

**Restorative Justice and the Discipline Gap:
Exploring the Impact of Restorative Practices on Racially Disproportional School
Discipline**

by

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University of Pittsburgh, 2018

Abstract

School suspensions and expulsions are frequently used throughout U.S. schools as a form of discipline or behavior modification. However, for the last four decades, students of color have been disproportionately excluded from school compared to their White peers. To address this disparity, districts across the nation are now utilizing relationship building interventions such as restorative practices to repair broken relationships in the school community. Schools using restorative practices are generally able to significantly reduce the total number of suspensions; however, racial disparities often remain. Guided by ecological systems theory and critical race theory, this mixed-methods study examined factors that contributed to the persistent discipline-gap at a school implementing restorative practices. Data are drawn from interviews, training observations, classroom observations, instrument data, and pre-post intervention discipline data. As demonstrated in the literature, findings demonstrate an overall reduction in school suspensions during the intervention year. However, the discipline gap remained leaving Black males 1.7 times more likely and Black females 1.3 times more likely to be suspended compared to all other students. Within gender, Black females had three times the suspension risk making the Black female discipline gap greater than the Black male discipline gap. A contributing factor to this racial disproportionality was the race-neutral implementation of the intervention. As a

race-neutral intervention, it did not account for the structural and interpersonal factors that sustain racial disparities. Further, findings suggest that punitive discipline policies and variable quality of intervention delivery conflicted with the relationship building aims of restorative practices. In all, an array of social, structural and implementation barriers impacted the intended delivery of the intervention. Implications for intervention research, policy, and school social work practice are discussed.

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1.0 CHAPTER 1

1.1 OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

Throughout the United States, students of color (SOC) are disproportionately suspended compared to their White counterparts (Office of Civil Rights, 2016). During the 2013-2014 academic year, Black K-12 students were 3.8 times as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension as their White counterparts (Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Research indicates that out-of-school suspensions are largely punitive and ineffective (Brown, Skiba & Eckes, 2009; Reynolds et al., 2008) and create negative long-term consequences. Further, school exclusion of students of color is often related to non-violent subjective behaviors such as defiance and disobedience, which include talking back to teachers and tardiness (Ayers, Dohrn, & Ayers, 2001; Hanson, 2005; Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Once a student is suspended, the student often enters a cyclical pattern of repeated suspensions (Brown, 2007), which may send them down the school-to-prison pipeline (Browne, 2005). Thus, to reduce the high and racially disproportional rate of school suspensions, school-wide interventions such as restorative practices are used. This form of intervention was used during the 2015-2016 academic year in a district-wide study conducted by a local non-profit organization. This dissertation documents and explores the implementation of restorative practices in one high school and examines the training,

implementation, and impact of restorative practices on school discipline. This study does not seek to critique participants or the school-site but instead provides a critical analysis of the way educators and students are situated within discipline policies. Specifically, this dissertation highlights practices that maintained racial disparities as overall suspensions declined.

In chapter two, I discuss the history of school suspensions in the U.S. and how they became racialized. Since the 1970s, school suspension rates have been higher for African-American students and students with disabilities (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014). Nonetheless, research indicates that student behavior is not the most significant predictor of school exclusion (Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002; Wallace et al. 2008).

I present evidence from the literature on the interpersonal and structural factors that sustain racialized discipline disparities. I subsequently describe studies using restorative practices to address high and racially disproportional suspensions. While most studies find an overall reduction in school suspensions, the rate of suspension for students of color compared to their White counterparts generally remains disparate (Gregory, Clawson & Davis, 2016; Simson, 2012, Skiba, 2015). This chapter also details tenets of restorative practices. I describe how restorative practices entail essential relationship building components that have shown to be successful in improving student-teacher relationships in urban schools. Both critical race theory and ecological systems theory are employed to guide inquiry.

In chapter three, I situate this dissertation study in the larger context of a randomized control trial conducted by a local non-profit and describe my role as research support staff on that project. Furthermore, I describe specific elements of the training and intervention that relate to relationship building and discipline ethos. This includes the underlying philosophies and

elements of restorative practices, which pertain to permissive vs. punitive discipline, restorative practices tools, types of circles, and specific questions used to address conflict.

