argue or, I throw something at somebody. Because I told you people irritates me. Like, you keep playing and talking and then you just don’t shut up, I get irritated. I guess you let some of your anger, release your anger out [when you argue]. So it feels good because you let your anger out. I would go in ISS [In-School Suspension] for purpose. I would wear stuff which you don’t supposed to wear like some ripped jeans or pajamas or tank top, so I’d go to ISS. Or, for skipping. Or for going to class late. Stuff like that. [It doesn’t bother me] because, it’s better than being in class. We don’t do nothing down there. You don’t have to work. Just sit a table and that’s it. [You stay in there] depending on how you doing in ISS. If you do good, you do what you supposed to do, you get out the same day. [I like ISS] cuz I get to sleep when I be tired. Instead of sitting right there suffering through 8 classes doing work, work, work. Your hands be hurting. You need a rest. They don’t let you go to sleep. In ISS, you can go to sleep. So when I’m tired, I need some relaxation time to think. In ISS you take breaks. Like, we can do some work in ISS, but they’ll let you take breaks - let your hand rest. In class, you gotta work. You’re not gonna work me like a slave!
I would get suspended] for saying I'm fighting or stuff. Or for not following directions or for skipping class, but not for fighting. [Or] for arguing or playing in the hallway or something like that, but I never got suspended like for fighting. I would argue with girls. I don't know [why]. I like to pick arguments some time. If I don't like you, I'm going to say something to you. Cuz, I hate when people think they better than people. It irritates me. Like, everybody is the same. [Suspension is like] nothing - A vacation. Nothing. It just feel like you be home on a regular day. Like you're home on a weekend. It don't feel no type of way. It's boring, but, I don't feel no type of way [about it]. [When you come back to school] it feel like you just coming back from the weekend - starting back school. It don't feel like nothing.

I was going to school [before I got pregnant]. [I stopped going] because I was pregnant, tired and sleepy. It wasn't no point in me going because I'm just going to sleep. So, why go to school if I could stay home and sleep? My Mom knew [I wasn't going]. It went on my absence list. I missed over 100 days - I missed too many days, so...It's a certain amount of days you can miss, so they had to call the school social worker and see why I wasn't coming to school and then I had to go to court. [My teachers] were cool. I just didn't want to go. I didn't care. I already knew the consequences and if I don't want to go, I don't want to go. I was tired. So, I didn’t care because I knew nothing would happen and I was pregnant and people was pregnant, too. So they probably did the same thing, so...I didn’t care about all that stupid stuff. I'm tired. [They were] like, "you going to get locked up." I'm like, "Noooo..." I really didn't care. I was like, "Ok," cuz I knew I wasn’t going to get locked up, so...I didn't care about [probation], cuz if I do good, I can get off, so...I was just like, ok...

[Going to court is like] nothing. [It's like] school. People getting on your nerves. Cuz [they ask], "How you doing, Julia?" Asking me questions and you gotta sit there - wait all day! School, basically, yeah! [You have people] telling you what to do and what not to do and stuff. Sometimes I'm listening if they don't wear me out. Cuz if they wear me out it's going to go in one ear and out the other. [They wear me out] by just talking too much and just going on and on and on. And keep saying the same thing. So it’s gon' go in one ear and out the other cuz I already heard it a billion times. They just always ask me how my baby doing. Tell me, um, stuff. Try to make me - try to tell me how they childhood was and all that stuff. Finish school and get a job and stuff like that. Yeah. And that wear me out cuz I heard it a thousand times. But if I'm listening, yeah. [I hear them] if they just say it one time and then go on to the next question. If they keep talking about it, it's gon' wear me out.

I don't need help because I don't like people help. I just don't like people helping me. My probation officer keep up on me. Make sure I'm going to school and stuff like that. And make sure I don't get into trouble. I don't talk to her like that. I talked to her...I forgot when was supposed to had...so, a couple weeks ago. [We talk about] how I'm doing. Really, how my baby doing. That's it. The 9th grade social worker make sure I'm doing good. Taking care of my baby and doing what I'm supposed to do. He's nice. He likes me. He's a very cool guy. Like, he's not all mean and stuff. Everybody like him. He's laid back. [Teachers] be all mean and strict and wanting to yell at you and all that. I don't know. I really don't care if you mean or nice because I'll be mean right back to you. [Nice teachers are] I guess fun for kids they can go back and tell they mom or dad [about their teacher], they stay out of trouble and stuff.

[School is] really the same since I been back - nothing. They be trying to get you ready for the real world. They be telling you. I learn how to count money, read and write. The laws so people don't try to trick you and stuff like that. [I'm] trying to hurry up and finish to get out of school. [I'm] going every day. [I'm] glad to get out the house. Going to all my classes and not
leaving school [is challenging] cuz that's not what I'm used to doing. I don't want to get locked up. [I want] to finish school so I can take care of my baby. I want to stop missing days. [But] I'm tired! School is boring! You sit right there and hear people talk for hours and hours and hours and hours. That's boring. [I would rather] be on my phone. On the computer. That would make school more fun. Maybe I would like going. I think everybody would. School is boring. It's exhausting. The students are nerds. [They] like to study, do your work and all that stuff, go to class on time, like...but my friends, well, my associates like to hang out a little bit after class. Hurry up and try to run to class before the bell ring and stuff like that. Do your work late. Not nerdy type. I guess the teachers nice. I don't know. I don't be paying attention to them teachers cuz they talk too much.

If I knew then what I know now, I would keep going to school. Doing the right thing and stuff cuz I wouldn't be on probation, go to court and go through all this. Cuz when [you] get in trouble. You gotta deal with all that stuff. You can get locked up. So if I just woulda went to school, I wouldn't have to do all that stupid stuff. I just want to get off probation and finish school and get this all over with. Get a apartment, house with JB and Princess. Get a job, a car, be able to buy the shoes I want every weekend. Get my hair done. Go places. Hang out with Princess. Buy her shoes and clothes. Be like, one of those fun Moms that like to party and stuff. Cuz I be seeing people do it when they have a little girl. And that's what I wanted - a little girl. We can hang out. Y'all can match and stuff. Get y'all nails done together. Boys, you can't do all that stuff.

[I tell myself to] take stuff serious and think about it for your child because you're living for somebody else now that you have somebody to take care of. That she can't talk for herself, so...stay in school. Do what you got to do. Yeah, really! Pretty much! And make sure, yeah, finish school, do what you got to do - have a job, have a roof over y'all head and provide for her.
AYANA’S PERSONAL NARRATIVE

My name Ayana. I’m 15. I’m funny, smart, talkative, playful. [I talk] too much! Because I be trying to tell people, but they think that they know everything. And I yell, a lot. Like, you know how like, somebody will bring up something and then, one person will be telling about it and I’ll be like, "No! You’re wrong, that’s not what you’re talking about" and then we just going back and forth, back and forth. Like, I like to get my point across, so I talk louder...so everybody can hear me. I like to debate.

I'm happy all the time, so...the only way you can make me not like you is if you do something real bad, or like, mess with me or something to make me really not like you. I really like everybody. [I don’t like people who] like fighting for no reason, or trying to fight me. Or telling rumors and stuff that’s not true. [Like] umm...when I was in my little rough patch, I sent a boy an inappropriate picture and he put it on Facebook. It's cool [though]. I can’t get mad because I sent it to him. I know, like, it’s kind of rude, but...I mean...I did it. I know it wasn’t right, but, like, you know how some girls get angry...be all crying and stuff...I just be like, you never know what people gon’ do. Because once you sent it to him, it’s, it’s, it’s, they can do whatever they want to it. He took it down, but by the time he took it down everybody had already saw it. Somebody just asked me about it today. They had it on a little page on Instagram or something. I ignored them. “It's none of your business.”

[I know I’m Black] because my Mama that. Because my Mama Black. My Daddy Black. I know I’m Black. So...why act something that you not? [Being a Black girl is] rough because you know some people don’t believe Black females can do something. [But school] was good, um, most of the time. Sometimes it’s not good when people be trying to make people laugh and all that - messing with people. It happens to me. Like, they’ll snatch off my hat or touch me inappropriately...and stuff like that. Just to make people laugh. Because I got short hair. Because, you know, this generation, everybody about long hair with a weave and stuff. And I don’t have that, so I guess they consider that ugly, like not to have hair and stuff. It’s like in our generation people think it’s cute when you have long hair and you always got your nails done and you skinny and stuff. But, I had none of that. Like, I was always just juicy. Like, I don’t know. Like...like I wasn’t never skinny. So I don’t think that they likeded that. And like, boys always wanted a girlfriend who had long hair and braces and got expensive clothes, expensive shoes and stuff like that. I just learned to ignore [people making fun of me]. Cuz after while, cuz, if you really think about it, they just saying the same thing over and over again. So I just ignored it, like...At first, I did [care] and that’s when it started to get to me. Like, I used to go home and I used to be crying and stuff. And telling my Mama and stuff. And then, that’s when, like, after a while when they kept doing it, I started fighting. It was, like, every time somebody say something, I want to fight them. But now, I just ignore it. Like, I just be like, "Ok, you saying the same thing over and over again. Like, you have nothing else to say, so..." I mean, when people get bullied it make them feel like nothing. Like, it’s like, when people get bullied they, like, it make they self-esteem low and feel like they not nobody or they don’t got something what everybody else got. And it make them feel like they want what everybody else got and stuff. It made me fight a lot cuz like, at first don’t nobody want to be your friend until you make a name for yourself. Like, at first I didn’t used to say nothing to nobody or nothing like that when they used to talk about me. And then, wouldn’t nobody want to be my friend cuz they be like, "Oh, you a punk, you let them folks say stuff to you and you ain’t do nothing about it” stuff like that. So then, after while I start fighting and then that’s when the attention come where they’ll be like, "Girl, you better show her
or she gon' beat you up" or something like that. Like, your so-called friends. Like, they really be rallying you up to fight. [Fighting] gave me the attention, well it gave me the attention I was looking for. Like...they was like, "Oh, she my friend, she could fight" or something.

And like, they'll, you know how, like, sometimes when you're, um, when your little, your, um, butt crack be out some, they'll stick like a pencil or something in there. It's kinda weird. I don't know [how to deal with it]. I just, I just forget about it. Or I write it up and then I just let the school deal with it. [I'll] go to the office and put in a incident report. So if something do happen, they'll already know. Because, the old me, I would've probably been got into a fight or something already so, if that time do come, they'll already be, like, they'll already know what the fight was for. [The office] don't do nothing, though. Like, they'll be like, "Ok. Y'all go talk" and then that's it. Like, like, they'll call the students up to the office and they'll talk and then we'll talk and then that's it. They'll do the same thing [after that].

[I've been suspended] a lot of times. [Starting] after 6th grade. [I got suspended] every time I got to fighting. Like, if it was a one-on-one fight, then I probably got suspended. But I only got suspended for one day. Because I never started the fight. Well, maybe one or two, but...Because, you know, I ain't. I ain't petty, so I ain't gon' fight you, like, just fight you for no reason. Like, if you keep, keep, keep, keep messing with me, then you just, some people just, snap. And then they be ready to fight. Sometimes I was mad [during my suspension] because I couldn't go to school...and I like to go to school. [But when you get back], like, everybody be running up to you, be like, "Oh, girl, you won that fight! Yeah! You beat her up!" and all that stuff. Back then, it made you feel good. Like, anybody would feel good if they didn't get beat up.

