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This dissertation, **BLACK ON BLACK SCHOOL DISCIPLINE: DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF DISCIPLINING YOUR OWN** by TERUKO DOBASHI-TAYLOR, 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 Education, in the College of Education & 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.

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BLACK ON BLACK SCHOOL DISCIPLINE: DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE  
PERSPECTIVE OF DISCIPLINING YOUR OWN

by

TERUKO DOBASHI-TAYLOR

Under the Direction of Dr. Sheryl Cowart-Moss

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine how Black school leaders understand double consciousness and discipline in America and in the schools they lead. The following research questions guided this study: (1) How have Black school leaders experienced discipline as Black students? (2) How have Black school leaders experienced double consciousness in their personal and professional lives? (3) What are the different perspectives that Black school leaders hold regarding their disciplinary practices of Black students? This arts-based phenomenology explored five Black school leaders' perspectives of disciplining Black students in an urban public school district in the Southeastern United States. Data gathered from participants' semi-structured interviews, their critical responses to a poem, and an analysis of the school district's student code of conduct were crystallized to construct new understanding of the phenomenon of being a Black school leader responsible for disciplining Black students. Overall themes that emerged were expressed metaphorically through three African proverbs, (1) *"It takes a village to raise a child"* (2) *"The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth"* and (3) *"The sun does not forget the village just because it is small."* Findings were shared structurally and then poetically in a liberating manner that engenders an appreciation for creative writing and counter-narratives. Black school leaders reiterated the importance of increasing parent and community engagement, building staff's cultural competence, strengthening Black students' sense of belonging, and illuminating anti-Black practices embedded in various aspects of schooling. Recommendations for school practice and policy included access to professional development that challenges biases, increased educator critical self-reflection, and a focus on implementing intentional policies that promote discussion and advocacy around social justice issues.

INDEX WORDS: Black school leaders; double consciousness; discipline; arts-based research; phenomenology; poetry; Kwansaba; anti-Blackness; Black pride

Black on Black school discipline:  
Double consciousness and the perspective of disciplining your own

by

Teruko Dobashi-Taylor

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in

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in

Educational Policy Studies

in

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Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA

2022

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## DEDICATION

### **Regina**

*I ain't supposed to be  
stronger than the system  
That's made for breaking  
Taking pieces  
of my hard outer shell  
Selling it back to me  
This broken self-worth  
Wrapped carefully  
Trapped in this cycle of hell*

*But you remind me  
I was birthed to a phoenix  
Finding beauty in flames  
We are wildfires  
Burning brilliantly  
boundaries of our light  
is nonexistent*

*you encourage me to go  
harder  
do whatever it takes to be  
smarter to survive longer  
You taught me the hustle  
So, when they come back  
tomorrow  
I'm gonna tell them  
My price has gone up  
Even the fragments of  
past failures  
And future fears  
I'll be able to auction off*

### **Ruby**

*Never would have made it  
Without the whispering of  
wind  
Telling me your prayers live  
In the rhythm of the trees  
the rotation of the stars  
Still fixing your lips to  
Ask God to wake me up  
Turn me around  
Place my feet on solid ground  
Give me grace  
And guide me right  
Telling me  
I am the glisten of morning  
And the glory of the night*

### **Jamie**

*The gentlest reminder  
There is resilience being  
brewed in your tower  
Home to unyielding power  
We walk beside you  
Hoping to catch  
Your essence-the music  
playing in your presence  
God's gift- your laugh is  
found on his playlist  
Soon enough  
The world will  
place at your feet  
All of what you deserve  
We will call you  
Unconditional love in human  
form  
Dr. Manning  
Black excellence  
Because  
The next graduation is yours!*

### **Eric**

*You don't even know  
The impact you've had  
First poet-positioned me with  
perspective*

*You were locked up  
But showed me with a  
liberated mind  
we could never be held down  
you're the one who taught me  
I ain't got nothing to lose  
When the most valuable  
possession is inside of you*

*The willingness to live  
The strength for the fight  
So here I am- south paw  
But you smile hugs the frame  
of your face tight*

*Reminding me  
The battle is won when  
they think we're defeated  
but we look and laugh  
and keep on believing*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*won't you celebrate with me- what i have shaped into a kind of life? - i had no model. -  
born in Babylon -both nonwhite and woman- what did i see to be except myself?  
i made it up- here on this bridge between- starshine and clay-  
my one hand holding tight- my other hand; come celebrate with me that everyday  
something has tried to kill me- and has failed.*

– Lucille Clifton

***Depression is a silent killer and imposter syndrome is its co-conspirator. I want to acknowledge the strong Black Womyn in my life who have consistently lifted me out of dark places when I felt as if I wasn't enough.***

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## CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

"If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it." – Zora Neale Hurston

### Figure 1

Poem: when asked what i learned in elementary school being bussed from Mattapan to Wellesley

What they think is appropriate: to treat  
Black hair like a pregnant woman's belly,  
question if larger nostrils enhance  
breathing, probe my legs for extra calf  
muscles  
    under skin our teacher said  
    doesn't bruise because she can't see the  
        blood  
        -screams beneath.  
    i learned to tolerate  
    the frumpy lies of well-intentioned White  
    women—bosoms heaving, eyes liquid with  
    Reaganomics, Willie Horton and how they  
    imagined my parents (a crack whore  
    mother, an imprisoned father)  
—and their messianic attempts to save me  
    from my stable home.  
    i learned to master

Simon says skills; to be a chameleon; to  
code-switch; to bite my tongue instead of  
theirs; to make excuses for them, yet allow  
awkwardness to pant circles around heads  
    asking what i prefer to be called  
    (Colored? Negro? African  
    American? Black?)  
    never landing on my name.  
    i learned to execute  
    the affirmative action of elementary  
arithmetic—(effort 2 \* time)/x = equity; that  
history is an art painted in primary colors:  
    White supremacy,  
White privilege, White fragility; that darker  
shades are plucked out, passed over:  
crayons reserved for trees, rocks, dirt; that  
other tales struggle to sing through the  
cacophony of the single story (slavery, civil  
rights

poverty) muting a talented tenth; that i  
should be grateful. i learned to accept  
that "Cohen" and "Karelitz" were nigger -  
names before  
my orange bus replaced their yellow stars;  
that kids say the darndest things when  
grandparents remember the Shoah,  
unlike others whose ancestors held whips  
or felt pilgrim pride in the face of fallen  
feathers;  
    i learned to endure the cultural  
appropriation of slang, when every bobby  
and becky becomes "my brotah," "my  
    sistah,"  
with teeth clenched, lips parted, hoping  
for the day they can reclaim "my nig. . .".  
    i learned to drink  
the cafeteria's chocolate milk, my back wall-  
braced; to never trust sudden movements; to  
fight for every inch of slide and swing, each  
paper mâché turtle i "couldn't have created  
on my own"; to recite "today's a good day  
to die"  
    —  
    every day  
    —  
down checkered halls to my seat beside the  
office secretary, she who understood the  
intersection of round pegs and square holes;  
to enjoy solitary confinement recess; to  
admire the ants who rebuild their lives after  
every collapsing storm or malicious White  
sneaker.  
    i learned that they think i can't swim.

Matthew E. Henley

*Note.* Figure 1 is a published poem by Dr. Matthew Henley depicting his experiences as a Black student being bussed to a predominately White school. Participants completed a critical analysis of this poem describing how this experience related to their schooling experience, other Black students' experience, and their perspective of double consciousness.

Poetry has played an integral role in storytelling and critical dreaming. It has been used to paint pictures of past pain, post-trauma, current climates, circumstances, setbacks, and future healing. It has held the darkest truths and the heaviest burdens while also revealing the brightest moments and lightest loads. It flutters with the versatility of grace and strength, a flicker of fire igniting new sight and setting ablaze change. It carries the revolution in the archways of each stanza and picture it frames.

Poems like the one above share experiences of a phenomenon of existence, depiction, and experiences of Blackness. In this arts-based phenomenology, I asked Black school leaders to react to the experiences explored in Dr. Henley's writing entitled *when asked what i learned in elementary school being bussed from Mattapan to Wellesley*. In addition, they also contributed an understanding of their own Blackness, their Black students' needs, double consciousness, and anti-Black Discipline, which are shared thematically and poetically to elucidate the phenomenon of disciplining Black students while being Black in America.

## **Background**

In 1954, the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. The Board of Education* desegregated schools and made it possible for Black students to bring their physical body to school. However, this case did not give their Blackness permission to be seen, heard, or protected within the school system. Despite racial and social progress that has helped Black Americans' advancement, there are still negative connotations, stereotypes, and consequences associated with Blackness (Swain, 2018). After eliminating de jure segregation, Black students have been removed and excluded from school at a higher rate than their White peers and endure

being ostracized and criticized for things as simple as the way they dress and how they talk (Douglas et al., 2018). Black girls and boys across the country have been stereotyped, criminalized, and negatively affected by the stigma associated with their Blackness (Morris, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2017; Wun, 2016). Just a little over 68 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, schools are currently serving as institutions actively working against or perpetuating the marginalization and oppression of Black students.

In school, teacher's and school leader's bias driven by cultural insensitivity has led to subjective inequitable and exclusionary policies and practices (Grace, 2016). Extant literature highlights how Black students have been subjected to disproportionate discipline that is associated with unintended consequences such as stripping students' sense of belonging, school dropout, substance abuse, and higher chances for interactions with the school-to-prison pipeline (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Morris, 2016; Ryan & Goodram, 2013). Disciplinary actions like out-of-school suspensions could lead to adverse outcomes, including impeding student academic success (U.S Department of Education, 2016). A myriad of literature explores the impacts of exclusionary disciplinary practices on students of color (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Ryan & Goodram, 2013). These studies explore how Black students need equitable school leaders to address exclusionary policies and practices implemented in schools.

*Brown v. The Board of Education* (1954) offered the notion of equality, and its aligned implications were Black students receiving access to quality instruction, materials, and facilities. This Supreme Court ruling also meant some Black students had to enter hostile schools led by White school leaders and classroom teachers who opposed integration and despised these students' Blackness since Black teachers and schools were seen as inferior. Black-led schools closed, and over 38,000 Black school teachers and leaders in southern states were pushed out of

education and forced to quit their jobs (Tillman, 2004). According to the U.S Department of Education (2016), only 10% of school administrators identified as Black at the time of the survey. Despite such a low number, extant literature has shown that this small percentage of Black school leaders has positively impacted minority students (Khalifa et al., 2014; Lomotey, 2019; Peters, 2020). As Black folks take on roles as school leaders, they are responsible for supporting students to overcome adversities and oppressive systems while also grappling with the effects of oppression and racial injustices themselves (Castagno, 2014; Obidah, 2000). Black school leaders may deal with this conflict when leading systems created with oppressive cultures that impact Black students. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1968/2013) highlights that the “conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them...; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and re-create, in their power to transform the world” (p.46). Education scholars should acknowledge and explore Black educators' experiences of disciplining Black students while trying to grapple with racial injustices, anti-Blackness, and White gaze. In essence, White gaze is a hegemonic practice in which Blackness is both invisible and hyper-visible simultaneously (Yancy, 2013). Black people are viewed through oppressive stereotypes created by the dominant culture. Morrison popularized this term in the early 70s as a way in which Black lives are compared to Whiteness and then devalued (Pailey, 2020). Such explorations of White gaze, anti-Blackness, and racial injustices could ultimately support Black educators as they navigate the perils of internalized biases and untreated traumas. Moreover, this form of research can help identify solutions that mitigate anti-Blackness in schools.

## **Research Question**

This arts-based phenomenology explores Black school leaders' personal connections with school discipline and their professional perspectives of district and school-wide disciplinary policies and procedures that shape how Black students are disciplined. The questions ask Black school leaders to reflect on Blackness in America and how it may relate to their discipline decisions.

The questions that drive this study are the following:

- (1) How have Black school leaders experienced discipline as Black students?
- (2) How have Black school leaders experienced double consciousness in their personal and professional lives?
- (3) What are the different perspectives that Black school leaders hold regarding their disciplinary practices of Black students within urban schools?

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this arts-based phenomenology is to understand how Black school leaders perceive their experiences disciplining Black students while being Black and grappling with Du Bois' (1903) idea of double consciousness, which is the sense that one must constantly look at oneself through the eyes of those who see them externally; of measuring one's worth based on the notions created by others. Previous studies have affirmed the significance of Black school leaders' experiences and perceptions that can affect various issues that impact Black students. This study seeks to illuminate the perceptions of Black school leaders who reflect on their lived experiences as Black Americans when disciplining Black students. Furthermore, exploring how these leaders grapple with double consciousness, implement culturally responsive practices, and uphold or develop policies that promote or police Blackness will be examined.

## **Significance of the Study**

By examining Black school leaders' experience disciplining Black students and exploring their personal connections, beliefs, and biases, this study could provide insightful information for all school leaders. This study is significant because it offers alternative responses to students' misbehavior other than exclusionary discipline. This study adds to the existing literature by examining how Black school leaders perceive their navigation through their discipline trajectory and their current experiences disciplining Black students. Additionally, it adds to the literature around double consciousness, internalized racism, and Black school leader resiliency. This study aims to improve school leaders' approaches when disciplining Black students regardless of their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or cultural upbringing. This study is significant because it strives to identify practices and processes utilized by Black school leaders who discipline Black students. Through this study, I hope to amplify the voices of Black school leaders and share practices engendered to equity and culturally responsive school leadership with the larger goal of attaining social justice in schools.

## **Overview of the Study**

This study shares a critical review of the literature to understand and describe the phenomenon of disciplining Black students while being Black in America. This study accentuates extant literature from the field of educational leadership, the impact of double consciousness, the importance of cultural competence, culturally responsive school leadership, social justice leadership, and restorative practices. I hope that through the exploration of this phenomenon, Black school leaders' lived experiences and perceptions of disciplining Black students are illuminated in a way that critically captures the essence while acknowledging the significance of concepts explored in the extant literature. According to Moustakas (1994), a

phenomenological study shares how an experience is perceived and is shared through detailed and rich descriptions. The term phenomenology is extracted from the Greek '*phainein*', which means to bring to light or appear. Therefore, imposing a theoretical framework would limit the new understanding and provide an unnecessary starting point in this kind of qualitative research. A phenomenology offers the tool to position building blocks of constructed meaning from authentic experiences expressed through participants' comprehensive descriptions.

Phenomenology informs this study by providing an inquiry-based methodology. It could lead to new theories that can inform educational practices and policies. Phenomenology research investigates participants' thoughts, beliefs, and how they position themselves to understand a particular phenomenon (Crotty 1996; van Manen, 1990; Yüksel, & Yıldırım, 2015). Therefore, leveraging phenomenology allows Black school leaders to help make meaning of an issue or idea as it emerges. Phenomenology aids in answering the research question effectively by uplifting the voices of school leaders who experience the phenomenon of being Black and being required to discipline Black students. According to Lavery (2003), phenomenology seeks to shine a light on invisible aspects. The essence of Black school leaders' experiences disciplining Black students is uncovered and explored to craft a new understanding of this phenomenon.

### **Research Design**

This study was intended to examine Black school leaders' perspectives of disciplining Black students through an arts-based phenomenological approach. This study examined how Black school leaders experienced discipline and their viewpoint towards their decisions while disciplining Black students. This arts-based phenomenological study elevated the voices of five self-identified Black school leaders who currently work in a school serving Black students. Semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and reflexive journaling were gathered,

transcribed, analyzed, and crystalized. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and I hand-coded the data identifying themes and crystalizing the information gathered from Black school leaders. These themes assisted to cultivate poetry, an alternate view into the phenomenon that synthesizes the details offered by participants in a newly constructed light. I have provided textual and conceptual definitions of terms and explored how the information gathered can help school leaders across the country. After a thorough investigation and triangulation of the information, I competently and ethically share my findings with the greater society.

Through self-reflection based on the same questions asked to the participants, I identified my connection and lived experience with the phenomenon to compare my thoughts and beliefs with the participants experiencing this phenomenon. I developed creative poetry to share my understanding of the phenomenon and the themes that were crystalized and as the reflexive journaling to unearth new understanding. Data was transcribed academically and poetically to explain the findings and share implications and next steps in a creative, abolitionist manner.

### **Important Terminology**

#### ***Anti-Blackness***

To understand anti-Blackness, first, the definition of Blackness must be shared. Blackness is a socially constructed identity that is a combination of a history of struggle, style, mannerisms, and shared expression (Caldera, 2020). Anti-Blackness is the negation, oppression, and dehumanization of Black bodies and Black experiences. Anti-Blackness can range from microaggressions in the form of stereotypes or implicit beliefs to violent attacks on Black bodies. Hines & Wilmot (2018) define anti-Black aggression as “conscious and subconscious forms of anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism that are expressed through verbal, nonverbal, interpersonal,

and environmental violence directed at Black individuals to degrade, dehumanize, or/or create racially toxic conditions for Black persons” (pp. 65-66).

### ***Double Consciousness***

To further understand Black school leaders' experience and decision-making, it is crucial to understand the Black struggle in America. That is, examining the twoness that Black people must operate to maintain their Blackness and Americanness. *The Souls of Black Folks* was published by W.E.B Du Bois in 1903 and compiled essays on race in American society. Du Bois argues that Black folks must consciously look into the world with two perspectives. They must be aware of how they view themselves and critical of how the world sees them. According to Walker (2018), being a cultural minority involves being a member of two diverse groups. One must abide by both sets of standards and evaluate oneself based on the judgment of others' perspectives. This consciousness is vital for school leaders who work with Black students because it can help school leaders identify how their personal experiences with race and discriminatory school practices shape their decision-making.

### **Figure 2**

#### *Poem: Double Consciousness*

Peering through  
 painted portraits of piled high expectations,  
 stereotypes, and unfortunate realities  
 Images distorted  
 dependent on who describes me  
 I lie on White canvases of our colonies  
 even though my brown body builds  
 distractions  
 I try to decolonize the crevices of my  
 thinking  
 Telling myself that I belong  
 but then duality dawns like rising of suns  
 The ones that kiss me with melanin  
 while also labeling me “the savage one”

deciphering between the America and the  
 Blackness that blankets me  
 I can't tell if the heat is comforting or the  
 smolder from my ancestors' village  
 set ablaze  
 The flowing consciousness of “What do they  
 think to be true about me?”  
 drowning in their beliefs  
 bearing the burden of their fears  
 walking on eggshells and fragments of  
 broken mirrors  
 trying to find the real me in the eyes of  
 others

*Note.* An internalized understanding of double consciousness provided by the researcher.

### ***Social Justice Leadership***

Social justice leadership is the practice of advocating for marginalized communities through implementing school visions, policies, and practices that promote social justice. Social justice leaders hope to eliminate marginalization in schools (Theoharis, 2007). These leaders who want to disrupt inequities should be competent in issues that impact their communities and be "action-oriented." This type of leadership asks leaders to be cognizant and have a heightened awareness when issues like racism, classism, and other oppressive issues arise (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). Moreover, social justice leadership is a deliberate use of power and influence to address discrimination, inequities, and injustices in schools that may impact our society (Turhan, 2010).

### ***Culturally Responsive School Leadership***

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) encompasses aspects of social justice leadership, transformational leadership, and anti-oppressive/racist leadership to create a new concept. CRSL goes further than the leadership styles stated above by affirming the marginalized group's culture. As a result, culturally responsive school leaders value culturally and linguistically diverse students and strive to exert care and support for students to be held to high academic expectations (Johnson, 2006). Culturally responsive leaders seek to institutionalize and celebrate the diverse cultures of the students they serve (Khalifa et al., 2016).

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters exploring the research questions listed above. Chapter One introduces the problem this study hopes to explore and the purpose of the research. Background context is provided to shed light on the study's purpose. Additionally, the research

questions are stated, and the significance of this study is shared. Chapter Two starts to formulate a conceptual framework that undergirds this study and creates a window into the guiding practices that position the study.

Additionally, a review of the previously conducted research is shared by themes. Chapter Two highlights studies that align with Black school leadership, discipline in schools, and leadership practices that are culturally relevant and aligned with social justice leadership values. Finally, it explores restorative practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline. While Chapter Two illuminates the plethora of research relating to Black School leaders and the discipline of Black students, very few simultaneously illuminate each of these topics. Therefore, Black on Black school discipline is revealed as a gap in the literature. In Chapter Three, I share how the study is conducted through an arts-based phenomenological view, exploration of the setting, participant selection, data collection modes, and analysis of the findings and study's limitations. Chapter Four highlights the findings from this study by identifying and presenting themes in two ways. These ways include thematic coding to analyze participants' responses and a poetic transcription to synthesize and share participants' thoughts in an artistic, liberating manner that engenders the appreciation of story-telling and creative writing. Finally, Chapter Five summarizes the results based on participants' responses, shares discussion topics aligned to ponderings and best practices revealed from interviews, a conclusion that wraps up the study, and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*“To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time.” – James Baldwin*

### **Introduction**

Instead of schools being held responsible for uplifting and respecting Black cultures, Black students are expected to assimilate to the White systems that monitor, restrain, and constantly violate their bodies (Caldera, 2020). Historically, Black citizens have been seen as problematic, inferior, and unintellectual which has led to stereotypes, labeling, and overt discrimination. This ongoing deficit-mind thinking and anti-Blackness has seeped its way into educational institutions. Anti-Blackness in education is defined as “The presumed ineducability of Black children, the normalization and justification of Black suffering in schools, the need to contain and discipline Black bodies knowledge, and desires, the “doing” of education policy on Black children and families, as one might experiment on rats or primates” (Dumas & Nelson, 2016, p. 9). Some argue that the purpose of schooling within the United States has been to provide curriculum, culturally responsive pedagogy, and processes for all students to be successful for college and careers (Sleeter, 2012). Others argue that colonial schools have historically excluded marginalized groups and have a foundation of anti-Blackness and White supremacist thinking in which marginalized individuals have to fight to access increased opportunities (Love, 2019; Spring, 2018).

While both arguments can exist simultaneously, it is essential to examine how Black school leaders grapple with these differing arguments and operate within the school system, especially highlighting their perspectives around race and supporting students. This chapter provides a succinct review of the literature based on the following areas: (a) school leadership and Black school leaders' battle with double consciousness; (b) school discipline, specifically

focused on office discipline referrals (ODR) and the school to prison pipeline; (c) social justice tenets and how leaders can engender these qualities; (d) the importance of cultural competence and cultural humility in schools; (e) culturally responsive school leadership and its relation to disciplining Black students; (f) restorative practices as a response and alternative to disproportionate discipline; (g) and phenomenology as the framework that encapsulates this research. Important to note, this chapter elucidates the complexity of Black educators who work within the public educational system.

### **Black School Leadership**

School leaders play a pivotal role in cultivating an environment that ensures that Black students are seen, heard, and accepted. This environment should be fueled by Black cultural reverence and identifying and addressing anti-Blackness. Black cultural reverence is defined as a space that identifies and values Black children's culture, abilities, strengths, and most importantly their humanity (Hale, 1986). Educators who engender Black cultural reverence do not see Blackness as a hindrance or a hurdle but as a mandatory tool integral to student learning (Njee, 2016).

In preparation for educators to teach Black children, five practices are uplifted and examined as ways teachers can implement practices that demonstrate Black cultural reverence (Carothers, 2014, p. 10):

1. Understand your [Black] students
2. Care wholly about your [Black] students
3. Set high expectations of your [Black] students
4. Involve and appreciate the parents of your [Black] students
5. Enjoy teaching and learning from [Black] students

The literature is rich with empirical studies that exemplify the meaningful and positive impacts having a Black teacher has on Black student development and success because of their cultural competence, motivation, and the type of decision-making they utilize daily (Irvine, 1989; Milner & Howard, 2004; Mitchell, 1998). Additionally, research has shown that Black principals positively impact Black students (Lomotey, 2019). Earlier in his career, Lomotey (1989) stated that Black principals lead in a different way than their White counterparts. Moreover, Jordan (2018) elucidated that understanding Black school leaders' duality or double consciousness may help educational communities.

Despite empirical research showing the positive impact of having a Black teacher and leader on Black students, The Department for Professional Employees (2019), which shares information about 24 union states, reported that there were over 900,000 school administrators across K-12 sectors in 2018, with only 14% of them being African American. The highest representation, 20%, of African American school leaders are nestled in urban areas, while the lowest representation of only 5% is found in rural areas (National Association of Education, 2018). Black school leaders are typically hired to lead large urban schools that are underfunded and lack resources. These schools are filled with uncertified teachers tasked with supporting students who are minoritized and marginalized (Brown, 2005). Black school leaders, though small in numbers, can address anti-Blackness and challenge inequities in schools. In Henderson's (2008) study, he examined the experience of seven African American male leaders. Through a narrative inquiry approach participants in Henderson's study stated they felt responsible for incorporating a fair and consistent approach to all decisions. Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of being emotionally intelligent, cognizant of equitable discipline,

and modeling strong leadership for Black students. Participants explained a heightened sense of responsibility for disrupting a system that has historically harmed Black males.

Several studies have explored the experience of Black school leaders (Goings et al., 2018; McKenley & Gordon, 2002; Walker & Byas, 2003). Specifically, how race, identity, and experiences shape their leadership qualities, their commitment and compassion to students, and the advancement of racial equity and social justice (Khalifa et al., 2014; Peters, 2020; Vinzant, 2009; Walls, 2017). Before the *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) ruling, Black school leaders were a valuable source to the Black community. These leaders served as community activists and organizers. They exerted their efforts to unite the school community (Peters, 2019). As a result of the *Brown* ruling, more than 38,000 Black educators and administrators were fired in southern states because students were being bussed to White schools composed of White teachers and administrators (Tillman, 2004). Black school leaders are still disproportionately underrepresented compared to the number of Black children in the P-12 sector (Taie & Goldring, 2017). School leaders are tasked with a myriad of duties that range in classification. However, they work in tandem to operate a system that is over three centuries old (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Georgia Department of Education, 2014). These tasks can be categorized into multiple frames of perspectives. School-based leaders address structural school-wide needs through planning, instruction, and organizational management. They cultivate symbolism through the vision and mission statements engendering aspirations of school-centric and community-based goals and the type of citizens they will develop. Leaders are responsible for hiring, training, and retaining quality teachers. They are instructional leaders who model best practices, provide construction criticism, and evaluate systems, protocols, and teachers' effectiveness. Additionally, they are

responsible for building authentic relationships and alliances, developing social capital, and gathering resources for their students and staff (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

School leaders are advocates and champions for children, who should be cognizant of legislation, inequitable policies, and students' and community needs. In addition to overseeing pedagogy, operations, and management, school leaders must actively grow and learn to be intentional when creating and implementing practices that will optimize their ideologies, dispositions, strengths, and decision-making to support students' holistic success. Khalifa (2020) argues that a leader's fight for equity and ensuring social justice and culturally relevant teachers are essential in school leadership. School leaders play a pivotal role in ensuring equitable practices occur to support Black, Brown, poor, and differently-abled students. School leaders have a commitment to acknowledging community voice and instilling agency in their students and families. Douglas and colleagues (2018) conducted a phenomenological study exploring twelve students of color and their perception of the importance of race when building relationships with leaders. Students of color believed that race impacted their experience with discipline. Findings from these semi-structured interviews indicated that students perceived school leaders as overly punitive and led with school norms that made students of color more likely to experience exclusionary discipline. Through identifying ways to challenge systems that negatively impact students and families in their circles of influence, like developing solid relationships, school leaders may influence students' perceptions of authority and the support school leaders offer. While school leaders' roles encompass currently include many facets of leadership and operations, school leaders were once known as only disciplinarians and building managers (Department for Professional Employees, 2019; Anderson, 2016). Even though school leaders' duties have become more complex, discipline is still an integral part of the job.

Discipline disproportionality impacts Black students' chances of academic success. Research has shown that Black students are almost four times more likely to be suspended and two times as likely to be referred to law enforcement agencies. (U.S Department of Education, 2016).