In chapter four, I describe the overarching research goal of exploring the impact of restorative practices on racially disproportional suspensions. Subsequently I discuss my research questions, which pertain to suspension outcomes, intervention implementation, practices that influence discipline, and mechanisms that contribute to racialized discipline outcomes. This is followed by a description of my methodological approach, which included both qualitative and quantitative methods. My work was driven by qualitative methods and paired with quantitative analyses to produce a holistic understanding of discipline trends and outcomes. I further describe how my qualitative methodology was framed by critical race ethnography, thus exploring the connectedness between policy, practice, and racialized discipline outcomes. As such, I use ethnographic observation, systematic observations, semi-structured interviews, school-site artifacts, regional reports and school policy as data with which to conduct qualitative analyses. Quantitative analyses include descriptive statistics, relative risk ratios and binary logistic regression to analyze school attendance data for suspension outcomes. Finally, correlational analysis was used to assess instrument data. Next, I discuss the selection of the study site and description of the school district, including enrollment rates, suspension trends across race, gender, and infractions. Subsequently I describe the recruitment process, participant characteristics, and the *Eleven Essential Elements* of the *Safer Saner Schools*® restorative practice model. Moreover, I discuss the qualitative data analysis process, which included pattern coding, inductive, deductive coding and memoing. Finally, I present my positionality and measures taken to assure validity.

In chapter five, I respond to the research question, will the case-study school decrease its racial disproportionality in school exclusions during the 2015-2016 intervention year compared to the 2014-2015 pre-intervention year? Thus, I compare pre-intervention year and intervention year data through descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression. Results indicate that overall suspensions were decreased at the school site compared to the intervention year. However, students of color remained disproportionately suspended during the intervention year. In addition, I disaggregate suspension data across race and gender to report on gender-related suspension trends. Within gender data analyses indicate that Black girls had more than three times the risk of suspension compared to all other girls. These findings underscore the implications of data disaggregation and an intersectional methodological framing in school suspension research.

In chapter 6, I contribute to the literature that explains how restorative practices often reduce overall school suspensions without addressing the discipline gap. To explore the factors that contributed to this outcome, this chapter addresses the following research questions: (1) how do educators apply restorative practices? (2) What factors influence the way that restorative practices are implemented? Thus, I describe how restorative practice circles were used, the quality of circles facilitated, and factors that were barriers or facilitators of the intervention. Overall, I present how race-neutral implementation, punitive policies, staff discipline ethos and structural barriers hindered the effectiveness of restorative practices and thus their potential to address the discipline-gap.

In chapter 7, I respond to the overarching research question: how does the case-study school use restorative practices to address discipline? I also respond to the question: what factors

influence the way restorative practices were implemented? Drawing from observations, artifacts and interview data, findings suggest that educators' discipline ethos, policy and practice conflicts, and unintended consequences of policy and practice all influence the way the intervention was implemented. Specifically, I describe how punitive policies leading to automatic detention and suspension disrupted the relationship building aims of restorative practices.

In chapter 8, I address the following research question: in a school where restorative practices reduce overall school suspensions, why do racially disproportional school suspensions remain? Using critical race theory as a guiding framework, I first call attention to the race-neutral implementation of the intervention. I subsequently highlight the deficit discourses on race within the school and how staff members' lack of understanding of racial disparities then perpetuate inequitable practices. I next describe the presence of whiteness – an illusive construct that students are measured against and punished for not exhibiting. I then present the way that the standardization of whiteness and inconsistent discipline practices contribute to elements of “student push-back” that are student reactions to inequity. Finally, I discuss how these concepts work together to create racialized discipline trends as exhibited in the overrepresentation of Black and Brown students in afterschool detention. I conclude that restorative practices from their inception at the school lacked key factors that could facilitate the reduction of disparities. Namely, without race critical, structurally transformative, and explicit focus on equity, the intervention became an add-on training tool unable to dismantle the interpersonal and systemic practices that contributed to disproportionality.

In chapter 9 I describe the significance of the overall findings. I frame the findings within ecological systems theory and critical race theory describing how structural, social and interpersonal factors impacted the way that restorative practices were delivered.

First, I describe how punitive discipline policies contributed to suspension outcomes and thus hindered the less-punitive aims of restorative practices. I then discuss how intervention barriers such as lack of time or limited circle questions hindered the quality of restorative practice circles facilitated. I follow this by describing the race-neutral application of the intervention and how this fostered inequitable discipline practices and racialized discipline outcomes. Implications for practice, policy and interventions with diverse populations are discussed.