[Teachers] treat you the same [after suspension]. Like, if, if they feel like you wasn't wrong in the situation, they'll treat you the same. But sometimes when, when you wrong, they'll tell you you wrong. They be like, "You shouldn't of did that" or something like that. All my teachers [tried to get through to me]. They would say, "They're not worth it. Just walk away and stuff like that." But back then, if you walk away, you'll, everybody be like, "You scary! You a punk!" Like, they'll call you out and stuff like that. Like, how some people when other people say stuff to them, they don't get as upset. Like they'll, sometimes they'll probably just walk away or something. But when people say stuff to me, I want to say something back and it creates a argument. And then if it get too, too in depth, we probably get into a fight. If you let it go, then they gon' keep keep doing it. Like, if somebody say something to me and I don't say nothing and I just ignore them, they'll probably do it again, just to see what I'ma do. So, if they say something to me and I get it straight right then, that won't happen. They probably won't say nothing else.

[In] high school, [I got in trouble because of] a want to fit in thing in 9th grade. Well, I used to skip school. I never did drugs before! ...because I don't like that. But I used to skip school, go to people house. They lived by the school. Sometimes I'd go to school, but we would walk out. Or go to the park or something. [I skipped] because I wanted to fit in with my friends. I wanted to do what my friends wanted to do. They used to be like "Ayana, is you going to skip school with me?" Then, I'll be like "Yeah." And then one time, I got suspended and, and I ain't tell my Mama. And I just went to school but I, but I didn't go to school. I rode the bus, but I didn't go to school. I went to somebody, I, I went to my friend house until school was over and I got on the bus and went home. Her parents were gone. It was just all, all our friends and stuff were there. [I wanted to fit in] because I was like...well, when you first get in high school, you want to be cool. Like, you don't want to be no lame. Like, a nerd or something. You don't want to be that. I had to do something to make - to get friends and stuff like that. So, so like people felt like if you ain't skip school you lame. Like, I feel like, if you lame, you can get easily picked on because if
they know you lame, they know you not gon' do nothing and they know you don't want to fight and stuff. So they gon' pick on you because they know you don't want to fight. But if you cool, they know you fight. They gon' be like, "Oh, I ain't gon' mess wit her because she probably beat me up or something." Like, they not gon' mess with you as much as they mess with the lame people. [But for me], I wanted to have a reputation. I don't really know what it was for, but...like, like, some people is actually scared to skip school and stuff like that. But, at first I was scared too, but like, and then, like, when I first started skipping everybody wanted to be my friend. They'd always be like, "Oh, you want to skip school with me?" and stuff. And I'll be like, "Yeah." And then it got me more friends. But, it's not the kind of friends you actually looking for. Like, I was happy because I was getting friends, like, everybody wanted to hang around me and stuff. But I felt regret and like, deep, deep, down in my body, I felt like, "I know I'm a get in trouble, so why I'm doing it?" But I still wanted to do it because I wanted to go with my friends. And then, I knew, like, what if, like, "What if my Mama find out?" or something like that. Like, I knew I was gon' get in trouble, but it was more of a happy thing than a regret thing. It's not that I didn't want to go to school. It's just that I wanted to go with my friends. Like, like, if they didn't skip school, I probably would have been in school. Like, but if they did, I probably would've went with them. It wasn't about, I didn't need to be there. It was just that I wanted to be with my friends. I put my friends before I put school. Like, when I get up every morning, I be telling myself, "Ok. I'm going to school." But then when I get there and my friend be like, Oh, y'all want to go [to a friend's] house?" stuff like that. I just be like, "Yeah. Why not?" So then we just go. When I was skipping, like, I was scared. I knew somebody knew I was skipping, but they just didn't say nothing. So like every time somebody call or something, I'd be nervous, like, "Ok. Is that the people from the school fin to tell my Mama that I was skipping" or something. So I was always nervous. Like all the time.

Peer pressure wasn't a part of it. All the decisions I made I, I wanted to do it. Well, because, like, when you first start being bad, your teacher try to talk to you, Principal try to talk to you, give you chance after chance. But then, when they realize you not understanding and you gon' do what you want to do anyways, they really don't get on you as much as they did at first. So they just like, "Well, she gon' do what she want to do, she gon' do it anyways," so... It's like if you go to school and try a teacher will try to work with you and try to help you cuz they know you trying. But, like, if you skip school, cuss out your teachers, walk out the class, be a disruption, then the teacher be like, "Ok. What's the purpose in helping them when they don't want help?" Like, you can't help nobody that don't want to be helped. So, like, when I did want to go to class, the teachers used to be like, "We ain't even fin to waste our time and help her cuz we know she ain't gon' listen," and stuff like that.

Because, I'm not the only person from [my school who got in trouble]. A lot of people had to go to court. Like, you used to, we used to see each other at court and everything. A lot of people was on house arrest. They was getting, like, if the school had to call your probation officer and tell bad news, they'll lock you up. And I don't want to go to jail. So that's why I just sat - because the first half of school was when I was skipping and stuff. And then the second half of school was when I start going to court. So I start doing my work. I stopped skipping class and stuff. But then that's when I lost all my friends because they was like, "Oh, she, she a lame now. We ain't gon' talk to her no more." At the time, I really cared what they thought. Because I wanted to fit in. I wanted everybody to like me. But then, after I started going to court, I was like, "Y'all not fin' to get me in trouble, like...y'all gon' be the reason I go to jail and I don't want to go
to jail.” After I went so far with it and then I started getting in trouble for what I was doing it really was like, "Girl! You better stop!" Like, cuz, because, because, you know, the school try to deal with so much and after you keep pushing it, pushing it, pushing it, that’s when they get the court involved. Because if they can’t do nothing, the court is going to do something about it. So once they get the court involved, they’re not responsible for you, like, if you get in trouble, they calling the court, if you skip class, they calling the court. To some extent, they don’t even call your parents no more. Because they, cause, cause, like, when you, like, when you first being bad and they know, they know you not a bad person, they’ll call your Mama be like, "Oh, well, she keep doing this, she keep doing that, just talk to her or something" and then, after they keep calling your parents, and your parents, and you still doing the same thing, they like, "Ok, we not gon’ call the parents, we gon’ get somebody else involved." I did let it get that far. That’s why I had to go to court.

[At court] the Judge told you what your consequences was gon’ be. The first, the first thing is they’ll give you the blue sheets. If you don’t do the blue sheets and you still get in trouble after that, they’ll put you on house arrest. If you still get in trouble after that, they just gon’ take you out of school, then you’ll go to school at [youth detention]. At juvenile. [The blue cards are] just, basically, tracking cards. So they, so they’re really trusting you to go to class. It’s just like a second chance. Like, they’ll give you a chance to go to class and do what you got to do. Get the things signed and then that’s it. [The blue cards helped me] cuz like, you know how, like, say you forget and you know you getting in trouble because you forgot, so why have to get in trouble for not going to class when you just go to class by yourself and then, just not get in trouble. [I gave the cards to] the judge when I went to court. And then, if you did good, they won’t give you no more. But if, like, your conduct, like they grade you, like they got the conduct on there and if your conduct bad and you not doing no work, they’ll give you another set for, like, another month. And then if you don’t get those signed, then you getting on house arrest. Cuz they feel like, you not going to, like, they feel like you not going to school. Cuz if you had went to school, you woulda had your stuff signed.

[Court is] scary, cuz, like...if you already in a environment where jail is always talked about. Like, like, like, especially if you know people who go to jail a lot, who always go to court - it's scary, like. Like, wow! Like, who would want to go to jail for something small? So it was scary for me cuz I was scared. Like, “What if I go to jail?” I was nervous cuz you never know what the judge will say. And then I was nervous cuz I didn’t know how the judge would be. I was nervous cuz I didn’t know what my Mama was gonna say. I was nervous because my Mama was fin’ to find out I was skipping school and you never know what the reaction may be from her. What she might do. So I was nervous.

I mean, [the people at court] responded like they knew. Like, I mean, like they responded like they know it was gonna happen or like, they understand your reason for doing it. Like, if you tell them what’s going on with you and why you’re skipping school and what made you start skipping school, they’ll be like, "Ok, well we’re gonna give her a chance because she don’t want to skip school, but she want to fit in." They’ll be like, "Maybe by her knowing that she can get in trouble for it and we give her another chance, she’ll probably stop skipping school and stuff like that." So that’s what I did. I stopped skipping school and stuff, but you got some people - the judge will give them chance after chance and they don’t want to change.

I’m not in touch with my old friends now because I was seeing how much I was hurting my Mama. Then she was stressing a lot cuz she was always worried about what I was doing. Cuz she always thought I would put myself in danger - give her a hard time. She could never keep a
job because she used to have to come up to our school all the time. So, I had to stop, so, I, so she

can keep a job. If she can't keep a job, all of us gon' be on the street. So, I, and then my sister she

was disappointed in me. Because she was like, the whole purpose of her going to the army was to

encourage us to do right. Because they was like, if she, cause my sister, she went through a little

rough patch, too. So she was like, "If I can do it, y'all can do it." It was effecting more people

than myself. [School is important for me now] because, like, even though people do want to fit in,

if you don't graduate high school, they really gon' pick on you then because you didn't finish high

school. Then, ye ain't gon', because a lot of jobs now, you got to have a high school diploma to

work at, like, McDonald's you got to have a high school diploma or a GED. Like you can't just

go and apply for it. Or you got to be in school. [My education is] the key to everything.

Um, when I grow up I want to be a veterinarian and then when I get out of school for be-
ing a veterinarian, I'll probably go work for somebody and then when I save up my money, I'll

probably start my own place. I ain't gon' go right back to school cuz I just got out of school

[when I graduate high school]. I'm not fin' to go right back to it, but I'll go, I'm going to college

and while I'm on a little break in between, well, I'm still, I'ma keep, I'ma keep a job. I'ma still be

living with my Mama...till I get my career. [I'll] help my Mama with the bills probably, cause

next year, um, you know, when I graduate high school, she gon', she want to get a rent to own

house so she can own her own house. So I'll probably help her with that and help her with my

little sister and brother cause they gon' still be in school. I don't know [what the future has in

store]. I mean, it's all left up to my decisions, so...I don't know yet.
EMILY’S PERSONAL NARRATIVE

I'm Emily. I'm 17. [I'm] talented. Smart. Out-going. Funny. I'm very goofy. Um, I guess you could say hard-working. Yeah. I work at [a fast food restaurant]. I just work, go home, work, go home all day. It is a [big responsibility] because, so like there are people there that's my age, that's 16 and 17 and they expect me to play with them instead of actually work. But like, as a crew, when I was crew, I did. But like, now that I'm a manager, I can't because that's going to affect me more than it affects them because I'm the person in charge and like, I'm supposed to be telling them what to do and if they don't do it that falls back on me.

Well, my mom was 18 when she had me. She was young and she was still in school and she didn't think that she could [raise me], so she gave my aunt custody of me. She has a son, but he's like years older than me. He was like 16, 17 years older than me, so basically, I was the only child. [I stayed with her] until middle school because my aunt started going through some things. She got sick and so I finally just came home. Like, I did go home on the weekends to my Mom's. So I knew her. It was not like I didn't know her. So I was comfortable with going there, but I really missed my aunt a lot when I went back to my Mom's because I was with her for so many years - that's who I used to. Like, it's like she's my mom. I was really close with her. Like, we still are close.