School leaders should value antiracism and be extremely careful not to perpetuate hegemonic oppressive culture and climates to help eliminate racism, discrimination, and other forms of oppression in schools (Khalifa, 2020). When school leaders develop school-wide strategic plans, they must focus on practices that increase student achievement, create a positive culture and climate, and decrease inequitable practices in their schools. These outcomes can be accomplished by exposing teachers to their implicit biases and developing spaces to critically examine structures of oppression, racism, and inequities in schools (Baiden, 2019). Black school leaders must contemplate how they exhibit both compliance and liberation for Black students. As a result of them being agents of the institution while also being catalyst for change creating access and equity for minoritized students, they may struggle with this twoness (Goings et al., 2018).

### **Double Consciousness**

Du Bois (1903) wrote, Black people had the gift of duality, "gifted with second-sight in this American world, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (p. 7). This consciousness is vital for school leaders who work with Black students because it can help school leaders identify how their personal experiences with race and discriminatory school practices shape their decision-making. Crawford and Bohan (2019) explain W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness as the belief that marginalized groups of people try to blend themselves into the dominant culture by adopting multiple identities for survival. Moreover, in Crawford and Bohan's (2019) study

examining the double consciousness of nine Black students integrating Atlanta Public schools, the authors highlighted how students had to figure out how to operate in both their Black world as well as the White world that negated their humanity. Black students illuminated the "strife" it took to look at themselves through Whites' eyes, who saw them as tokens and inferior.

Moreover, Moore (2005) contends that Black people subconsciously internalize a sense of inferiority to members of the dominant culture. This could be a result of the legacy of trauma that Black people have endured from the perils and aftermath of slavery and the ongoing oppression they face daily.

Leary (2005) describes Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) as behaviors in response to trauma, racial oppression, and lack of resources. PTSS can be explained in three categories: vacant esteem, ever-present anger, and racist socialization. Vacant esteem can be explained as the belief about one's perceived worth. For example, African American individuals and communities may have deeply ingrained beliefs of inferiority which can lead to conformity, undermining achievements, and hopelessness which may play a pivotal role in how Black students see themselves. Ever-present anger is the idea that African Americans with PTSS are easily angered in response to societal oppression, blocked opportunities, and being lied to for centuries. The final category is racist socialization. This is the idea that African Americans have acquiesced to the slave master's beliefs and values. In this, Leary states that many African Americans have been socialized to look at themselves and their communities with White eyes that condemn Blackness and promote White prejudice and rules of acceptability. Emdin (2021) also shares Black educators' difficulty in being their ratchetdemic and authentic selves. He expresses how those educators of color who have successfully maneuvered through an education system that was not designed for them to be successful may find themselves perpetuating similar

structures they experienced if they do not actively work to disrupt them. Moreover, he highlights mental slavery or educational Stockholm syndrome. He states:

Educational Stockholm syndrome is the process by which people who were emotionally and psychologically harmed in school as students pledge an allegiance to the same educational system and work within this system to uphold the same structures that harmed them in their youth. (Emdin, 2021, p. 34)

In studies like Walker, (2018) and Barton, (2020), participants shared their perspective of conforming to socially acceptable or Eurocentric standards to be seen, accepted, or successful. Participants in Walker's (2018) empirical study illuminated how double consciousness has felt like a pressure cooker that required Black people to live up to society's expectations. The pressure of double consciousness is also present in other minoritized groups' experiences. Barton (2020) conducted a phenomenological inquiry researching the lived experience of four Latinx school leaders. He leveraged portraiture (i.e., detailed personal descriptions) coupled with phenomenology to cultivate a vivid and in-depth description of the leaders' experiences as Latinx school leaders. Findings resulted in Latinx leaders expressing that they had to assimilate and adapt to the perceptions and expectations of American culture for them to be successful. Similarly, Vinzant's (2009) qualitative multiple participant case study explored Black school leaders' struggle with Du Bois' idea of "double consciousness", their experiences, and their perceptions of race affecting their leadership. In the essence of Vinzant's study, double consciousness is the idea that Black leaders must progress their school forward while still situating themselves in Blackness that often devalues and oppresses them in a White-dominated school system.

Smith's (2019) qualitative phenomenological study illuminated the experience of 14 Black male principals in the United States through two one-on-one semi-structured in-depth interviews. The researcher found that Black male school leaders had to navigate racial space and

felt invalidated and silenced by their White colleagues, leading to negative perceptions of self. Black administrators are products of an anti-black education system created to spirit murder Black children. They are now responsible for preventing toxicity, anti-Blackness, and inequitable practices throughout their leadership journey in the same system (Rogers-Ard & Knaus, 2020). Jordan's (2018) study explored how ten African Americans perceived double consciousness and how race played a role when working with White colleagues in educational organizations. Jordan found that Black administrators functioned through duality through being conscious of whom they served, challenging biases, and how to provide consistent and fair discipline. As far as discipline, a participant in Jordan's study stated that implementing and following rules and regulations prevented being portrayed negatively by minority families who are upset about suspensions and White teachers who felt unsupported when Black students were not disciplined harshly.

Schools have been known to be steeped in Eurocentric norms, therefore requiring Black school leaders to impose consequences that may marginalize and oppress Black students (Goings et al., 2018; Monroe, 2005). Monroe (2016) explained how a Black principal expressed her reasons for disciplining Black students as, "our babies can be kind of snappy." Moreover, this statement highlighted how this Black principal has internalized the nature of the "angry Black woman" cliché and could be negatively impacted by her perception of acceptability and expectations of Black girls based on how the dominant culture may see them. In McClellan's (2020) phenomenological study, the author explored six Black female students' perspectives in 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade with a Black female principal. The author leveraged portraiture to illuminate these students' experiences of having a Black female school leader. Through this study, the author highlighted how those Black girls felt their principal embodied an authentic

commitment of care and exercised tough love or exerted harsher punishments because she wanted them to be successful. While some of the girls appreciated the principal's approach, some students expressed disregard for the tough love and the preparation for the real world and expressed that the principal wanted them to be tough like they must already be in their neighborhood. They felt like they could not show their authenticity and had to endure punitive discipline for simply being themselves.

More recently Watson & Nash (2021) conducted a case study that examined a Black school leader's decision to uphold a dress code policy that deemed an intelligent, athletic, well-rounded Black girl's natural hair unacceptable and disruptive. The student engaged in a verbal confrontation with her teacher when she was told to tame her hair and put it in a ponytail holder. She refused and eventually was told to get out of the classroom. When the student made her way to the principal's office, she was bombarded with disbelief. While she assumed she would be supported by her Black principal in her decision to defend her hairstyle, she was shocked to find out otherwise. The Black female principal explained to the student that she needed to have pride in presentation, and she should consider chemically straightening her hair. She believed the student had a bright future and to fit the expectation, she would need to ensure her hair was perceived as professional and acceptable through the lens of the "diverse" students she would encounter when she went to college. The principal expressed how she, herself, has straightened her hair for years and how her hair represented beauty and professionalism. She ended her belittlement and disciplinary talk by telling the student that while this reality may be harsh, it was all in preparation for the real world. Du Bois (1903) stated, "One ever feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

## **School Discipline**

Discipline, without a doubt, is the most essential and the most difficult aspect of education, for without discipline there can be no effective teaching. Unfortunately, many people have a warped view of what discipline really is and a deceptive concept of why there is a lack of discipline in our schools (Dreikurs et al., 1982). Discipline is defined as “the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior using punishment to correct disobedience” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Schools have historically functioned as systems that perpetuate dominant social ideas, hierarchies, and oppression and without intentional efforts, they will continue to reproduce oppressive systems (Morris, 2016).

Existing research has illuminated the Whiteness engrained in school and district policies that demoralize Black students' cultures and lead to punitive discipline practices that disproportionately affect Black students (Ryan & Goodham, 2013; Taylor & Foster, 1986; Wun, 2016). Zero-tolerance policies were adopted in the 1990s to ameliorate the fears of lack of safety in schools and send a message that specific actions would not be tolerated (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). More recent legislators have developed policies to mitigate schools' over-disciplining in the United States and revisit policies that required harsh punishments for various offenses. For example, Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) mandated states to provide support to school districts to lower the usage of exclusionary discipline practices that remove students from the classroom setting. The Education Commission of the States (Rafa, 2018) released a resource that provided a state comparison aligned to discipline. Fifteen states limit the use of exclusionary practices and promote the utilization of non-punitive and more supportive strategies (Rafa, 2018). Additionally, policies like Georgia Code Section 20-2-735 (2000) state that all local school boards should develop a code of conduct for students that include standards, student

behavior, and disciplinary actions aligned to code violations. Legislatures enacted this policy to improve student's educational experience, especially looking through the lens of discipline. As a result, states require school districts to develop a progressive discipline plan that provides realistic disciplinary actions that involve parents, lead to learning and changed behavior, and maximize alternatives to suspension and expulsion options when possible. However, Fergus (2019) illuminated assumptions that lead to disproportionate discipline despite state and federal policies. He explains through the notion of poverty-disciplining-belief, which is the assumption that poverty itself is a culture that is defined by actions that prevent school success, promote disrespect, and disorderly conduct. While not all Black students are impoverished, poverty is often used as a proxy to justify racial disparities. The bias that is operating here lends itself to harsher punishment for poor Black students to address the dysfunction in their community and refine their culture, so they can assimilate into appropriate customs, norms, and behaviors typically defined and decided by society.

School leaders are responsible for delivering policy-driven consequences based on events staff observe and document in office discipline referrals (Pas et al., 2011). Office discipline referrals (ODR) are documentation of negative student interactions with peers or staff. Office discipline referrals can impact students' ability to stay ahead of coursework, negatively impact students' interactions with adults, and impact students' investment in schooling based on the consequence an administrator decides to align to the ODR (Gregory et al., 2014). An example of Black students referred for misconduct and a target of disproportionate punitive practices is highlighted in Anderson and Ritter's 2017 study. Anderson and Ritter conducted a quantitative analysis leveraging seven years of discipline data from public schools in Arkansas. It was determined that race was reflected in most disparities across schools. The researchers calculated

the percentage of students in each subgroup and the percentage of students suspended or expelled in each subgroup which illuminated extremely disproportionately. Discipline referrals were placed in seventeen categories, and consequences were separated into seven categories. Through logistic regressions and aggregated residual techniques, the researchers were able to answer their research questions. Anderson and Ritter's results concluded that Black students are three times more likely than their White peers to be written up for misbehavior and are nearly six times more likely to be given out-of-school suspensions. Additionally, the researchers developed a School Severity Index (SSI) for each school to determine the length of their punishment and how exclusive their discipline practices were. Anderson and Ritter were able to conclude that Black students across Arkansas face harsher discipline than their White and Latinx classmates. While this study only elucidated the need in Arkansas, findings across the country illuminate the racial disparity in discipline and exclusionary practices (Anyon et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2014; Ryan & Goodram, 2013).

To identify the relationship between race and office discipline referrals and the location where Black students were disciplined the most, Anyon and colleagues (2018) conducted a phenomenological study with 198 school staff in which they examined participants' lived experiences. The authors found that Black students were more likely than their White peers to receive disciplinary referrals from their teachers who knew them and were supposed to have strong relationships with them. Other findings from this study illuminated that the school staff implemented interventions and strategies that supported positive behavior trends in schools. The researchers collected data through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The authors found that strong authentic relationships with students and families, positive contact with parents, morning meetings, advisory periods, and staff visibility were key strategies in creating a

positive school culture that reduces exclusionary practices and racial discipline gaps in their school.

In previous studies, Black teachers have shared their perspectives of disciplining Black students. For example, Brockenbrough's (2015) study explored 11 Black male teachers' struggle with being perceived as strict disciplinarians hired to ameliorate the impacts of institutional inequities impacting Black students. Through semi-structured interviews and focus groups, the author illuminated staff expectations of Black male teachers being hard on Black students and being a "belt dad" who exerts harsh punishments preparing Black students for the real world. Almost half of the participants expressed difficulty conforming to these expectations. On the other hand, almost half of the Black male teachers expressed how they felt like they had to enforce strict discipline, and as a result, their peers relied on them to be the discipline stop and the enforcer of punitive anti-Black school discipline.

In 2014, while 15% of students in the nation were labeled Black, 35% of the suspensions and 44% of expulsions were Black students (Gregory et al., 2014). The disproportion of Black students facing suspensions and expulsions is alarming and highlights the inequities Black students face when being disciplined. Exclusionary practices negatively impact students of colors' academic achievement. Students who are suspended miss instruction and are more likely to fall behind. As a result, students are more likely to be retained or drop out of school (Ryan & Goodram, 2013). Socioeconomic status has also impacted disproportionality in discipline, but race has played a pivotal role in the severity of students' consequences (Anderson & Ritter, 2017).

Too often, the word "tough" is haphazardly thrown around in the Black community. There is an expectation—one that is upheld by the way society views Black children—that we are equipped with an exterior layer of ruggedness. “Rigid gender norms and the unimaginability of Black boys as children compound to delegitimize these boys’ right to experience fear or anger or sadness, to be anything but ‘tough’” (Dumas & Nelson, 2016, p. 34). Similarly, Black girls are treated as more responsible and adult-like. Black girls are perceived as needing less protection and less comfort, as being more informed about sex, and more likely to take on adult responsibilities and roles which may have implications on discipline disparities (Epstein et al., 2017). Moreover, research substantiates Black children are often judged as less innocent than their White peers (Dumas & Nelson, 2016).

Student-focused solutions to discipline have been identified as ways to minimize suspensions. However, focusing on children instead of the adults ignores the systemic inequities, puts the blame on the students, and fails to address the teacher (Anyon et al., 2018). School leaders play a crucial role in disrupting exclusionary practices that could lead to students being shuffled through the school-to-prison pipeline. In Monroe's (2005) case study, the author explores her own experience as a Black assistant principal battling to uphold school and district policy and disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). Monroe provided suggestions for school leaders to disrupt the STPP. Some of these were: forge relationships with the students and community served right away; identify and confront racism at all costs; share and be upfront about expectations for instruction and discipline; create a school-wide advising and disciplinary plan for teachers and staff and integrate students' frame of reference in all policies and school procedures.

## **Social Justice**

Justice is defined as a person's freedom to a fair opportunity and is a virtue of an institution (Rawls, 1958). While social justice is difficult to define and depends on the context, researchers have stated it as being the ability to examine inequities embedded in policies and practices that maintain the status quo. Secondly, it is the consciousness about the abilities and expectations of both teachers and students. Finally, it is seen as a commitment to emotional intelligence, democracy, and inclusion (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Hirsh & Hord, 2010). For this study's purpose, social justice will be defined as the conscious efforts to enact equitable practices that actively dismantle oppressive systems that impact marginalized groups.

School leaders who engender social justice values must be able to identify implicit and explicit acts of inequities and create solutions that work best for their schools. Social justice has been defined as "achieving quality of access to desirable social outcomes, such as high-quality education, safe housing, financial security, civic participation, and sustained employment" (Behizadeh et al., 2019, p. 280). Social justice has arisen as a direct response to institutional racism. A commitment to social justice must be deeper than acceptance and tolerance. It is a vow to amplify marginalized voices, prevent tyranny and complacency, and ensure school stakeholders are action-oriented (Grant & Gibson, 2013).

School leaders need more support in understanding and conceptualizing the term social justice (Vogel, 2011). Vogel's case study was conducted to determine how educators who completed an educational leadership preparation program in the previous five years understood multicultural education and social justice and their impact in ensuring P-12 education was equitable. The researchers wanted to determine how if at all, school leaders who attended a preparation program implemented reforms to promote social justice. The results confirmed that

out of 54 educators, less than half were familiar with social justice. Only 7% attributed this knowledge to an experience or class activity during their preparation program. As a result of this study, the conversation has started about the need for a deeper understanding of social justice and its place in education. Less than half of the study's participants felt like they truly understood what social justice was and how to implement its tenets in their school; almost a third of the participants had no idea what the term meant. This study clarified the need for professional development geared towards school leaders, so they can leverage the knowledge to make conscientious decisions that impact marginalized students. To be an effective school leader, these stakeholders need to be equipped with a clear understanding of what social injustice looks, sounds, and feels like in our society and school.

Additionally, school leaders need to be given the skills and competency to prevent injustices from perpetuating and deepening the impact on marginalized students. Leader preparation programs are not the focus of this research study, but they play a pivotal role in shaping a leader's journey. Adding this information highlighted why school leaders may not include social justice, racial equity, and exclusionary practices into their professional learning plan for teachers or school strategic plans. Vogel's (2011) study identified that some leadership preparation programs are not explicitly teaching terms like social justice and multicultural education, which leaves leaders to their own means to understand and implement social justice.

Social justice leaders have divided social justice in schools into two major categories: social justice and social injustice. Additionally, they have identified two actions that social justice leaders partake in: remedying injustices and preventing injustices (Mitchell et al., 2016). Through their quantitative study conducted in 2016, 79 participants who considered themselves to be social justice experts leveraged a seven-point scale to rate themselves on how

knowledgeable they were about social justice ideologies and concepts. Additionally, the leaders ranked and conceptualized social justice in schools to determine how social-justice-oriented a belief or action was by explaining it through a short scenario. The researchers provided a list of features or actions that leaders might complete and categorized them as "prototypical (justice), antithetical (injustice), and secondary (peripheral) of non-justice-related consideration (p. 13)." Participants rated 46 actions to categorize them based on how socially just the action was. These ratings included things like interrupting a colleague while saying something racial. For example, "I only hire White teachers because they are better" was a statement that the participants had to rate. Additionally, actions like administrators seeking a thorough understanding of interaction before providing a consequence to the student were also listed to be categorized and coded. Participants in this study were selected because they were published authors of articles or books on social justice or doctoral students from two educational leadership programs that had a strong emphasis on social justice. Moreover, Mitchell and colleagues (2016) study examined the difference between justice and injustice and that school leaders who are socially just are either preventing or remedying or preventing injustices. The authors argue that *remedying* injustices addresses wrongs while *preventing* injustices is cultivating a vision that includes aspects of social justice.

Being an advocate for social justice is often a difficult and overwhelming task. Through Theoharis's (2007) critical study leveraging principles of autoethnography and in-depth interviews of seven school leaders, the literature determined that leaders are often faced with resistance and pushback. This pushback could come from teachers, parents, or even school agencies. The seven leaders stated that leaders should feel morally obligated to improve achievement for marginalized youth. To fulfill this obligation, the researchers concluded that

leaders must provide teachers with space and opportunity to address implicit biases, racist practices, and inequitable policies while also identifying how their identities, biases, and beliefs impact the decisions they make (Theoharis, 2007). Dedicated leaders who leverage social justice components will advocate for justice by building their teacher capacity around social justice and deficit thinking. This means leaders must strategize ways to include this kind of work in professional development (DeMatthews, 2015). These leaders should provide autonomy, make decisions democratically, and address toxic work cultures. Social justice leaders should equip teachers with the ability to provide students the agency to be advocates and agents of change in their school and the larger community (Turhan, 2010). For this to occur, leaders may first need to identify their responsibility and role in ensuring social justice is achievable in their school, and then provide the support needed to make equity for all students an option.

Multiple empirical researchers have conducted studies in which school leaders have examined social justice and racial equity in their schools. Authors examined how school leaders provided students with culturally relevant teaching and safe spaces and illuminated positive outcomes (Baiden, 2019; Shields, 2004; Walls, 2017). Many of these studies explore the use of critical professional development and professional learning communities as a step towards being more social justice-oriented. For example, in one study, Baiden (2019) provided implications for the future as the clear need for more extended professional development that encompasses critical conversations beyond pre-service. Baiden's qualitative case study examined educators' critical consciousness, their privilege, and power. Baiden (2019) examined oral and written discussion, document analysis like group charts, and other answers to questions and prompts after a two-day professional learning experience. The sample consisted of 17 teachers who predominantly taught students of color and students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch.

In analyzing the data, the researcher identified codes to align participant responses with the four critical literacy pillars: (1) disrupting commonplace, (2) considering multiple perspectives, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, (4) taking action and promoting social justice. The results allude to participants having a better operational definition of equity, equality, social justice, examining their biases, assumptions, and ideologies. Additionally, the participants acknowledged that examining their identities and privileges helped to support their students better. The themes that emerged for social justice educators are intentionality and critically examining multiple perspectives.

Finally, social justice leaders accept the commitment to disrupt inequities and dismantle systems of oppression. Critical Race Theory (CRT) illuminates race and its pervasive impact on school curriculum, school discipline, and areas of our greater society like housing, medical treatment, and the criminal justice system (Ladson-Billings' 1998). Martinez (2014) states CRT should be utilized to expose and disrupt the dominant culture's privilege. Despite the 45th President of the United States' war on racial justice, as seen through his fight to eliminate all CRT professional development, social justice leaders recognize the everlasting impact of racism and inequities based on the social construction of race. Therefore, these leaders may currently be entrenched in the fight for Critical Race Theory's place in America and on the education table

The tenets of CRT are as followed:

1. Racism is deeply ingrained in American society
2. Storytelling is powerful and used to challenge the status quo through exploration
3. Liberalism is too slow to make racial change
4. Whites, especially women, have benefited most from civil rights legislation like affirmative action

CRT is an important theory for social justice leaders to understand and unpack because it provides a rationale for Black counter stories to dominate and replace the hegemonic narrative that Black people are inferior and less capable. Social justice leaders understand the significance of personal accounts and how they serve as liberation from stereotypes or assumptions placed on Black people by the dominant culture.

### **Cultural Competency**

Cultural competence originated in the healthcare field by playing a pivotal role in how health care professionals communicated efficiently with diverse communities (Bennett, 2004). Cultural competence can be explained in developmental stages. Bennett (2004) constructed the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) which moves people from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativist. A synthesized version of Bennett's (2004) stages is listed below:

1. Denial: In this stage, people believe their experiences and truths are the only real ones. Cultures that are different from theirs are associated with otherness.
2. Defense: In this stage, people are more likely to discriminate against differences and believe that their culture is superior.
3. Minimization: In this stage, people make assumptions about cultural groups and either trivialize or romanticize a different culture from the dominant one and believe in ideas like a melting pot.
4. Acceptance: In this stage, people understand that their culture is one of many, and cultures that differ from theirs are still human and deserving of respect.

5. Adaption: In this stage, peoples' constructs and behaviors are extended to encompass other cultures through learning how to communicate and incorporate others' worldviews into their own perspectives.
6. Integration: In this stage, people identify how a bridge can be created to promote unity and understanding of different cultures.

Cultural competence is defined as the beliefs, behaviors, systemic policies, and a person's capacity to interact and respond to the unique needs of people with cultures that vary from mainstream or the dominant culture (Cross et al., 1989). Moreover, Cross and colleagues developed a framework that provides a continuum and highlights six stages including the following: 1) cultural destructiveness, 2) cultural incapacity, 3) cultural blindness, 4) cultural pre-competence, 5) cultural competency, and 6) cultural proficiency. Furthermore, cross-culturally competent people can grow to understand multiple cultures while being committed to accepting, respecting, and appreciating the differences between people (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). During one-on-one semi-structured interviews, Handsuvadha & Slater (2012) found that school leaders exhibited cultural competence by respecting and advocating for diverse students, exploring equity, social justice, and power relations. In Jay's (2009) phenomenological study exploring five Black school stakeholders' experience with race and racism in school, she explores how inequalities pervade our society and school unofficial policies and processes. The author highlighted how Black teachers are frequently pigeon-held or placed in positions aligned to their perceived relevant experiences and expertise. One of the Black teachers highlighted in the semi-structured interview that even though the students in lower-performing and inclusionary classes looked like her, she was not raised like them. This incident highlighted the idea that Black school stakeholders, including school leaders, may still need to explore their cultural

competency level to meet Black students' needs. Moreover, school leaders need to be understanding, responsive, and sensitive to the needs of Black students and Black teachers alike.

Moreover, in addition to cultural competence, cultural humility is an important aspect for educators to leverage when working with students from diverse backgrounds or students with similar backgrounds but different life experiences. Cultural humility was originally coined by Jann Murray-Garcia and Melanie Tervalon, two social work educators (Haynes-Mendez & Engelsmeier, 2020). Cultural humility challenges the idea that there is a finite body of knowledge and mastery. Cultural humility is defined as a lifelong process that requires educators to understand that learning is an ongoing process in which they must remain open to the lived experiences of others. Cultural humility asks educators to model the following: 1) Mitigate and challenge power imbalances 2) Institution accountability to build community partnerships on behalf of students served, and 3) Commitment to lifelong learning and critical self-reflection and critiques (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). This is because competency expresses an all-knowing while humility expresses a sense of learning and understanding.

### **Culturally Responsive School Leadership**

Culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogy or teaching lead the charge for culturally responsive school leadership (Gay, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995). While teachers play an important role in the classroom, there is an essential need to focus on how leaders promote and sustain environments that support teachers in cultivating culturally relevant classrooms and culturally responsive activities and curriculums (Khalifa et al., 2016). Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) includes aspects of social justice leadership, transformational leadership, and anti-oppressive and racist leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016). CRSL requires anti-oppressive and liberatory practices while also affirming the identities of marginalized and

minoritized groups of students. The status quo, which is aligned with discipline, has historically contributed to the violent oppression of Black students by removing them from classrooms and hindering them from an adequate education. Leaders must understand the cultural contexts and histories of students and families who enter their building. Oppressive structures do not disintegrate simply because a school leader is Black. Educators must actively disrupt the status quo and feel confident and competent enough to push against this oppression (Khalifa, 2020).

Through the comprehensive review findings of Khalifa and colleagues (2016), four major strands or tenets emerged. The researchers leveraged a literature review of findings from 1989 to 2014. The authors settled on 37 articles and 8 books related to the topic of CRSL. They used search words like African American, school leadership, morals, ethnicity, and indigenous. The purpose of this article was to identify behaviors, actions, mannerisms, and dialogue that impacts school structure, teachers' support, and student outcomes. The authors categorized four themes: (1) Critical Self-Awareness, (2) Culturally Responsive Curricula, (3) Teacher Preparation, and (4) Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments.

Critical self-reflection plays a vital role in an educator's practices (Baiden, 2019). These values, assumptions, and beliefs are integral in determining how biases impact the support that students receive, the type of punishment school leaders find compelling, and the policies school leaders uphold. Additionally, inclusivity and culturally affirming environments, where Black students are reminded of their experiences and their bodies matter, are essential for cultivating an environment that disrupts discipline practices inequities. This requires critical liberatory consciousness and the willingness to have critical conversations with staff who may perpetuate hegemonic oppressive thinking (Love, 2019).

Culturally Responsive School leaders who are intellectual and social activists have been around for quite a while (Johnson, 2006). Johnson's historical case study acknowledges the importance of comparing historical leadership situations to the continuum of current educational practices. Johnson surveyed primary sources from a myriad of archives to describe and characterize Gertrude Ayer, the first African American woman principal in New York City. Through Johnson's research, Ayer's voice and experience were lifted and analyzed. It examined Ayer's determination in the 1930s, in the depth of the Great Depression, and how she was a culturally responsive leader despite the Great Depression and other societal woes. As a result of the historical case study, Johnson concluded with the idea that CRSL must view and understand the historical, social, and political aspects to lead with diversity and inspire the direction of practice that leads to less inequitable practices, so more students of color feel like they matter in schools and society.

### **Restorative Practices**

Restorative practices focus on repairing harm that has occurred by holding space for both participants to engage in conversation. This process allows participants who caused the harm to take accountability for their actions. Additionally, participants can hear perspectives from whom was hurt or harmed in the situation which promotes mutual understanding through dialogue and respect (Gomez et al., 2021; Kline, 2016; Pavelka, 2013; Richardson, 2022). Two types of community circles are used primarily in schools. Proactive circles help build emotional intelligence such as empathetic listening, peer and staff interactions and respect, and problem-solving. Reactive circles are leveraged to provide students or staff the opportunity to speak, listen, and respond to conflict in a safe space. Restorative practices in school have their

underpinnings and values from restorative justice that originated in the criminal justice system in the 1970s utilized as a mediation between offenders and victims (Peachy, 1989).