Finally, to assure anonymity for individual participants and the school district, participant names and the name of the school district have been changed. To create anonymity for participants, the gender pronoun and/or position for some participants were also changed. Finally, to protect the identity of the district, associated articles were used but not cited in this dissertation.

2.0 CHAPTER 2

In chapter two, I discuss the history of school suspensions in the U.S. and how discipline outcomes became racialized. For the last 50 years, Black students have been disproportionately suspended. Yet, research indicates that student behavior is not the most significant predictor of school exclusion (Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002; Wallace et al. 2008). Thus, I present evidence from the literature on the social and policy related factors that contribute to the discipline gap. This chapter also details tenets of restorative practices and I describe how schools are using restorative practices to address high and disproportional suspensions. Both critical race theory and ecological systems theory are discussed and used to shape inquiry.

2.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Out-of-school suspension and expulsion are exclusionary school discipline methods frequently used within U.S. public schools (Cameron, 2006). Currently, students of color are overrepresented in school exclusions across the United States (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2013; Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014). Although disciplinary exclusions are intended to curb problematic behavior and ensure school safety for all (Brown et

al., 2009), there often are significant short and long-term harmful effects on the suspended student, such as poor academic achievement, school dropout, and later incarceration (Edelman, Beck, & Smith, 1975; Mendez, 2003; Skiba, 2015). Both national and statewide efforts have attempted to find alternatives to suspensions and ways to reduce these harmful outcomes (Brown, 2007, Cregor & Hewitt, 2011; Wald & Losen, 2003). Currently, interventions such as restorative practices show promise for reducing school-wide suspensions (Gregory, Clawson, Davis and Gerewitz 2016; Lewis, 2009; Simson, 2012; Skiba, 2015). Yet, less is known about their effectiveness for reducing racial discipline disparities (Skiba, 2015). Therefore, this study examines the implementation and impact of restorative practices on discipline disparities at a high school.

Restorative justice is a framework and practice focused on building and repairing relationships (Restorative Practices Development Team, 2003; Wearmouth, Mckinney, & Glynn, 2007). When “harm” is committed, a restorative model suggests that a student is held accountable for his/her behavior via non-hierarchical dialogue with the individuals or community impacted (Mullet, 2014; Suvall, 2009; Teasley, 2014). This is facilitated through meetings or conferences in which the ‘offender’ acknowledges their wrongdoing in front of the ‘victim’ (Restorative Practices Development Team, 2003). The offender subsequently works to construct a way to repair the harm done (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2009). With core social work values of social justice, advocacy, and ecological approaches (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010; Gumz & Grant, 2009; Rothery, 2008), school social workers are uniquely situated to engage restorative practices in schools (Teasley, 2014). However, there is currently limited school social work literature addressing school discipline (Cameron & Sheppard, 2006) and

limited literature on the school-based application of restorative practices (Teasley, 2014). This study aims to contribute to knowledge by assessing how educators, administrators and school social workers apply and interact with restorative practices. Restorative practices are also used to address harm or violations committed by adults within the school setting (Costello et al., 2009). This mutually accountable process has promise to become a needed gateway for discipline equity and in one study was associated with a reduction of out-of-school suspensions (Anyon et al., 2014). This is particularly important in addressing racially disproportional suspensions, which involve policies, student behavior, and adult bias towards students of color. However, additional research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of restorative practices on reducing racially disproportional suspensions (Skiba, 2015). As such, the focal aim of this dissertation study is to investigate how these practices impact discipline practices across race.

2.2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.2.1 History

Until the 1960s, U.S. schools legally operated under the concept of “in loco parentis,” which was an English common law indicating that a school should take authority over a student in the stead of his/her parents (Brady, 2002; Brown, Skiba, & Eckes, 2009). In this position, schools maintained the responsibility to ensure that the child received appropriate discipline in order to meet educational objectives (Brady, 2002). School discipline more broadly is a way to maintain a safe environment for staff and learners while simultaneously teaching students

appropriate interpersonal behaviors (Brown et al., 2009). Corporal punishment was the initial discipline method used by schools until it was largely replaced by school exclusion in the 1960s (Brown et al., 2009). Out-of-school suspension is guided by the notion that excluding a student will deter inappropriate behavior, maintain a safe school environment, and/or provide a ‘cooling-off’ period for the student (American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP], 2003). It is further used to call parental attention to a child’s problematic behavior and provide respite for involved school staff (AAP, 2003). In contrast, in-school suspension only excludes a student from the classroom and, in turn, is less disruptive to the educational process, as the student still receives instruction (Allman & Slate, 2011; Dupper, Theriot, & Craun, 2009). Finally, expulsion is a school discipline practice used to permanently exclude a student from school when behavior is egregious and a safety risk (AAP, 2003).