I really did talk a lot [in elementary school]. I still talk a lot! Yeah, I really talked a lot and the teachers would have to move me. But little did they know, I talked to everybody in the class so wherever they moved me, I talked. I was a A/B [student]. I was on the A/B honor roll until I got to middle school. I don't know what happened. I think it was the change in environment. I don't know. I was used to it just being only me. But when I went home, back in middle school, it was me and my two sisters. So it was three of us. And, it was very different, like, I was used to doing stuff alone, like doing stuff with my Aunt. Now I could barely see her because she got sick. [I was] sad. I would cry sometimes. Like, sometimes I would cry myself to sleep because I couldn't see her. I don't know [why] but I didn't talk to my Mom about it. I didn't think she was the person to talk to, I think that's what really caused me to start acting out. I'd be getting in trouble at school, um, that's when I started, like, I didn't, at the time, I didn't think of it as disrespect, but now I look at it, it was disrespect. But I would start disrespecting my mom. I'd be like, "You're not my Mom!" and all that stuff. [I would] not listen to the teachers. I wouldn't go to class. I'd get in fights and stuff. [That was] 7th grade. 6th grade was horrible, too. I actually had to move schools because everybody kicked me out. I don't even remember [what for], to be honest. I just know I almost got kicked out so I had to move to [a new town].

I know [I got suspended for] the first time in the 6th grade, but, I don't remember what I did. Well, it would be like every other week. I was always into something. I don't know why. I was just always into something at school. Because it was like I didn't care. But I cared. I was showing that I didn't care, but I actually cared. Um...so, like, [when you're suspended] like, I don't know. It's like people think you're okay, but you're really not okay so you have to pretend - like, play it off. And like, that wasn't really a good feeling. So I was like...Yeah, I was trying to be, like, all...I don't know...I really cared about everything, I just didn't want people to know that I actually cared. I was trying, I guess I was trying to play hard - play bad or something. [When I got suspended] I really feel like a bad person because, like, I don't see anybody else getting suspended. But I'm the only person. Well, I would do stuff with other kids, but they wouldn't get in trouble, I would because I - they're gonna believe them because I have a record. Like, just to get suspended is crazy.
My friends would say "Oh! Where's Emily been?" "Oh yes, girl! Emily was suspended" and stuff...and then when I got back to school people would come up to me, "Why were you suspended? What did you do?" and stuff. And it would be people I didn't like. I felt, I don't know, I felt cool cuz everybody knew my name. I remember a lot of students, like, just calling me "bad" and all that stuff. But then, you know, other people, you know, people just like me - Black people, ok, Black people. Um, ok, yeah, they'd be like, "Oh yeah, that's that girl Emily. Yeah, don't mess with her" and all that stuff. "If I ever need somebody to come fight with me, I got Emily." And I'd just be like, "Yeah." It really felt good. I felt like I was doing something. Like, like, I felt like I was known. Like, you know, doing something known.

I really can't remember [what I would get suspended for]. [A] lot of times I got suspended for fighting. It's like, so, I had anger problems. I don't have anger problems anymore, but this, um, this girl, she made me so mad. She said something. So, I just, you know, how we had desks? Like, the little square desks? I, picked it up and I was about to throw it at her. So, they were talking about expelling me, but they didn't. They were like, I need counseling and stuff, so my Mom she took me to counseling, but I wouldn't talk to her. [My] Grandma always told us that, like, cuz she had to do counseling, too, but she always told us that they brainwash you. But I didn't feel comfortable talking to her. And [the counselor] tried to make me talk to her. Like, "You're not leaving here until you talk to me!" So I would eventually say "Hey" and that's it. But, like, I really didn't talk to her or tell her what was, like, actually going on. So she suggested family counseling...and we did, we did family counseling, but I still didn't talk. I would just sit there. I just didn't feel comfortable opening up to, like, a complete stranger. Like, I didn't know you so why would I tell you my business? But like, the only person I could talk to was my Aunt. I would tell her how I felt and why I was doing the things that I did. And she would always remind me, she's like, "I'm always here for you. I just can't take care of you right now" and stuff.

The first time [I got expelled] was in 6th grade and the second time was in 8th grade. But, in 6th grade they were expelling me, but my Mom withdrew me so, I guess that kind of stopped the expulsion. But, I still got expelled. So, I moved to [another town] and I went to [a new school]. Everything was, like, it was different. Like, the setup, like the school, like the people in the school were different. Like, they were all preppy, like, and [my old school] wasn't preppy. It was, like they had more money so, I guess, you could say they knew how to act or whatever. Like, they act different. Like, the first time I got in trouble there, they were all like, "Oh, my gosh, the new girl, she got in trouble" and all that stuff. They were, like, predominantly White. Like, it was like, you would see a couple of African Americans, but...[my old school], I can't say it was diverse because it wasn't, it was, like, African American. It was more African Americans and Mexicans than anything. [So] it was a big change because it's like, I felt like I had to fit in there. Like, I had to change who I was to fit in there and it wasn't working. I thought I had to dress like them, talk like them, and all that stuff. But, I didn't like how I was. It was like they were preppy and you can't be, I couldn't be preppy. I tried, well, first, I tried to dress like one of the little white girls, but it failed cuz I didn't pull it off. Then I tried to talk proper. And I couldn't do it. They were always quiet in class, so I tried to be quiet in class. But I just had to talk to somebody! They acted really, really, like you had to spell every word right. You had to pronounce every word, spell every word right and all that stuff. Like, they didn't use "finna" or any of that. I really was [trying to start over], but then, I got caught cheating on a test and one of them told on me and I got mad and I cursed them out and, from there I got 3 days of ISS. Yeah, um, I kept going to ISS, then I started getting suspended cuz they had some policy, like, you only get a certain
amount of days for ISS before you start getting suspended. So after that I had started getting sus-
pended and when they suspended me, I didn’t care cuz, I’d rather be at home. Cuz I really didn’t
like the school. I didn’t want to be there.

[After ISS, my cousin] was like, I know he was like, "Oh! My girl out of ISS!" Blah, blah, blah.
But I was really happy to be out. It felt good to be out of ISS. It’s kind of like being locked
up for 8 hours a day for three days. I don’t know what the majority of [students] thought but,
[when] I went back to class the next day, the people were like, "Oh, she’s bad. Don’t talk to her
guys." I really do remember that because it’s what I heard for that whole class period. And I was
like, "I don’t care! Blah, blah, blah, blah." Like I had, like, a really smart mouth. But actually, I
did [care]. Because I tried, I tried to be friends with some of them, but, I guess, I guess that situation
made them not want to be my friend. Cuz, you know, none of them really got in trouble like
that and if they did, it was probably just for talking in class and that’s it.

[After the first time, [my teachers] really didn’t say anything, but like, after it continu-
ously keep happening they would always think I’m doing something. They always call me out for
something. Like, if I even look like I’m talking, the teacher would really just call me out. So I
would get silent lunch a lot. It’s where you do something, like, you’re not supposed to do, so the
teacher gives you silent lunch. [You, um, go back to the classroom and eat in silence. Well, it
was, there was a couple of people in there that I knew, so it was fun. [The teacher] didn’t know
us. And she would always just leave the room, like...and then sometimes, if she heard us down
the hall, she’d come back and, like, tell us to split up. Well, one of the [students] was my cousin.
Um, and then the other was this girl that used to be my friend. We used to be friends, but we lost
contact, so...it was a group. It was, like, probably like 5 of us. I think like 5 of us.

[In] 8th grade I had got too many write ups. I got in too many fights. I got in it with too
many teachers. So they sent me to alternative school. I feel like they saw it coming cuz I kept, cuz
I kept getting in trouble. So, and like, you know how you keep, like, say you’re a principal and,
like, you know this girl keeps doing stuff and keeps doing stuff. You’re not even going to say any-
thing to her. You’re not gonna try to help her do better. You’re just gonna wait till she messes up
again and just keep waiting. And then, when she hits that mark, just expel her. Like, nobody,
well, I think I would’ve accepted the help, but I feel like nobody tried to help. I mean, like, at the
school. Like, school-wise, nobody tried to help. But my Aunt, she always told me. She was always
there and she wanted me to do better and stuff. Like, I never sat down and had an actual heart-
to-heart talk with any of them [at school] and like, they never asked "Why do you do this?" They
just give me my consequence and send me about my way.

I was in alternative school for 2 years. And, I got in trouble, more trouble. That’s when I
got on probation, in alternative school, because I was fighting a police officer [at school]. I re-
member I walked out the school because I was mad because they were suspending me from alter-
native school. Then, I was fighting him. Then I remember he arrested me and they sent me to
[youth detention]. And I was there for the weekend. And they sent me there for the weekend. And, and
that’s when I was like, "Ok, well I might as well just do what I want to do anyway." So, I just
started doing what I wanted to do. Because I was just, like, I was hearing everybody else [in
youth detention] talk. They were like, they’d been in there for a long time. No matter what they
do, they keep coming back. They try to do good. They keep coming back. I’m like, well, ok, there’s
no point in me doing good because I’ma still end up here. Because I’m already in the system, so,
it doesn’t matter. So I just started doing whatever I wanted to do. And then, 10th grade, like, I got
arrested like 5 times and spent 72 days in [youth detention]. Then I had went to [a military youth
program] for like 6 months. And I graduated from there and I turned my life around. And here I am.

[The days in youth detention] were long. [T]here were fights every day. Like, girls could not keep their hands to themselves. Um, this girl tried to fight me. I was like, "Honey, um, no, I'm sorry. I'm not fighting you for something so petty." I don't even know what it was. But I was not about to fight her. I was always the chill one. I don't know how that was, but I was always the chill one. I was quiet cuz I didn't want to be in anybody's drama. And what I was really afraid of was going on lock down - where you had to be in your room from 3 to 7 days. Like, you couldn't come out - only to shower and that was it.

[It] actually felt good to be back in school [after youth detention] cuz, you know, being at school, like, being in jail school for a long time, I really got used to it, but then, when I got back to regular school, I was so happy. I don't even know how to explain it, but...Like, just being out. Being able to wear my own clothes, you know? I don't have to have people walk me to class. My aunt [helped me go back] cuz I had to re-enroll back into school cuz when I was incarcerated, it's a different school system, I had to take me out of the school that I was in and enroll me into the jail school. So my aunt had to take me out of the jail school and enroll me back into the regular school. So we spent a lot of time at the center and stuff. Um, it's where you have to register for school. It was hard cuz I had to go back up to [youth detention] to get my transcripts. I don't know why, but I had to get transcripts. Nobody helped us get enrolled again. I probably [needed] a little motivation.

This girl that I was in [youth detention] with told me about [a military academy] because she went there. So, she texted me about it. She was like, "Oh, yeah. It's fun. You should do it. It's military-like, but I think you'll like it." And I did. I don't know [why she thought of me]. I think she saw good in me. I really do, because like every time she got ready to fight, I would try to calm her down and stuff. So, I think she really did saw good in me or something. And like, we always motivated each other. We're [still] friends.

The first two weeks [the military academy] was horrible. I wanted to go home cuz I didn't think I could do it. It was really hard. Like, I have never in my life done push ups and they made me do, like, 20 of them a day. Probably more. I was like, "I can't do it. I want to go home." Then they made us run, more than what I was used to running and I, think, that morning - that's when I got a attitude. I was like, "You know what? I'm going home! Forget y'all!" and all that stuff. And one of the sergeants got in my face. And it made me mad. But when I told him he was making me mad, he made me give him pushups. So that really broke me from, you know...Like, he got me in check. Knowing that, like, I knew that I couldn't just talk to them any kind of way. So...yeah, it made me give them respect. And then I saw that when I gave them respect, they gave me respect. Like, if you disrespect them, they're gonna disrespect you. [It was good for me] cuz he was...cuz he, like, usually when somebody is like, literally in my face yelling at me, I'm not like, the happiest person. I probably, I don't know, I'll probably push you back or hit you or something. But I knew I couldn't. Cuz, like, I knew I would go home. Part of me wanted to go home, part of me didn't. Cuz, like, a lot of people, like, when I left - before I left, a lot of people said that I wasn't gonna make it. So, really in my mind I was like, "I want to go home. I don't care what they say." And then, like, the other part's like, "You do care! You gotta prove them wrong!" and stuff. That's what my Auntie told me - "Prove them wrong."