Schools that have some form of restorative practices in their discipline model have reduced exclusionary decisions, lowered racial disparities in punitive discipline practices like suspension, and have improved school climate overall (Armour, 2013; Augustine et al., 2018; Baker 2010; Gonzales, 2015; & McCluskey et al., 2008). Through empirical research, restorative practices have been shown to increase students' sense of belonging, ability to build authentic connections through enhancing students' ability to be conscious, empathetic, and confident problem-solvers. McCluskey and colleagues (2008) conducted a two-year study that evaluated the effectiveness of restorative practices in 18 schools. Findings show that there was a decrease in both in-school referrals and out-of-school suspensions. The schools in the study embraced building strong relationships, mutual engagement, accountability, emotional intelligence, and reflection.

Despite policy changes around punitive discipline, zero-tolerance initiatives, and the push for more restorative practices, racial discipline gaps still exist. Disproportionate discipline in schools mimics the harsh criminalization and punishment that Black and indigenous people face in facets of American society, specifically incarceration. (Lustick, 2021). Through a year-long ethnographical study, Lustick (2021) investigated three principals' perspectives around making discipline decisions while dealing with the pressure of school stakeholders like teachers, parents, and other principals in the district. She found that principals were required to abide by a student code of conduct, but ambiguity provided leeway in determining the severity of the discipline chosen for students. Principals felt torn between being responsible for enacting restorative practices and being accountable to the punitive status quo that promoted control and order. Principals, based on their values, leveraged restorative practices in various ways.

Research has shown that restorative practices are effective and help to decrease punitive discipline, but this cannot be the only change to discipline decisions that reinforce status quo and traditional patterns of power and racism in schools. Mansfield and colleagues (2018) highlighted that in addition to incorporating restorative practices, centering issues of equity, providing professional development, and promoting students' voices played a pivotal role in narrowing the discipline gap.

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a structure of experience or consciousness that typically occurs in the first-person perspective. Literally, phenomenology is defined as the conscious study of how things appear or how we experience things (Smith, 2008). Therefore, a phenomenological research approach is used to investigate a phenomenon at a deeper level which helps researchers broaden their perspective. Furthermore, this approach encourages researchers to identify and define their position and make meaning of a certain phenomenon to pursue truth and interconnectedness (Qutoshi, 2018). According to Spiegelberg (2012), phenomenology is diverse and has several variations. Phenomenology is credited to Husserl in 1925 even though it was a concept that existed in the mid-1700s and has ties to early philosophers like Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. Husserl illuminated the importance of understanding individuals' direct experiences in their realities and world (Jennings, 1992). Moreover, the classical phenomenological research method focuses on pursuing realities and a vision of truth reliant on participants' perspectives. Based on Moustakas, the researcher of a phenomenological study shares how an experience is perceived and is shared through detailed and rich descriptions (1994). This study will leverage Moustakas' take on phenomenology to answer the three research questions.

## Summary

There is a plethora of empirical research that explores Black students' experiences in the P-12 sector. Black students have experienced harsh realities of systemic and institutionalized racism coupled with inequitable school discipline policies and practices that remove them from classrooms and set them up to fail and be further behind their White peers academically. Black school leaders may have been subjected to the same educational system that decenters their culture and marginalizes their communities. In this way, Black school leaders likely function as cogs that keep recreating the current educational system. Research about Black leaders has encompassed their lived experiences, perceptions about how racism impacts their leadership and ultimately leads them to work with grit, passion, and dedication ensuring that Black students succeed. However, there is limited research that illuminates Black leaders' perspectives on discipline and the connectedness of Blackness, or on the utilization of alternatives to punitive discipline, like restorative practices. Moreover, there is a gap in extant literature that shares how Black school leaders experience double consciousness, race in schools, and how they may or may not embody tenets of social justice and culturally responsive school leadership to support Black students' ability to be seen, heard, respected, and allowed to thrive.

## CHAPTER 3: THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*“When I dare to be powerful — to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.” – Audre Lorde*

### **Purpose Statement & Research Question**

The purpose of this arts-based phenomenological study is to examine the experiences of five Black school leaders and explore their perspectives related to their own educational experiences and ways in which they discipline Black students by upholding or challenging inequitable discipline practices. This study aims to investigate the intersection of lived experiences and beliefs about Black school leaders disciplining Black students. By completing this study, I hoped to examine how Black school leaders' connection and prior experience with discipline and perception of discipline policy impact their decisions when disciplining Black students.

Research questions drive the empirical research design and influence the choices leveraged to conduct the research (Hays & Singh, 2012). The primary questions guiding this phenomenological study are the following:

1. How have Black school leaders experienced discipline as students?
2. How have Black school leaders experienced double consciousness in their personal and professional lives?
3. What are the different perspectives that Black school leaders hold regarding their disciplinary practices of Black students within urban schools?

### **Research Design**

The research design's decisions were chosen by carefully contemplating multiple research options, the study's focus, and my epistemological standpoint. I believe that knowledge is constructed from our lived experiences; from our reflections on how our worldviews were

shaped and established because of our specific lived experiences. This study's intended focus was to examine Black school leaders' view of how Black students are disciplined through formal and informal policies and practices. This research is approached through an arts-based phenomenological study. Hays & Singh (2012) describe qualitative research as an interactive exploration of a phenomenon from a new perspective that helps researchers discover, uncover, verify, and reflect. The significance of participants' epistemologies and perspectives helps the phenomenon evolve and become more complex, helping to delve deeper into how the phenomenon is perceived and experienced.

A prominent phenomenological researcher, Moustakas (1994), shared that a phenomenological study aimed to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and how they can provide a comprehensive description of it. Additionally, Moustakas (1994) highlights that the researcher determines the experience's underlying foundation by analyzing the original situation related to the experience studied in phenomenological studies. Therefore, examining personal accounts may illuminate the meaning of the phenomenon and its origin in participants' lives. This arts-based phenomenological study will complete Moustakas's (1994) data analysis protocol while also paying close attention to the researcher's personal experience with the phenomenon. This will be explored more thoroughly in the data analysis section.

While phenomenology was the primary vehicle for this study, arts-based research (ABR) helped to form and shape this study. Arts-based research was coined in 1993 as a way to provide rich models for social and behavioral science in a thoughtful and creative manner (Wang et al., 2017). ABR is defined as “research that uses the arts, in the broadest sense, to explore, understand, represent and even challenge human action and experience” (Savin Baden &

Wimpenny, 2014, p. 1). The primary data collection methods of an ABR study could be well-documented and leveraged like interviews and observations or through more artistic methods like poetry writing or digital story telling. ABR plays a significant role in how findings from this study were crystalized and will be disseminated. Specifically literary art, which is one of six categories of ABR, is utilized to engage participants of this study and invites the readers to explore language, to cultivate new meaning, and connect to the research creatively and imaginatively (Chilton & Leavy, 2014). This study will be shared in conventional ways as well as through artistically inspired forms such as performances and poetry presentations.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Researchers cannot separate who we are, what we believe, and what we do in empirical research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It has been noted that "personal history brings the core of the problem into focus" (Moustakas, 1994, p.104). This phenomenological study is significant to me because as a school leader specifically responsible for safety and discipline, I realize that my duties require me to police poor, Black children. I know police is a harsh term, but the reality is I am responsible for enacting policies that remove Black students from learning environments. Research has highlighted Black students are policed due to their Blackness, being too loud, too expressive, or too visible (Gregory et al., 2014; Ryan & Goodram, 2013, & Anyon et al., 2018).

Moreover, as a Black woman living in America, I have experienced how Whiteness coats perceptions, practices, and policies that impact Black students. Ideals possibly instilled and ingrained in my fabrics of being because I, once a Black child, experienced school as an institution where my identity, voice, and needs were not valued or met. I find myself repeatedly engaged in conversations with Black teachers who express to me that we are setting students up for failure when we do not teach them tough consequences in school. In addition to the pressure

for exclusionary discipline, I sometimes feel controlled by policy or led by a false perception of a positive outcome when I had naively considered suspension as an intervention or rehabilitation like some naively would call the juvenile detention centers, jails, and prisons filled with Black men and women. I find myself in critical conversations with Black teachers in which they argue that if we fail to punish our children early, our society will teach them life lessons through even harsher discipline like lengthy prison sentencing and overt discrimination embedded in our society.

In these conversations during my first year as an assistant principal, Black teachers and I typically reassured ourselves that the discipline decision we make is in the student's best interest. Most importantly, we reminded ourselves that we did what we had to do because Black students had to be aware that our society will not be lenient on them. Instead of addressing our school discipline data's disproportionality, we unconsciously used students' Blackness as the first step in progressive discipline. Progressive discipline is a system that provides gradual steps to discipline which consider prior offenses, students' background information, and previous consequences given to students before making discipline decisions. This system is leveraged to prevent disproportionate discipline and provide fair and objective consequences. However, I can see how subconsciously a student's Blackness could be used as the first step in discipline decisions. As a result, Black school leaders and teachers may feel compelled to teach Black students harsher consequences earlier because lack of lessons related to respecting and listening to authority later in life can end fatally. We have seen this replayed *over and over* in the deaths of Black men and women in our country at the hands of police and White vigilantes with little or no justice thereafter.

## **Researcher's Positionality**

My personal experiences have shaped my realities about school discipline. As a Black student in the P-12 sector in the early 2000s, I have been forcefully removed from a class, excluded from opportunities, and tracked into lower-performing classes due to teachers' perceived understanding of my behaviors. These experiences have impacted my personal beliefs and understanding of my Blackness and how it shows up in schools. Moreover, this also impacts my professional life by requiring me to be cognizant again of how my Blackness is perceived. I consider myself to be an activist for educational equity by criticizing the curriculum and school policies I utilize, engaging in critical conversations, and fighting for social change inside and outside of schools. The miseducation and oppression I experienced in schools have led me to work in my purpose by advocating for minoritized groups. I was labeled "at-risk" as a teenager, however, my grandmother's prayers and working at non-profit-social justice-organizations helped me to evade the school-to-prison pipeline.

I am extremely dedicated to interrupting inequitable practices and dismantling the system that feeds our Black students to prisons. Through critical reflection about my identity, lived experiences, implicit biases, and privileges, I am now aware of my position as a cog in this system that has historically and violently oppressed Black students. I refuse to sit idly and let it perpetuate the marginalization, deterioration, and dehumanization of my people. I consciously decided to complete a phenomenological study that would challenge myself as a leader. As a Black female assistant principal responsible for disciplining Black students, I wanted to conduct this study to examine my biased beliefs, subconscious thoughts, and my own discipline decisions. I hoped that through this study I identified perspectives that illuminated positive discipline practices for leaders to utilize when supporting Black students. Moreover, I hoped to

gain a deeper understanding of Black school leaders' double consciousness, cultural competence, sense-making, and how the aforementioned ideas impact our decision-making.

As a result of being both a Black school leader and a product of public schools who has experienced exclusionary school discipline, I would consider myself an insider in this research. As a marginalized group member, I can conceptualize, offer to understand, and help to co-construct meaning from a personal place of knowing. Besides collecting data from the selected participants, I have collected and explored my own frames of reference related to this research inquiry. Overall, my experience has served as an additional piece of data that can illuminate best practices as well as biased views that must be acknowledged, bracketed, and addressed.

Finally, as a Black woman who has experienced White gaze, double consciousness, and imposter syndrome, I know the importance of counter-narratives and have felt the power in storytelling. In America, Black voices have been silenced and Black joy has been weighed down by the shackles that have transformed into invisible, yet malignant, cysts that spread across our country. However, I know there is power, resilience, and hope in our stories, our songs, and our perspectives. Therefore, I position myself as a ratchetdemic (Emdin, 2021), a loud, proud Black educator who stands in authenticity. I understand that schools have been created to foster and perpetuate brokenness and silence our joy. School is not a broken system. It is operating exactly how it was designed.

To combat the centering of Whiteness in academia, I lift this study in the light of Black resistance, Black art, and Black resilience. Each chapter starts with a quote from a Black liberator who has resisted the status quo and being force-fed that their Blackness was not good enough. Poetry has been a platform to share pain and hope simultaneously for Black folks. Poetry is an art of resistance. I incorporate personally written poems that use Black English – or

Ebonics – on purpose. Additionally, I share Kwansabas, an African American poem composed of 7 lines, 7 words, with no more than 7 letters composed are created. These poems illuminate the complexity of Black art and the connection to our pride. Using Kwansabas, which has such a strict format, symbolizes the oppression we have faced and work to overcome with the resources we have. Finally, I leveraged African proverbs to describe findings in the discussion section. Even after the exploitation, dehumanization, and constant degradation, Black people have risen above negativity and continue to pour culture, consciousness, and creativity into this world.

### **Sample**

I invited five Black school leaders to participate in this arts-based phenomenological study based on 1) the specific criteria I set and 2) a willingness to participate. According to Sale, Lohfeld, and Brazil (2002), the sample size of a qualitative study should be small and purposeful, so that interview respondents share essential information that is unique to their experiences and is not expected to be representative of an entire population. My criteria included identifying as a school principal or assistant principal responsible for discipline decisions, identifying as Black/African American, and currently working in a school with at least 10% Black students. A minimal threshold of Black students was identified to ensure that Black school leaders can offer their perspective of disciplining Black students regardless of whether there are one or one thousand Black students in a school, Black school leaders can impact how those Black students experience discipline. Black school leaders – rather than another minority group – were selected for this study because of the prevalence of anti-Blackness embedded in systems like schools. With maximum variation (Hays & Singh, 2011) in mind, participants were selected with a critical eye to ensure the sample provided a range of demographics in their age, work experience, prior and current socioeconomic status, and highest educational attainment.

## **Participant Selection**

After I received approval from both the university and the school district's Institutional Review Board, I posted an initial invitation to participate through message boards, mailing lists, and direct emails. I followed up with a formal invitation and informed consent emailed directly to interested candidates who met the selection criteria. Purposive criterion sampling was leveraged to identify participants for this study. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative studies because it provides information-rich data from a subset of people. It is intentional because selected participants should provide substantial insight and details about a phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). All the leaders selected have experienced this phenomenon of interest, a Black leader with the experience of disciplining Black students. Additionally, Etikan (2016) states that purposive sampling relies on judgment to identify participants who embody certain qualities and provide insight into specific experiences. To be selected, leaders had to identify as Black and hold an educational leadership role in the P-12 system in the southeastern United States. I did consider demographic data concerning gender, role (principal/assistant principal), and school level (elementary, middle, and high). The aforementioned assisted with maximum variation. The leaders selected can provide what Patton (2002) explained as in-depth understanding.

This study sought to elucidate the racialized experiences of Black school leaders and their perspectives of disciplining Black students in a large urban district in the southeast. I selected five participants to participate in this arts-based phenomenological study. I selected a Black male middle school principal originally from Georgia, a Black male middle school assistant principal originally from Chicago, a Black female high school assistant principal originally from New Orleans by way of Nigeria, a Black female elementary school assistant principal originally from

Georgia, and a Black male elementary school principal originally from South Carolina (See Table 1). These individuals had the opportunity to reflect on their willingness to participate in the study and were then asked to fill out an online short descriptive background survey and schedule their two semi-structured interviews (see appendix B) and response to poetry activity.

**Table 1**  
*Participants' Background Information*

| <b>Name</b>   | <b>State Originally From</b> | <b>Age Range</b> | <b>School Grade Level</b> | <b>% Of Black Students</b> | <b>Leadership Role</b> | <b>Years as a School Leader (AP/P)</b> | <b>Total Years in Education</b> |
|---------------|------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Cheikh Freire | NY                           | 31-40            | Middle School             | 98%                        | Principal              | 10                                     | 14                              |
| Rodney Hope   | IL                           | 51-60            | Middle School             | 90%                        | Assistant Principal    | 6                                      | 29                              |
| Summer Maya   | LA<br>Nigeria                | 51-60            | High School               | 100%                       | Assistant Principal    | 4                                      | 27                              |
| Sasha Paige   | GA                           | 41-50            | Elementary School         | 27%                        | Assistant Principal    | 4                                      | 16                              |
| Elijah Stone  | SC                           | 41-50            | Elementary School         | 94%                        | Principal              | 7                                      | 22                              |

*Note.* Information was gathered about participants from a pre-interview questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions.

### **Methods of Data Collection & Procedures**

The primary form of data collection was received through two one-on-one in-depth semi-structured phenomenological interviews on a secured online platform that records video and sound. The average interview lasted about 50 minutes with the longest being 94 minutes. One outlier interview only lasted 22 minutes which was a participant's second semi-structured interview. This participant provided many in-depth anecdotes, stories, and examples in the first

interview, therefore he felt as if he covered several of the questions asked in the second interview and did not want to sound redundant or repetitive. He, like other participants, was asked if they had anything else they wanted to share or elaborate on during the member checking process. A total of 488 minutes (over eight hours) of interview data was collected via semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were optimal in this study because the questions were developed ahead of time. Through this structure, the researcher can follow the conversation's trajectory to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experience (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006) and prevent biases that could shift the types of questions asked in each interview. The research design intentionally leveraged two one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The first interview sought out background information about the participant, an understanding of their racialized experiences, more specifically their discipline experience, the reflection of their current discipline approach as a school leader, and their understanding and reaction to double consciousness.

The second interview delved more into each school leader's perception of disciplining Black students, their understanding of double consciousness, and thoughts and considerations for school leaders responsible for disciplining Black students. Moustakas (1994) explained how open questions could provide vital, critical, and profound descriptions of the phenomenon's participants' perspectives. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were ideal for this study because these interviews facilitated obtaining themes and a new understanding of the experience. The questions that were developed and asked during both interviews are located in Appendix C.

Additionally, data was collected through poetic document analysis. After the second semi-structured, in-depth interview, each participant was asked to critically respond to a poem written by Dr. Matthew E. Henley that is provided below. Dr. Henley highlighted his experiences

as a Black child being bussed 10 miles from a predominantly Black neighborhood to integrate a school in a predominantly White neighborhood in Boston which the reader may assume takes place in the late 1980s due to his deliberate mention of Reaganomics and Willie Horton.

According to Hunter (2002), poetry can be used as a qualitative data source that can be analyzed.

Participants were asked to share what images or experiences rose to the top of their noticing, how this poem's imagery or themes could relate to their current Black students' experiences with discipline, and to share this poem's connection to double consciousness in any way.

### Figure 1

*Poem: when asked what i learned in elementary school being bussed from Mattapan to Wellesley*

What they think is appropriate: to treat  
Black hair like a pregnant woman's belly,  
question if larger nostrils enhance breathing,  
probe my legs for extra calf muscles  
under skin our teacher said  
doesn't bruise because she can't see the  
blood  
-screams beneath.  
i learned to tolerate  
the frumpy lies of well-intentioned White  
women—bosoms heaving, eyes liquid with  
Reaganomics, Willie Horton and how they  
imagined my parents (a crack whore mother,  
an imprisoned father)  
—and their messianic attempts to save me  
from my stable home.  
i learned to master

Simon says skills; to be a chameleon; to  
code-switch; to bite my tongue instead of  
theirs; to make excuses for them, yet allow  
awkwardness to pant circles around heads  
asking what i prefer to be called

(Colored? Negro? African  
American? Black?)  
never landing on my name.  
i learned to execute

the affirmative action of elementary  
arithmetic—(effort 2 \* time)/x = equity; that  
history is an art painted in primary colors:

White supremacy,  
White privilege, White fragility; that darker  
shades are plucked out, passed over: crayons  
reserved for trees, rocks, dirt; that other tales  
struggle to sing through the cacophony of  
the single story (slavery, civil rights  
poverty) muting a talented tenth; that i  
should be grateful. i learned to accept

that "Cohen" and "Karelitz" were nigger -  
names before  
my orange bus replaced their yellow stars;  
that kidssay the darndest things when  
grandparents remember the Shoah,  
unlike others whose ancestors held whips  
or felt pilgrim pride in the face of fallen  
feathers;

i learned to endure the cultural appropriation  
of slang, when every bobby and becky  
becomes "my brothah," "my sistah,"  
with teeth clenched, lips parted, hoping

for the day they can reclaim "my nig. . .".  
i learned to drink  
the cafeteria's chocolate milk, my back  
wall-braced; to never trust sudden  
movements; to fight for every inch of slide

and swing, each paper mâché turtle i  
 “couldn’t have created on my own”; to  
 recite “today’s a good day to die”

—  
 every day  
 —

down checkered halls to my seat beside the  
 office secretary, she who understood the  
 intersection of round pegs and square holes;

to enjoy solitary confinement recess; to  
 admire the ants who rebuild their lives after  
 every collapsing storm or malicious White  
 sneaker.

i learned that they think i can’t swim.

Matthew E. Henley

*Note.* Figure 1 is a published poem by Dr. Matthew Henley depicting his experiences as a Black student being bussed to a predominately White school. Participants completed a critical analysis of this poem describing how this experience related to their schooling experience, other Black students’ experience, and their perspective of double consciousness

I also reviewed and analyzed each school’s discipline data as provided by district data platforms accessible to district employees as well as information from a data domain that the district provides to the public in hopes to illuminate how Black students are disciplined in each school leader's school to help paint a clear picture of each schools’ discipline climate. I hoped to find information that showed suspensions by race, gender, and location. Additionally, I reviewed the school district’s discipline code, hoping this investigation would unveil the type of consequences leveraged for various offenses. The student discipline code of conduct is considered a form of policy school leaders are required to follow and implement.

Finally, as a form of arts-based research, I cultivated poems as my reflexive journaling to document my thoughts, connections, and personal biases that arise as a Black school leader and cultivate new meaning based on the information obtained from information from the literature review, semi-structured interviews, and critical response to poetry. As a result of journaling before, during, and after collecting data from participants, another method is being utilized to understand the phenomenon and ensure bracketing of my personal bias.

I created poems describing each participant’s essence and the experiences they chose to share prior to introducing each participant and their school’s background, and discipline style in

a more formal sense. Additionally, poems were created for each research question with each stanza representing the crystallized information (i.e., information that has become definite or clear) for each identified theme that rose from this study. These poems were created through my constructive understanding and personal perspective based on participants after the formal sharing of the findings to value and uphold researcher integrity.

I also created eight different Kwansabas. A Kwansaba is an African American verse form that was created by East St. Louis Poet Laureate and professor of English at Southern Illinois University, Eugene B. Redmond in 1995. This poetry type was originally created to honor and celebrate Kwanzaa. “The poetic form adopts the number seven from Kwanzaa’s *nguzo saba* (seven principles) as well as embraces its roots in the South African tradition of the Praise Poem” (Moore, 2011). Each poem contains seven lines that are composed of seven words in each line and written with no word surpassing seven letters. The poems serve as an artistic approach to redefining and understanding each pertinent piece of literature that ungirds this study.

### **Data Analysis**

Meaning from participants arose from the audio and video recordings, transcriptions, and poetry response synthesis. The poetry response required participants to read Dr. Henley’s poem (see Figure 1) and express how the experiences shared in the poem could relate to their experiences as Black students or experiences of Black students they serve. In addition, when analyzing the poem, participants were asked to identify themes regarding discipline, Blackness, and double consciousness. Participants’ responses were crystallized and categorized based on research questions. Through immersing myself in the data provided from the district student code of conduct and available discipline data for each school, I had a more well-rounded understanding of the school’s suspension rating for Black students. I first listened to and

transcribed all eight hours of audio recordings and read each transcribed interview at least three different times prior to highlighting concepts, hand-coding, and leveraging researcher journal notes. I construct themes using Moustakas' (1994) data analysis strategy to process participants' responses and their understanding of the phenomenon (see Table 2 for a detailed, synthesized version of the process). I explored my personal thoughts and connections and bracketed my biases after each interaction with the data.

**Table 2**  
*Black-on-Black School Discipline Data Analysis Steps*

| <i>Steps</i>   | <i>Actions</i>   |
|--|--|
| <b>Step 1:</b><br>Researcher's<br>Epoche                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Acknowledge personal perspective.</li> <li>● Suspend judgment and prejudices.</li> <li>● Verbatim description and transcript.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Step 2:</b><br>Transcendental-<br>phenomenological<br>reduction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Examine participant's statements related to the perception of disciplining Black students.</li> <li>B. Document all pertinent statements.</li> <li>C. List invariant horizons (non-repetitive statements).</li> <li>D. Connect and couple the invariant meaning units into topics.</li> <li>E. Conduct a synthesis of theme and new understanding to develop a description of Black-on-Black school discipline. Include precise examples from both interviews.</li> <li>F. Consider a personal description of Black-on-Black school discipline. Through innovative creativity, develop the foundation and understanding of your experience.</li> <li>G. Assemble a textual-structural illustration of the understanding of your experience.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Repeat  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● From the precise transcript of Black-on-Black school discipline of every participant, complete steps A through G.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Step 4:</b> Combine   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Based on the textural-structural description from each participant and me, develop a combined description of the meanings and understanding of the phenomenon, including all individual descriptions into an all-inclusive description of the experience depicting the group as a whole.</li> </ul>   |

*Note.* This table demonstrates the steps taken to analyze phenomenological data based on Moustaka's methods of analysis.

**Step 1: Researcher's Epoche**

Naturally, we judge our surroundings, experience, and new understanding through our own lens that helps us make meaning. Epoche is the ability to suspend that judgment in order to review the phenomena from a viewpoint that removes our ego. As Moustakas states, it “requires that we learn to see what stands before our eyes, what we can distinguish and describe (1994, p 33).” This first step of this process is crystallization which is imperative in order to conduct a trustworthy study that is credible and reliable. As a researcher, my preconceived thoughts can subconsciously lead to disqualifying information that does not align with my perspective and fails to challenge my ability to cultivate new awareness and beliefs. The verbatim transcription ensures that “in the textual description of an experience nothing is omitted; every dimension or phase is granted equal attention and is included” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 66). While I may have opposing views about what I hear and see, through reflecting and acknowledging my bias before and after each encounter with participants or data, I am more conscious of the direction of my thoughts. Subsequently, I am more readily available to authentically engage and receive the information in an unbiased manner because I am clear of my beliefs and understand that the participants’ construction of meaning does not take away or invalidate my experience.

**Step 2: Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction**

In this particular step, seven processes occur for each participant’s transcription that is listed in an a-g manner. These steps include (a) examining statements, (b) documenting pertinent statements, (c) highlighting invariant horizons which are non-repeating statements (d) connecting non-repeating statements into units (e) creating a synthesis of new meaning (f) developing a personal account (g) assembling a structural understanding of the phenomenon. Transcendental is the idea that experiences are beyond our own ego and perception of a certain idea or

phenomenon to unveil a new essence or meaning. Phenomenology illuminates that everything about our world can be categorized into smaller phenomena and examined by its features and essence. Finally, a reduction is a route back to self, the act of narrating what I was able to see and understand in terms of the phenomenon that I explored. Therefore transcendental-phenomenological reduction illuminates each experience related to certain phenomena through a constructive lens (Moustakas, 1994). After the third time reading through each participant's transcripts, I began to categorize each participant's response as they aligned to each research question within a password-protected online excel sheet (See Appendix E). When a pertinent statement arose related to the research question, I highlighted it and then wrote a shortened subtheme-like statement in another column. Quotes from both interviews and participants' poetic analysis were highlighted in the same color which matched the crystalized subtheme-like statement for easy access. These specific quotes were then transferred to a new column beside the statement with the participant code name in parenthesis.

### **Step 3: Repeat**

The A-G process outlined in step two was conducted with each participant's interviews and poetic analysis template. Quotes that aligned with an already identified theme were highlighted in the color chosen from the first participant's interview. Participants' initials were written beside each quote. Invariant horizons (i.e., individual and non-repeating statements) were then re-evaluated against the themes that did repeat. Themes related to the study's topic were identified across participants' experiences and were listed in a later column. These individual experiences helped to construct an alternative understanding of the phenomenon and provided an additional perspective that was valued and taken into consideration. Some invariant horizons

added to the themes that will be mentioned in the findings section while some provided recommendations for future research.