By 1975, concerns about excessive exclusion arose after a report by the Children’s Defense Fund revealed that one million students were suspended or expelled during the 1972-1973 academic year (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Zeidenberg, 2000; Edelman, Beck, & Smith, 1975). This report also indicated that black students were disproportionately suspended (Edelman, Beck, & Smith, 1975). As discipline practices conflicted with student rights, legal proceedings reshaped school exclusion practices (Brown et al., 2009). By 1975, the *Gross v. Lopez* case afforded students due process, declared education as a ‘property interest,’ and limited suspensions to a 10-day period (Brady, 2002, p.171; Brown et al., 2009). As a property interest, a student’s education could not undergo ‘limitless revocation,’ which would be a violation of a student’s Fourteenth Amendment rights (Brady, 2002, 171). Despite the *Gross v. Lopez* proceedings, suspensions later increased to 3.1 million per year during the 1990s, even while

student enrollment remained about the same between 1970-1990 (Lafolla, n.d. as cited in Hanson, 2005). Today, many scholars cite “zero tolerance” policies as the central catalyst in the recent rapid growth in school exclusions (Brown et al., 2009; Teasley, 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003).

2.2.2 Zero Tolerance Policies

Zero tolerance policies were initiated due to growing public concern about the violence threatening the safety of children and teachers in schools (Brady, 2002; Vilarruel & Dunbar, 2002). This public concern instigated the development of the 1994 Gun Free Schools Act that became the first federal effort to address school discipline and began the creation of zero tolerance policies (Hanson, 2005). Attention to zero tolerance policies was especially fervent after the 1999 deadly school shooting at Columbine High School where twelve students and one teacher were killed while 23 others were injured (Brady, 2002). Zero tolerance policies required schools receiving federal funding to suspend for one year, any student in possession of a weapon (Brady, 2002; Hanson, 2005). Immediate and predetermined suspensions were also assigned for violent behavior and possession of drugs (Hanson, 2005).

Zero tolerance policies were also applied to the possession of objects that resembled weapons (Vilarruel & Dunbar, 2006). In some cases, objects such as a stiletto high heel shoe or toy gun were considered weapons (American Civil Liberties Union of Florida et al., 2011; Dunbar & Vilarruel, 2002). Critics have scrutinized the use of zero tolerance policies for non-firearm or drug related offenses, as they have led to subjective application and greater rates of

punishment for students of color for subjective behaviors (Ayers, Dohrn, & Ayers, 2001; Hanson, 2005; Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Others cite zero tolerance policies as the central catalyst in the rapid growth in school exclusions across the United States (Brown et al., 2009; Teasley, 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003).

Zero tolerance policy amendments were later made through the No Child Left Behind Act to limit the number of students who were being suspended for weapon-less behaviors (Hanson, 2005). Despite this, high levels of suspension persisted (Annamma, Morrison, & Jackson, 2014; Dupper, 2010; Spiller & Porter, 2014). In response, the Obama administration and various advocates called for an end in the use of zero tolerance policies (Spiller & Porter, 2014). However, without any legislation to mandate this, zero tolerance policies are still a threat to school discipline equity.

2.2.3 Racial Disproportionality

Early speculations on racially disproportional suspensions were made by Derrick Bell (1976), who suggested that racial integration through *Brown vs. Board of Education* would cause African American students to be disproportionately disciplined. Today, scholars are better able to measure suspension patterns and how they relate to practice and policy (Pernell, 1990; Skiba, 2002). During the 2013-2014 academic year, Black K-12 students were 3.8 times more likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions than their White peers (OCR, 2016). Further, Black girls accounted for 8% of students enrolled and 13% of students receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions (OCR, 2016). A study using 15 years of nationally representative data

found that the Black/White discipline gap among girls is larger than the Black/White discipline gap among boys (Wallace et al., 2008).