Like, she wrote me. She always wrote me. I got my first letter from her and I started crying cuz it had been, like, 4 days since I saw her and talked to her. So it, I think the real thing [that] broke me was being away from home for so long. Like, I had been away before, but I could
talk to [my family] when I was, like, detained and stuff - when I was arrested. I could talk to them, but for the first two weeks, I couldn't talk to them at all. It really made me realize a lot. Like, it made me come to the conclusion what life really was.

Like, there's actually more to it than just being bad and wanting attention and stuff. Like, be successful. Like, I had time to think about stuff and everything that I’ve done. Like, one night, I stayed up just thinking about everything that I’ve done. Like, was it really worth it and stuff? But like, when I was there, I was like - no it wasn't worth it. But, now, I say it was because, like, if I hadn't...if I would've just had, like, a normal life. I probably wouldn't...like, I probably couldn't help another kid. I want to help somebody get on the right track. Cuz there were so many people that were trying to help me, but I didn't want their help.

I felt like I could change on my own, honestly. But I couldn't cuz I didn't have the mindset to change. But, I guess, yeah - I guess you just have to have the mindset to change and at that time I didn't have the mindset to change. And like when I was at [the military academy] I saw, I really saw that they were trying to help me and not trying to, like, hurt me. The long talks. The screaming in my face. Um, I guess, the push-ups, you know. Yeah. And then, like, while I was doing push-ups they would just, like, sit there and tell me why I shouldn’t do this and tell me how they were a bad kid, but they joined the military and how the military changed them. First I didn’t believe it. Like, I couldn’t just believe it. I don't know. I just...like, you know how somebody looks...looks and acted. I didn't think they went through something before. Well, I guess it's not more the looks. It's more how they acted or...they acted, I don't know, I guess - civilized, I would say.

Well, for one, these adults, they've actually been working there for, like, a long time. They've come, like, they've had worse kids come through there and they've changed their life. So, I don't know. I think whatever they did, whatever they're doing, they're just doing good. Like, I guess they know how to treat us, talk to us. You know, I guess they can relate - some of them can relate, honestly. They didn't talk to us like we're, like we're just a nobody. Like I had people out here yell at me, tell me, "You keep doing this, you're not going to be anything in life!" But, them, they were like, there was this one Sergeant, she was like, she always told me to never give - like, a lot, all of them told me to never give up. But [the] Sergeant, she taught me to never give up because she sees good in me, I'm a good person and all that stuff. She was like, "I don't know why you do the things you do, that's between you and whoever, but what I see...just don't give up." Yeah, we had a lot of long talks. They automatically gave us respect. Unless we disrespected them.

I really got motivated [at the military academy]. There was this one Sergeant. He would always say, "Get motivated, you!" and that used to be our slogan or whatever - "Get motivated, you!" - whenever we saw him. He was hard on us. He was really hard on us. I didn't like him at first. It was a lot of us that didn't like him at first. But, we realized he was here to help us. And a lot of us came - we started with, like, really bad attitudes and by the middle of the class, well, by the second month - we really didn't have that much of an attitude. So it made me, you know, realize a lot of stuff.

Um, well there was this one sergeant, he was the preacher there. He was like, "No matter what you've done, or whatever, God doesn't look at your past." So, like, really, that's really the main reason I didn't like going to church, because, like, because of my past. Like I never went to church because I felt like how can you go to church and you sin. But now I see it completely different. [Before], I was like, "How could you go to church if you sin? God is not going to save you" and all that stuff. "It takes a long time to get saved" and all that stuff. So now, anybody can
come to church because Jesus saves automatically. You just have to say the words. You just have to repent to him.

I know God has done a lot for me. Like, He’s just the backbone of everything. He is so good. He – I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for God. Like, He wouldn’t have, He wouldn’t have given me the strength to finish the program. I wouldn’t have jobs - interviews - like crazy, if it weren’t for Him. [In the past] He was there, but now He’s there. But, like you know how the Bible says when you’re born God knows what he has planned for you. So I feel like this is what he took me through to get to where I’m at - to get closer to Him.

[Everybody felt like] there’s no hope for this child. I remember that. I do remember that. That there’s no hope for this child. Um, there’s nothing going to change her. And all that stuff. I heard my Mom say that. My Aunt said it. Well, not the one that I lived with. She didn’t say it. She always prayed. She said, um, she’s always said that she’s going to pray for me. Then she prayed that I’d get back right. It hurt. It really did. Because I tried and I tried, but for some reason, I just… I tried to like, do better. Every time I tried, it’s like, you ever you ever see like, uh, an, an, addict, like, they, they try to...Say somebody they try to stop smoking, but as soon as they, like, smell a cigarette, or see somebody with one, they want to smoke it. It’s kind of like that.

I felt like I needed a crowd [when I was getting in trouble]. I don’t know [why]. Maybe, like, I feel more powerful with a crowd or something. I think so. Like, I felt like, ”Oh, y’all can’t mess with us.” If there was a group of girls we didn’t like, I’d be like, ”Y’all can’t mess with us.” If I’m by myself, I’d go the other way. Now I can really just walk down the street by myself. Walk in the halls by myself…I don’t know if you’ve ever really noticed, but like girls never - well, like, high school girls, they never go to the bathroom alone. Like, they never walk down the hall alone. But, now, I can say I can. I can go alone. I don’t need anybody to make me feel like I’m powerful. [My power comes from], like, my actions and how I treat certain situations. Like, let’s see...Let’s say if somebody wants to argue and, like, they really don’t have anything going for them self. I’m not going to entertain them.

I think my future has a lot in store for me. I want to work in a youth detention center for a while until I can get my degree and then probably become a probation officer cuz I want to help kids that I was like. I think I’m gonna be able to do just what my dreams are. I think [other people would] say, I’m going in the right direction and I’ve came a long way. [But I need], you know, a better support system. Um, like you know, somebody to encourage me or, ”Oh you got this! You know, you can do it!” At least an ”I’m proud of you every once in a while.”

If I knew then, what I know now...well I don’t know how to say it, but I really wouldn’t - I don’t know if it’s bad, but I wouldn’t change anything. Because I like where I’m at now and I can only go up from here and, like, if I wouldn’t have got in any trouble or anything, I would probably still be in high school with my class - graduating with my class, but like, I’m glad I graduated early. Because that just shows other people that they can do it too. Like, you can graduate at 16, you just have to put your mind to it.
Isis’s Personal Narrative

Um, I'm funny, kinda shy sometimes till I get open and, um, I'm very polite and, yeah. Um, I like to run. I play soccer. I play the violin and I like working at my job. [I play soccer] for my school and I play for a club. [I've been doing that] uh, since 5th grade. It's just, like, I joined and my Mom, like, thinks I should stay in it cuz it can help me get into colleges and stuff cuz it looks good on my application. I enjoy it because, like, I’m very athletic. I like running a lot. It just makes me feel, like, relieved and stuff and [I] forget things that's actually going on. And then in orchestra, it’s just fun to learn new stuff how to play and stuff.

[If you really knew me], you would know that I'm funny. I just see me as just, me. I don't know what I do, like, for people to look at me any way. I just do me. Like, I don't know. I've always been that way. I get it from my Mom. She just tells me, like, "Be who you are!" [laughed] Uh, she just tells me, like, "Don't let what other people say about you get to you. Just do what makes you happy." I don't know what I do, but, I'm happy, so...[She got that from] her mom. My Grandma. She’s like that, too. We don't really do much. We just, like, do what we have to do just to do it. Like, we don't try to be any kind of way. We just do what we do, I guess.

I didn’t get in trouble for much [in school]. [In 6th grade] Um, I think one day I had, my teacher called it insubordination because I wouldn’t move my seat or something like that and she wrote me up. Umm...Like, maybe like 3 days in ISS, I had got [for that]. [That was the only time] umm, in middle school. In high school, uh, the same thing with a teacher. Like, I just went in the class and he was just picking on me, like, saying things, like, um, what was he saying? He just kept getting on me about little things and I was just like, "I don't have time today." Like, I could say that. I could say how I feel and he called the office and then they gave me ISS for some days. I forgot how many. I didn't want to be rude to him or anything or, like, be disrespectful. I just said, "I don't have time today." Like...But, to him, I was being respectful.

[Growing up in my town] Um, it's, like, it's been kind of hard, I guess, because, like, I don't really, well, I didn't know many people when I moved there [in 4th grade]. So, uh, I mean, I started making friends and stuff in elementary and middle school and high school and then when I got to high school things just changed and stuff. Like, people start acting out, like, different and stuff. Trying to be popular and talking about people and stuff like that. [Before that school] was fun, like, everyone got along and stuff and there was no drama and no social media really. So...cuz people start using social media, talking about people behind their backs and stuff and it just causes drama and yeah...

People were, like, talking about Black people in a bad way [in school today]. I mean, it feels good to be [Black] sometimes because, like, I don’t see anything wrong with Black people. But sometimes it kinda makes me feel bad, like, we just stick out or something. Like, people just, well, Caucasian people just, like, feel like they can just talk about us and stuff like that and I just don't understand why. Like, it makes me feel bad that I’m not, like, normal to them when I feel normal. Like, I don’t see the problem with being Black. [When Trump won the election] they were just, like, screaming "Nigger" down the hallway at school and, like, saying, like, "Go pick cotton" and stuff like that. Not, like, directly to me but, like, just, like, trying to be funny, I guess, in the hallway. And it wasn't funny. It's like, maybe, like, 20 of us [in my school]. It's not many. I mean, like, we couldn't do anything cuz we're at school. Like... I mean, [the teachers] heard, like, but they didn't do anything. They were screaming it down the hallways. I mean, [the teachers] don't care. [If the Black students say something] then the white students would say something back and then, that would probably trigger us and then we would probably be the one in trouble.
It's like we're just out here and we have to be silent and if we're not silent we have to take all the fall for it. I mean, I still feel good about myself. But, like, I have learned that people are gonna talk and you can't do anything about it. So, I don't know. Um, cuz, I made, like...like, I did something bad and I wasn't thinking because of what someone said and then I let it get to me and I reacted in the wrong way. But if I would've just did what I did today then I probably wouldn't be in my position now.

Um, I was getting bullied by this girl and, like, it happened, it had started in August and the fight happened in January when we got back from Christmas break. And we were, [the girl I fought] had just came back to the school, she wasn't there before. So, I guess that's why nothing had happened. And so, we were walking down the hallway, or whatever, when she came back, and she would just, like, say things. But before she came she would, like, say things over the internet and stuff about me and, like, people would send me screen shots of her, like, saying "Oh, I'll beat her" and things like that, but I didn't really care. But, the day of the fight, I was walking down the hall and she was saying things, like, just saying slick stuff. And then, I just wasn't having it that day and I just went up to her and asked her "What's your problem?" stuff like that. And she was, like, getting smart in my face and, like, I just went blank. I guess she was jealous of me because her, um, ex-boyfriend liked me or something like that. But they, like, I don't know her and they weren't having anything or nothing like that. They didn't communicate. So...I don't know [why she was jealous]. They were broken up way before we started even talking. And then she just came out of nowhere with, like, that. I think she felt jealous of me, I guess, because I'm a Black girl. I don't know. She's like, not Black Black, you know? Like, her skin is not, like, you know...brown. She's like, albino looking. I guess, [she's jealous] because, I'm pretty, I don't know. Cuz, my Mom tells me that all the time - that "People are going to be jealous of you." Everybody tells me that. Like, people that I don't know and stuff like that. So I guess that's why.