#### **Step 4: Combine**

Subsequently, the information gathered and crystalized was interpreted and utilized to create an in-depth report on how five Black school leaders experienced discipline as students, how they acknowledge and grapple with double consciousness, and mainly their perspective of disciplining Black students. I utilized the themes and topics that rose to the top to share the implementation of the findings and the study's significance to the education field. Results have been synthesized into written literal responses that highlight themes along with aligned verbatim information that will be categorized and explained in detail. Additionally, the information was funneled through a creative writing process by incorporating my personal poetry that encompasses the overarching themes and meanings revealed. This method provided a different outlook and approach to sharing scholarly research data. Prendergast (2009) calls this practice *Vox Participare* in which a researcher sifts through participants' voices to identify words and phrases that help synthesize meaning and provide an affective, and powerful, new meaning.

Recommendations for future studies and school-level practices and procedures have been cultivated and shared in Chapter Five. As a means of dependability, I received support from an external creative writer to read, listen, and compare the poetry created and the themes crystalized to ensure the creative writing did not veer off from the participants' understanding of the phenomenon. Conclusions around Black-on-Black school discipline have been shared and offered because of the crystallization of the data obtained from the research participants. This information is presented in written form through structured paragraphs and illustrations and may be shared through an oral presentation.

## **Research Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that research is strengthened when it is trustworthy. Trustworthiness includes a study's credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. In addition to collecting data and storing it appropriately, there are specific measures I have taken to certify the trustworthiness of this study. Triangulating or leveraging multiple methods of data collection helps to provide a richer deeper understanding (Wilson, 2014). To analyze and describe the findings, I have used multiple data sources to describe the importance of this study fully and confirm the themes and new meaning. Multiple data sources include the audio and video recordings of the interviews conducted with Black school leaders and the district-developed documents that were used as reference points for the student codes of conduct that leaders referred to in their interviews. Also, information gathered from public and private data dashboards helped to provide a thorough description of discipline data and trends for each school included in this study. Additionally, I used a reflexive journal that allowed me to share how data analysis impacted me personally and professionally. I used this journal to bracket my biases and notate how I make meaning with the information gathered at each phase of this process.

An additional layer of trustworthiness is the study's credibility. By allowing the participants to member check, the study is more credible and authentic. Lincoln & Guba (1985) explained that member checking enhances the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research. Member checking is described as validation, ensuring the participant's voice is being represented accurately. I shared the transcripts with each participant to ensure the accurate transcribing of the interviews. By leveraging member checking strategies, I have included an essential and truthful statement from the participants in the research.

Additionally, as another form of member checking, I shared the introductory poem I created for each participant to be respectful in how I framed each of them poetically. While the information leveraged to create the poems was gained from the participants' verbatim description, I wanted to be sure that the essence of their being and leadership experience through my poetic response was appropriate and acceptable. The final layer of trustworthiness that I added in this study is transparency. I was able to explicitly identify my role and position as a researcher. My personal and professional values and cultural background help to shape my views about the research, therefore it was important to share these stances. Strategies leveraged in this study to ensure trustworthiness are listed in detail below (See Table 3).

**Table 3**  
*Trustworthiness Indicators*

| <b>Indicator</b> | <b>Strategies</b>  |
|------------------|--|
| Credibility      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participants were selected from a variety of schools and geographical locations in a large urban school district in the southeast.</li> <li>● I asked questions in a similar manner to each participant.</li> <li>● I member-checked with participants to validate the analysis and to ensure the participants' voices were heard and represented accurately by sharing my verbatim transcriptions.</li> <li>● I bracketed my biases and opinions to ensure they did not hinder my ability to crystalize information gathered from participants.</li> </ul>   |
| Confirmability   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I triangulated information by leveraging more than one source of data including reflective journaling, interview questions, and document analysis.</li> <li>● I leveraged multiple online dashboards to review each school's discipline data which shared their overall suspension rate and the suspension rate for Black students.</li> <li>● Poetry analysis conducted by the participants after semi-structured interviews.</li> <li>● Multiple data sources including written and audio and video recordings of the interviews.</li> <li>● Reflexive journal to share how I was making meaning during the data gathering and analysis process.</li> </ul> |

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Dependability   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I sought an external creative writer to ensure the poetry is aligned with the data gathered and does not veer from the themes elicited from participants.</li> <li>● I leveraged colleagues to conduct an inquiry audit to ensure findings and conclusions are based on the data gathered and not on my biases or preconceived notions.</li> <li>● I used multiple layers of hand-coding to identify themes and topics that rise to the top of the data.</li> </ul> |
| Transferability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I provided a thick description to provide detailed information about the phenomenon so that the study can be replicated in other districts or states.</li> <li>● I provided a rich description of the methods section.</li> </ul>   |

*Note.* A description of the researcher's approach to cultivating credibility.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Researchers are responsible for examining ethical issues that may arise during the research. Hays and Singh (2012) highlight five components of research ethics. They are the following:

#### ***Meta-Ethical Principles***

Meta-ethical principles include autonomy, not harming participants, benefiting participants, justice, fidelity, and accuracy. As the researcher, I must be cognizant of how I share participants' stories in order to advance the literature without harming participants. Additionally, I was sure to share authentic and truthful perspectives to maintain accuracy and justice for the participants.

#### ***Informed Consent***

Informed consent is the researcher's ability to efficiently communicate the study's vision and any risks or benefits associated with the study for the participants to decide if they want to participate (Nusbaum et al., 2017). I leveraged process consent (Smythe & Murray 2000), which is an ongoing activity between the researcher and the participants as the inquiry develops.

Through this process, I made sure individuals continuously agree to participate and share their experiences. I established trust and rapport with participants in order to have informed consent to participate in the research and a deep understanding of their stories. I ethically helped to voice their experiences and epistemologies.

### ***Confidentiality***

Participants had to be willing to share personal demographics and experiences that they may not want to be distributed. Discussing confidentiality is a necessity to receive informed consent (Kaiser, 2009). I changed identifying descriptors that could expose a participant. Participants were given the autonomy to share as much or as little as they would like. They were allowed to choose their own name pseudonyms. However, I chose the pseudonym for the school names and the school district. Through confidentiality, I have kept information that could harm participants' privacy and stored it safely in a password-protected online personal repository.

### ***Multiple Relationships***

Multiple relationships (i.e., when the researcher holds more than one role with the same individual) are among the most challenging issues to avoid in qualitative research because it usually occurs in a natural setting (Smythe & Murray, 2000). I was extremely mindful of selecting leaders with whom I do not have a personal or professional relationship. Moreover, I have not engaged in conversation about the phenomenon with these leaders prior to the interviews conducted in this research study.

### ***Competence***

Due to my immediate interaction with the type of research being conducted, I want to be sure that I do not overglaze the research with my personal perspective or drive the answer participants to share. I worked diligently to do the necessary work to ensure my competence

throughout this study by triangulating data and consistently looking for literature to enhance my understanding.

### **Limitations of the Study**

An important limitation that is evident in this study was the length of this arts-based phenomenological study. First off, this doctoral program was only three years, which decreased the amount of time spent on the study to identify participants and develop themes. The lack of time also decreased the opportunity to allow participants to reflect on their current practices and identify ways to improve their leadership style. The findings were phenomenal and powerful, and I could have spent many more years crystalizing and constructing new meanings based on the information gathered from participants. Secondly, the sample size of five qualitative research participants is reasonable. However, the more voices shared, the more connections can be made. Although a smaller sample size is ideal for qualitative research, a larger sample size possibly could have yielded more diverse experiences and responses from participants. Two male principals, two female assistant principals, and 1 male assistant principal were selected to participate through purposive sampling. A limitation arose when I realized this gender difference in leadership status. Moreover, I also tried to select participants who varied in their experience and the type of school they served. However, only one high school administrator was selected to participate while two leaders represented middle schools and elementary schools. Although five participants could explore their various lived experiences in a thought-provoking way, the information may not be generalizable for the population interviewed in this study. As a result, qualitative studies, in general, are less generalizable, which can be seen as a constraint to the research. 2020 has been struck with COVID-19, which has changed schooling in how we know and understand it to be. Depending on the state of schooling, once interviews begin, Black school

leaders may have different responses based on how discipline practices have changed once students returned face-to-face from the COVID-19 shutdown. Moreover, their beliefs about sending students home may have shifted based on their experiences during the pandemic. Finally, the way I interpreted the data could limit what findings were crystallized. Although I diligently set aside my epoche and allowed the findings to construct what would come to light, the data still had to funnel through my understanding of the phenomenon and comprehension of what was being shared by the participants.

### **Summary**

In summary, this art-based phenomenological study examined five Black school leaders' perspectives of disciplining Black students through semi-structured interviews, a poetic document analysis completed by participants, and a document analysis that included each school's discipline data and trends and the school district's student code of conduct. This chapter described the research, including the purpose of this study and methods leveraged to complete this study. Additionally, this chapter provided information about data collection and participant selection. This study was conducted in the southeastern United States with five P-12 Black school leaders across one large urban school district. The data sources utilized are semi-structured interviews, audio and video recordings, document analysis, and a review of my reflexive journal. The data was analyzed and hand-coded for themes and subthemes. Additionally, I discussed how the data was triangulated and member-checked for accuracy. Hand coding was utilized to organize data and develop direct themes and make meaning of invariant horizons. Themes were categorized by research questions and were creatively synthesized into poems to express how Black on Black school discipline has been encountered and perceived. Finally, this chapter explored the ethical considerations and limitations of this study. Chapter

Four provides a synthesis of findings, revealing the answer to this study's research question and connecting the literature review and conceptual framework to the findings.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

*“We are the ones we have been waiting for”* – June Jordan

Chapter Four provides the perspectives of five Black school leaders currently working in the Diamond Public School District (DPSD) in the southeastern United States. The school leaders, who served as participants in this study, collectively spent over eight hours exploring their experiences and constructing the meaning of this phenomenon. In this section, I provide a thick description of each one of my participants’ perspectives of school discipline, more specifically, their experiences disciplining students who share their Blackness. In presenting these perspectives, authentic storytelling is placed at the forefront, therefore verbatim transcriptions were leveraged to crystalize the findings. Participants, specific schools, the school district, and other identifying information have been given pseudonyms to protect participants’ confidentiality. Participants had the choice to choose their own pseudonyms. All five participants participated in two semi-structured interviews and completed a critical response to poetry in which they analyzed how the published poem (see Figure 1) could relate to their own experiences with discipline, double consciousness, or their experience disciplining Black students.

I start with a description of the school district, and a review of the district’s student code of conduct. When designing this study, I hoped that perusing online data sites developed and updated by Diamond Public School District would lead to a rich description of discipline trends like suspension rates, locations, times, type of incidents, methods of discipline, and demographic data of students who received discipline. However, I could only access the overall suspension rate, suspension rate by grade level, and suspension by race for four out of the five schools in this study. Since the high school included in this study accepts students from across the district,

discipline data was not aggregated. With further investigation, I found that discipline data for students attending this school was incorporated into their home school's data which I could not access without knowing each student's name. Thus, in the end, I had each participant's discipline style that they shared throughout both interviews (particularly interview one) and provided a slim description of each school's discipline data that I could access. More information about the participant profile will be explored below.

After a brief introduction of each participant is provided, I supply readers a detailed description of each participant's background, the school in which they serve, and discipline data gained from document analysis. Finally, as a part of the participant profile, I share a poem gathered from my understanding of each participant through reflexive journaling that paints some of the essence gained from each of their interviews and stories. I use the word "we" throughout their individual poems to express not only their personal experiences but also to illuminate the collective experience of Blackness that participants uplifted. This is not to generalize the Black experience in any way, but to highlight some of the shared experiences we have as Black folks. Once a clear portrait is painted for each participant, this chapter answers the following research questions: (1) How have Black school leaders experienced discipline as Black students? (2) How have Black school leaders experienced double consciousness in their personal and professional lives? (3) What are the different perspectives that Black school leaders hold regarding their disciplinary practices of Black students within urban schools?

To answer the research questions above, the participants' words, experiences, and stories are intertwined to construct an image that captures the essence of the experience of five Black school leaders who work with and are responsible for disciplining Black students. Moreover, participants' connections and analysis of Dr. Henley's poem (see Figure 1), and a document

analysis of the student code of conduct assisted in answering the research questions. Furthermore, once I crystallized themes based on each research question, I made connections to the extant literature provided in Chapter Two. By revisiting the literature with a new understanding of the phenomenon, I was able to make sense of each key literature topic. While connecting findings from participants' data to the literature review, I bracketed my personal thoughts and placed them in my researcher's journal. As a primary instrument tool, my perspectives are important and should be shared. Therefore, to share my new flow of consciousness, I created a Kwansaba (Moore, 2011), an African American poetry form to illuminate my perception of each of the literature topics. Through this arts-based phenomenological process, each experience and interaction with the data was valuable and shined a light on how Black leaders view their own Blackness, grapple double consciousness, and approach disciplining students who look like them.

## **Introduction**

### **Diamond Public School District Overview**

Diamond Public School District (DPSD) is a large urban school district in the southeastern United States that serves over 50,000 students. Roughly 70% of the student population is Black and 60% of the student population qualify for free or reduced lunch. The school district comprises 91 schools including five that are represented in this study. Two elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school were included in this arts-based phenomenological study. The five schools are located in different neighborhoods across the city, but all in the greater Diamond Public School District.

## **DPSD Student Code of Conduct**

Each school in the Diamond Public School District is provided a student code of conduct that is updated every year. This document is required to be leveraged when making discipline decisions. Each participant in this study shared that they relied on it for guidance when disciplining Black students. In my document analysis of the district's 102-page student code of conduct, I perused the district's commitment to COVID-19 guidelines, general information about the district, student code of conduct, and student offenses. Explicitly stated is the protection of pupil rights and amendments, the district's compliance with all state and federal discrimination laws, and a section specifically to address gender-specific issues and the district's ongoing commitment to transgender students.

I explicitly examined forty-eight pages of this document which provide guidance related to students' code of conduct while in school. The student code of conduct starts with a section that outlines what students and parents should expect while in Diamond Public School District. Additionally, their responsibilities as stakeholders are listed. Family engagement, a crystallized theme was shared explicitly in the student code of conduct. Regarding their responsibility to ensuring parents and guardians are included, DSPD stated they are committed to:

Recruit, develop, and retain employees who believe that all parents and caregivers love their children, want what is best for them, and are responsive to their needs; Cultivate a safe, welcoming and caring environment for students and their families; Support families in understanding the strengths and needs of their children and in fostering students' lifelong relationship with learning; and, Empower families as advocates by valuing their voices in decision-making about their children and their schools (DSPD, 2021).

Moreover, the DPSD's office of school discipline is provided to support students, families, and staff who may have questions, comments, or concerns. The student behavior code of conduct offers examples of situations that may occur and aligned disciplinary action and consequences. According to the student code of conduct, progressive discipline is encouraged

and is leveraged to assign appropriate support processes and interventions. Student offenses have been pre-arranged into four levels of behavior. Level One is considered minor. Level Two is considered intermediate. Level Three offenses are moderate. Finally, Level Four are considered serious offenses. Potential consequences for each disciplinary infraction are ranked from minimum and maximum within each offense level. Also, important to note, discipline decisions changed based on students' grade level. Elementary school is considered the first category while middle school and high school comprise the second category. Consequences vary based on the level of the behavior and the student's age. Before actual offenses are listed and addressed, 50 school-based interventions and alternatives to suspensions are offered as suggestions. Schools and school leaders have the autonomy to leverage other alternatives to suspensions and interventions through the wording, "*not all-inclusive of interventions and supports that may be used as alternatives to suspension.*" School leaders also can decide between the levels of discipline and between the minimum and maximum consequences provided. Below is a literal example of how the students code of conduct is phrased regarding a school-wide disruption.

**Figure 3***Diamond Public School District Code of Conduct Example*

"School-wide Disruption: No student shall, in any manner, by use of violence, force, noise, coercion, threat, intimidation, fear, passive resistance, or any other conduct, intentionally cause the disruption of any lawful mission, process or function of the school or engage in any such conduct for the purpose of causing the disruption or obstruction of any such lawful mission, process, or function.

Examples include, but are not limited to large fights, food fights, actions that disrupt multiple classrooms, actions that disrupt large areas of the school cafeteria, media center, etc.), or cause a disruption of transportation processes. Depending on the age of the student, level of severity or repetition, the administrator may utilize interventions, supports, and Level 2-4 disciplinary responses for this offense."

| Levels<br>2-4  | Elementary                                |   | Middle/High  |   |
|--|---|---|--|---|
|  | Minimum                                   | Maximum   | Minimum  | Maximum   |
| Level 2  | School-based Intervention                 | 3 days Detention  | School-based Intervention                                    | 3 days ISS  |
| Level 3  | 1 day of ISS & School-based Interventions | 3 days OSS and School-based Interventions   | 1 day of Saturday School OR ISS & School-based Interventions | 3 days OSS and School-based Interventions   |
| Level 4  | 3 days OSS and School-based Interventions | 10 days OSS and School-based Interventions; hearing referral/recommendation of long-term suspension | 3 days OSS and School-based Interventions                    | 10 days OSS and School-based Interventions; hearing referral/recommendation of a long-term suspension, expulsion, or assign |
| <p><b>Restorative practices are recommended to repair and restore relationships</b><br/> <b>Parent conference may occur prior to student return to school</b><br/> <b>Notify the appropriate Associate Superintendent</b><br/> <b>Contact Safety and Security – Criminal charges may apply</b><br/> <b>Combination of School-based interventions, supports, and disciplinary response may be appropriate</b></p> |   |   |  |   |

*Note.* Examples of student offenses that highlight the various levels of discipline and the minimum and maximum consequence based on the specific event listed above.

### **Participant Profiles**

A profile of each of the five participants is included below to give the reader a sense of each participant's educational trajectory, their background, and personal reflection around their approaches to discipline. Each profile illuminates the personality and essence of each participant. The profiles include the participants' words, thoughts, and stories gathered during the first and second semi-structured interview. I have worked diligently to describe each participant in a manner that aligns with their self-description. Quotation marks have been used to designate speech by the participant and italics have been used to indicate a poem or poetic description created through my reflexive journaling process that provides an arts-based approach to the

information received and crystalized. Poems created through reflexive journaling have been shared with participants as a form of member checking to ensure accuracy and approval.

The participants in this study are as followed:

- Cheikh Freire, the Principal of Freedom Middle School with a 98% Black student population
- Rodney Hope, the 8th-grade Assistant Principal of New Wave Middle School with a 90% Black student population
- Summer Maya, an Assistant Principal of a Choice High School with a 100% Black Student Population
- Sasha Paige, an Assistant Principal of Pearl Crescent Elementary School with a 27% Black student population
- Elijah Stone, the Principal of Gate Elementary School with a 94% Black student population

Below is the detailed profile developed for each participant. Each profile starts with a quote from my reflexive journal that was bracketed when I began to crystallize finding and was eventually added to show my introspection. Each short, italicized quote represents the essence each participant provided during our encounters during the semi-structured interviews.

Furthermore, after explicitly sharing findings about each participant, I present a poem developed by absorbing and crystallizing participant's responses and my evolving perception that I logged in my reflexive journal each time I interacted with the data.

### ***Cheikh Freire***

*Though still waters may be deep, if you know thyself, you shall never drown in others' expectations of you.* This is the first thought that comes to my mind when Cheikh Freire speaks.

Each sentence is filled with fervor and passion that he exudes especially when speaking about his work, commitment, and his Black students. He is cognizant of who he is, the battle he is in moment to moment, and the risk he takes each day as an advocate for Black intellectualism and social-emotional learning. He is the fourth out of eight children born to proud Black Muslim parents who believed in the strength of structure, the power of respect, and the need to know your capabilities and surpass them. He came from strong Black parents who were well-read and expected their children to follow. His father was a man of many trades who eventually became a pharmacist who made a good living for his family. His mother, the loving, fair disciplinarian, captain of the ship weathering each storm, ruled with an iron fist, and made whatever they had feel like home. The family relocated to the southeast right before Cheikh was born. Cheikh started his educational trajectory in a small private Muslim school and then transitioned to a public high school where he thrived and found his internal motivation to continue to succeed on his path of self-knowledge and constant learning.

Cheikh is currently the Principal of Freedom Middle School which is in a zip code that encompasses the poorest neighborhood in the city. He has 10 years of leadership experience and has been in education for a total of 16 years. Cheikh describes the neighborhoods that the school serves as some of the roughest in the city, the poorest, and densely packed with trauma. Cheikh highlights that “students definitely have a tough veneer on them and they’re dealing with a lot, food insecurity, home insecurity... a lot of things, and a lot of learning gaps as a result of that as well.” FMS is home to over 362 sixth to eighth grade students who can sometimes seem as if they are walking around with a weight of impoverished trauma; he explains how this reality becomes a barrier in his school when thinking about school discipline:

It is very difficult to motivate adults who may or may not have a full understanding of how that poverty really shapes their outcomes, life outcomes, academics, emotions in real-time,

because we're human beings so when student take their frustrations out on us... then we deal with secondary trauma and all of that is hard and it weighs on you and if you can't compartmentalize that correctly and process it correctly, healthy, and sustainable it can be very damaging to you.

As a result, Cheikh talks about hiring educators who have the heart and passion to work with students that FMS serves. FMS has a .38 suspension rate with the highest number of out-of-school suspensions occurring in the 7th grade (data gathered from the district-compiled documents referenced in the Chapter 4 opening statement). There is no disproportionality in discipline noted due to the student population.

Cheikh describes his discipline style as one that is clear, humanizing, and filled with high expectations for students and staff. Cheikh explains that one of the most important aspects of discipline is clarity of expectations, "It should be no surprise to adults what's expected for local discipline because otherwise, the pipeline is full and my whole job becomes discipline and that's not my job and that's a hard conversation." These conversations Cheikh expresses may be difficult but are necessary and should be explicitly had with students who should know the outcome of a disciplinary infraction. Leaders should also ensure that staff know these expectations so that the next steps are clear and consistent. Additionally, Cheikh illuminated the importance of humanizing students and disciplining them while knowing they are worthy of learning from their mistakes. "Even though you discipline a child you have to do it with dignity. You have to make sure they're human beings and you treat them as such." He shared that oftentimes administrators know more information about students that provides pertinent context and adds understanding to their life experiences. Finally, Cheikh highlighted the importance of high expectations for all students in academics and their behavior:

Dignity has to be unconditional. [Students] can be tearing stuff off the wall as we speak but I'm still going to talk about of my expectations and what I expect of you at your best

as opposed to belittling you and affirming what you probably feel in your mind at your worst...how you treat this child at their worst speaks to who you are.

Cheikh expressed his intentionality when addressing teachers when they must discipline Black students. He argued how important dignity was when supporting students who may have been dehumanized by the greater society.

**Figure 4.1.**

*Poem: Cheikh Freire*

*We real proud...  
page turnin'  
product of  
righteousness  
first generation  
but the  
passions been burnin'  
unapologetically  
poured and prefaced with  
the success of our people  
history etched into our being  
reminding us education is the mainstay  
& freedom must always light our way*

*Note.* Poem crystallized about the participant through researcher journal notes and directly from the interview.

***Rodney Hope***

*Laughter leads and love follows.* Rodney Hope has a smile that is infectious and a laugh that could lift broken spirits. It's easy to imagine the community of parents, students, and staff who see his leadership as a journey carved with love and high expectations. Rodney Hope is the second child of four and the only boy born to a single mother who called the Southside of Chicago home. Raised by an independent mother and supported by a God-fearing grandmother, Rodney had an enjoyable childhood with his cousins and sisters even though his family was working class for quite some time. Hard work and responsibility were instilled early in Rodney and his sisters. He started working at 14 for a paper stand, bakery, and grocery store to give his

mother a few hundred dollars here and there while she worked tirelessly to purchase their first home in a Chicago suburb. He was self-driven, had a true appreciation for work, and focused on his schoolwork because he knew the importance of education and saw it as his ticket out of the hood. As early as seventh grade, Rodney knew he wanted to be an educator and pursued his dreams. With help of his stepfather, grandmother, and strict mother keeping him on track, Rodney graduated and was voted friendliest of his senior class and went on to a small Catholic university right outside of Chicago. There he served as president of the Black student union and provided leadership in a myriad of roles in his fraternity. He became a resident assistant in his dorms which assisted him with forging authentic relationships with the diverse student body. Rodney had the opportunity to take students across the country to travel. During this time, he realized most of the students who had the privilege to explore the world were White. He quickly realized his passion in life was to ensure Black students had similar opportunities to see the world and experience new cultures.

Rodney is currently the 7th-grade assistant principal at New Wave Middle School. The assistant principals matriculate with their students, so he supported these same students as sixth graders and will continue to work with them as eighth graders. He has six years of school leadership experience, and this is his 29<sup>th</sup> year in education. NWMS has over 800 students who come from diverse neighborhoods not necessarily racially, but more so socioeconomically which varies greatly throughout the communities the school serves. As a result, student needs vary, and they require thoughtful and inquiry-based leaders. The school focuses on four pillars: basic needs, access to exposure, academics, and extended learning. Rodney states, “We really look and work hard with this meeting students where they are and giving them their needs so they can be academically successful.” At NWMS, human capital plays a pivotal role in student success. On

staff, they have three school counselors, a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), social workers, paraprofessionals, and several other staff members to support the four pillars that uphold their school. NWMS has an overall suspension rate of .91 and for Black students the suspension rate is .99. This means that Black students are receiving an out-of-school suspension as a consequence at higher rates than their non-Black peers. Based on the data gathered from documents from the district, every Black seventh and eighth-grade boy and girl is predicted to be suspended at least once in the 2021-2022 school year.

Rodney describes his discipline approach as one that values and builds strong relationships, sets clear expectations, and has follow-through. Rodney shared several stories that highlighted the importance of knowing family members' and students' interests. *"I build relationships, I meet kids where they are. I'm not afraid to be transparent with them so that goes a long way. I also show a general interest in what you got going on."* When Rodney found out that a student enjoyed technology, he made it his priority to ensure the student had an opportunity to apply and be considered for the tech club. He utilized the student's interest and the positive relationship he built with the student's father created years prior with an older sibling to cultivate a path of success for the student even after discipline occurred. Rodney expressed the importance of coaching students through scenarios to determine what behavior and reaction are warranted, acceptable, and expected:

The teacher said I did ABC; ok well did you do ABC? Let's talk about why you did ABC and why that doesn't work and what alternatives there were, and how to handle this moving forward and that's not to say that you won't have any consequences this time but let's set you up for success so that you don't repeat start this pattern.

Finally, Rodney alluded to the importance of following through with consequences for students and providing support after the infraction occurred:

When I encounter a student and I have to redirect them and their resistant to that redirection, another student will often jump in and say that's Mr. Hope you need to.. you better..you want to go ahead and do what he says vs. another person or AP in a grade level, he ain't gon do nothing, right, so it really depends on who delivers that because when students know you're going to follow through or handle the business, students are much quicker to redirect. What I will also say is what the students at my school know about discipline especially from me that I'm going to discipline you but I'm also going to make sure you're okay.

This highlighted Rodney's ability to hold students accountable while also humanizing the discipline experience and being able to implement supports that can prevent the student from encountering the same experience again.

#### **Figure 4.2**

*Poem: Rodney Hope*

*we...  
Southside  
from  
The heart of the hustle  
lies in the arm of the struggle  
at 14 slangin'  
papers for paper  
momma working the swing shift  
shared responsibility  
my sisters and me  
grandma's gifted way with words*

*that waltzed us into that Catholic school  
my cousins and all  
to her gentle reminders that  
she gave out love  
but if you needed a whooping  
she had my momma for that  
God-fearing  
forever praising  
she instilled in me  
no half steppin'*

#### **Summer Maya**

*She is enveloped in dignity with her head facing the sky.* Summer Maya speaks and operates with a grace that reminds me of royalty. Her essence is one when a queen knows her worth, wears her crown, and refuses to settle for less. This is probably easy for Summer Maya to do because she is considered a princess in her home city Lagos, Nigeria. Her father, 94, is currently the chief resolving civil matters and providing leadership to the community members. She is the sixth child out of nine children. She discussed her family dynamic in which colorism played a pivotal role in her drive to be so focused on school as an adolescent. Summer Maya

started sharing her experiences of having sisters who were considered extremely beautiful because they were light-skinned and almost White. Neighbors and family members would come over just to gawk and be in awe of their beauty and even sometimes give them money and gifts. Summer Maya states, “For that reason, I felt like I had to do something to put me on the top you know, so I became a very disciplined person; I focused myself on my education.” During her adolescent educational experience, Summer Maya made all As in her course work, competed across various countries in track, and received a full scholarship to college and an offer to study in the United States at age 15. At 16 years old, Summer Maya started college in Louisiana where she believed she would become a medical doctor. However, her love and deep understanding of numbers led her to computer science and math. She graduated and started to work at a fast-food restaurant where she not only wore the hat of manager but also an educational consultant and counselor. She spent her lunch breaks and after-hours motivating her staff to go back to school. She spent work hours combing through applications and documents to help them attain their GEDs, high school diplomas, and college degrees. She eventually decided to go back to school herself to receive her master’s and then her Ph.D. in the subject that she loved, Mathematics. While she spent some time as a college professor, as her family grew, she decided to transition into the K-12 sector which she has been a part of for over 27 years.