Disproportional exclusions are also found among students with disabilities. Specifically, White males with disabilities accounted for one out-of-10 students receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions while males of color accounted one out of five (OCR, 2016). Not only are students of color more likely to be suspended than all other students, research indicates that African American and Latino students are more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts when exhibiting the same behavior (Anyon et al., 2014; Skiba, Shure & Williams, 2011). Thus racially disproportional suspensions have persisted for decades and a growing body of research suggests that such disproportionality cannot solely be explained by greater misbehavior among students of color (Anyon et al., 2014; Wallace et al., 2008).

Gregory and colleagues (2010) demonstrate that factors such as low-SES, anti-social behavior, academic difficulties, and living in a violent neighborhood may correlate with school suspensions, but they do not completely explain the discipline gap. Instead, teacher and school level factors still significantly contribute to suspensions, even after controlling for socio-economic status (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011). Therefore, moving disproportionality analysis beyond student behavior and SES brings to attention the role that policy enactment (American Civil Liberties Union of Florida et al., 2011; Figlio, 2006) and implicit and explicit biases have on discipline trends (Monroe, 2005). Examples supporting the latter claims of bias and policy are both rooted within adult attitudes toward students. For example, teachers' misunderstanding of the non-verbal communication patterns displayed by students of color and low-income students may lead them to interpret these students' behaviors

as confrontational and threatening (Townsend, 2000). This is repeatedly verified in suspension statistics, which show that students of color are more likely to be excluded for subjective violations such as insubordination, threat, and defying authority (Ayers, Dohrn, & Ayers, 2001; Hanson, 2005; Mendez & Knoff, 2003). These examples of cultural misunderstanding underscore the need for better cultural competence and relationship building tools and interventions to be used by educators.

2.2.4 The Impact of Suspensions

School suspensions have long been associated with negative short and long-term consequences on students (Edelman, Beck, & Smith, 1975; Mendez, 2003; Skiba, 2015). Among the myriad outcomes are poor academic achievement (Brown, 2007), depreciated student-teacher relationships (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010), increased likelihood for student anti-social behavior (Hemphill et al., 2006), repeat future suspensions (Dupper et al., 2009), higher dropout rates, greater chance of later incarceration (Cregor & Hewitt, 2011; Wald & Losen, 2003) and negative mental health outcomes (Brady, 2002). Studies have also described the economic impact of suspensions on schools and the community (Losen, Hewitt, & Toldson, 2014). Specifically, research indicates that state education funding is lost as school suspensions are associated with student grade repetition and school drop-out (Marchbanks, Blake, Booth, Carmichael, Seibert & Fabelo, 2015). School suspensions are also associated with crime involvement, later public assistance use and incarceration; these outcomes equate to long term costs reaching billions of dollars (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, & Marchbanks, 2011;

Losen, Hewitt, & Toldson, 2014; Rumberger & Losen, 2016). Subsequent paragraphs detail these outcomes and the potential for restorative practices to curb discipline rates.

2.2.5 Impact on Mental Health

School discipline can lead to negative psychological outcomes (Brady, 2002). The emotional impact of school discipline in general can include internalized ‘anger, humiliation, shame, and anxiety’ (Rothstein, 1984 as cited in Cameron & Sheppard, 2006). Other research suggests that retributive school discipline can lead to ‘discipline-based trauma’ leading to PTSD like symptoms (Cameron & Sheppard, 2006, p.17). Additionally, suspended students are less likely to receive the psychological or behavioral services they may need (AAP, 2003). In sum, with limited research to suggest that exclusions even deter problematic behavior (AAP, 2003; Mendez, 2003), suspended students can have increased socio-emotional and psychological vulnerability without the needed support for recovery.

2.2.6 Academic Achievement

Since academic engagement is the strongest predictor of academic achievement (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002), out-of-school suspensions inherently hinder a student’s opportunity for academic success. The impact of school suspension is long lasting and early school suspension often serves as a significant predictor of later academic difficulties (Mendez, 2003). Further, there often is an underlying ‘push-out’ effect among students who are at-risk or who are performing poorly (American Civil Liberties Union of Florida et al., 2010, p. 4). Work

by Figlio (2006) supports this notion with findings indicating that low-performing students were more likely to be suspended when schools were administering high-stakes tests. This tactic was used to maintain high average test scores by preventing low-performing students from taking the test (Figlio, 2006). There are also pronounced negative academic outcomes for youth characterized as ‘at-risk’ (Craun, 2009; Dupper, Theriot). School suspensions for this population often expose them to increased conflicts outside of school, a greater likelihood for future suspensions, and a greater chance for dropout (Craun, 2009; Dupper, Theriot).