[So I said something to her] because, like, she was getting under my skin. Like, I had been ignoring it for so long. It's so much that a person can take. Like, it was happening since August and it was January. She came to my house while my Mom wasn't home and my brother was there and he was scared. Like, they were beating on my door trying to fight me and stuff like that [before the fight].

So, I had, like, went to class, cuz [the fight] was during class change. So I went to my next class and then, I was in class for like 5 minutes and the principal came in and he was just like "Come here." And I went with him to the office. And, uh, I called my Mom and told her to come up here while they were talking to me and stuff like that. And she came up there and I already had told her everything that was happening and stuff and she was like, "Go to the principal," But the school doesn't do anything. They just make the situation worse because, like, they'll call the girls to the office and be like, "Oh, so and so said this." That doesn't do anything but make it worse. Cuz they'll still talk about you even worse. And so I would just tell my Mom. So my Mom, like, could, like, maybe do something like call the school or something like that so they won't say I said it.

[When] I got to the office, they were just, like, trying to get my phone and stuff. Like, what does my phone have to do with anything? So, I wouldn't give them my phone so they went through my lockers and stuff. Like, went through everything. They were looking through my locker for my phone. I don't know [why], but I wasn't going to give it to them. Because they were going to keep it! Like, overnight and stuff like that. Cuz I knew I was gonna get OSS and I wasn't trying to be on OSS without my phone. So, um, that happened. [I wasn’t giving them my phone] because, like, I have to talk to my Mom, my boyfriend, like my phone had nothing to do with the
fight. So, like I didn’t talk about it or nothing. I didn’t even know it was going to happen myself. So, I guess they were trying to figure out if it was planned or not and who else knew about it. But, none of that, I just lost my temper.

[After the fight] they called our parents and I was in this room with the principal and I don’t know where she was. I didn’t even see her after the fight. Um, and then when my Mom came, she came in there. Her and my Dad. And we were sitting there for a long time talking to them. And then they was telling my Mom that they wanted me expelled from school for [the] fight or whatever. I felt embarrassed because I let someone get under my skin and mess up what I had going on. Like, I was on the honor roll at school and then when I went to alternative school, cuz they had expelled me for the rest of the semester, my grades went down so bad because the teachers, like, there’s no teaching, they just give you your work. Like at alternative school they don’t get up at a board and teach you. You’re at your own pace cuz you’re in class with, like, 9th graders, 10th graders, 11th graders or 12th graders. I did work. Like, we had 4 classes - math, history, uh, science, and English. And it was 4 teachers and you just go in class - no talking.

Nothing. You’re under a camera 24/7. Like you’re in jail or something. And, you just go in there. If you have a question, you could ask the teacher, but the teacher’s not, like, actually teaching and you’re actually trying to teach yourself. Like, you have a book and you just flip it and try to teach yourself off examples and stuff like that. So...my grades went down and I just felt embarrassed that, like, I just let somebody make me do that. Get out of my character.

Well they told me that I would have to go to tribunal, so I had a chance of getting back into the school but...they told me that I was expelled for the rest of the semester, too. [Tribunal] was bad. Um, um, it’s just...you’re in a room with officers and stuff like that. And the people of the, little court thing - tribunal court. And when we went in there we knew that we didn’t have a chance because the man was White. Like, he just looked at us like, "Oh, they’re Black, like, I know why she’s here - probably fighting or something like that." Like I could tell, like the way they were looking at me, it was just so embarrassing. I explained [my situation] to them. We had evidence, um, I even told them how they came to my house even after the fight after school that day trying to fight me. Well, her, her older sister. Her friends at school. It was, like, 4 or 5 girls, I guess, trying to jump me. I’m not sure. But, my Mom told me not to go outside. So I didn’t go outside. I stayed in the house. So...that happened. And, yeah. Um, um, [the tribunal judges] didn’t even feel bad. I mean, it was a - there were like 4 judges. One lady was Black and the rest were white. Like you could tell, like, [the Black lady] was feeling sorry for me and knew that I didn’t belong there. And then the other ones were just like, "Oh, she fought, she’s here, she’s gonna get expelled" stuff like that. They all, like, went to the back room or whatever and, like, it doesn’t even look like they had a conversation - they just came out, like...Like, my Mom spoke, my Dad spoke. My Mom was a wreck. She was crying....everything. I just feel bad for putting her through that.

I didn’t get arrested. I didn’t even know that I had to go to court. Like, I thought once I, um, went to tribunal, like, I would just get sent to alternative school. Then my Mom got a letter in the mail saying that I had to go to court. I had been charged with affray. That’s like, um, public disturbance or something like that. And so, um, we went there and they just told me I had to be on probation. Like, the judge didn’t even, like, let me tell my side of the story. He was just like, "Probation." My Mom didn’t think I would need [a lawyer]. So, she just at last minute got one of the lawyers from the court. So, yeah. Um, he was, like, trying to tell the Judge, like, "My client has, like, evidence right here of where she’s been, um, been bullied" and stuff like that. And the
girl that I, um, fought, she actually has, like a record and stuff like that. So, if my lawyer is telling the judge that I'm the good one, I've never been arrested, none of that and the person that I fought has, then that's a problem. And he didn't see no problem with that.

Um, [my experience] made me better. Because I don't want to go back there. So, I'ma make sure that I do whatever I have to do. And I won't ever, like, let anyone get under my skin like that again. And even my grades, I felt bad because my grades were terrible. Like, I would barely pass. Like, I barely passed math. I passed with a 70 on the dot. And I just felt bad cuz I never had, like, lower than a B- ever. But now, I'm better. Like, my grades are back. But at alternative school, it's like, hard cuz I'm not being taught. So, I don't know...But now, I'm better cuz, like, I'm sitting in class and, like, a teacher's at the board, like explaining it to me.

[My experience] makes me sad because, like, when I think back, cuz I feel like I hurt my Mom. Like, she was really hurt by it. So when I look back, I just feel bad cuz I put her through that. Um, because I have, well, I had, like, a perfect life. Like, everything was just perfect. And then, I've never been on probation. I've never had to deal with cops, probation, none of that. And like, it's taking time out of her day all the time when we have to go to court. Like I'm still going to court. I don't know what for. I'm already on probation, so...and when she has to come meet my probation officer every month and she has to leave work early and it just messes up our relationship that we had. Even with my brother because he looks at me different and stuff like that. He thinks that I'm a bad person because I'm on probation. He's like, little, so...it makes me sad. Um, embarrassed. I know I keep saying that, but it's so embarrassing. Like, nobody's gonna take someone serious who's on probation. Like, it just looks bad. Even though people have their reasons and stuff like that but people just assume, like, "Oh, she's just a trouble maker" and stuff like that. Like, I try to come [to the probation office] as less as possible cuz when I see people in there, like, I just feel like they just label me. Like, if the other kids out there on probation see me walking or something like that they probably look at me, like, "Oh, she's in here probably for drugs or fighting" or something cuz that's what Black people are known for. I just feel bad. Well, I know [my probation officer] views me good because she understands because she actually, like, knows the girl. She knows what she's capable of, like, how she gets under people skin. And I think [another probation officer] does, too. Both of them. But those are the only people that I really know there, so...[They don't label me because] they know the actual story.

[My old principal] taught me a lesson. Everything happens for a reason. Don't let people get under your skin, even though they're pushing it. Just let it - at least tell somebody, like, a principal first so they can understand that you've tried to tell them. Because they think I just did that just because - when it was actually building up - building up. So, like, they probably would have made it a way where it was impossible for me to [not] see her at school. Like, cuz our classes, like, when it happened she was coming from this hall and I was coming from this hall and so, like, I saw her and...yeah.

I think [being a Black girl] had something to do with [my punishment]. It feels bad because it's like, you're missing out on your work and, like, it's hard to get back on track with your work if you miss it. Cuz if you miss a day, it's like you miss so much. Um, it would be, like, the teacher would be waiting for you to mess up again. Like, looking for the smallest thing cuz everything I do, she would say something - like, I could get up sharpen my pencil - "Don't get up!" I have to sharpen my pencil. It's just, like, little things. But, if another person, or somebody else did that, she wouldn't say anything. She literally wouldn't.

The white people usually [do] get in in trouble at school. Like if they bring a knife or something or drugs at school even, they'll just get, like, OSS or something like that. So, I feel like
- even if a dude fought, they wouldn't have got expelled from school. So I don't feel like that was right. I feel like they wanted to make an example out of me. [Before the fight] I didn't really pay attention. I was always to myself.
Ti-Ti's Personal Narrative

Well, my name is Ti-ti. I'm from [a different State]. I used to play a lot of sports. But, I don't much anymore. I like to associate, but not associate about people. Because that doesn't entertain me or nothing. It's just un-knowledgeable. Like, a lot of girls just like to gossip. I usually hang out with boys because, well, I'm ok with both. But girls, if they start talking about other girls, then I'm just gonna ignore them. With boys, I get a little bit better [along] with boys. Because they just, they like to play sports and stuff, too. I'm just mainly, like, I'm tom-boyish, but then again, I'm a girly-girl. But I'm just mixed between it. I REALLY like playing football. And I used to run track and I'm not a big fan of getting my nails done all the time or my eyebrows and all that and this and that. I was closer with my brother than my sisters. So it mainly made me [that way] cuz I grew up with him. I do like making sure my hair is ok and my eyebrows and stuff like that. Like, makeup. I don't wear makeup a lot, but, if I do, I have to make sure it's ok.

I really, I just, I just go with the flow. I'm just, like, “you just live life.” So, I don't have time to not like things. Only thing I just don't like is people who just want to be, like, hypocritical and just rude and just, always negative. Negative people! Put it that way. I hate negative people! Well, I don't hate them. I dislike them. So, I tried my best to stay away from negative cuz I'm trying to be positive. Because if you're negative, then you're always gonna be down. And I don't want to be down with that person. And, like, Jesus, He was always positive. So, I always wanted to be a leader. I'm never gonna be a follower. And negativity is just bad vibes around you and I don't like that.

Well, my Dad, I remember them saying that when my Mom was pregnant with me he got locked up. So I never had a Dad, had a father figure. But then when I was 2, he had got out and I seen a couple pictures that I had with him, but then they said he got back locked up, like, couple months after that. I don't remember him or anything, but I didn't grow up with a Dad. I grew up with my step-Dad for a couple years and then he got locked up, too. And then, my Mom, she had got her own way, like she used to sell drugs back in the day. And she had got locked up. And then, I had, then that's when I had to realize I was independent. I was 10. I had to realize I had to be independent on my own. I was staying back and forth with my sisters. One of my sisters did not like me. Like, cuz she was like, I was annoying. I'm in elementary, she's in high school. But, I had to realize I had to, I start cooking for my own. I start making sure I wake up in the morning this and that. I'm used to my Mom waking me up in the morning. So I had to do all this stuff by myself while I'm just 8, 9, 10. That's one reason why I stayed back in 3rd grade. Because I was doing all this and that. I was taking care of my nieces and nephews that younger than me. But then all that reflected and...it was hard. We got robbed before. Um, I lost my other step father who I thought was my real father. But a lot of stuff went on.