Summer Maya is currently the assistant principal of Choice High School. CHS is a unique school for students in unique situations that is composed of students who choose to leave their neighborhood school for a variety of reasons. Students may attend for credit recovery to try to catch up with their cohort and graduate with their peers. They may need wrap-around support like childcare, transportation, food, and housing. Some are just seeking a 100% virtual option that could result from a myriad of reasons like being the sole provider for their family, medical

conditions, and other needs that a general high school may not be able to address. The school currently has around 370 students enrolled with the population being 100% Black. Summer Maya shares that CHS is “a full-fledged support system” which provides utility support, houses a clothing boutique free to students, and a learning center operated by certified teachers. This learning center is an optimal option for CHS students who have young children of their own to rely on while they, too, learn. Summer Maya highlighted that the administrators focus on teachers with content knowledge to meet students' diverse and wide-ranging academic needs. “Our teachers have to be vast and very content savvy to be able to take students in any subject area within the same period to support them, so we don’t hire anybody who can't teach.” Since the school is composed of students from various homeschools in the Diamond School District, discipline data is not aggregated in a manner that can be interpreted. Students’ achievement and discipline data is wrapped into their homeschool information and could not be separated to determine how students experienced discipline. Therefore, only Summer Maya’s account of discipline can be leveraged to paint a picture describing the type of discipline Black students experience.

Summer Maya explains her discipline style as one that has changed over time. She also describes herself as a conversationalist who values strong, authentic relationships. Summer Maya shares that, “in the initial state I was no-nonsense. What I mean by that is you know I don’t play with kids.” She shared that more experience and exposure to different leadership and disciplinarian styles led her to how she disciplines students now. “The fact that I am with a principal who believes wholeheartedly in softness and relationships so I’m gleaning some things from her in terms of being soft and understanding students.” Through getting to know students

through mentorship and relationships she has felt successful in her approach to supporting students to avoid situations that end in severe or harsh discipline.

Again, I have gone from trying to discipline but having conversations with you and talking about your future. That draws them back to me. So, what they do now is not only do they respect me more, but they believe that I have their interest at heart.

### **Figure 4.3**

*Poem: Summer Maya*

*We dark skin girls cry  
Cocoa completed yet harvested in fields  
chasing love from those of lighter colors  
These were races never won  
but  
we found focus & discipline  
PhD in solving problems  
that our pigments positioned  
wrapped in mathematical notions  
these numbers  
ignited fires to keep us warm  
intelligence & knowledge that made us  
strong  
lightening the load with each accolade  
& barriers overcome  
running past regrets and setbacks  
gaining track meet medals and full rides  
scholarships*

*But even now  
We dark skin women still fill rivers with tear  
streaming from the consciousness  
that our color cuddles the diameter of defeat  
defined in each interaction with Whiteness  
but  
We stronger than their beliefs  
We wipe away our sorrows and pack them  
tightly in our power  
wrapped around our Blackness  
& whisper to our offspring that  
Hatred could never distract us  
Our success is within us  
We the offspring of royalty  
We be the highest supreme  
We will not be defined  
Or put down by their belittling scheme*

### **Sasha Paige**

*Reams of responsibility wrap around her coiled curls and strengthens her heart, mind, & soul.* Sasha Paige is a wife and mother of three Black boys and describes herself as a proud Black woman. When she speaks, every statement is filled with this accountability that covers her actions and her reflection. She grew up in a middle-class household and was raised by a single mother who worked as a federal agent to provide a Catholic school education. Her mother's job played an integral role in her maturity, structure, and keen sense of her surroundings. Sasha stated:

Her role as a federal agent brought a lot of structure and a level of strictness that is very different, so when I got a license at 16, she would have agents follow me and it was where are you driving and what did you notice?

This experience among others led Sasha to be conscious of where she was, who she was, and the expectations that were set for her. Despite her strict Catholic upbringing, her mother was very fluid, open, and accepting of others. She shared her respect for diversity and the negative impact of labeling and ostracizing people based on their differences. Sasha matriculated to Catholic High School and attended a local state college for her Bachelor's, Master's, and Specialist degrees. With her worldly experiences and her formal education, she understands her privilege and the impact it may have while educating Black students.

Sasha Paige is currently the assistant principal at Pearl Crescent Elementary School located in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city. The school is academically high-performing and serves a diverse group of students with varying cultural backgrounds and socio-economic statuses. Sasha speaks to the changing community based on redistricting which has shifted the demographics of students PCES serves. Currently, over 800 students are enrolled at PCES with about 27% of the population being Black students. Only about 10% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Sasha also speaks to the changes needed to support students who differ from what the school originally served:

So, we are having to make real-time adjustments to the quality of instruction, cultural and social-emotional awareness, and attempting to develop a toolbox where they can understand the demographics and the backgrounds of the students they are now teaching and the baggage that that brings.

Based on the data gathered from the district discipline, PCES has a 0.01 overall suspension rate which is one of the lowest in the district. However, Black students are suspended at a 0.02 rate showing that they are disciplined at a higher rate than their non-Black peers even though they make up less than a third of the students attending PCES. Sasha describes her

discipline style as one that consists of relationships, respect, and understanding. Sasha explains how building relationships with students plays such an integral role in preventing discipline and building trust. “So, when I meet new students or students on my radar the relationship piece is huge to me, so I initiate it and build it over time, and it comes with trust and understanding and check-ins.” It is through these relationships that trust is created, and respect can be emphasized. Sasha alludes to respect quite frequently in both interviews as an important aspect of her education and discipline style:

Mutual respect and honesty are huge for me whether I’m in the classroom or administrator. I have to have a relationship with my students, so they understand that there is always mutual respect. I respect you; you respect me, and we can be honest I’m not going to lie to you, and I need to know you aren’t going to lie to me.

She also illuminated how having empathy and knowing her students’ background and experiences assist her in making conscious decisions. She stated, “I think relationship-building, empathy, and understanding play a huge part in conversations and dynamics. I tell my students all the time I got three boys.” By sharing her commonalities with students, she has been able to forge relationships that she believes lead to fewer negative interactions with students.

**Figure 4.4**

*Poem: Sasha Paige*

*Mama said--  
open your eyes  
before you get lost in translation  
transcribed on these labels  
they’ve tried to place on people  
but baby, we’re much deeper*

*Mama said--  
Education is the key-  
the kite that flies us above low expectations  
Private school but progressively educated  
dedicated to awareness  
that rides in both Blackness and clear expectations*

*Mama said—  
be aware of your surroundings  
some dangerous  
some empowering  
Highest level of consciousness*

*Mama said—  
look past the image in the mirror  
“You are a reflection of me”  
we’ll never have to confide in the shadows of silence  
But we must learn to balance  
Black American Rage and Black Girl Magic  
Our anger and our power  
know your worth  
you are beautiful & Black  
forever and always  
so that is enough to remember  
the unlimited potential in your stride  
will always  
give you reason to have pride*

### ***Elijah Stone***

Elijah Stone was born and raised in rural South Carolina. His father served in the Air Force branch of the military and his mother was an educator. His father’s strictness and the school’s policy engendering corporal punishment led Elijah on a path to being well-behaved in school and at home. As Elijah reflected on his educational experiences in his small town, he shared “we had some really deep-rooted racial type cultures that even in the time I was in school in the 80-90s people didn’t think twice you know.” He attended a predominantly Black public schools in a town where most of the White students were hauled off to the nearest private school. He shared that one of his school mascots was a boll weevil, a beetle that feeds on cotton, and his high school was affectionately referred to as “home of the cotton patch”. These experiences seem to have given Elijah a keen sense of the insidious subtleness in the way Black folks are dehumanized and made to feel inferior. Elijah attended a predominantly White college, in what he explains as “a really eye-opening situation that was my first time seeing myself as the

minority.” He expressed how he had to start infiltrating student unions to advocate for himself and his Black peers whose culture and identity were not acknowledged or embraced on campus. He eventually took on the role of multicultural affairs and ensured that during student events, some of the speakers and performers related to and looked like the Black students on campus.

Elijah is currently the Principal of Gate Elementary School which has a little over 300 students enrolled in PK-fifth grade. Black students make up 94%, with LatinX students making up the other 6%; more than 85% of students at GES qualify for free or reduced lunch. It is a community school, only serving one specific neighborhood. Because of its location close to the downtown area, transiency is an issue that plagues the school. Fortunately, the school has partnered with local organizations that provide legal assistance and support families with housing and utilities. A little over 15% of students at GES are achieving grade-level expectations based on 2019 state testing data. GES has an overall suspension rate of 0.02 with the highest suspension occurring in fifth grade which is 0.12 for the current school year. Black students are suspended at a 0.03 rating, therefore showing a slightly higher suspension rate compared to their LatinX peers.

Elijah expressed his disciplinary style as one that is preventative, encouraging, and reliant on strong relationships with parents. Elijah talks profusely about the importance of listening not only to students’ perspectives after an incident but also during their time with peers:

...but that’s important to hear kids when they speak naturally and not censoring it like they would in class. Like being on lunch duty and easing into their conversations and knowing how kids tick. Sometimes you can hear things where you know something is about to take place. Let me get ahead of it. Ok, what’s going on?

Additionally, he spends a lot of his time motivating students to reach their full potential and exposing them to experiences and perspectives they may not see or hear often at home or in their community. He stated:

You gotta keep showing them other slices of life of where Black males can go. You don't have to be in baggy jeans and saggy pants and hoodies all day. But you can still do that and still be proud of who you are as a Black male and do a whole other trajectory. So, you know they see us as teachers, but they almost see it as a whole other world. They don't know that that can be their world.

Moreover, he leverages relationships with family who live with and help mold students' beliefs and experiences at home. He speaks to the importance of creating a strong connection with parents. "The parent connection is the lifeline related to discipline." Throughout the interview, Elijah referred to what students were exposed to at home and what their parents allowed them to do. He expressed how important it was to know where his students came from and how they were raised to handle things like conflict which speaks a lot about how to support the student moving forward.

#### **Figure 4.5**

*Poem: Elijah Stone*

*We don't need saggin' jeans to be seen  
as anything less than supreme  
because  
views of our Blackness  
ensures  
subtle subjugation saturated in every  
situation  
red lines- separating  
White eyes- hesitating  
blue lights- breathtaking  
despite degrees, determination,  
& Door dashing towards liberation  
culture captured between  
cornrows and short fros  
how will they see me?*

*our beloved middle school mascot  
the boll weevil and cotton patches  
how could this be me?  
Raised in contradiction  
Daddy said you better hit them back  
Momma said tell the teacher  
Whom do I believe in?  
father's military 'yes sir' and patriarchy's  
'no boy'  
disciplined by family members  
Memories of  
principals saying,  
"Either you learned  
or this paddle gon teach ya"*

## Findings by Research Questions

### Research Question One: Personal Discipline Experiences

The participants shared their experiences of being disciplined by illuminating events that occurred in their homes, communities, or their schools. These experiences were coded into a cluster of pertinent statements aligned to the research question. Similar clusters of meanings that align with the research questions were grouped together to develop themes. Invariant horizons were then revisited and leveraged to create a full description of the phenomenon. Three themes were crystallized and shared regarding participants' personal experience with discipline. All three of the emergent themes are aligned to the first research question that guided this research study as shown in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1**

*Categories of Themes by Research Question One*

| Research Question   | Crystallized Themes   |
|---|---|
| How have Black school leaders experienced discipline as Black students? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participants had strict parents which led to few discipline experiences at school.</li> <li>● Participants perceived their teachers to lack cultural competency.</li> <li>● When participants did experience discipline, it was punitive and harsh.</li> </ul> |

*Note.* Crystallized themes extracted from participants' lived experiences as students and young adults. Also inclusive of participants' critical response to Dr. Henley's poem (see Figure 1).

#### *Strict Parents Led to Few Discipline Experiences at School*

The first crystalized theme from the participants' experiences was strict parents. Overall, every participant shared that they were raised by parents who were no-nonsense at home. Their parents had both high and clear expectations that prevented participants from getting into severe trouble and requiring harsh punishment at school. The participants also illuminated how their parents were actively involved and engaged in their educational trajectory. While analyzing

participant responses for theme one, Cheikh stated, "My mother was a disciplinarian; my mother ran the ship, created the structures, and ruled with an iron fist." He also explained how his mother decided to transfer him from a small Muslim school to a public middle school and high school. "My mother didn't feel like I was being challenged enough; it was a real small school. She wanted a bigger school for more classes." Similarly, Rodney shared how his mother saved enough money to move to the suburbs so that he could receive a challenging education that a predominantly white school could offer. He stated, "she didn't want us to go to the local high school which was the worst in the city in our neighborhood. So, I went from Catholic school to being the first Blacks in the neighborhood." Sasha expressed her mother's strictness, "Her role as a federal agent brought a lot of structure and a level of strictness that is very different."

Sasha went on to describe how her mother would have federal agents follow her when Sasha first received her license. She explained that this was not to catch her in the act of doing something wrong but to help build her awareness around her surroundings. Rodney explained that his mother was the disciplinarian that he and all his cousins feared the most. As a result of Rodney's mother's strictness and clear expectations, "we knew what was acceptable, and we acclimated because we didn't want to be in trouble." Summer Maya highlighted the type of discipline she received if she misbehaved,

My dad is very strict. When it comes to discipline, he caned you. If he doesn't feel like caning you, he will still punish you like caning you in your back. You have to get on your knees, and I don't know if you have ever seen this discipline. It's the worst that you can give you.

In addition to her father's strictness, Summer Maya explained how her mother played a significant role in her education because she built relationships with the coaches and educators at the school she attended in another state where she ran track competitively. "So, every month my mom would

come to another state and make sure I was ok physically and then drive and travel back to Lago where we were staying.”

Many participants stated they believed that there was a correlation between their parents' expectations with how they behaved in school. Through discussion, the participants believed having strict parents aligned to why they lacked many punitive discipline experiences in school because they knew that their parents would not tolerate misbehavior or having them represent their family in a negative light. Sasha illuminated how clear expectations shape how she understands discipline:

When I think about does my level of consciousness of surroundings coupled with how I view discipline a lot of that comes from a home life of a mom that had very high clear expectations like there wasn't a lot of guessing around what she expected of me. It was very clear. It was clear and it was consistent, and it was unyielding.

Participants illuminated their fear of the discipline they would receive at home if they misbehaved in school. Cheikh stated, "At home is where the discipline started and ended. That's the discipline I feared." Similarly, Sasha stated, "So I wasn't scared of sister Mary Katherine or Sister Kay because I was afraid of my momma. So, I never had to get disciplined there." Elijah expressed that the structure his military father provided prevented him from needing to be disciplined at school:

I think a lot of that came from my dad who was military-do what I say it was directions and I listened to the adults and authority and that carried over into school. I had some strict parents, and my mom was an educator, going to school for the most part I did what I was supposed to do.

Overall, the participants highlighted how their parents' structure, discipline, and clear expectations encouraged them to follow rules at home and in other spaces like school.

### *Teachers' Lack of Cultural Competency*

The second crystallized theme obtained from participants' experiences was a lack of cultural competency, the ability to interact and respond to people's diverse needs (Cross et al., 1988). The lack of cultural competence was noted to come from their White educators during their time in school. Participants shared their experiences of feeling out of place and sometimes invisible in school.

Despite participants' upbringing and high expectations, participants shared how they fell short of perfection, and, like most children, made mistakes during their time in school. Some participants provided personal narratives from times in school where they were disciplined because of an educator's lack of cultural competence and not necessarily because of their own wrongdoings. Rodney explained a time when he was suspended for horse-playing with one of his best friends in the back of the classroom. He stated, "We had a White teacher who really didn't connect with us. All she saw was two kids hitting each other so she wrote it up and sent it to the office." Rodney also vividly remembers his confusion and why he had to miss school for this incident of playing with a friend when the teacher could have investigated and simply asked them to stop. While Cheikh highlighted how he was a smart aleck, but always was respectful, he expressed how his younger siblings struggled a little bit more in school after the tragic murder of their sister. He shared how it was a traumatic experience. His personal experience with loss now shapes how he views trauma's impact on students' behaviors and how to be cognizant of their experiences and needs. Also related to educators' lack of cultural awareness and responsiveness is Summer Maya's experience of feeling incompetent and penalized for not knowing what the word 'surfing' meant which was a part of the scenario on one of her class exams. She stated that she felt defeated, "And the teacher said, you don't understand that? Why not? And tears just

started.” Moreover, in Summer Maya’s critical response to Dr. Henley’s poem (see Figure 1), she stated that the poem reminded her of several times she felt invisible and that everything seemed to revolve around her White counterparts. Additionally, Rodney’s critical response to Dr. Henley’s poem as shown in Figure 1 alluded to Black students struggling to be seen and recognized. He shared how thankfully his grandmother’s validation helped build his self-esteem and develop his confidence because otherwise, he would feel defeated and invalidated in school. Rodney and Summer Maya’s different yet defining experiences occurred with educators who failed to take the necessary time to get to know whom they were serving and declined the responsibility to be culturally aware and understanding of their student’s diverse needs.

### ***Punitive Discipline***

The third crystalized theme gathered from the participants’ experiences of being disciplined in school was that, although few and far in between, the encounters were typically harsh and punitive in nature. Four participants endured physical punishment that seemed punitive instead of structured and scaffolded based on the actions requiring a consequence. Elijah illuminated how he also had the stigma of being sent to the principal’s office and awaiting sentences. These experiences were reflected in his response to Dr. Henley’s poem (see Figure 1). He highlighted that he could only count on one hand how many times he was sent to the principal’s office, but he knew that each time it was going to end with him being hit. He stated, “when you were going to the principal office it wasn’t going to be a conference it was going to be corporal punishment.” He explained that his parents gave permission to the school’s administrator to paddle him as a child. He described the time when he had to put hands on the desk and the principal would give him lick on his behind or when the teacher would walk around

with three-to-four rulers taped together with masking tape. He vividly remembered the teachers saying, “don’t flinch.”

Similarly, Summer Maya shared that during her time as a student in a school in Nigeria, teachers would cane you (to be beaten on one’s back, legside, buttocks, or hands) at least once and sometimes up to ten times if a student did not know the correct answer to the teacher’s question. In a similar manner, Sasha explained how nuns in her Catholic school would smack the hands of noncompliant children. She also highlighted how this structure and type of discipline were like what she experienced at home. As Sasha grew older, she experienced less formal discipline at school, but she did notice that her Black peers, specifically her high school Black boyfriend, who is now her husband, dealt with heavy scrutiny and discipline that she felt was harsher because he was one of the few Black male students at their predominantly White high school. Sasha explained that typically students who misbehaved would start off with a work detail or a conversation with an administrator – which is what she experienced – however his experience was quite the opposite. She stated:

He had racial experiences at [our school] that I could never fathom. He had a teacher that would ride him all about his tie or his belt or his socks. He could do the smallest things and walk into that man’s room, and he knew a demerit was coming. Like skip a work detail, his ass was getting a demerit. There was no progressive discipline for him. There was no discussion or understanding for him, and like not just one teacher but like two or three.

Moreover, in Cheikh’s critical response to Dr. Henley’s poem (see Figure 1), he explained how Black students who are misunderstood could be forced to stay in an incredibly unsafe space. More importantly, he highlighted how this space can be cultivated and maintained both inside and outside of non-Black and White dominated spaces. When responding to Dr. Henley’s poem (See Figure 1), Cheikh illuminated the student’s solitude, frustration, and invisibility. Moreover, he stated, “the worst part is that depending on the lived experiences of the

student, they can feel this way even in Black spaces.” Cheikh exemplified how Black educators can engender anti-Blackness in non-White dominated spaces. Leaders in this study, expressed the flow of consciousness relating to how Black students are treated in schools based on their Blackness and the expectation bestowed on them based on White hegemonic standards. This leads to the findings gathered from the second research question exploring these Black school leaders’ experiences with Du Bois’ idea of double consciousness. Figure 5.1 is poem pertaining to how Black leaders experienced discipline. Each stanza represents one of the three crystallized themes.

**Figure 5.1**

*Poem: Memories of Black Innocence*

**I.**

*Black parents  
Believed that  
Sparing the rod spoiled the child  
enclosing us in  
homes of high expectations  
keeping us wrapped in  
blankets of “you better act right cause you  
are an extension of me”  
giving us tools to prepare for piercing blue  
eyes  
success requires you to be twice as good  
yet real recognize that nothing is free  
Fear found in failing to meet mama’s  
expectations  
vacations to principals’ offices but more  
afraid  
of disappointment  
drawn out of mama’s voices*

**II.**

*Our teachers- book smart  
Filled with curiosity  
yet culturally vacant  
refused to look past our cover  
Left us with a loss of being misunderstood*

*Vehemently protesting, that this time I  
wasn’t wrong  
Only caught in a place where I didn’t belong  
between being seen and not heard  
when the teacher asked questions  
feeling insecure about not knowing the  
words my tongue never wore  
then  
suspended when we played on back walls  
prior to class bells– teacher tales  
of burning innocence’s light and laughter  
into portrayals of problems  
poised between blocked brilliance and Black  
violence*

**III.**

*Disciplined and disheartened  
By seas of harsh sentences  
That battered the ships of our self esteem  
We sailed with unpatchable pockets  
Teacher’s perched lips told us everything we  
needed to know  
no conversation could capture the harm  
our bodies had to decipher  
assault on our hearts and our minds  
We were caught up between being  
washed up and beat down*

## Research Question Two: Perception of Double Consciousness

Double consciousness is the idea that Black people are forced to not only operate within their Blackness, but they must also be cognizant of the dominant culture's expectations of them (Du Bois, 1903). Double consciousness requires Black folks to decipher and differentiate between the various parts of their identity that may conflict with social systems and norms. Based on the participants' experiences, codes were created and then clustered into pertinent statements aligned to the second research question. Clusters that were homogenous in meaning grouped together to develop themes. Invariant horizons were considered and included in the crystallization of Research Question Two. Two themes were crystallized and shared regarding the participants' perspective of double consciousness based on the working definition provided to them which is depicted in Table 4.2. Both emergent themes are aligned to the second research question that guided this research study.

**Table 4.2**  
*Categories of Themes by Research Question Two*

| Research Question  | Crystallized Themes  |
|--|--|
| How do Black school leaders perceive double consciousness in their personal and professional life? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participants believed that double consciousness was a gift and a curse for Black people.</li> <li>● Participants perceived double consciousness as a looking glass that prepared Black children for injustice.</li> </ul> |

*Note.* Crystallized theme extracted from participants' lived experiences and critical responses to Dr. Henley's poem (see Figure 1).

### *Double Consciousness is a Gift and a Curse*

The first theme extracted from participants' experience was that they believed that double consciousness could be seen as a dichotomous experience that could gift Black folks with strategies while simultaneously burdening Black folks with the perception of others, especially those of the dominant culture. Participants believed that double consciousness could either empower Black people or entrap them in an internalized state of oppression. The participants illuminated that power arrives from Black folks having a strong sense of self and pride in their Blackness, however, the burden attached to others' perspectives can lead to internalized oppression and a distorted sense of self that buys into the misrepresented and misconstrued views of Blackness.

All participants contended that double consciousness is ever-present because of the existence of White supremacy and Black inferiority that infiltrates all aspects of American society. Sasha illuminated that, "as long as a White power structure and White privilege exist, we are always going to have to conduct ourselves in various ways." Rodney states, "I think that we have to be able to move and operate in both of these effectively. The more effectively we can manipulate both worlds, I believe those things build and contribute to our success." Even though participants exemplified that White-dominated structures exist, participants argued how being inundated with Black pride prepared them to face the stereotypical views and discrimination in a way that encouraged them to walk with their heads held high and leverage the strength bestowed onto them from their ancestors to neutralize negative consciousness. Sasha stated, "I am absolutely a proud black woman, it's who I am! I try to convey that to my sons so they can find pride and beauty in their race and who they are." Cheikh highlighted that coming from an extremely proud family prevented him from feeling belittled or minimized by the

perspectives of others which others may not have the same privilege or experiences. By the same token, Elijah stated in his critical response to Dr. Henley's poem (see Figure 1) that:

When black students are comfortable and prideful of who they are and feel proud of their natural physical features and rich history, many discipline infractions will be obsolete. Kids who are proud of their skin tone or hair texture don't get angry or offended and resort to fighting when teased about their skin or hair.

This speaks to the power of Black pride and how it can negate deficit perspectives that may impact Black students while in school and in their lives moving forward.

Although Black pride was shared as a strong tool for dismantling the plight of White supremacy and Black inferiority, it was clear that some participants felt the negative effects of double consciousness despite the positive connection to Black pride. Sasha stated, "it weighs on you" when asked about double consciousness. The participants expressed this burden as one that impacts the emotional, mental, and intellect of Black people. Elijah explained how he has been treated differently than his White counterparts in stores even when he was not in clothing that stereotypically couples Black men with violence. He stated, "I don't have to have on baggy jeans because I'm Black, they're always going to see me in a certain light." He expressed how he has been talked down to and is fearful for his life every time police lights shine and sirens blare, hoping that it isn't the last drive he gets to take. He stated, "It doesn't matter how much I've accomplished or how many degrees I have or what position or role I have, they still see me as another black man." Equivalently, Summer Maya explained the emotional and mental toll it takes to live in a predominately White environment. She stated that she is cognizant of how she speaks, dresses, and behaves in her neighborhood. She stated:

I try to describe myself, my kids, and everybody. That's my consciousness coming out to say, hey, this is who we are, right. In a way that says if we don't show you, we're better than you, we may not necessarily be welcomed in this environment, and you won't look at us so suspiciously.

As Summer Maya wiped tears from her eyes when describing the need to prove she is good enough, she explained that she tries her best to blend into the dominant culture to survive in her affluent neighborhood which is highlighted in Vinzant's (2019) study. Through digging deeper into this experience, Summer Maya expressed her reluctance of moving into this predominantly White neighborhood where she and her family own a beautiful, million-dollar home, yet feel out of place, judged, and ostracized. She expressed her fear for her Black male husband and her Black children every day. Furthermore, she shared her desire to go back to a community where she and her family are embraced and understood. Like Summer Maya, Cheikh illuminated how double consciousness lent itself to marginalized people internalizing stereotypes. When asked to react to the working definition of double consciousness and its impact on his personal or professional life he expressed:

Stereotype threat to me proves that it takes a cognitive load to worry about our people looking at you a certain way and it takes away from your ability to just perform. So that gap within itself explains double consciousness not only do I have to worry about the task at hand I have to be and be the observer to perceive what the observer feels about me and my performance as to not affirm the stereotype or prove them wrong.

Moreover, Sasha shared an experience in her personal life of being worried that she would be seen as a stereotypical Black woman when advocating for one of her Black sons at his private school led by predominantly White educators. She elucidated the need to be extremely tactful and even felt the need to have a White male colleague to review her emails before sending them to her son's teachers. She stated, "I got five degrees, if I can't do nothing I can write, but even in my writing I have to be cognizant of how I'm writing to make sure that I'm not being misconstrued as an angry Black woman."