2.2.7 The School-to-Prison Pipeline

One of the most pronounced outcomes within school suspension literature is later incarceration (Wald & Losen, 2003). Research now confirms the presence of the ‘school-house to jail-house’ relationship and how it has been exacerbated by zero tolerance policies (Brown, 2005, p. 7; Morrison, & Jackson, 2014). Now that school misbehavior is more frequently criminalized under zero tolerance policies, infractions once disciplined by suspension have become a matter for the juvenile justice system (Browne, 2005; Carter, Fine & Russell, 2014). During the 2013-2014 academic year, Black students were 2.2 times as likely to receive law enforcement referral or become involved with school-related arrests as their White counterparts (OCR, 2016).

Law enforcement presence in schools is now commonplace (Losen, Hewitt, & Kim, 2010). Specifically, 24% of elementary schools and 42% of high schools had sworn law enforcement officers during the 2013-2014 academic year (OCR, 2016). Law enforcement

surveillance is partly attributed to grants issued to schools through the Department of Justice (Cregor & Hewitt, 2011). One example of this is the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS; Cregor & Hewitt, 2011). The intent of this funding is to provide school-based law enforcement that will help maintain safer schools. However, given the increased criminalization of students for minor infractions under zero tolerance policies, COPS personnel also become gatekeepers pushing youth through the school-to-prison pipeline (Cregor & Hewitt, 2011).

Factors contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline include ‘systematic suspensions, expulsions, discouragement, and high-stakes testing’ (Browne, 2005, p. 11). Another study found that students who attended alternative education schools after being excluded from their neighborhood schools were likely to be later incarcerated (Losen, Hewitt, & Kim, 2010; Losen, Hewitt). Research examining school suspension in Chicago, Denver, and Palm Beach found that Black and Latino students were disproportionately represented in the school-to-prison pipeline (Browne, 2005). In addition to these correlational findings, a six-year statewide study in Texas found that school exclusions tripled a students’ chances of being involved with the justice system (Fabelo et al., 2010). This trend has been partly associated with school policing and zero tolerance policies (Browne, 2005).

Further concerning is the overrepresentation of students of color with special educational needs who are within the school-to-prison pipeline (Annamma, Morrisson & Jackson 2014; Tulman & Weck, 2009). Using state level data from Colorado, scholars used spatial analysis to provide visual representation of the school-to-prison pipeline (Annamma, Morrisson & Jackson, 2014). Specifically, they mapped the overrepresentation of students of color involved in school discipline and the juvenile justice system showing the ubiquity of the school-to-prison pipeline

throughout Colorado (Annamma, Morrisson & Jackson, 2014). The punitive ethos of school exclusion is now backed by zero tolerance policies, which have created pipelines to prisons across the U.S. In total, both the student and society pay long-term consequences for the over usage of school suspensions as a discipline method. Together, the potential disruption of a student's academic potential and life-course suggest that schools are in dire need of alternatives to suspension.

2.3 REVIEW OF INTERVENTIONS

During President Barack Obama's tenure as president, federal and state level initiatives supported the use of comprehensive and multi-tiered school-wide intervention initiatives (USDOE, 2014). These have included school-wide behavioral intervention supports (SWPBIS) and restorative justice practices (USDOE, 2014). Although typically race neutral, scholars propose that these school-wide, equality-focused interventions can be designed to respond to highly specified and individualized student needs (Sugai & Horner, 2002). It is also speculated that generalized interventions could be effective in racial disparity reduction when guided by equity frameworks (Skiba, 2015). The Department of Education and Department of Justice previously supported this notion as outlined within the 2014 jointly produced, *Guiding principles: A resource guide for improving school climate and discipline* guidance document. This guidance packet acknowledges racial and intellectual disability suspension disparities; however, its guiding principles for improving school climate only makes an obscure mention of

these groups using the term ‘at-risk’. Instead, the following reflect the three guiding principles outlined within this document: (1) climate and prevention (2) expectations and consequences and (3) equity and continuous improvement (p. 2-3). Hence, the guidance is supportive of equity focused race neutral interventions. This initiative was also supported by a \$50 million dollar backing for states to address school climate by way of ‘tiered supports’ like school-wide positive behavior intervention supports (SWPBIS) (DOE, 2014, p.5). Thus, in the following section I present the literature on SWPBIS and restorative justice practices (RP), both multi-tiered interventions. In addition, I critique the race-neutral application of these interventions with a review of the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy.