To be honest, I didn't fully forgive [my Mom] for, like, just leaving me like that and then, like, expecting me to forgive her like that. I didn't fully forgive her because, like, she just came back and act like everything was ok. She didn't say, like, "I'm so sorry." Like, she just... “You just left me there. Like, with no mother figure.” I ain't had no father. That's when my anger start coming out more. Cuz like, I have a nice heart. I used to get bullied a lot about my weight [when I was in elementary school] and I kept getting bullied until 3rd grade and then that's the year my Mom, she had got arrested and she was in and out and like, all this other stuff was going on. And then, I had stayed back that year. So that's the first time I been retained and people used to still make fun of me. But then, that's when I started acting up. After that I tried sticking up for myself.
and then, I guess I just was acting up. I got held back twice. The first time - 3rd grade - cuz I didn't pass [the State standardized test]. And 7th grade I dropped out. I tried dropping out. I didn't go to school. It made me feel dumb because a lot of people still pick on me cuz they, they'll be like, "You're dumb! You're stupid. Who is 16 and in the 8th grade?" And like, sometimes I let it get to me and sometimes I don't. It's just like I feel like I'm dumb. I'm stupid. Why did I get stayed back? Sometimes I feel like I want to drop out cuz I'm 16 so I can drop out now. So like every, I used to always tell myself on the first time I stayed back - "I'ma drop out when I'm 16. I can't wait till I'm 16, I'ma drop out." And now I'm still in school, but I'm like, dang, I'm two grades behind. It just make me feel like, I could have done it, but I didn't try to. I didn't put no effort. I do [want to stay in school], but I don't want to be in this grade. That's the only thing holding me back.

I mean, well, [at school] all the teachers and everything loved me. Like, if I wanted to do PE or Art, or this and that, like, I loved all that stuff and teachers and everything else. [When] I went to a different school in 4th grade, teachers loved me there, too. But, that's when I start not listening sometimes and this and that. And then, well, 5th grade was the worst. I just started acting all out crazy, you know? I didn't care about, like, if you said something. [My life] makes me think at school sometime. It was like, I just stay there and I don't focus. I get distracted and I blank out. I block out everything. I mean, I start getting in trouble cuz, like, when people kept like, messing with me and I just got tired of everything - I just started snapping. But, now I control myself with that. It just build up and all that anger just build up in me and I just exploded.

But like, the teacher, she was sorta, I thought she was racist or something because like someone used to be talking and she used to blame it on somebody else. Like, sometimes she blamed it on me. Like, I would just, I would just be quiet and she would see me doing my work and be like, "Ti-ti stop talking" or "I'ma write you up" and this or that. She knows it was other people, but they were all White. Like talking next to me. Some of the [teachers were helpful]. I used to always, most of the time when I was at regular school, I did always say, "You just messing with me." I said, "You just pick me out of the whole bunch because I'm Black. Cuz I'm different." And then some people would say, "You're not even Black!" They used to think I was just Hispanic. I said, "I'm mixed!" I said, "I still consider that Black."

That's when I kept getting, I got, I had got over 32 referrals and suspensions was more. I was supposed to get kicked out [but] they couldn't kick me out of elementary school, though. I got in trouble for dumb reasons. And we all let [my teacher] know, like, even though she wrote us all up and I didn't get to go to the 5th grade end of the year trip. I didn't get to go to field day. I got kicked off the chorus team because of my behavior. I got kicked off...I almost got kicked off the track team. But, it was like, only reason I didn't get kicked off the track team, I think, cuz the Black coach. He was a Black coach and he supported me and he knew that I was going through stuff. So he was like, he always told me to get my act together. This and that, like, he just tried to make me...encourage me.

I kept getting in trouble, trouble, trouble, whatever, this and that and that is when they had finally brought the officer from the alternative school. I remember him. And then at first we didn't get along. Like when he talks, he's like a military guy. He used to, I guess he used to be in the military and then turned into a officer. And that's when, he just spits when he talks and then that's when I had, [wiped my face] and he thought I was being funny. He was like, "Na na na!" And then that's when I was just like, I said, "You're spitting in my face" and that's when was like, "I don't care if I'm spitting in your face. I can be doing it!" I was like, "Ok, well, you don't have
I said, "Ok! Do it!" and that...I was just slick, I guess.

Well, 6th grade I was supposed to go to alternative school, but they let me go to a regular school to see how it was and, it was actually...well, the 8th grade used to bully me a lot. [W]hen I used to walk home or walk to school they used to throw rocks at me and girls used to be like, "Oh, you a hoe!" They used to call me out my name just because they didn't like me. I guess...my Mom used to tell me, "Cuz you're prettier than them" and all this and that. I lost a lot of weight in 6th grade. I was just depressed. I didn't eat. All I did was sleep and all I did was run around. So I was just, like, I actually got really sick in 5th grade. I had something called hand, foot, and mouth disease. Like, I used to be around germs and stuff like that. And I did lose weight from that and I also lost weight from 6th grade from just not eating. And then that's when I got arrested and got on probation in 6th grade.

First time [I got arrested] was in 6th grade when I didn't get up to go to lunch detention. [The police officer] got aggravated so he just picked me up and arrested me. He wanted to say resistance of arrest. I wasn't resisting, I was just, like, I said, "What are you doing?" and then he was just, like, he got one of my hands and I hold on to the table. Well, I guess that is resisting. And then he slammed me to the door. He was like a redneck. [He was] very country and "You gon' do what I say!" This and that, like...I had, like, all the bruises right here on my arms and...I didn't want to go to lunch detention. That's the only reason. The lady had wrote it right in front of my face so I told her I'm not going because you just wrote my name. And she was like, "You got lunch detention." I said, "No, I do not! Cuz my teachers would have told me.” And then she had put the lunch detention paper right in front of my face and then she had wrote my name right there. She said, "You do have lunch detention see right there” and she wrote my name, like, right there in front of my face. I was like, everyone seen it, and I was just, like..."I'm not going!" She said, "I don't care." She called the assistant principal. He came. He said, “If you don't go to lunch detention, I'ma have to call the officer." I said, "Go ahead. Call him because I'm not going to go! And I'm going to tell him exactly what I just saw and what you just did!” And then I told him what happened. I said"Sir, I'm not going." I said, "I do not have lunch detention." I said “She wrote it right there in my face" and [the other students] was right there and he said, "Y'all shut up! I'm not talking to y'all." They was making fun of him. They was like, "You want a donut" this and that, like, and he got in his feelings, I guess. And that's when he retired that year. After he arrested me, he retired that year. I really think, cuz, like, I was gonna press charges cuz he had, I had bruises and everything and, like, he wasn't supposed to slam me like that in front of everyone. And so, I was gonna press charges on him. He took me to the county. To the jail house and they had did fingerprints and took pictures and this and that. They put me in a cell and I had to wait till my Mom came. I never went to youth detention. I just been to the jail house. I slept over there one time. It was, it was nothing to me. I was just laying down. I was just thinking about, like, what can I do in life?

And that's why I went to alternative school. I guess I got my act together and then I went back to regular school [in 7th grade] and I got kicked out again and got sent back to alternative school. And my behavior at alternative school, I did not care about nothing. Cuz I already was there. I knew everybody. I was like, "I don't want to be bothered." Some day's I'd skip school.

[Suspension feels like] freedom. You just stay home. I mean, but you lose a lot. I realize that I lost a lot, like, of knowledge - stuff to learn at school. But, it's like, I sleep in and that's all I do. Cuz when I go back to school, I be like, "I did this?" Like, "What is this?" When I first came [here], I couldn't go to school cuz they wouldn't let me until I had, um, a paper signed off from
my Dad, but he was in prison, so it was really hard to get. I didn't go to school in January, February, March. I didn't go to school till April. No, yeah, the end of April. And I was just...I looked at all my work, like, I didn't even know what it was. I forgot everything and I was just, like, I felt...I felt stupid. And like, I'm trying to, I didn't even, look, I couldn't even write right. So, like, every time I wrote, it didn't...it didn't look right - none of that. [When I come back to school] I be, I be all behind. I don't remember anything. Like, if I take a test. I won't remember how to do this, like, cuz they had skipped ahead, so...I couldn't even work right...it's all computer work. It's just...It's my, it's my, like, bad grades. Like, that's all the problem. Bad grades. [My friends will] be like, "Hey!" They be trying to hype me up and get me hype [when I come back to school]. They be like, "Yeah, you back, you back!" Like they'll try to make me laugh. I just be like, I just laugh. Like they happy I'm back and this and that. Or sometimes they be surprised, "Oh, you came back? I thought you had extra day off school." Like...sometimes I be like, "Yeah, I'm back." and sometimes I'm like, "No, I can't get kicked out of here."

[I've been suspended] more than once! More than...a lot of times! I recently - my last time I had got suspended is why I'm on probation now - because my, I had, I think I told you about that. I had, um, I wasn't feeling good and I had went to the, um, the principal office. I went to the probation - I mean, I went to the principal office and I was throwing stuff off his desk and everything. I was getting mad cuz my Mom made me mad cuz she told me she was gonna come and get me and she never came. She told me that, like, a month ago and it was at the end of the time and I kept saying, "I want to go home. I want to go home." They heard me kept saying it. I kept going. I'm getting mad and that's when I got up and I started throwing everything. I remember that. He suspended me for two weeks cuz I threw everything and, yeah, disruption of school. And then I got probation for it.[I'm on probation for] 6 months, but I might get off a little earlier cuz my behavior [has been good] and everything. [Probation] was good. I met some people. I mean I met some people and they go to my school and, like, people got to know me more. Like, people started knowing who I was and everything. Like, I used to just be mean last year and now, I'm just more outspoken, I guess. I mean, I made some associates cuz they've been, like, some of the people been through some stuff I've been through. And so, it's just, like, maybe we got a little bond.

Well, I told my Mom in January I was tired because I kept getting kicked in and out of houses. I couldn't stay with my Mom. She stays under my sister roof and her boyfriend - my sister boyfriend doesn't want me there. She said I was disrespecting her house by not coming in at the right time. I wouldn't come because, like, one: sometimes I didn't pay attention to time. Two: cuz I really don't have a reason. I mean, I guess, I just didn't want to come cuz, when I was there, I used to be so sad and so depressed. And when I'm outside and I'm doing whatever, I just felt, like, freedom. So...I was [staying] with family. Like I got kicked out of my family's houses. Like, for being disrespectful and all this other stuff. And they didn't want me there. So in January, I was tired. Cuz, like, am I really gonna live like this my whole life? I can have a education - cuz I wasn't going to school like that. I kept getting suspended. I was just like, "When am I gonna grow up?" this and that and that's when it popped to me. I was staying with my friends and then they got locked up. So, that's why I had to depend on myself and that's when I just told my Mom I want to go somewhere. I was like, I don't know where, I said, but I'm tired. I don't want to go through this no more. So then I came up here [to live with my Aunt]. I want to be something in life. So that's why I decided to come up here and change my life around.