Additionally, Elijah highlighted how the internalization of stereotype threat occurs in his professional life as a Black school leader. He shared two experiences that highlighted the impact

of double consciousness. First, he explained the necessity of appeasing the dominant culture when applying for corporate America or education jobs. He shared how his physical appearance could stand in the way of receiving a call back. He stated, "I knew in my hearts of hearts that I wouldn't get the job if I interviewed with the cornrows, so I literally got rid of my cornrows." While he knew his hair had nothing to do with his qualifications or ability to lead, he understood how positive perceptions from the dominant culture was a requirement to be successful. Additionally, as he moved into his principalship, he stated that he noticed that more Black teachers and parents were willing to push the envelope or disagree with him as a Black administrator because they may have perceived him as not meeting professional expectations simply because of his race. He stated, "I seen it where those same parents will just agree with terms, not complain or contest it when it's a Caucasian administrator and it's because, with this specific person, they believe what [Caucasians] feel equates professionalism sometimes which is interesting." While Elijah illuminated how outsider perspectives can impact how parents and others interact with Black school leaders, Rodney also highlighted how this outsider perspective can negatively impact Black students and their ability to be seen in their authenticity which may lead them to have a lack of confidence and sense of self. He stated:

I think many of them doubt their capacity because of their experiences. Experiences of disappointment, discouragement, and even degradation leave many waiting on that one person, event, or situation that allows them to be seen and understood, in order to help them to begin to see their own worth and then demonstrate that confidently to others.

Correspondingly, when reacting to the working definition of double consciousness, participants unveiled how the stereotypes and perceptions of Black people crafted by the dominant culture has the potential to be internalized by Black students and Black school leaders. Another example of the curse or negative impact of double consciousness that participants highlighted was low expectations surrounding Black folk's ability to succeed and to embody

intellectualism. Cheikh highlights how stereotype threat and low expectations placed on Black students could impact how they view themselves:

I know we are under duress stress from people all the time in society that attacks and assaults our identity as a people so our students, not only if their home life does not elevate scholarship, are left to the default; the default is that black people are not intellectual.

When describing an experience while working on a committee to retain more Black faculty members at the school, Summer Maya shared how even as a research professor she was demeaned and discredited by White colleagues. In this experience, she applied to be the secretary for the college of education and when asking the dean what her job duties would be, he stated, “oh, you just sit there and look pretty.” Summer Maya stated that although this experience was quite a while ago, she will never forget how he made her feel, the disdain stemming from his voice, and the disbelief brewing from other people who heard his statement. Similarly, when asked what imagery is being created in Dr. Henley’s poem (see Figure 1) leveraged for the critical response, Elijah stated, he could “see the voices of black children and youth crying out for understanding and for acknowledgment that they are enough and that they want to be valued for what makes them unique, with no apologies.” He stated that this experience of being ignored and invalidated not only resonated with his own personal experiences when he was a Black student, but is a current phenomenon in his school now where Black students are angry, reactive, and may be subjected to receive discipline for their actions without acknowledging the root cause of the behavior which could be a result of their lack of self-esteem and ability to feel comfortable and be their authentic selves at school. With low expectations and perception that there is a lack of intellectualism being a reality for Black people, the participants explored and elucidated the importance of preparing Black students to be cognizant of how they will be viewed by the

dominant culture and how it will impact their views of self which leads to the second theme of this research question.

### *Looking Glass Preparation*

The second theme extracted from participants' experience with double consciousness was that they believed that their roles as either a parent to Black children or school leaders serving Black students required them to prepare Black children for the phenomenon of dealing with double consciousness themselves. The participants argued that double consciousness makes Black people more aware of their differences in comparison to their White peers. Moreover, participants proclaimed that Black students would have to fit into the dominant society's expectations to be accepted and successful as noted in Watson's (2021) case study. The participants argued that Black students will face injustices and inequities, not only in school, but in the world around them if they don't try to assimilate to the expectations aligned to a White-dominant society.

Findings from both semi-structured interviews and the critical response to Dr. Henley's poem (see Figure 1) exemplified how participants believed that society operates through a lens of Whiteness that infiltrates various aspects of our daily world. Participants shared that double consciousness is a view of Blackness from oneself as a Black individual and the perspective from others in the mainstream society. Moreover, double consciousness serves as a reflection and a scale to illuminate how far a Black person is away from success or possible violence or death at the hand of the dominant culture.

Participants spoke to the need for Black students to learn to code-switch. Sasha expressed code-switching is a way that prevents Black students from being ostracized and allows them to be seen in White-dominated spaces. She highlighted in her response to Dr. Henley's poem (see

Figure 1) “A life skill required to be successful, sometimes it is as simple as doing what “Simon says” other times it is your ability to blend in and go unseen.” This phenomenon of invisibility was also highlighted in Summer Maya’s thoughts related to supporting Black students when they are in predominantly White spaces. She highlighted that she has been in places where “everything revolved around White counterpart, and I was not worthy of their consciousness of how things were presented in the classroom” which she argued could be a reality for some of the Black students she serves.

Another form of code-switching was illuminated in how students spoke. Elijah and Sasha elucidated the importance of using King’s English. They argued that this is a form of subliminal code-switching that a lot of students have not mastered and hinders their ability to succeed and blend into the dominant culture. Both participants spoke of the need to teach students that their language is fluid and must change depending on where they are and who they are around.

Also in her interview, Sasha explains how conforming to certain social norms that may go against whom Black students are allowed to be at home with their families and communities, but she made it clear that dominant culture’s expectations become the “mask we have to wear” regardless of what is accepted at home. Moreover, Elijah explains how sometimes the culture Black students experience at home adamantly opposes what is acceptable in school. When asked what some challenges are he faces when disciplining Black students, he highlighted the following:

With my students in an inner-city environment we do have a culture that tells students to be tough and to stand up for themselves and I always err on the side of I agree with parents, but I also try to press upon parents that when they’re in the confines of the school and in charge and care there should be another type of code-switching of the least that allows the teacher to address the situation before it becomes a tick for tat—but definitely a culture.

As a result of her understanding of double consciousness, Sasha felt compelled to assist Black students to understand how they are going to be seen by the dominant society based on their skin color as well as their character. Also, Rodney shared the importance of his own consciousness and being aware of “the plight of Black men and Black girls and understanding how they’re handled outside of my building.” To prepare Black students for similar experiences. Sasha highlighted the difficulty attached to preparing young students to be seen in a light that criminalizes and dehumanizes them similar to the findings from Dumas & Nelson (2017). During her conversations with Black youth, she illuminated what future perspectives are possible for Black students. “I know it’s hard to see at nine or ten, but I promise you, I got White women in my building who are going to be afraid of you in three years.” She shared how little Black boys go from being cute to being seen as violent and dangerous the older they become. In similar regards, Summer Maya who is responsible for disciplining high school students shares with her students how jails and prisons are filled with people who look just like them. She stated that she sometimes feels compelled to lead her conversations with the reality of overt discrimination that they may be subject to as they go through life. Summer Maya stated that she hopes that through these conversations Black students are more cautious with their actions, so they can become part of the population of Black leaders who change the world and are not shackled and imprisoned. Participants’ experiences grappling with double consciousness is shared poetically in Figure 5.2. The poem is separated into two stanzas to represent the two crystallized themes gathered from this research question.

**Figure 5.2***Poem: Perceptions of Double Consciousness***I.**

*Double consciousness,  
 hatred wrapped in a bow,  
 A gift of a curse  
 Little Black child  
 Maimed and muted  
 Trading in ain'ts and fennas  
 for acceptance found in a box  
 but baby you're more than  
 the parameter of their prison  
 incarcerated thoughts  
 release your mind from lies  
 that your natural hair too wild  
 your voice too loud  
 Black ain't smart  
 Baby, you ain't gotta be hard to have heart  
 Hold your head high*

*Black excellence  
 be embezzled in your stride  
 Don't let their deficit view  
 penetrate the truth  
 Because Black culture is rich  
 don't let them pour pity  
 and self-hatred into you*

**II.**

*But when they do  
 It is my job to hold the mirror  
 to your tender 10-year-old face  
 Because in your innocence  
 The label criminal will take its place  
 I must prepare you for the fact that  
 Your Blackness breeds biased blame*

*positioned as a pawn in this game  
 But still move forward  
 Because King's English &  
 Queen code-switching  
 can become your power plays  
 At school entryways  
 Black children received masks  
 Years before COVID  
 Covering their authenticity  
 and hopes that...  
 Tomorrow  
 the mandate will be over  
 But until then know that  
 It is their fear of your  
 outpouring of gold  
 Once you're unveiled  
 They'll feel too small  
 Closed in with too much  
**Black matter***

**Research Question Three: Perspective of Disciplining Black Students**

The perspectives around disciplining Black students were bountiful and assisted in depicting the challenges of disciplining Black students while being a Black school leader. On the other hand, the participants' perspectives illuminated some strategies and practices leveraged to minimize disproportionality and harsh discipline. Based on the participants' stories shared, struggles highlighted, and advice offered, codes were created and then clustered into pertinent statements aligned to the third research question. Clusters that share similar meanings were

placed together to develop themes. Invariant horizons were considered and included in the crystallization of Research Question Three whether they aligned to the themes identified or provided a different, yet important avenue into disciplining Black students. Three themes were crystallized and shared regarding the participant's perspective of disciplining Black students as seen in Table 4.3. The three emergent themes are aligned to the third research question that guided this arts-based phenomenological study.

**Table 4.3**

*Categories of Themes by Research Question Three:*

| Research Question   | Crystallized Themes  |
|---|--|
| What are the different perspectives that Black school leaders hold regarding the disciplinary practices of Black students within urban schools? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participants saw disciplining Black students as planting seeds that double consciousness helped to water.</li> <li>● Participants identified the need for cultural competency and cultural responsiveness in schools.</li> <li>● Participants noted the significance of conscious discipline and ongoing reflection.</li> </ul> |

*Note.* Crystallized theme extracted from participants' lived experiences and critical response to Dr. Henley's poem (see Figure 1).

### ***Planting Seeds that Double Consciousness Waters***

The first theme crystallized from the third research question was that participants had an extra layer of responsibility to leverage discipline to develop an understanding of society's expectations that will go beyond students' experiences while in school. Participants shared that they were aware that the learning they hope students acquired through the discipline may not make sense just yet. They argued that learning from current school discipline may have a greater impact on students later in life. As gardeners understand, you can plant a seed today but may not see the hard work bloom until later down the line. Participants in this study explained their duty

to cultivate learning experiences that could possibly help students in their lives outside of school and beyond their P-12 education. When explaining his discipline decisions, Cheikh asked himself a question, “What do you do if you want to build culture and plant seeds that have a long-term impact?”

He goes on to explain that instead of buying into a system that harshly punishes Black students, he has an additional responsibility is not to mimic the oppressor by harming and shaming Black students. He argued that instead, his job is to plant seeds of love and love Black students so much that they are not willing to accept less when they leave him and his school. Elijah expressed the importance of planting seeds of diverse images and future opportunities that may not be depictions they see often. He stated, “you gotta keep showing them other slices of life of where Black males can go.” Elijah explained that providing this alternative perspective and engendering high expectations for students can help them see how they can transcend negative stereotypes and low expectations that the dominant culture has created for them. Cheikh also highlighted that his students do not have access to doctors who look like them and his job is to expose them to all the possibilities they have. He contended the work necessary to expose Black students to an alternative, more positive, view of self is a struggle that White leaders who serve White students do not have to worry about. Additionally, one of the invariant horizons that aligned to Black school leaders having an extra layer of responsibility was hiring staff who also have high expectations for students and are willing to do the hard work of dismantling oppressive systems in schools. Cheikh illuminated,

We have to interview; we have to hire for heart. Because we can teach skills that doesn't mean we hire unskilled people. We will take a risk on skill to make sure you have a heart for kids because our kids are so marginalized.

While this was the only statement related to hiring staff members who have high expectations for Black students and exude a willingness to grow, it was important to add because other participants spoke to teachers and staff's low expectations or lack of cultural competency which led to the increased discipline of Black students. This will be talked through more thoroughly in the next section highlighting the need for cultural humility.

While the statements above show how planting seeds of positivity is important, on the other hand, some participants saw the need to plant seeds to prepare students for the harsh reality that Black students may encounter. Rodney expressed that he wants to plant seeds that reflect students' current reality, so they can act accordingly. He shares with students, "Life ain't fair, nobody owes you nothing." He went on and shared that he explains to Black students that our society operates with double standards for Black students. He exemplified that White boy Johnny who comes from an affluent neighborhood and has better circumstances may receive a slap on the wrist for his lapse in judgment and bad decision, while Black boy Jontavious will not be granted the same grace. Similarly, Summer Maya expressed the important role of conversations when disciplining Black students. She makes certain that Black students know prison and jail statistics and how they must continue to strive towards being the Black folks who change the world. Additionally, Sasha explains that she hopes her seeds help Black students avoid being perceived in a light that frames them negatively. Sasha's seeds are in the form of conversations with students after they make a negative decision. This highlights her choice to plant seeds of character that may help students avoid negative encounters later in their life. She stated, "I'm trying to teach you to have integrity, own your mistakes, and learn from them because the world is not going to be kind to you. It's not going to give you the privilege and opportunity to skirt through things." However, in the same breath, she stated how important it is to be intentional in

the type of seeds planted, so she's not only focused on the negative things they may encounter in life like police brutality. Sasha shared, "I don't want to plant seeds of fear or intimidation because I feel like the world is going to give them enough as they grow older."

Like Sasha's sentiment, Cheikh highlighted seeds planted in the form of discipline should not be aligned to the malignant and harsh discipline that leads to disproportionate disciplining of Black students as seen in Anderson and Ritter (2017) but should be a humanizing experience that goes against what students may have internalized based on their experiences with double consciousness. He stated:

You have to make sure they're a human being and you treat them as such, and you have to talk to that person like you have high expectation even at their worst. You still have to have high expectations and speak that life into them, and you may not get nothing back so that dignity has to be unconditional. They can be tearing stuff off the wall as we speak, but I'm still going to talk about my expectations and what I expect of you at your best as opposed to belittling you and affirming what you probably feel in your mind at your worst.

Participants declared disciplining Black students required thoughtfulness, patience, and love to ensure the seeds grew and cultivated into life-long lessons. Leader self-reflection was also a poignant aspect that will be addressed more thoroughly in latter sections. Black leaders have an additional layer of responsibility when disciplining Black students. Cheikh elucidated that possibly because of double consciousness, some Black school leaders participate in tough discipline practices specifically towards Blacks students to prepare them for the real world as represented in Khalifa's 2015 study. However, Cheikh argued that Black school leaders are accountable for disrupting oppressive and racist systems that harshly discipline students. He stated:

I disagree with what is prevalent in Black schools and in poor schools- this idea that I have to beat you down to get you ready for the real world beat you down. I hate that. So, you got to abuse somebody so they can be ready for abuse?

This extra layer of responsibility Black leaders have required them to be thoughtful in their actions and how they approach Black students they discipline. In alignment, Sasha stated, “I will say my conversations with my little brown babies were probably a little bit more intense and a little longer and maybe even a little more nurturing to make sure those seeds were planted.” Moreover, Rodney and Elijah both highlighted that Black school leaders must work diligently to ensure that Black students are seen, heard, understood, and learn to operate with a sense of pride and confidence that Black leaders must model for students.

### ***Cultural Competency & Cultural Responsiveness***

Another crystallized theme extracted from the third research question is that Black school leaders should have cultural humility despite their Blackness and be willing to develop cultural competency and be culturally responsive themselves. Also, important to note is Black school leaders’ expectation that their faculty and staff also build their cultural competency and responsiveness in order to effectively discipline Black students.

Participants highlighted that all students have diverse needs regardless of their race, socio-economic status or lived experiences. The participants argued that school leaders need to be cognizant of students, family, and community needs to support growth and positive change which aligns with the explanation of Cross and colleagues (1989) how to be culturally competent. Elijah stated, “Every child has a context and it’s our job to get to know every child individually about what they bring to the table and what their parents bring as well.”

Summer Maya also argued that if you do not understand the students you serve, you cannot support them. When asked what is essential to consider when disciplining Black students, Sasha stated, “First and foremost you got to meet them where they are and know where they’re coming from.” Similarly, Rodney expressed leaders must be aware of the specific student they

are disciplining. Therefore, approaching discipline in a way that does not harm students, instead helps them learn from the discipline experience. Moreover, he added, “I think you really need to meet students where they are and consider who you are speaking with and be empathetic to that specific situation as much as possible.”

Sasha and Cheikh share more specifically how Black students and their diverse backgrounds and needs should be considered when disciplining them. Sasha highlighted, “these folks don’t know how to teach em; don’t know how to reach em.” Explaining further she stated, “I feel like I have this Brown demographic of children who I really need to help find ways to support and grow so that we can close this achievement gap which is egregious.” Cheikh illuminated that his school has found several ways to build more understanding of what students need to help cultivate pride and expand students’ exposure to non-academic-specific opportunities. He stated:

We have programs like the bike shop, and we still have African drumming – these extracurricular opportunities that we did in order to build value and cultural awareness and in order to build a connection between decision-making and goal setting.

This connection between decision making and goal setting is also something that Rodney spoke to when he was asked what was essential to consider when disciplining Black students. He lifted the fact that Black school leaders must be cognizant of what they are aspiring to accomplish when disciplining Black students. He highlighted that exclusionary discipline, like out-of-school suspensions, may not be beneficial for a student who is already a responsible caretaker at home or does not feel a sense of belonging at school. Therefore, he argues that suspension is not a consequence, only a punishment. He stated, “you have to consider whom you’re disciplining and how they’re supported.”

In the same light, Elijah illuminated the importance of moving away from punitive, antiquated discipline practices like zero-tolerance policies (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Elijah argued, “It is no one size fits all in any situation so really being able to dissect a situation and not have this zero-tolerance mentality.” Rodney contended that knowing about students’ cultural upbringing, customs, and diverse needs are important aspects that help prevent implementing a discipline decision that is biased, punitive, or counterproductive in nature.

Despite participants’ exemplifying the importance of cultural responsiveness, teacher and leader biases were findings that rose to the top of this study. Participants illuminated how implicit bias could lead to subjective and overly punitive discipline. School leaders in this current study felt they had to grapple with and work diligently to prevent implicit biases from guiding how they discipline Black students which aligns with findings from Grace’s (2016) study. Several instances of bias as well as internalized anti-Blackness were unearthed. Rodney stated how some teachers’ and leaders’ view of Black students impact how they expect them to be disciplined, “I think the people who don’t look like us have natural or innate fear or reservation in handling and dealing with our kids.” This fear can lead to harsher punishment for Black students. A similar sentiment was uplifted when Sasha explained that she has White female teachers who, in a few years, will be fearful of the same Black boys they teach now. She illuminated how Black boys can go from being little, bright, and cute to being seen in a light of criminalization all during their time at Pearl Crescent Elementary School. Sasha goes on to explain that it hurts her heart to know the number of Black boys who must be on her radar. However, the type of student behaviors she observes in her school is not violent or not always deserving of exclusionary discipline. She stated, “It’s not disrespectful back and forth with teachers, but its small disruptions, but the culture is so not that it appears to be more egregious

than it really is.” Sasha explained that her school culture is one that Black students must assimilate to be successful. Moreover, she contends behaviors that would be tolerated and accepted in a predominantly Black school in another part of the city are looked down upon at her school.

Sasha shared two incidents that illuminate this difference. One incident was with a non-Black kindergarten teacher who asked for an administrator’s support because she felt her Black male students were exhibiting violent behavior during recess. When Sasha investigated, she could see the Black boys’ innocence and joy during what they called “zombie play”. She stated their play was not violent in nature and only required a small talk and redirection instead of an office discipline referral or more severe consequence which the teacher expected. The second example Sasha shared is students jonesing/joking in class and blurting out answers. She has been called to classrooms several times to remove students because of their disruptive behaviors. She explains that over the course of the last few years, Pearl Crescent Elementary has had an influx of Black and Brown students which has shifted the support they need to offer to teachers:

So, we are having to make real-time adjustments to the quality of instruction, cultural and social-emotional awareness, and attempting to develop a toolbox where they can understand the demographics and the backgrounds of the students they are now teaching and the baggage that that brings.

Sasha unearthed the need to provide cultural competence training while also holding teachers accountable for the biases they hold. She did this by bringing teacher biases to light and instigating a plan to address them such as the plan proposed by Baiden (2019) who exemplified how to facilitate critical conversations that help enact social justice and change for minoritized students.

When discussing teacher demographics and disciplining Black students, another finding that rose to the top was Black teachers or administrators were not automatically inundated with

cultural competence in relation to the Black students they served. Findings illuminate that poverty also plays a pivotal role in how students are viewed and receive discipline.

When speaking about double consciousness, Cheikh argues that poverty tells us that “Whoever is subjugated in that sense suffers.” Participants illuminated that Black staff like non-Black staff had biases that impacted the discipline they thought should occur after an infraction. This aligns with the idea of cultural humility and that every leader has room for growth and improvement.

Summer Maya highlighted that life experiences and not necessarily race had a positive impact on how Black students were disciplined. She stated, “I found that those who have similar backgrounds as the kids are able to reach the kids better than the ones that don’t, or the ones that have not taken their time to understand different backgrounds.” She also highlighted how internalized racism and biases impacted how some of her Black colleagues treated Black students differently based on their socioeconomic status or looks. She stated:

I have seen where even colleagues have looked at one black kid and because they are cute would be treated differently from another kid who looked different, you know, curly hair fancy-looking kid, light skin, beautiful, smile, would have done something wrong, but doesn’t get disciplined. On the other hand, kids who look bad—dirty, old shoes, are treated differently. People are mesmerized by the look of one as opposed to the other one.

Similarly, Elijah expressed:

Even though we have African American teachers, students, and staff, there is a kind of difference in economy and social-economic status, so of course you may have some teachers that may have come from humble beginnings who understand the dynamics of coming into or growing up in impoverished homes, having a rough start in having access to certain things, but we also have some staff members who did not have that experience and cannot identify with some of the plights.

Summer Maya explained that a White male teacher at her school has been able to connect and build more authentic relationships with Black students than some Black teachers because he has taken time to understand their experiences, who they are, what strengths they bring to the table,

and what they need to feel successful. Like Anyon et al. (2018) who shared ways to decrease disproportionate discipline and improve school climate and culture, Sasha argued that schools should focus on educator competencies and not student-focused discipline. Like Khalifa's (2018) findings, Cheikh elucidated the necessity to actively disrupt the status quo by facilitating critical conversations with teachers. He stated:

Confronting bias is a very courageous, lonely thing because people are accustomed to what they are accustomed to. So, you have to draw a line in the sand for you and who you are and what your square is that you stand on. The question is, do you care more about being popular, or do you care more about doing what is right?

This statement aligned the findings from Theoharis's (2007) qualitative study that highlighted the difficulty associated with being a socially just leader and the obligation school leaders had to prevent the further marginalization of Black and poor children.

Despite the complexity associated with preventing biases, Elijah also argued the importance of challenging biases that may impact Black students beyond the school's four walls in alignment with Jordan's (2018) study. Elijah highlighted how overly punishing students can lead to adverse outcomes and perpetuate a cycle of inequity:

The whole ultimate goal and if we're trying to cut off the pipeline from schools to prison. We do not want them to have a situation where they are adults and the judge said this is your sentence and there is no rehabilitation there either. You get back out, what do you have a record? A record that prohibits you from trying to get a legitimate job so it's a cycle and we don't want to create a cycle with our kids in elementary school you're suspended and then your back then you're suspended again you get more days you're back so it's pretty much the same model and we don't want to feed into that.

In alignment, Sasha highlighted the need for more support from the district for school leaders and teachers to improve their ability to be culturally competent and support students with diverse needs. An invariant horizon revealed that Sasha felt that the school district provided less social-emotional support, mentoring opportunities, and programs that work specifically with marginalized youth in her school. She elucidated that because her school serves more affluent

students, the school is less likely to receive whole-child support that many Black children need despite their socio-economic status. She stated that teachers in her school have a desire to become more competent, however access is an issue:

I do think there is absolutely an interest in learning about cultural differences and learning differences and being more aware and mindful of how to deal with students from different backgrounds. They just don't have a resource to go get it, and I don't think our district does a great job of making those things tangible or accessible to everyone I feel like we talk a good talk, but I don't know how we'll roll those kinds of things out.

This aforementioned statement that Sasha shared led to the third and final theme of being a conscious disciplinarian who reflects on the type of discipline allocated to students. Equally important, Black school leaders' ability to provide a platform for staff reflection, so cultural competency needs are identified and addressed.

### ***Conscious Discipline & Reflection***

The third crystallized theme echoed from this study's final research question is that participants perceived disciplining Black students as a challenging balancing act that requires conscious decision-making, educator and student reflection, and systemic follow-through.

Black school leaders highlighted the importance of being cognizant of the inequities present in society to prevent perpetuating the same oppressive systems in their schools. Cheikh illuminated the realities of the interaction between our justice system and Black people and how it is perpetuated in public schools:

I know that data says this, it is not my opinion, that there is a huge gap and disparity between what level of the scale certain students of certain races and other gets and in that also mirrors societies gaps in sentences and all these other things that makes me even more vigilant about having real conversation about this and what we are perpetuating in society. Even if [teachers] don't have internalized racism and you mean well for our children. If you want to recreate the outside world here so they can get the short end of the stick here in preparation of getting it out there, then I need to confront that deficit-based thinking for marginalized communities. I need to make you aware that you are mimicking the oppressor in that sense and the oppressor being a society that would allow two different justice systems to exist as if it was one.

Rodney also shared a similar sentiment. He stated that when he is required to make a discipline decision regarding a Black student, he must be thoughtful of how Black students will be perceived and addressed. He stated, “I consider a great deal how our students will be handled being Black kids in society, so giving them lessons and tools to better manipulate or handle situations that they might encounter outside my building is the purpose.” Rodney argues, school leaders must ensure systems and safeguards are in place for Black students as a way to follow through with learning after the discipline is decided and implemented. He explained that one of the most important facets of discipline is what supports are put in place, so students make better decisions when a similar situation arises. Rodney stated:

For example, they are going to have daily check-ins with the behavior specialist to make sure they have time to have some counseling. If they are in special education, they will get some extra support from the interrelated teacher and model why those actions were inappropriate. Really getting them to redirect- finding discipline that works.

The follow through and consciousness asked of school leaders aligns to critical self-reflection which Khalifa (2020) illuminated as a key tenet of culturally responsive school leadership. When expressing what is important to consider when disciplining Black students, Sasha illuminated the significance of checking how her double consciousness can lead to biased thinking and actions. She unearthed that looking at Black students through the lens of the dominant culture may impact the type or the level of harshness she leverages when disciplining them. She provided an example of how she held herself accountable and checked her double consciousness to ensure she was doling out equitable consequences. She explained that when a Black and White student both participated in a school-wide disruption in the cafeteria, she had to align appropriate consequences, and check herself to ensure she isn't treating them differently. She stated that sometimes the self-talk sounds like:

That's biased...and you didn't even realize it was biased.... You need to self-reflect and adjust because they're both boys, but I went totally somewhere different initially with the Black boy that I didn't with the white boy. And I know as a mother and a Black woman that it's me wanting to get them ready for what's coming right, you're a Black male boo it'll be different for you when you get out there.

Sasha stated that although both boys received a consequence, she had to be extremely thoughtful and conscious of what is guiding her decision making to ensure the consequences she provided to both students were aligned to the problem and were not different based on the students' race or future hypothetical encounters with oppressive anti-Black systems.

In addition to being cognizant of how double consciousness seeps into how Black school leaders view Black students, Cheikh exemplified how double consciousness also arises when thinking about how teachers view them as leaders based on the discipline support they seek and receive. Cheikh argues that it is a challenge to find a balance that develops a culture that reacts appropriately to discipline because otherwise you lose your positive culture and teacher buy-in. On the other hand, he contends that being conscious and aware of how the discipline teachers want could potentially kick kids down the road.

Therefore, participants illuminate how they must be cognizant of how they leverage the student code of conduct and how school policies are not always appropriate for every student and their situation. Cheikh explained:

Using discipline as an example regular philosophy – you discipline kids a certain way but then that doesn't work for my kids, and I know my kids are dealing with a lot more. I can't subscribe to greater philosophy because that may not work within my school or best for what my students need.