School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (SWPBIS). SWPBIS is frequently used and maintains commitment to several core supportive principles. Fundamental components of SWPBIS include: (1) a school-wide commitment to 3-5 behavior standards, (2) supporting students to remember these standards through a variety of mechanisms (3) supporting positive student actions (4) a clearly communicated range of penalties for violation of rules (5) and regular assessment of behavioral data to properly track student progress within the outlined positive behavioral supports (Sprague & Horner, 2006; Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2002). Given its established tenure in school climate reform and recent support through the DOE’s *Supportive School Discipline Initiative*, SWPBIS and PBS have been used in school districts across the country with varied success (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Using K-12 data from four academic years between 2005-2009 in a Los Angeles School district, Chin et al. (2010) analyzed change in suspension rates before and after district SWPBIS intervention. Findings support that K-12 suspensions, expulsions, and ‘opportunity transfers’

decreased by 13.3%, 55.6% and 31.7%, respectively when SWPBIS were used (p.7-8). However, findings disaggregated by race and ability yielded less encouraging results during the 2007-2008 school year with African-American and SEN students being suspended at twice the rate of other students. By the 2008-2009 academic year, suspension was three times greater for African-American and SEN students than the rest of the student population (Chin et al., 2010). Overall, disproportionality still remained with African-Americans representing 45.4% of suspensions, 46.3% of the total expulsions, and 36.9% of transfers during the 2007-2008 while only representing 19% of the population (Chin et al. 2010). Though SWPBIS only became a partial victory for suspension reduction in this Los Angeles district, other studies show results that are more positive.

In a study by Tobin and Vincent (2011), the efficacy of SWPBIS to reduce suspensions was assessed across 46 schools including Colorado (n=3), Illinois (n=1), Maryland (n=12), and Michigan (n=30). Initial results revealed that African American students were suspended at three times the rate of their White peers. Researchers then sought to evaluate if use of specific SWPBIS assessed through the teacher Effective Behavior Support Survey (EBS) were associated with a decrease in relative rate index (RRI), a measure of disproportionality. The study found a significant RRI reduction within the classroom subscale ($R^2 = .52$, adjusted ($R^2 = .36$, $F(11, 34) = 3.312$, $p = .004$) associated with 'positive reinforcement' $\beta = -.812$ ($p = .003$). RRI was similarly reduced by a scale item representing 'orderly transitions' between classroom and non-classroom spaces at $\beta = -.606$ ($p = .014$) (p. 195). Follow-up analysis further substantiated the use of SWPBIS by evaluating schools with the highest time 2 scores on the Effective Behavior Support Survey (EBS). Schools with the highest EBS scores also were similarly successful in reducing

disproportionality. Items associated with RRI reduction were: (1) problematic student behavior consistently reported to a committee, (2) consistent ‘training and support’ for the committee and (3) the student received approximately 10 hours of ‘assessment-based behavior support planning’ (p. 197). Taken together, these findings suggest that when praise and positive reinforcement were used, suspension disproportionality decreased. This was especially among schools where discipline committees kept track and monitored student behaviors and were consistently supported and trained throughout the process.

Over 500 schools have implemented SWPBIS since 2002 (Sugai & Homer, 2002). As displayed above, the results can vary significantly. Little is known about the comparative fidelity of intervention implementation at the different sites. Chin et al. (2010) critique the internal validity of this study by indicating inability to account for the reporting and data entry accuracy in school suspension data. They also suggest that differential implementation of SWPBIS contributed to the poor outcomes among SOC. Additionally, Tobin and Vincent (2011) critique their study by suggesting that a larger school sample size would be needed to support generalizability. Despite these challenges it remains evident that SWPBIS is a promising tool for overall school suspension reduction. Although neither study makes a claim to support race-based strategy adaptations to SWPBIS, Tobin and Vincent’s (2011) finding that positive behavioral supports of praise and positive reinforcement were successful for Black students is consistent with literature on culturally relevant pedagogy and practice. This literature supports that caring is essential to educate SOC in urban schools (Brown, 2004). Culturally relevant literature similarly supports that this entails assertiveness, authority, high expectations, and general concern toward

the student (Brown, 2004; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008); hence ‘praise and positive reinforcement.