I never liked school. I just...I mean, all the, I don't know...I'm actually getting to like it now. Like, I just be trying to get it over and done with. Like, cuz sometimes, some days I don't
feel good and I just don't want to go to school. Like, I'd rather do homeschool than regular school cuz I just don't like no drama. I don't like all that. It's just, it's just too much. Like, not [at my current] school, but like the old drama. Like, kids just going back and forth, talking, like, all this. Like, "Oh, I'm a beat you!" "Ok." And then they fightin' and my name get in the middle of it. I be like, "I don't know nothing at all." Cuz I don't! Don't say my name if you think I'm gonna stick up for you. I don't know anything. I mean, like, [the school] try to get me in trouble, like, but I just be quiet. Like, littlest things: "Your shirt's untucked. I should write you up. You were late, I'm gonna give you OSS or ISS." I'm like, I just be like, "Um, well..." And I just be quiet most of the time.

It's hard for me to learn. And like, teachers sometimes don't want to help or, like, no one wants to help and I have to do it myself. So, I, I, don't try to guess, but when I think too hard, my head hurts. It [always] been like that and it still is. Like, it's hard for me to, like, when we study and this and that, I freeze. And I be like, "Um, I don't remember." I blank out sometime or I forget what we were learning and it's hard for me to pronounce a lot of words. I mean, they tried putting me in an IEP thing. It's like where they help kids, or whatever, but I kept saying "I'm not stupid! I'm not stupid! Don't put me on that!" I used to snap on them. Like, I said, "I wish you would put me on that." I used to threaten them and I used to be, like, so angry. I didn't want help. Cuz, I didn't feel like I needed it. I thought, I guess, at the moment, I didn't want help. Cuz, like, my Mom wasn't trying to give me no effort to try to help me and this and that. So, it was just like, I didn't want help, I guess. I used to think, like people was gon' call me retarded and laugh at me, cuz I'm all - they see me with that class or they see me go to the class or something.

[When I was getting in trouble] I guess I needed someone to lean on. I needed a shoulder. Someone, like, I could talk to. This and that. Like, I had friends - some of my friends, I was always there for them, but they were never there for me. But I was still friends with them, cuz, I guess, I don't know. And it's still like that. Cuz every time I try to bring my feelings or, like, how I feel, they be like, "Get out your feelings." But when they talk to me, I don't say that. I just listen to them and they talk to me, like, so, I just really keep my feelings to myself. They say it's not healthy cuz, like, cuz all that anger and stuff just builds inside and this and that, but...I don't know [why I do that], honestly, I just keep everything to myself. [The school] didn't know [about my family and everything that was going on]. Maybe [it would be good for them to know] cuz if people knew about my past, like, if they understood, like, what I went through and what I had to go through, then maybe they'll be like, "Maybe this is why and she just need some help. She just need some love." Like, maybe they'll say that, but they didn't know. They didn't know that situation. And I didn't tell. I didn't tell it to nobody.
Appendix B: Youth Interview Research Protocol

Interview #1: Re-Telling Self

Check-In (Not Recorded)
1. How are you doing today?
2. How do you feel about being interviewed about yourself?
3. Are you ready for the interview to begin?

Interview Questions
1. Tell me about yourself.
   a. Possible Probes
      i. How do you describe yourself?
      ii. What are your favorite things to do? Why?
      iii. What are some of your favorite things? Why are they your favorite?
      iv. What are things that you do not like?
      v. Where are you from? What is it like there?
      vi. What are your earliest memories?
      vii. What was your childhood like (from birth until age 12)?
      viii. What was/is your youth like (from 13 until now)?

2. Tell me about the people you surround yourself with.
   a. Possible Probes
      i. Who do you hang out with and why?
      ii. What are your friends like? Why do you keep them around?

3. Tell me about what it means to you to be a Black girl.
   a. Possible Probes
      i. Do you consider yourself a Black girl? Why or why not? What is it like to be that?
      ii. How do you identify yourself? Are there other words that you would use to describe yourself?
      iii. How did you learn how to be these things?

4. Tell me a story about anything you want.
   a. Possible Probes
      i. Why did you tell me this story?

Debrief
1. “How was it for you to be talking to me in this way?” (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).
2. “What questions do you have for me as we end our time together?” (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).
3. “I appreciate your openness and willingness to share your experiences with me. I feel that I have learned a lot from you that will help me in my work” (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).
Interview #2: Re-Telling School Re-entry

Check-In (Not Recorded)
1. How are you doing today?
2. How have you been since our last interview?
3. Has anything been on your mind about the interviews since our last time together?
4. Do you have any questions about the transcripts that I gave you? Did I get our conversation right?
5. Is there anything I can do to help you feel more comfortable about today’s interview?
6. Are you ready for the interview to begin?

Interview Questions
1. Tell me about your time in school.
   a. Possible Probes
      i. What schools did you go to? What were they like? What are they like for Black girls?
      ii. What was school like for you? Did you like it? Why or why not?
      iii. How do you think people at school would describe you? Why?

2. Have you ever been suspended? Tell me about a time when you were suspended.
   a. Possible Probes
      i. Have you been suspended more than once? Can you tell me about another time? The researcher will probe for the participant to share as many experiences of suspension as they care to share.
      ii. What does it feel like to be suspended?
      iii. What does it feel like to be a Black girl who got suspended? Did your race and gender matter?
      iv. What was it like after you were suspended and went back to school?

3. Have you ever been expelled? Tell me about a time when you were expelled from school?
   a. Possible Probes
      i. Have you been expelled more than once? Can you tell me about another time? The researcher will probe for the participant to share as many experiences of expulsion as they care to share.
      ii. What does it feel like to get expelled?
      iii. What does it feel like to be a Black girl who got expelled? Did your race and gender matter?
      iv. What happens when you get expelled? Did you go to an alternative school?
         1. What is alternative school like?
      v. Did you go back to traditional school after you were expelled? Why did you or didn’t you try to go back?

4. Have you ever been arrested? Tell me about a time when you got arrested?
   a. Possible Probes
i. Have you ever been arrested more than once? Can you tell me about another time? The researcher will probe for the participant to share as many experiences of arrest as they care to share.

ii. Have you ever been arrested in school? What is it like to get arrested at school?

iii. Did you go to youth detention? What was youth detention like? What was it like as a Black girl?

iv. How did you get released?

v. What was life like after you got released?

vi. How did your experience in detention impact you after you were released?

vii. Did you try to go back to school after you were released? Why did you or didn’t you try?

viii. What happened when you tried to return to school?

If the participant successfully returned to traditional public school:
1. Did anyone help you return to school? Who were they? How did they help you?
2. How did you return to school? What did you have to do?
3. Why was it important for you to go back to school? How did/will school help you in your life?
4. Were there any programs to help you get your schooling?
5. Does/Did your experience being suspended or expelled or going to detention impact your experience in school? If so, how?
6. Do/did people at your school know about your background? If so, how did that impact you when you went back to school? If not, why didn’t they know?
7. Will/did you finish school? What will you do after you finish (or do not finish)?

If the participant was unable to return to school:
1. Did anyone help you try to return to school? Who were they? How did they help you?
2. Why didn’t you go back to school?
3. What did you do instead of go to school?
4. Did/Do you feel that school is important? Can school help you in your life?
5. Are there any programs to help you get your schooling?
6. What is it like being a Black girl/woman in your situation?
7. Does/Did your experience being suspended or expelled or in detention impact your decision to not go back to school?
8. If you tried to return to school, did people know about your background? If so, how did that impact you being able to go back? If not, why didn’t they know?
9. Will you ever return to school? Do you want to go back?

Debrief
1. “How was it for you to be talking to me in this way?” (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).
2. “What questions do you have for me as we end our time together?” (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).
3. “I appreciate your openness and willingness to share your experiences with me. I feel that I have learned a lot from you that will help me in my work” (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).
Interview #3: Narrative Exploration

Check-In (Not recorded)
1. How are you doing today?
2. How have you been since our last interview?
3. Has anything been on your mind about the interviews since our last time together?
4. Do you have any questions about the transcripts that I gave you? Did I get our conversation right?
5. Is there anything I can do to help you feel more comfortable about today’s interview?
6. Are you ready for the interview to begin?

Interview Questions
1. Tell me about your dreams in life.
   a. Possible Probes
      i. What are your dreams in life?
      ii. How did you get these dreams?

2. What inspires you?

3. Think about your experiences with suspension, expulsion or arrest and finish this sentence: “If I knew then what I know now, I would__________________.”

4. Tell me what the future has in store for you.
   a. If she doesn’t know:
      i. Why don’t you know what the future has in store for you?
      ii. What do you think other people might say about your future? Why do you think they would feel that way?
      iii. Is this what you want for your future? Why or why not?
      iv. What do you think you need so that you can have what you want?
   b. Possible Probes
      i. What makes you have this vision of yourself?
      ii. Is this your vision or someone else’s?
      iii. Is this what you want for your future? Why or why not?
      iv. What do you think you need so that you can have what you want?

5. Tell me about the kind of education you need, if you need it, to have your vision of the future (not someone else’s)?

6. Tell me about the kind of support you need to have your vision of the future.

Debrief
1. “How was it for you to be talking to me in this way?” (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).
2. “What questions do you have for me as we end our time together?” (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).
3. “I appreciate your openness and willingness to share your experiences with me. I feel that I have learned a lot from you that will help me in my work” (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).
4. This is our last interview, is there anything you want to talk to me about before we finish the study?
5. (Optional) If you can, please bring a photograph, object or story that best represents who you are to our next group conversation.
Appendix C: Group Conversation Research Protocol

Group Conversation #1 – Good & Bad Black Girls

Materials
- Roll of Toilet Paper
- Post it notes
- Butcher paper
- Markers
- Post-it Paper

I. Introduction/Getting to Know You Game: I’m on a roll!
   a. The researcher will pass around a roll of toilet paper and allow the girls to take as much as they want. When they are done, they will be asked to share something about themselves for each square they tore off.

II. Purpose of the Group Conversation
   a. In each of the interviews we had, the purpose was to learn about what life is like for Black girls who have been on probation. This group is designed to keep it real about getting in trouble so that other girls who have gone through this can get the help they actually need and also so that the people who help them can know what is truly helpful.
   b. Like the interviews we have had, this focus group is confidential. I will use the names you chose to write about your responses. Please feel free to be honest. There are no right or wrong answers.
   c. The group will be asked if they have any questions or concerns about the purpose.

III. Shared Agreements: Before the group conversation, the girls will have discussed individually with the researcher the following agreements. They will be given an opportunity to add/edit to this list:
   a. Bring and keep a positive attitude
   b. Have an open mind
   c. Remember that my opinion matters
   d. Remember that other people’s opinion matters
   e. I am the expert on my own experience, but I am not the expert on another person’s life
   f. What is said in the room, stays in the room.