Similarly, Rodney stated, "I try the best as I can to follow what's the suggestion and the recommendation in the handbook but making the decisions on how impactful the discipline will actually be is more important." Summer Maya stated that she spends more time conversing with students and only looks at the code of conduct for larger issues like weapons or drugs. Sasha

explains the code of conduct as “sometimes a hard pill to swallow.” She stated that she feels like as an administrator, she’s bound by the code, but does feel like the district has made some revisions this year to student consequences to become more progressive and less restrictive.

Another aspect of consciousness rose when participants talked through formal and informal discipline and how they recorded the number of incidents on the district provided platform. Sasha provided a perspective not lifted by other participants along the lines of consciously coding incidents. She stated, “I try really hard to avoid the formal as much as possible – I don’t want to be the administrator putting things on paper that puts them in worse predicaments later.” Sasha argued that the formal discipline procedure of placing an offense in a child’s official record could harm them later in their educational trajectory, so she chooses to create paper trails and informal disciplinary procedures that include notifying parents and providing aligned consequences without over-labeling them.

Labels and harmful, exclusionary discipline were also brought up by participants when they were asked about their teacher demographics and how teachers’ perspectives impacted their discipline decisions. Related to this, participants highlighted that the student code of conduct could be either helpful or a hindrance based on how it is interpreted and how student offenses are handled (See Figure 3 for an example). Cheikh illuminated, “Some adults want retribution. Discipline is not about retribution, but that’s what some adults want.”

Elijah stated that the student code of conduct is vague and left up to interpretation which can lead to biased decision making if a leader does not seek help to put the puzzle pieces together. Moreover, Elijah explained how teachers sought punishment that was not aligned to the offense. He stated, “I found as a principal; teachers prefer you to suspend them, suspend them, suspend them – they want you to get them out of their classrooms.” Similarly, Cheikh stated, the

student code of conduct is something that helps ground his decisions that teachers typically do not argue against because they know policy's significance in schools. He shared an example of what he has explained to teachers who expected more punitive exclusionary discipline to occur for a minor infraction:

Ma'am, I can't do that because policy does not allow that. Skipping is a Tier 1 offense. I can't send a kid home for five days for skipping. Let's talk about it and figure out a better solution" — so that flexibility matters—The policy itself is saying there is a floor and there is a ceiling.

Rodney also spoke to how he must consciously interpret the discipline decisions laid out by the district and what he chooses to leverage. He stated, "I have to consider even at looking at these policies. Again, I can suspend a child because the handbook says so, but what usefulness and how impactful in a positive way will that suspension be?"

School leaders being conscious and thoughtful around what type of consequence to implement played an important role in the support students receive to build achieve academic success. Summer Maya stated, "I am not a proponent of sending kids home three to five days unless you have to because, at the end of the day, the gap especially for African American students keeps widening. The gap doesn't close. The way they learn is not by sitting at home."

However, in the same breath, participants argued that disciplining students led to teachers feeling supported. Rodney stated that some teachers don't feel supported when students are not disciplined. Some of these teachers are apathetic to students' behaviors and have low expectations of what Black students could do, a more hands-off approach. Although Cheikh believes that discipline is a shared responsibility, he elucidated that reactive discipline is sometimes necessary otherwise you lose your teachers and your culture. He highlighted that it is sometimes hard to motivate teachers to proactively handle discipline because some are dealing

with their own traumas, have a difficult time compartmentalizing their own stressors, and they are human.

Cheikh elaborated that a challenge he faced when disciplining Black students was being conscious of perpetuating inequities, how to support teachers while being aware of Black students' specific needs and still having high expectations when disciplining them. He stated:

If we allow the perception that teachers can be harmed and there are no consequences of culture of high expectation discipline-wise, then you still are damaging the greater environment for everyone because that teacher is going to be disengaged. The teacher is going to be despondent and you can potentially, accidentally enable a student and teach them a wrong lesson, in love, in real-time because greater society doesn't really care about that circumstance so we want you to be in this cocoon of love but we still want to prepare you for the real world, but I disagree with what is prevalent in Black schools; in poor schools, this idea that I have to beat you down to get you ready for the real world beat you down. I hate that.

All five Black school leaders in this study felt that it was their duty to mitigate harmful and punitive discipline by identifying and implementing more effective discipline techniques. Participants felt that emotional intelligence, access to social-emotional learning, and restorative practices were key to preventing over-disciplining Black students. Summer Maya stated, "restorative practices is a great tool that the district implemented that I think many people really should be using."

Participants argued that restorative practices were an essential aspect to consider and incorporate into school leaders' toolkit when disciplining Black students. Sasha argued the importance of giving students the opportunity to share their thinking, "We talk through it; tell me what happened what have you thought since and it works." Furthermore, Sasha stated, "when [restorative practices are] leveraged consistently, it brings a provocative, meaningful change." Rodney also shared that the most important aspect of discipline is what happens when the student returns from a suspension and goes back into their classroom. He illuminated how

providing the opportunity for restoration and getting to know students played a pivotal role, “I think having those conversations and showing that amount of interest- it means something.” Moreover, Elijah stated, “Kids have to learn some lessons that suspensions are not going to teach them. The suspension is only a break for the teachers and not rehabilitation for the kids.” Therefore, he stated at his school, “we are being more proactive with that student to make sure they are not making unwise choices moving forward.

Despite restorative practices being presented by participants as an optimal approach to discipline, lack of training opportunities for staff, specifically teachers presented itself as a problem. Cheikh highlighted:

I think that DPS has been ahead of the curve for SEL and in terms of allowing for training and restoration and restorative practices and they been pushing it more and more, but it is a journey because it's philosophical.

He argues that it can be difficult to get staff on board with these practices if they are not bound by some sort of policy. Sasha stated, “I wish the district would make [restorative practices] more readily available; it’s hard to get in trainings.” Not only trainings on how to implement restorative practices, but also to support teachers’ mindset shifts. Cheikh stated that there are teachers and adults who oversee discipline decisions who battle internalized racism and oppression daily. He argued that “they don’t see value in restoration, they want punishment because that is what they think is best for certain children.”

Finally, participants elucidated the importance and necessity of growth over time. Elijah expressed that through his various roles, his approach to discipline has evolved. He has learned more management styles and how to lean on parent connections as the lifeline. Sasha stated that she is consistently working towards her competency as a leader to better support her students and staff. She stated she considers, “Anything I can do to peel away at cultural layers to help me

understand and even in having conversations with my colleagues peel away layers of bias.”

Summer Maya also illuminated a change in her discipline style:

Where I am now is different than where I was a few years ago. You know, in the initial state I was no-nonsense. What I mean by that is you know I don't play with kids. I wanted them to see me as a disciplinarian and so I was a little bit harsher and more straightforward, and I barely smiled with them because I wanted to keep that distance between me and them.

Summer Maya acquainted her changes because of gleaning better practices from her principal who values strong authentic relationships and leads with softness. Summer Maya expressed that zero-tolerance and lack of empathy could have adverse and negative effects on students. In the same light, Cheikh highlighted how exclusionary discipline is ineffective and school leaders need to find alternative solutions. “If exclusive policies worked, we would have no discipline problems because we would have suspended them away.” Furthermore, Cheikh challenged Black leaders specifically to do some “self-work” because he stated that Black school leaders, like non-Black leaders can either perpetuate inequities or confront them. He stated that he had to draw a line in the sand and stand square on what he cared about which is more important than being popular.

Participants had a wide variety of experiences disciplining Black students. They uplifted several essential things to consider and offered suggestions and implications that Black leaders can leverage. Figure 5.3 provides my new understanding of the three themes crystallized when answering the third research question.

**Figure 5.3**

*Poem: Perspective of Disciplining Black Students*

**I.**

*With every little seed a lesson is sowed  
saturated in high expectations  
and visions of the endless places you can go  
disciplining with love I know  
the beauty will be bloomed in the rose  
not positioned in the trauma and the pain of  
the thorn  
The consequence shouldn't harm  
only add to the light that will help you grow  
unfortunately, still you must know  
the world will call you wrong  
tell you jail or 6 ft. under is where you belong  
So, I take a little extra time  
to paint the picture that life ain't fair  
and America's freedom  
got color preferences- so beware*

**II.**

*But we are ready to be botanists  
life-long learners  
lean on our trainings  
and change the lens on our focus  
We gotta learn to reach em before we teach  
em  
not fall victim to the systems' depiction  
of Black bodies as violent and vicious  
that's fiction  
Ready to face the fact*

*that we don't know it all  
but we carry an unyielding  
willingness to unfold*

**III.**

*Then we be prepared to cultivate  
consciousness that breaks cycles  
and systems of shame & blame  
disrupt decisions that leave Black bodies  
in back of classrooms, bottom of ditches,  
behind bars and never in front of books  
that bare faces like theirs  
We know the weight of the work  
But we rather carry that instead of chains  
So we read between Black and White lines  
Liberate ourselves from lies  
To find that even between  
Blackness is still unseen  
Just because  
the policy says suspend them  
don't mean the code of conduct  
ain't operating the same machine  
that disregards Black stories,  
dehumanizes Black bodies, drive Black  
children  
into a pipeline of pain  
So, leaders must see  
That our consciousness is either  
our prison or our power  
so plant seeds of love  
so tomorrow Black resilience, Black power  
will be rooted, grounded and  
will bloom into flowers.*

**Crystallization of Extant Literature**

As the primary investigator of this arts-based phenomenology, I consider myself to be a major research instrument. This means that my consciousness and personal experience of the phenomenon helped me make meaning when connecting participants' experiences and responses to the extant literature in Chapter Two. However, the research methodology selected required me to set aside my epoche so I could allow themes and new meaning to become crystallized free

from my bias. So, once I collected and analyzed the data, I was able to revisit the literature selected and view it in a new light that illuminated a deeper, more rich understanding. By reading and reflecting on the extant literature and its connection to the findings of this study, my understanding of each literature topic has been enhanced. Once themes were crystallized and sense-making occurred, I developed Kwansabas for the following literature review topic (a) Black school leadership (Figure 6.1); double consciousness (Figure 6.2); school discipline (Figure 6.3); social justice (Figure 6.4); cultural competence (figure 6.5); culturally responsive school leadership (figure 6.6); restorative practices (figure 6.7); and phenomenology (figure 6.8) to represent my understanding of what the literature exudes

**Figure 6.1**

*Poem: Leaders with light*

Black leaders guide with light, not heat  
 Halting hatred from burning as school's purpose  
 Powered by passion, past pain, and pride  
 Forging a new path lit with freedom  
 Found nestled in corner of Black smiles  
 valuing joy that comes in Black form  
 Rare, sacred, and worthy of our fight

*Note.* This figure provides the researcher's new understanding of the literature review topic, Black school leadership.

**Figure 6.2**

*Poem: Flawed Masks*

Lock eyes with me while I'm crying  
 Do the tears wash away my flaws?  
 Or am I drowned then dried out?  
 Roots dug up to be planted again  
 Low beliefs placing me beneath the trees  
 This shade you cast- I escape from  
 For light could never be washed away

*Note.* This figure provides the researcher's new understanding of the literature review topic, double consciousness.

**Figure 6.3***Poem: Singing Caged Birds*

Write them up and break them down  
 Lost in logic that polish steel bars  
 Deficit mind thinkin'- both violent and empty  
 "suspend them cause they're not learnin' here"  
 Pre-k to prison- A Black body's journey  
 Jarring jury created of callous caged birds  
 Locked in singing "it's what they deserve"

*Note.* This figure provides the researcher's new understanding of the literature review topic, school discipline.

**Figure 6.4***Poem: School's Justice*

This justice don't need no picket signs  
 No bullhorn or milk to offset teargas  
 Just a connect to the verb, *matter*  
 Lift our voices; help create freedom songs  
 Disrupt bias, break broken systems, build hope  
 expose painful truths and success ladders too  
 Give us a chance to thrive too

*Note.* This figure provides the researcher's new understanding of the literature review topic, social justice.

**Figure 6.5***Poem: Worthy to be Learned*

Can't know my needs without seeing me  
 Bare-bore in beauty-covered in art  
 Opened eyes open doors deep in heart  
 Beating to the rhythm of foreign drums  
 Watch as I dance- move your body along  
 Shores of my being- forever floating on  
 Accept, respect, protect, worthy enough to learn

*Note.* This figure provides the researcher's new understanding of the literature review topic, cultural competence.

**Figure 6.6***Poem: Mirror Magic*

Affirm our bodies and feed our minds  
 Respond to our trauma but know deeply  
 We're magic- too complex to be defined  
 Do this work and take your time  
 Hold mirrors that reveal our divine beauty  
 Design spaces that wrap us in gold  
 Honor our stories- let truth be told

*Note.* This figure provides the researcher's new understanding of the literature review topic, Culturally Responsive School Leadership.

**Figure 6.7***Poem: Restored Hope*

Circles not bars build strong lasting bridges  
 Wrapped around this room reeling in proof  
 To grasp peace, we must honor truth  
 Believe in the ability to end war  
 Battles lost to *push out* no more  
 Fight to close gaps and equity traps  
 Speak through healing and hope- not harm

*Note.* This figure provides the researcher's new understanding of the literature review topic, Restorative Practices.

**Figure 6.8***Poem: Lighthouse*

Let there be light from towers tonight  
 Rising like suns over fertile fresh land  
 Water deep thought like young flower roots  
 Reveal new meaning and share its growth  
 Magnify pieces that have been unseen unheard  
 Nurture its power and place in view  
 Broaden the scope- the sight of truth

*Note.* This figure provides the researcher's new understanding of the literature review topic, Phenomenology.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

*“True resistance begins with people confronting pain . . . and wanting to do something to change it” – bell hooks*

This chapter provides a summary of the study and important conclusions drawn from the findings in previous chapters. This arts-based phenomenology was conducted to lift the voices of Black school leaders as they grappled with double consciousness and navigated discipline in their schools; discipline specifically geared towards students who share their beautiful Blackness. This study was not to generalize the experience of Black school leaders tasked with disciplining Black students but to amplify marginalized voices, appreciate their underrepresented perspective, and gain critical insight into how to support Black students and disrupt punitive discipline in schools. While this study focused on Black school leaders, the participants magnified the importance of this work and these strategies for any leader responsible for disciplining Black children. Therefore, in this discussion, “school leaders” refer to all school administrators and “Black school leaders” will be used intentionally to describe additional suggestions and practices lifted from participants pertinent to the self-healing and self-actualization Black leaders may need. This discussion will offer (a) a summary of the study through the lens of the conceptual framework (b) a discussion of key findings of the research, (c) implications for educational practice and educational policy, and (d) recommendations for future research and conclusions.

### **Summary of Study**

Extant research has illuminated repeatedly that Black students in public schools are more likely to endure punitive consequences, experience discrimination, and encounter the prison industrial complex in alignment with the exclusionary discipline doled out in public schools (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Douglas et al., 2018; Morris, 2016; Ryan & Goodram, 2014). The purpose of this study was to lift marginalized voices of Black school leaders to build an

understanding of how they perceived the phenomenon of disciplining Black students in a society that has historically dehumanized, oppressed, and criminalized Black people from its conception.

The participants in this arts-based phenomenology shared their perspective of grappling with Du Bois' theory of double consciousness in their personal lives and professional lives when disciplining Black students. Double consciousness is the gift of knowing oneself while also being cognizant of how the dominant culture perceives a group of people, their culture, and the expectations and stereotypes placed on this specific group (Du Bois, 1904; Vinzant, 2009). The dominant culture alluded to in this study is considered White people and the centering of Whiteness in school. Therefore, aspects of Critical Race Theory (CRT) help unpack this study and illuminate the way racism is embedded in every fabric of American society, specifically in school systems and systems of discipline and punishment. Since this study's methodology is arts-based phenomenology, CRT was not leveraged as a theoretical framework. However, CRT informs the study because it provides a rationale for Black counter stories to replace the hegemonic narrative that Black people are inferior, less capable, and more deserving of harsh punishment. Personal accounts serve as liberation from stereotypes or assumptions made about Black school leaders and their perceptions about disciplining Black students. More about CRT will be discussed later in this section when describing its significance to how Black students are disciplined in urban schools.

Important to note, the term phenomenology is extracted from the Greek '*phainein*', which means to bring to light or appear. Moreover, arts-based research (ABR) is characterized by flexibility and a level of openness that helps to generate new understanding (Göb, 2022). Therefore, imposing a theoretical framework would inhibit new understandings from rising to the top and provide a starting point that is unnecessary in this kind of research. An arts-based

phenomenology offers the tool to position building blocks of constructed meaning from authentic experiences expressed through participants' comprehensive descriptions. According to Laverly, phenomenology makes invisible aspects lit with new understanding (2003). The essence of five Black school leaders' experiences disciplining Black students and grappling with double consciousness was illuminated and explored to develop a new understanding of this phenomenon.

Approximately eight hours of phenomenological semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Black school leaders who are responsible for disciplining Black students. Further, these Black school leaders spent additional time reading, internalizing, and critiquing a poem that highlighted a Black student's experience with anti-Blackness in school (see Figure 1). Participants were asked to identify themes in the poem that aligned to their experiences as Black students and to lift any connections to how Black students are currently disciplined in their schools.

Although participants examined a poem written through a lens of a Black male student speaking through his experience enduring anti-Blackness in what seemed like a White-led school, I wanted to determine how the themes and phenomenon expressed in the poem could be present in Black dominated and Black-led spaces. Therefore, this poem helped to make a connection to how negative views of Blackness can be internalized and housed in the double consciousness Black leaders grapple with daily.

This arts-based phenomenology was guided by three research questions: (1) How have Black school leaders experienced discipline as students? (2) How do Black school leaders perceive double consciousness in their personal and professional lives? (3) What are the different

perspectives that Black school leaders hold regarding their disciplinary practices of Black students within urban schools?

Crystallized themes emerged from each research question posed in this study. Data analysis occurred through Moustakas' (1994) modified analysis steps. Four steps of analysis occurred. In the first step, I explicitly stated my perspectives and thoughts around the phenomenon prior to interviewing participants to suspend judgment and open my consciousness to perspectives that may vary from mine. Second, I transcended my ego and perception of the phenomenon to examine and document all pertinent statements, highlighted invariant horizons that provided new meaning, and created a synthesis of new meaning to share in a structural manner. All this occurred by interacting with the data on several different occasions and in a variety of ways making connections to the problem statement, literature review, and research questions.

### **Research Question One**

The findings from Research Question 1, how have Black school leaders experienced discipline as Black students, revealed the following themes: (1) strict parents led to few discipline experiences at school (2) teachers' lack of cultural competence, and (3) punitive discipline. This question provided a background to the discipline that Black school leaders faced as students themselves. While this question did not address the phenomenon of being Black and disciplining Black students, it did provide an insight into how Black school leaders themselves experienced discipline in school. Their experiences aligned to the overall problem related to over-disciplining Black students. Moreover, findings led to conclusions around how these Black school leaders currently discipline Black students and helped to formulate suggestions to support Black students more effectively.

Through crystallization of these findings, I have identified an overall theme for Research Question 1 based on an African proverb, “*it takes a village to raise a child.*” This village, composed of various stakeholders, must include caring and conscious educators who value and leverage parental support and their perspectives when disciplining Black students. This discussion makes connections from the study’s findings to the pertinent literature on social justice leadership and culturally responsive school leadership (Anyon et al., 2018; Khalifa, 2020).

Extant literature expressed how building positive relationships with parents could help mitigate behavioral issues and disproportionate discipline. Additionally, culturally responsive leadership requires educators to not only be cognizant of students’ needs but also aware of parent and community needs. The findings from this research question highlighted how clear, high expectations and the fear of their parents’ discipline at home were the motivating force behind their desire to succeed academically and stay out of trouble.

Additionally, participants elucidated their parents’ willingness to do whatever it took to ensure their children, the participants in this arts-based phenomenology, had a formal education that set them up for success. Cheikh described how his mother moved him from a smaller Muslim school so that he could be challenged. Summer Maya explained how her mother traveled across to another country to visit her when she attended college at the tender age of 15 on a full-ride scholarship. Rodney and Sasha illuminated how their parents took additional measures to ensure they were enrolled in Catholic, private schools. This theme of a supportive village was a common thread in all the participants’ experiences that prevented them from experiencing an exorbitant amount of harsh discipline in school. Every participant spoke profusely about their parents’ impact on their educational experience and their current success.

An interesting perspective regarding Black parents did rise to the top that aligns with this research question. When asked what challenges Black leaders faced when disciplining Black students, participants identified community stressors, parents, and culturally accepted and promoted behaviors. Cheikh stated that as a school leader, he sometimes has more context than teachers regarding the conditions students are living in which changes how he views certain situations and student misbehaviors. Rodney expressed parents are sometimes not supportive with discipline decisions because they do not believe their child deserves the consequence and the redirection may be little to none from the parents. Similarly, Sasha spoke to defensive parents who are frustrated and lash out because they do not feel supported. Also, Summer Maya shared that when students leave, they go back to their normal life where they, their parents, or the community may be engaged in activities that are not tolerated in school, for example, smoking or possessing marijuana.

Elijah stated, “culture, culture, culture of different families and communities which has evolved over the years.” He illustrated that since his students come from an inner-city environment, they come from a culture that tells them to be tough and stand up for themselves similar to extant literature that highlights the exterior ruggedness that society places on Black children (Dumas & Nelson, 2016). Comparing how parents of Black school leaders supported their educational trajectory and what participants explain they are experiencing with their current Black students’ parents in their schools today provided a wondering regarding how Black school leaders support parents who may not engender the parenting skills or strictness their parents had. Moreover, school leaders must be willing to explore how much of parents' disagreement with discipline decisions are developed as a result of the lack of trust they have with the school system based on their own experience of harsh punitive discipline.

Although participants in this study did not face a high number of discipline experiences, when they were disciplined, consequences were harsh and punitive. The sentiment expressed through the crystallized findings were that participants felt that there was no long-term learning in the discipline they received. The harsh, punitive discipline came without regard for how to address behaviors moving forward or which strategies should be leveraged to proactively mitigate unacceptable behaviors. Moreover, some participants in this study encountered the harsh reality that they were expected to assimilate the dominant culture and their expectations in order to be successful in a world that revolved around Whiteness. The participants in this study illuminated the painful memories of physical assaults by teachers and school leaders through paddling and verbal depreciation while in school. Aspects of double consciousness prevailed in this theme and led directly to Research Question Two. Participants shared views placed on them by the dominant culture seeped into the discipline they received. Despite encountering some of the negative discipline experiences, participants highlighted how their parents made sure they knew they were reflections of them when at school and out in the world. Moreover, they shared the expectation of carrying themselves with Black pride regardless of the situation or circumstance. The findings from this research question contribute to the extant literature by reiterating the importance of building strong relationships with parents and enacting discipline decisions that instead of harming students, they guide them to better choices.

### **Research Question Two**

Research Question 2 asked school leaders to reflect on how double consciousness plays a role in their personal and professional lives. This question revealed various poignant experiences that unearthed participants' sense of self and their perspective about race in schools. Additionally, participants highlighted the supplementary requirements placed on Black students

to code-switch, leave their authentic selves at the door, and wear a mask of acceptability in school and eventually in the real world. The findings revealed the following themes: (1) double consciousness was seen as a gift and a curse, and (2) double consciousness served as a looking glass preparation for Black students.

The participants expressed that double consciousness could be seen as a gift and a curse, this idea that the perspective that comes with double consciousness could either be prison or a force of power for those who grapple with it. Finally, double consciousness led to this idea of needing to prepare Black students for the anti-Blackness they may encounter within their lifetime. This question provided an understanding of how Black school leaders viewed the school system, understood the operation of oppressive systems, and grappled with double consciousness and the Whiteness embedded in the systems in which they are considered cogs. This question aligned with the problem statement by identifying how Black school leaders dealt with stereotypes, their thoughts around the notion of Black inferiority, and their perspectives pertaining to Black students and the type of discipline Black students deserve in schools.

The overall theme crystallized from this research question comes from an African proverb that states, "*The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth.*" Black leaders and students alike need to feel a sense of belonging and a sense of pride in themselves and their lived experiences. While Du Bois coined double consciousness as the gift of duality, findings from this study illuminated that in addition to a gift, there is a burden attached with the consciousness required to operate through both Blackness and dominant society.

Findings from this study suggest that Black school leaders may face an insurmountable cognitive load that weighs them down with thoughts of if they are good enough, smart enough,

or worthy enough to be acknowledged in their personal and professional lives. Black school leaders expressed the feeling that regardless of their educational status, socioeconomic status, or privilege, their Blackness would always show up first.

Similarly, in schools, Black school leaders acknowledged how double consciousness required students to move through school and eventually society being aware of what others may perceive of them. More importantly, Black students may be burdened with others' perceptions, leading to an internalized oppressed sense of self. Subsequently, Elijah highlighted how a lack of pride and sense of self may cause Black students to act out in ways to seek attention or figuratively burn their village down. Students seeking to be heard, like Sasha's students who blurt out answers in the middle of class, may lead to being punished more punitively because they do not fit into the confines of Whiteness cloaked in acceptability embedded in school systems. Therefore, participants illuminated the need for Black students to become aware of their Black excellence by cultivating a sense of self that negates stereotypes and finds beauty in their Blackness.

While participants highlighted the need to code-switch or assimilate to the dominant culture in schools to be successful, every participant illuminated the power that rides in Black pride. Consequently, findings from this study show that preparing Black children for society requires both code-switching and teaching self-love. This requires genuine conversations about race, society's inequities, and the light that Black students have inside of them instilled from the burning desire for liberation and equality from their ancestors.

Participants in this study agreed with American pedagogical theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings that race is ingrained in the fabric of our society (1998). Despite findings from this study highlighting the importance of building pride in Black children and the need to conduct crucial

conversations about race and social issues, several lawmakers across the country are pushing to implement laws that will restrict what educators can teach. States across America are battling against what is shared and discussed, specifically regarding the haunting history of Black degradation and oppression that still lay rooted in the core of America's fabrics. Some school districts have banned teaching the legacy of Black survival, our fight for freedom, and our battle for education.

Despite race only being one defining feature, critical race theorists argue that race is a prominent aspect that helps to shape our daily experiences. "People-White or nonWhite-who don't intend to be racist can nevertheless make choices that fuel racism (Sawchuk, 2021)." Critical Race Theory was inspired by and transcended Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which is the study of inequities in the legal system (Martinez, 2014). Critical legal theorists examined how the criminal justice system is inequitable in its distribution of the law. This theory plays a pivotal role in biases that may shift how behavior is mitigated, the over-criminalization of students of color, and the increased chance that students will encounter the school-to-prison pipeline. Paying attention to racial realism impacts not only the discursive ways White educators illuminate their biases and anti-Black views, but it also illuminates the way in which all educators, regardless of race, can partake in racially marginalizing practices (Blaisdell & Bullock, 2022). I believe we cannot progress forward without a true understanding of our past and our current situation. As educators, regardless of race or our lived experiences, it is our duty to provide a holistic education that meets the needs of our students and encourages them to critically think and address problems that permeate their community and greater society. Therefore, we must equip Black students with the consciousness that colors them as beautiful and deserving to be seen, heard, and not weighed down by negative views that excludes their authentic selves.

### Research Question Three

The final research question asked school leaders to share their perspectives of disciplining Black students in an urban context. Black school leaders in this study were cognizant of the disproportionality in the discipline that Black students endured. They felt compelled to address the racial discipline gap in their schools because they understood the life-long impact exclusionary discipline could have on Black students which align with findings from Theorharris's (2007) study relating to all school leaders' responsibility to promote and uphold social justice. The responsibility expressed by Black school leaders in this study shows their commitment to culturally responsive school leadership. The findings for this third and final research question revealed the following themes: (1) Participants saw disciplining Black students as planting seeds that double consciousness helped to water; (2) participants identified the need for cultural competency and cultural responsiveness in schools; and (3) participants noted the significance of conscious discipline and ongoing reflection. The findings from this research question provided an insight into how Black school leaders mitigated punitive discipline, how double consciousness played a role in their discipline decisions, the impact of teacher demographics as well as policies that either support or challenge their thought process around disciplining Black students.

The overall theme crystallized from this research question also resonated in an African proverb that states, *"The sun does not forget a village just because it is small."* In the essence of this arts-based phenomenological study, this proverb means that every aspect of the school, regardless of how modest, is integral to nourishing Black students' sense of belonging and well-being and can be pivotal in mitigating exclusionary discipline. "There is a physical, emotional,

psychological, and spiritual violence woven into the structure of schools and manifested through everything from instruction to curriculum” (Emdin, 2021, p. 230).

Black school leaders in this study argued that there are multiple avenues worth exploring when approaching discipline and how to address Black students’ diverse needs. From perceptions to policies, the figurative sun, in the form of inquiry and exploration, can illuminate promising practices that prevent and remedy injustices and anti-Blackness in schools. The Black school leaders in this study illuminated their practices which aligned with extant literature in regard to social justice leadership. Their statements highlighted how they were cognizant of the way biased perspectives and broken systems could lead to the continuous marginalization of Black students which was discussed in Khalifa (2020). Findings unearthed that these Black leaders exhibited and upheld aspects of social justice leadership in their discipline decisions through preventing and remedying injustices.

Instances of preventing injustices were lifted by participants when they exemplified the importance of checking if their double consciousness empowered them to see Black students in a positive light or imprisoned them to negative views and beliefs regarding how students should be disciplined. Black school leaders prevented injustices by having high expectations for Black students and exposing Black students to alternative futures which may decrease the need to discipline them. These images of Black pride and success adamantly oppose stereotypical perspectives of Blackness based on White gaze and internalized oppression that could become a reality attached to Black double consciousness like arguments expressed in the book *Ratchedemic*. The author insists that Black school leaders show up as their authentic unapologetic selves, so they can model for students how to negate the burden of internalized racism and oppression. He states, “Without the recognition of their own excellence, they will

always judge themselves through the lens of the perceived excellence of others” (Emdin, 2021 p. 194). Moreover, the author argues that to heal imposter syndrome, Black students must be celebrated and valued, so they are not looking for acceptance from a dominant group who may perceive them as less than, and inferior because of White superiority. This ties back to Critical Race Theory which is connected to culturally relevant teaching because it strives to help students identify and criticize how social injustices permeate their life (Sawchuk, 2021). Black students must be exposed to learning that helps them to cultivate counter-narratives that uplift and encourage them to see themselves in a resilient and positive light. The participants in this arts-based phenomenology expressed the importance of planting these seeds when conversing with Black students who may need consequences for their actions.

Student-focused support like social-emotional learning and emotional intelligence were brought up as important aspects of learning that could help students express themselves and their needs. Findings also highlighted that through hiring practices and staff professional development, preventing injustices could be possible. Findings from this study highlight the essential aspect teachers play in the over-disciplining of Black students. Therefore, a strong recommendation is for all school leaders to be intentional when interviewing and hiring teachers who want to teach and support Black students. Once teachers are hired, school leaders must examine the support they offer to teachers regarding implicit bias and alternatives to exclusionary discipline. Moreover, it may be important for school leaders to redefine what support means, looks like, sounds like, and feels like.

Remedying injustices when they occur was also a crucial component that the participants alluded to when discussing their perspective of disciplining Black students. Black school leaders in this arts-based phenomenology spoke to the perils of racial injustices and the criminalization

of Black bodies in society. They recognized that similar mindsets are embedded in school systems and could be in the creases of school policies. Furthermore, participants argued that it is crucial to partake in reading between the lines of policies and curriculum. Remedying injustices requires school leaders to be aware of the harm attached to following policy blindly and being willing to stand against adverse consequences embedded in vetted student code of conducts. This critical self-reflection helps school leaders actively work against institutionalized racism as well as internalized racism. Being exposed to anti-Blackness, and the negative perceptions attached to White gaze has led to double consciousness being a shared experience that impacts how Black school leaders see themselves and their Black students.

Theoharris (2007) illuminated that school leaders may experience resistance when trying to implement socially just practices, however school leaders are responsible for providing platforms and opportunities to unpack biases and challenge status quo. Moreover, participants in this study elucidate that Black school leaders have an extra layer of responsibility. This includes addressing the appropriate usage of office discipline referrals and confronting implicit biases. This aligns with the extant literature around culturally responsive school leadership. The participants illuminated the need for cultural competence trainings and access to more alternatives to suspension trainings like restorative practices, leveraging parent support, and access to community mentorship programs. These villages or aspects of school, regardless of size, can help to dismantle systems of oppression that harm Black students if they are illuminated.

Overall, Black school leaders perceived school discipline to enhance Black students' cognition regarding the anti-Blackness embedded in America's fabric to prepare them to inevitably encounter it in their lifetime. These planted seeds must also be accompanied with the

development of pride and sense of belonging. Black pride so boisterous that it invalidates even the slightest thought of Black inferiority and absence of Black intellectualism. Moreover, a sense of belonging so strong that Black students will never again have to wear a mask of acceptability to be seen.

Developing students' consciousness requires Black school leaders to engage in their own critical reflection and be clear about what they value, believe, and are willing to challenge. Findings show that participants felt the burden of double consciousness and can become victims to internalized oppression that permeates their perspectives of Black students and the purpose of school discipline. To mitigate the perils of perceiving Blackness through the lens of the oppressor, continuous, thoughtful, and critical reflection must occur often. Black school leaders have an extra layer of responsibility to dismantle systems that deem Blackness unworthy of love, protection, and respect in the school system. This requires them to be intentional with the curriculum they leverage, the practices they implement, and the policies they uphold.

Black school leaders must consistently lead with light, discipline with humanity guiding their decisions, and challenge the status quo that coddles the idea that Black students deserve punishment. Black school leaders play an integral role in preparing Black students for the future, and this can be done without harming them now and toughening their skin, to prepare them to be harmed later.

### **Implications for Educational Practice**

Based on the findings of this arts-based phenomenology, a plethora of lessons and next steps were offered for any school leader, regardless of race, responsible for disciplining Black students. There are several implications for school leaders as they work diligently to create

environments that hold Black students accountable for their actions but prevent the perpetuation of America's criminalization of Black bodies.

The first recommendation for school leaders is to build strong connections with parents, guardians, and community members. Participants spoke to the positive impact their parents played in their educational trajectory and highlighted how a lack of parent support and engagement could be a hurdle to implementing effective discipline in schools. Culture and community are paramount. Crystallized data from this arts-based phenomenology highlight the significance of culturally competency and an educator's journey to cultural humility. Educators working in communities who have different lived experiences than their own must spend time reflecting and learning about the students and families they serve. When working with students who have a tremendous number of diverse needs, school leaders should connect with community partners to meet students where they are and guide them to where they see their future can lead. Secondly, Black school leaders cannot ignore how race is embedded in school practices. Participants in this arts-based phenomenology expressed the load that lingers in double consciousness. Moreover, they exemplified the importance of exhibiting Black pride to counter anti-Blackness that permeates the school system which helps lift the burden of this second sight. Black school leaders should seek district and community support to create platforms for Blackness to be seen as beautiful, mattering, accepted, and respected. This occurs by students feeling like they belong in school buildings, seeing themselves in curriculum, and having the opportunity to learn from their mistakes so they are not condemned to a lifetime of punishment. White supremacy and anti-Blackness are constantly camouflaged in plain sight and mutate into stronger, yet harder to detect, variants. All school leaders must be transparent with their beliefs about what Black students deserve and their stance for equity and social justice.

Finally, participants lifted clear, thoughtful, and aligned discipline decisions to identify and disrupt harmful exclusionary discipline. Applying these discipline decisions first requires school leaders to provide the time and space for themselves and other stakeholders, specifically, teachers to reflect and process their beliefs, biases, and willingness to grow. Conducting equity audits or equity scans to determine areas where marginalized students suffer could be a starting point.

Once identified, school leaders can implement systems that hold stakeholders accountable for providing an equitable and socially just education. Examples are critical friendship groups and professional development to enhance educators' toolkits. Reading, synthesizing, and discussing books like *Ratchetdemic* by Christopher Emdin, *We Want to do More than Survive, We Want to Thrive* by Bettina Love, or *Cultivating Genius* by Gholdy Muhammad can help school leaders become more effectively culturally responsive. It can also help leaders become advocates for social justice and develop the means to attain it on behalf of the students they serve.

### **Implications for Education Policy**

A plethora of ideas and areas of focus emerged because of the conclusion of the research study. Participants spoke to how district policies, like the student code of conduct, hiring practices, and push for restorative practices impacted their decision making. A crucial component of the data gathered in this study was school leaders' willingness to push back against policies that may harm Black students. Participants argue that school leaders must consciously interpret student code of conduct in a critical manner. Consequently, simply because the policy offers suspension as the consequence does not mean that suspension is the most

effective solution. Removing a child from a classroom alone will not help them understand expectations or give them access to alternative behaviors in case a similar situation occurs.

Since code of conducts are created by each school district, more support should be offered to school leaders, so they can effectively discipline Black students. Support looks like encouraging and building Black students up, honoring their voice, and celebrating their resilience. It is not to tearing them down, criminalizing their color, or cloaking them with invisibility tactics being pushed through anti-Black legislation. This requires talk of resilience and past pain. While this does not require shaming White people for past transgressions, it does require us to evaluate how Whiteness is currently sewn into the fabrics of our society and finding ways to unravel it. It is important to note the need for criticality around race in schools. Therefore "CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9).

Moreover, power, harm, and retribution were areas that should be further explored and addressed. Teachers acquire power in their position, and they can ultimately harm Black students if they desire retribution over restoration in their approach to discipline. School leaders should have the final choice to hire teachers who are a good fit and meet the community's profile of an effective educator. School district and state policy should reflect minimum requirements necessary to teach or lead in this specific school district serving Black students located in the southeastern United States. The requirements should include social justice leadership, culturally competency, and culturally responsiveness. Moreover, teachers should be held accountable by policies that are first reviewed through a lens of justice and equity. Policies should be created

with Black children on the forefront. Additionally, another recommendation is the creation of policy that seeks parents' perspectives and when developing professional development for staff and curriculum for students. Findings from this study show that parents play an integral role in students' success and can have a tremendous impact on how students are disciplined in schools.

Finally, restorative practice instead of punitive discipline was leveraged by all five participants. While the Black leaders in this arts-based study relied on restorative practices and commended their district for starting the conversations around the positive impact it has on discipline and its place in schools, they illuminated the need for access to more training, specifically for teachers who are typically the ones who spend the most of their time engaging with Black students and reporting student misbehavior. This could address and review subjectiveness in discipline policy and how maximum consequences can be detrimental to Black students if teachers or leaders believe that Black students deserve punishment instead of an opportunity to learn from their mistakes. Developing policies can require all educators to be more thoughtful in their decisions which could help transform exclusionary anti-Black discipline, moreover, helping transform our greater society's perspective on discipline and the criminalization of Black bodies.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

While conducting this study, several future research questions were unearthed:

1. What are the varying perspectives of Black school leaders in the same building disciplining Black students depending on their role (assistant principal or principal)?
2. How do teacher and leader preparation programs prepare educators to grapple with double consciousness and anti-Blackness in schools?

3. What are different ways school districts provide formal support to Black school leaders regarding effective implementation of the student code of conduct?
4. How does disciplining Black students differ based on school overall demographics when the school leader is Black (High population of Black students v. low population of Black students)?
5. How do perspectives regarding disciplining Black students differ in the various grade levels (elementary, middle, and high)?

### **Conclusion**

This arts-based phenomenological study addressed three research questions related to the goals of this study (1) How have Black school leaders experienced discipline as students? (2) How do Black school leaders perceive double consciousness in their personal and professional lives? (3) What are the different perspectives that Black school leaders hold regarding their disciplinary practices of Black students within urban schools?

This study provided light into Black school leaders' view of race in schools, the ways they prepared Black students to one day deal with society's inequities, and how they perceived disciplining Black students. The findings in this study indicated that school leaders should be cognizant of their areas of growth and are accountable for Black students' sense of belonging and success in schools. Black school leaders in this study believe they have an additional responsibility to disrupt inequitable policies that harm, silence, and abuse Black children. This starts by modeling for other leaders, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, or socio-economic status how to be conscious disciplinarians, providing access to professional learning around alternatives to suspensions, and becoming culturally responsive leaders who cultivate gardens for Black children to grow authentically and freely.

**Figure 7***Poem: Hope Heals*

*There's hope in hallways  
 home to humble leaders  
 Who listen to silent cries  
 And who truly fight for  
 no child left behind  
 no Black faces at bottom of wells  
 bearing brilliance  
 Breaking statistics  
 stagnancy, and stained mirrors  
 These leaders who rather be  
 sentenced to seven years of bad luck  
 Than to believe in the brokenness  
 being depicted in mirrors  
 so they choose to  
 No longer bottle biased beliefs  
 about a culture confined to the  
 parameters of status quo  
 pouring out low expectations,  
 excuses, & passive aggression,  
 Imagine...  
 School vision statements  
 aligning along the side of change  
 Channeling triumph, perseverance, and resilience  
 Community building  
 Resistance  
 Refusal to just survive  
 Because the revolution will not be televised  
 but lifted in students' voice  
 Imagine if schools were places  
 Where children were given permission  
 to question the realities, they're presented.  
 Take a concept and critically and consciously push back  
 but school is more of "wait your turn, sit down listen and learn, I'm right you're wrong"  
 teach consequences and "so what if you're not ready, it's time to move on."  
 Imagine if we believed that our children were not tabula rasa  
 Blank canvases  
 But more like murals  
 Imagine if  
 Data digs  
 Demographic reviews  
 Revealed internalized oppression  
 Seeping from our children who've equated  
 White skin with distinguished*

*dark bodies with “do better”  
 Professional developments with  
 plans of action to dismantle institutionalized  
 methods that ostracize our children because they never been surfing...  
 can't relate to the test  
 set up over and over to prove that someone must be lower than the rest.  
 Imagine if  
 we utilize planning time to rise above policies that police our children  
 and frameworks that deny the importance of their existence or experiences.  
 Imagine not needing to slip in black jewels the hidden curriculum  
 No longer required to teach that running while black, or hoodies too low... raising your voice too  
 loud, staying in your own home or car can automatically equate to the last breath you take*

*Imagine if schools didn't have to  
 Mimic prison lines in hallways & self-isolation to rehabilitate  
 and teach lessons because “we got to prepare them for the real world”  
 if we cultivated and inspired liberators and freedom fighters*

*Imagine if  
 Seeping Silhouettes of Oscar, Sandra and Trayvon in history books instead of just Martin,  
 Mortaring for more than hashtags and a week of outrage  
 because we can't get no peace  
 Our dreams have been deferred  
 But this is the time  
 So, let's wake up and give our children the ability to take charge  
 And thrive*

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**APPENDICES****APPENDIX A**

Informed Consent

Georgia State University

Informed Consent

**Title:** *Black on Black school discipline: Double consciousness and the perspective of disciplining your own*

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Sheryl Cowart-Moss

**Student Principal Investigator:** Teruko Dobashi-Taylor

**Introduction and Key Information**

You are invited to take part in a research study conducted by Teruko Dobashi-Taylor of Georgia State University. It is up to you to decide if you would like to take part in the study. The purpose of this study is to illuminate the perceptions of Black school leaders who are responsible for disciplining Black students. Moreover, this study will explore how Black school leaders address double consciousness, implement culturally responsive practices, and uphold or develop policies that promote or police Blackness. Before you decide to participate, you should read this form and ask questions about anything you do not understand.

Your role in the study will last three hours over 8 weeks.

You will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in (2) 60–75-minute interviews (face-to-face or virtual)
- Submit a short online response/reaction to a poem (15-30 minutes)

Participating in this study will not expose you to any more risks than you would encounter in daily life, however, in the slight possibility of psychological risk, participants are entitled to seek free counseling services from Georgia State University by calling and scheduling an appointment using the following number 404-413-1640.

There is no benefit to participants in the study. The results of this study will provide evidence on Black school leaders and their perspectives around exclusionary discipline practices. Overall, this study hopes to gain information about Black school leaders' experience disciplining Black students. Participants could benefit from school leadership practices that arise from the study.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand how Black school leaders' experiences and perspectives regarding disciplinary practices impact their decision-making when disciplining Black students. This study will amplify Black school leaders' voices and experiences. This study hopes to add to the existing literature by examining how Black school leaders perceive their navigation through their personal experiences as a Black school leader responsible for disciplining Black students. Moreover, this study will explore how Black leaders grapple with double consciousness and approach disciplining students who look like them. You are invited to take part in this research study because you are a Black school leader working in a school with at least 10% of your student population being represented by Black students. A total of 10 people will be invited to take part in this study.

### **Procedures**

If you decide to take part, you will interact with the student principal investigator either in a public place of your choice or online using GSU webEx to complete the following:

- (2) Audio/video recorded semi-structured interviews (60-75 minutes each)

- (1) Response to poetry leveraging a secured online platform (15-30 minutes)

In total, you will commit to at least 2 hours and 15 minutes and at most 3 hours to participate in this study over the course of 8 weeks.

### **Future Research**

Researchers will remove information that may identify you and may use your data for future research. If we do this, we will not ask for any additional consent from you.

### **Risks**

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would on a normal day of life. No injury is expected from this study, but if you believe you have been harmed, contact the research team as soon as possible. You are entitled to receive free counseling services from Georgia State University by calling the following number: 404-413-1640.

### **Benefits**

This study is designed to benefit you personally. Overall, we hope to gain information about Black school leaders' perspectives of disciplining Black students.

### **Alternatives**

The alternative to taking part in this study is to decline participation in the study.

### **Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal**

You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. During the semi-structured interview and response to poetry, you may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

## **Confidentiality**

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and entities will have access to the information you provide:

- Teruko Dobashi-Taylor, Student P.I
- Dr. Sheryl Cowart-Moss, P.I
- GSU Institutional Review Board
- Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)

We will use a pseudonym of your choosing rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored in a locked cabinet, and password- and firewall-protected computers. Code sheets with pseudonyms and research participant names will be stored separately from the datasheet to protect participants' privacy.

When we present or publish the results of this study, we will not use your name or other information that may identify you.

- Code sheets will be deleted five years after the completion of the study.
- Audio/Video recordings will be password protected on a secure online platform for up to five years after the study's completion.
- Participants should be aware that data sent over the internet may not be secure, but the student P.I will work diligently to ensure data security by leveraging password-protected online platforms.

## **Contact Information**

Contact Teruko Dobashi-Taylor, (415) 815-7001, [tdobashitaylor1@student.gsu.edu](mailto:tdobashitaylor1@student.gsu.edu)

- If you have questions about the study or your part in it
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study

The IRB at Georgia State University reviews all research that involves human participants. You can contact the IRB if you would like to speak to someone who is not involved directly with the study. You can contact the IRB for questions, concerns, problems, information, input, or questions about your rights as a research participant. Contact the IRB at 404-413-3500 or [irb@gsu.edu](mailto:irb@gsu.edu).

### **Consent**

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

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Printed Name of Participant

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

---

Date

**APPENDIX B**

## Introductory Survey

**Enter Details****First Name \*****Last Name \*****Email \*****What is your age range? \*** 20-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 Other**Where are you originally from?**

Where did you get your degree(s) from?

What type of school do you serve as a leader? \*

Elementary School

Middle School

High School

How many years have you been a leader responsible for student discipline? (ex. 5 years as an AP and 12 years as a Principal) \*

To protect your privacy, I will be using a pseudonym. If you would like to choose your own code name, please include it here.

## APPENDIX C

### Semi-structured Interview Questions

#### Interview I Questions

1. Please describe your family type as far as your family's social-economic status growing up, demographics, and discipline structure.
2. Share your personal school trajectory growing up (type of school, demographics, location).
3. Describe your personal encounter with discipline (school or community). (How were you disciplined).
4. Please describe your current school.
5. What are your experiences with disciplining Black students?
6. How do you describe your style or approach to disciplining Black students?
7. “What role (if any) does race play in your personal life, professional life and in your leadership position?” (Jordan, 2018)
8. React to the working definition of double consciousness- What does it mean to you? (Jordan, 2018)

In 1903 W.E.B Du Bois coined double consciousness as the Black struggle in America. This is the idea that Black folks must consciously look unto the world with two perspectives. Double consciousness is examining the twoness that Black people must operate to maintain their Blackness and Americanness. According to Walker, being a cultural minority involves being a member of two diverse groups. One must abide by both sets of standards and evaluate oneself based on the judgment of others' perspectives (2018). Crawford & Bohan explain W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness as the belief that marginalized groups of people try to blend

themselves into the dominant culture by adopting multiple identities for survival (2019). Vinzant (2009) argued that double consciousness is the idea that Black leaders must progress their school forward while still situating themselves in Blackness that often disvalues and oppresses them in a White-dominated school system.

### **Interview II Questions**

- 1) Since we met, is there anything you would like to highlight or share from our first interview?
- 2) How would you describe the overall discipline experience for Black students in your school?
- 3) What do you think is essential to consider when disciplining Black students?
- 4) Tell me about some challenges you face when disciplining Black students?
- 5) Discuss your teacher demographics and any relation to your discipline philosophy and practices.
- 6) What are some informal/formal procedures that you rely on when disciplining Black students?
- 7) Which policies (district/state) have impacted your work?
- 8) How do you understand these policies and how do they interact with your race?
- 9) How does double consciousness (your perspective around race) impact your decision-making when disciplining (students who look like you) Black students?
- 10) What recommendations do you have for Black leaders or/and any leaders disciplining Black students?
- 11) What are your total years in education?
- 12) Is there anything else you would like to share?

## APPENDIX D

## Critical Poetry Response Template

*Poem:* when asked what i learned in  
elementary school being bussed from  
Mattapan to Wellesley

What they think is appropriate: to treat  
Black hair like a pregnant woman's belly,  
question if larger nostrils enhance breathing,  
probe my legs for extra calf muscles  
under skin our teacher said  
doesn't bruise because she can't see the  
blood  
-screams beneath.  
i learned to tolerate  
the frumpy lies of well-intentioned White  
women—bosoms heaving, eyes liquid with  
Reaganomics, Willie Horton and how they  
imagined my parents (a crack whore mother,  
an imprisoned father)  
—and their messianic attempts to save me  
from my stable home.  
i learned to master

Simon says skills; to be a chameleon; to  
code-switch; to bite my tongue instead of  
theirs; to make excuses for them, yet allow  
awkwardness to pant circles around heads  
asking what i prefer to be called  
(Colored? Negro? African  
American? Black?)  
never landing on my name.  
i learned to execute  
the affirmative action of elementary  
arithmetic—(effort 2 \* time)/x = equity; that  
history is an art painted in primary colors:  
White supremacy,  
White privilege, White fragility; that darker  
shades are plucked out, passed over: crayons  
reserved for trees, rocks, dirt; that other tales  
struggle to sing through the cacophony of  
the single story (slavery, civil rights  
poverty) muting a talented tenth; that i  
should be grateful. i learned to accept

that “Cohen” and “Karelitz” were nigger -  
names before  
my orange bus replaced their yellow stars;  
that kidssay the darndest things when  
grandparents remember the Shoah,  
unlike others whose ancestors held whips  
or felt pilgrim pride in the face of fallen  
feathers;  
i learned to endure the cultural appropriation  
of slang, when every bobby and becky  
becomes “my brothah,” “my sistah,”  
with teeth clenched, lips parted, hoping  
for the day they can reclaim “my nig. . .”.  
i learned to drink  
the cafeteria's chocolate milk, my back  
wall-braced; to never trust sudden  
movements; to fight for every inch of slide  
and swing, each paper mâché turtle i  
“couldn't have created on my own”; to  
recite “today's a good day to die”  
—  
every day  
—  
down checkered halls to my seat beside the  
office secretary, she who understood the  
intersection of round pegs and square holes;  
to enjoy solitary confinement recess; to  
admire the ants who rebuild their lives after  
every collapsing storm or malicious White  
sneaker.  
i learned that they think i can't swim.

Matthew E. Henley

Code Name or Name

Short answer text

---

What imagery is being created for you as the reader?

Long answer text

---

What are some themes you see present in the poem?

Long answer text

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Explain how any portion of this poem resonates with your experience as a Black student or relates to the experiences of your Black students?

Long answer text

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How might this poem relate to Black on Black school discipline and double consciousness?

Long answer text

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Is there anything else you would like to add?

Long answer text

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## APPENDIX E

## Example of Crystallization Process

| A  | B  | C  |
|--|--|--|
|  | Themes   | Participant Supporting Quotes  |
| <p>Research Question 1a: How have Black school leaders experienced discipline as students</p> <p>I1Q1: Please describe you family type SES and how you were disciplined at home?</p> <p>I1Q3: If you can you describe your personal encounter with discipline it can be school or dig deeper in the community or at home.</p> <p>Poem 3 Explain how any portion of this poem resonates with your experience as a Black student or relates to the experiences of your Black students?</p> | <p>I1Q1: Strict parents (1)</p> <p>I1Q1: Clear Expectations (1)</p> <p>I1Q1: Fear (1)</p> <p>I1Q3: Few &amp; Far in between discipline at school (1)</p> <p>I1Q3: Lack of cultural awareness/responsiveness led to discipline (2)</p> <p>I1Q3: No progressive discipline-straight to punitive</p> <p>I1Q3: Corporal punishment (3)</p> | <p>"My mother was a disciplinarian my mother ran the ship created the structures ruled with an iron fist" CF</p> <p>"But ever since I can remember, my mom has always been the disciplinarian. Always and my mother was strict." RH</p> <p>"Because my mother was such a disciplinarian, I really didn't have any issues growing up." RH</p> <p>"My dad is very strict you know my dad is extremely strict. When it comes to discipline, he canned you. If he doesn't feel like caning you, he will still punish you like caning you in your back. You have to get on your knees and I don't know if you have ever seen this discipline It's the worst that you can give you some. I preferred the cane." SM</p> <p>"She was a federal agent. Her role as a federal agent brought alot of structure and a level of strictness that is very different, so when I got a license at 16. We didnt have cell phones back then. She would have agents follow me and it was where are you driving and what did you notice?" SP</p> <p>"I think a lot of that came from my dad was military do what I say it was directions and I listened to the adults an authority and that carried over into school. I had some strict parents and my mom was an educator, going to school for the most part I did what I was supposed to do" ES</p> <p>"my mother was very very disciplined and turns it in terms of structure like we had strict rules in terms of cleaning up in terms of upholding what are responsibilities" CF</p> <p>"It was really like that so we knew what was expected so at school we didn't play around." CF</p> <p>"we knew what was acceptable, and we acclimated because we didn't want to be in trouble." RH</p> <p>"when I think about does my level of consciousness of surroundings coupled with how I view discipline a lot of that comes from a home life of a mom that had very high clear expectations like there wasn't a lot of guessing around what she expected of me. It was very clear. It was clear and it was consistent and it was unyielding." SP</p> <p>"so I knew what the expectation was everywhere I went and so whether it was school or in public" SP</p> <p>"At home is where the discipline started and ended. That's the discipline I feared, she would beat the hell out of us.." CF</p> <p>"My grandmother had 11 kids, so I have a whole lot of cousins because my mother had 10 brothers and sisters so anytime we are a pretty tight family. So it was 11-12 kids in a house with my grandmother when we would go visit. So when the kids got unruly, she would say you better chill out before I go get Iris. Iris is my mother of all the kids my mother was the one, so with that, discipline was a big part of me growing up." RH</p> <p>"So I wasn't I wasn't scared of sister mary katherine or Sister kay because I afraid of my momma. So I never had to get discipline there." SP</p> <p>"So, ironically, the most I had with school discipline was in 8th-9th grade I was jut bored in class so I would be like a smart alek in class, but never overtly disrespectful but sarcastic, I would try em" CF</p> <p>"I had one fight in high school and it wasn't a right, I didn't have the discipline experience too much." CF</p> <p>"So I did not misbehave at school uhhmm because I was taught not to misbehave in school. but of course every school every class</p> |
| <p>Interview I ▾ Interview II ▾</p>  | <p>Research Questions ▾</p>  |  |