IV. Focus Group Questions/Activities
   a. The researcher will ask each girl to give Erica an object that best represents themselves. She will bring the object to the group and put it on display. The girls will then write a list of words to describe what they think each object says about the person who brought it. She will then invite each girl to claim her object and explain its significance.
      i. What do these objects say about us?
   b. The researcher will define “School-to-Prison Pipeline”
i. Have you ever heard of the school to prison pipeline?

ii. Now that you know what it is, does it seem familiar to you in any way?

iii. Do you think that schools and jails should have such close relationships?

iv. Do you have experiences with schools being under-resourced? (Classes being over-crowded, not enough permanent teachers, not enough counselors, not enough books or materials, not enough interesting classes)?
   1. What is it like to go to an under-resourced school?
   2. How did going to an under-resourced school effect you?

v. Do you have experience with zero-tolerance policies (i.e., where you break a rule where the school says they don’t have a choice but to suspend or expel you)?
   1. What is it like to experience a zero-tolerance policy?
   2. How did being put out of school effect you?

vi. Do you have experiences with school resource officers?
   1. What are school resource officers like?

vii. Do you have experiences with alternative schools?
   1. What is going to an alternative school like?

viii. Everyone here has been on probation before, what is it like to be on probation?
   1. What is going to school like when you are on probation?

ix. Most of what we hear about Black youth relates to how Black boys are doing. That is why I wanted to do this study. Black girls are also affected by the school-to-prison pipeline and as you can see, it is not always their fault.
   1. The group will watch a video by Girls for Gender Equity where Black girls discuss their school criminalization experiences: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0AmxZMgpQ
      a. What did you think about the video?
      b. Did any of the girls’ stories resonate with you? Why or why not?

x. The girls will then be invited to play Stand for your Opinion: The girls will be asked to speak from their own experience. The researcher will read some statements made in the video and the girls will walk to an area of the room if they Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree.
   1. One of the girls said that education between Black and White students is not equal: do you agree?
   2. Black girls have a chance to learn their history and culture in school: do you agree?
   3. Black girls get disrespected by their teachers and other people at school: do you agree?
   4. Black girls need to silence themselves when they are in school: do you agree?
5. Black girls have to change themselves to look and act White: do you agree?
6. Getting suspended makes your grades drop and it’s hard to catch up: do you agree?
7. Schools automatically suspend students: do you agree?
8. Teachers really know their students: do you agree?
9. Teachers make assumptions about who you are before they know you/Teachers stereotype their students: do you agree?
10. Schools can cause you to shut down or be misunderstood: do you agree?

c. Question/Prompt 1: The video suggests that people have ideas already made up in their mind about who is a good girl and who is a bad girl. Let’s define both of those words:
   i. Activity: Chalk Talk - Participants will be given markers and post-it notes. They will then be able to write, draw, or list ideas that define a “good” girl and a “bad” girl on the post-it note and then stick the note on a large poster paper.
      1. How do you know that this is what a “good” girl is? How do you know that this is what a “bad” girl is? Where did you learn these things?
      2. Do you agree with this definition of a “good” girl? Do you agree with this definition of a “bad” girl? If not, what would your definition be?
      3. How do these definitions influence girls?
      4. What happens when we add our Blackness to this conversation? Are these definitions for Black girls?
      5. Are girls either “good” or “bad”?

d. Question/Prompt 2: What don’t people know about Black girls who have been on probation before?
   i. Activity: Inside Me Drawing
      The girls will lay down on butcher paper and will take turns drawing the outline of their bodies. She will then write, draw, or think about what was going on inside their head/brain, heart, belly and veins when they got in trouble. After the girls outline their bodies, the researcher will ask:
      1. What do you see?

If further prompting is needed, the researcher will explain the following:
Brain: Our brain is where we take in and process information. It is the “motherboard” of our bodies. Without us even being aware of it, the brain makes your entire body work. It allows you to learn new things and take in information through the senses of sight, hearing, touch, and smell. What, if anything, was going on inside your mind when you were getting in trouble?
Belly: Our belly is where our bodies create fuel. The belly gives us the energy to be able to get up, get out and do things! Without fuel, we are lifeless. Our bellies also make sure that we get rid of toxins in our body because it extracts the nutrients that we need and expels the waste that we don’t need. What kinds of things were you (or were you not) taking into your body when you get in trouble? Why?

Heart: Our heart is the engine that keeps our bodies running. Without it, we wouldn’t get the oxygen we need to create the energy our bellies make. What was “running the engine” when you were in trouble? What was in your heart?

Veins: Our veins run throughout our body, carrying oxygen to our tissues and blood back to our hearts. They are the messengers of the body – carrying the work of the heart throughout the body. What was flowing through you when you got in trouble?

There are also things happening outside of us that influences what goes on inside of us. Everything outside of us impacts what happens within. On the external of the body, write, draw, or talk about what you were holding on to in their right hand, what you were letting go of in the left hand, what you were standing on/what was supporting you under the right foot, and what you were walking over under the left foot.

The researcher will display the drawings on the wall and the group will reflect on them as a group.

Closing:
1. What do people need to know about Black girls who have gotten in trouble before?

Gratitude
1. “I appreciate your openness and willingness to share your experiences with me. I feel that I have learned a lot from you that will help me in my work” (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).

Lunch
Group Conversation #2 – Narratives of Hope and Possibility

Materials:
- Masks for decorating
- Colored paper
- Tissue paper
- Decorative Items
- Paint
- Brushes
- Magazines
- Colorful Fabric
- Glue
- Group Conversation #2 Handout

I. Introductions: Check-In
   a. Participants will each be given as much time as they would like to talk about how they are doing.

II. Purpose of the Group Conversation
   a. The last time we were together we talked about “good” and “bad” Black girls. This time we will talk about why girls who get in trouble do the things that they do and also about the kind of support and opportunities you feel Black girls who have been in trouble need.
   b. The group will be reminded that this focus group is confidential, that they can be honest and that there are no right or wrong answers.
   c. The group will be asked if they have any questions or concerns about the purpose.

III. Review the Shared Agreements

IV. Focus Group Questions/Activities:
   a. The group will watch a mini-documentary on understanding the interiority of Black girls who are criminalized at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Kse-llLZ0k
      i. Did anything from the video resonate with you?
      ii. Dr. Morris said that sometimes the ways Black girls express themselves get misunderstood. Has this every happened to you?
         1. Do you feel like people see you for who you are?
         2. How do you feel people see you?
      iii. Dr. Ocen said that Black girls don’t get to be treated like children – that they are treated like little women. Do you agree or disagree?
      iv. Ms. Archie said that when she was truant, the connection she was looking for was for someone to understand what she was going through.
         1. What connection, if any, were you looking for when you got in trouble?
Dr. Morris said, “We have to begin to piece together...these dots and really begin to understand what our community can do better to acknowledge the trauma that impacts whether girls are able to feel as if they are welcome parts of the school community.”

1. The girls will be asked: What can the community do to help girls in trouble feel welcome in school? For each of the following school community members: teachers, students, principals, school resource officers, parents, school workers.


i. The researcher will pass around pictures of various African masks from throughout the Diaspora. She will explain where the masks are from and what they are used for. The participants will then discuss ideas about figurative masks:
   1. What are some of the masks you put on when you want to conceal all or part of ourselves?

ii. The researcher will invite the girls to make visual representations of the masks they wear (or do not wear).
   1. When finished, they will be invited to discuss her mask and what it says about her.

iii. While the girls make masks, the researcher will ask the following questions relating to common themes among their interviews:
   1. Many of you talked about not having friends or having associates. Why do you have associates more than you have friends?
   2. Many of you talked about not wanting to be told what to do. Where does that come from?
      a. How does not wanting to be told what to do work out for you when you are in school?
   3. Many of you talked about the reputation you get when you get in trouble. Does getting in trouble help or hurt your reputation?
      a. Does fitting in or not being lame have anything to do with getting in trouble?
   4. Talk about being too pretty to get in trouble. Is that a thing?
   5. What does it feel like to get bad grades?
      a. Does getting bad grades impact your decision to get in trouble?
   6. Why do girls fight?
      a. What would have helped de-escalate a conflict?
   7. What does it mean to be ratchet?
   8. Many of you talked about schools having a lot of “drama,” what does that mean?
   9. Is it easy or hard to stop getting in trouble? Why?
10. What is being on probation like?
    a. Does being on probation help you?
    b. Does being on probation hurt you?
Closing:

1. What do people need to know about Black girls who have gotten in trouble before?

Gratitude

“I appreciate your openness and willingness to share your experiences with me. I feel that I have learned a lot from you that will help me in my work” (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).
Appendix D: Administrator Interview Research Protocol

Check-In (Not Recorded)
1. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me.
2. The purpose of this interview is to help me understand the context you work in, your approach to school climate – particularly as it relates to discipline – and to talk about Black girls who get in trouble and what happens when they return to school after being suspended, expelled, or arrested.
3. Are you ready for the interview to begin?

Interview
1. Tell me about the community your school serves.

2. Tell me about the school you lead.
   a. Tell me what it is like to be an administrator there.
      i. How do you spend the majority of your time?
   b. Tell me about your students.
      i. What are their strengths?
      ii. What are their challenges?
   iii. Talk about Black girls, in general, who attend your school.
      1. What kinds of things are popular among them?
      2. What are their strengths?
      3. What are their challenges?
      4. What do you feel they bring to the school community?
      5. What do you feel they need?
   iv. Talk about Black girls, in particular, who are chronically in trouble at your school.
      1. What are their strengths?
      2. What are their challenges?
      3. What do you feel they bring to the school community?
      4. What do you feel they need?
         a. Is the school able to provide those needs?
      5. Why do you think they get in trouble so often?
   c. Tell me about your teaching staff.
      i. In general, do you feel that your team is prepared to serve the students who attend this school? Why or why not?
      ii. What perceptions do your teaching staff have of Black girls as a group?
         1. Where do these perceptions come from?
      iii. What perceptions do your teaching staff have of Black girls who are chronically in trouble?
         1. Where do these perceptions come from?
         2. What do they ask from you to help with Black girls who are chronically in trouble?
         3. Do teachers have the ability to do anything about Black girls who are chronically in trouble?
   d. Tell me about the relationships you have with Black girls who get in trouble.
i. Is there anything you can do to support them?

3. Tell me about the approach to school discipline you take.
   a. What systems do you have in place to support school discipline?
   b. What are your priorities when it comes to enacting discipline on a student?
   c. Tell me about the policies, if any, that you follow to support the school discipline decisions you make?
   d. In terms of the different types of disciplinary sanctions:
      i. What is your perspective on suspension?
         1. How do you decide when to give in-school suspensions?
         2. How do you decide when to give an out-of-school suspension?
         3. Tell me about a time when you had to suspend a Black girl. What happened?
      ii. What is your perspective on expulsion?
         1. How do you decide when to have a student expelled?
         2. What happens to students when they get expelled?
         3. Tell me about a time when you had to have a Black girl expelled. What happened?
      iii. What is your perspective on school-based arrest?
         1. How do you decide when to have a student arrested?
         2. Tell me about a time when you had to have a Black girl arrested. What happened?
      iv. Is it ever permissible to use physical restraint on a student?
   v. Is gender taken into consideration when students get in trouble?

   e. Re-entry
      i. Tell me about Black girls when they come back to school after suspension.
      ii. Tell me about Black girls when they come back to school after being expelled (or after alternative school)?
         1. Do you know when a student is re-enrolling after alternative school?
         2. Does knowing that a student has been to alternative school help the school? If so, how?
      iii. Tell me about Black girls when they come back to school after having gone to youth detention?
         1. Do you know when a student is re-enrolling after youth detention?
         2. Does knowing that a student has been to youth detention help the school? If so, how?

4. Does your school utilize school resource officers? If so, tell me about your school resource officers.
   a. What role do student resource officers play in the school?
   b. How does the relationship between your role as administrator and the role of your school resource officers’ work?
   c. How does the presence of SROs impact your school climate?
d. What kinds of relationships do you observe between school resource officers and students?

e. What kinds of relationships do you observe between school resource officers and Black girls, in particular?

5. Is there anything else you can tell me about Black girls who chronically get in trouble that we didn’t cover?

6. Is there anything else you can tell me about what happens to Black girls when they return to school that we didn’t cover?

Debrief
1. “What questions do you have for me as we end our time together?” (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).
2. “I appreciate your openness and willingness to share your experiences with me. I feel that I have learned a lot from you that will help me in my work” (Josselson, 2007, p. 545).