Restorative Justice (RJ) Practices. Restorative justice is a practice originally used to address the impact of criminal actions on others (Gums & Grant, 2009). It was developed as an alternate vehicle to remediate loss to individuals and the community instead of using the criminal justice system (Gums & Grant, 2009). Additionally, the ‘offender’ is held accountable before the ‘victim’ and the community by acknowledging wrongdoing and co-constructing a means to restore justice (p.119). Applied in the school setting, restorative practices have become an alternative to immediate suspensions under zero-tolerance policies (Teasley, 2014). Students are held accountable for their behaviors in front of the individuals they impacted as well as the larger impacted school community to rebuild relationships (Mullet, 2014; Teasley, 2014). In turn, use of restorative practices as an alternative to school exclusions has become well received as it is less punitive and has greater potential for long term impact (Mullet, 2014; Simson, 2012).

As a multi-tiered intervention, restorative practices also include harm reduction and relationship-building practices that respond to the needs of small groups, large groups, and individuals (González, 2012). As such, an evaluation of the efficacy of restorative practices is largely an investigation of the process, performance, and perceptions of relationship building. Thus, in schools where student-teacher trust has deteriorated, the relationship development capacities of restorative practices have the potential to create an environment fit to build partnership and establish a trusting and caring ethos. This potential coincides with research supporting that effective work with urban students of color includes a caring learning environment (Brown, 2004) and positive teacher-student relationships (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan,

2011). Thus, if comprehensively implemented, restorative practices have the potential to produce classroom environments that will facilitate success for students of color.

A study by Gregory and colleagues (2014) exemplifies the potential for restorative practices in diverse classrooms as it captured lower classroom referral rates with higher use of restorative practices. Findings support that students of varying ethnicities felt that restorative practices were implemented equally in their classroom and led students to feel that their teachers respected them. Subsequent results indicated that teachers implementing a higher degree of restorative practices were less likely to engage exclusionary discipline practices both generally and across race. These findings reflect the relationship building capacities of restorative practices and their potential to impact whether discipline referrals are used.

Since restorative practices require relationship development, an educator that can effectively evaluate their own culture and that of others is also better able to develop culturally-responsive pedagogical skills in praxis (APA, 2003, Gay, 2005, Ladson-Billings, 1990). Teachers who pursue self-knowledge can begin to differentiate “cultural values and behavioral codes” across class and race (Gay, 2005, p. 234) by exploring other cultures (APA, 2003). This is important as cultural incongruence between student and teacher often lend itself to misinterpretation of behaviors (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2005; Irvin, 1990) and possibly negative beliefs.

2.3.1 Culturally Relevant Interventions

Given the reduction in overall suspension rates, both RJ and SWPBIS are useful interventions. However, because they are interventions made for the general population, there is limited specific attention to racial disparities in discipline. Monroe (2005) makes a similar claim in a description of culturally relevant disciplinary practices. Part of this includes having an ethnically diverse school staff as well as providing cross-cultural training for teachers in a context of school discipline. Similarly, Darensbourg, Perez, and Blake (2010) support the use of collaboration models with teachers and opportunities for cultural competency training. Work by Gay (2005) supports that teachers are often better able to educate students who are most culturally congruent with them. This congruence aids the learning process and allows for unspoken cultural understanding. In contrast, the behaviors of students that do not align culturally with their teachers are often misunderstood which can hinder student-teacher relationship development (Gay, 2005).

In all, there still lacks a critical mass of evidence-based interventions to address racial suspension disproportionality (Skiba, 2015). Given the centrality of relationship building for increased student-teacher understanding, the combined tenets of restorative practices and culturally responsive practices may have the potential to address racial discipline disparities. Specifically, the restorative practices model from the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP) is supportive of exploring “self-knowledge” (Gay, 2005, p. 234) through regular self-reflection of praxis (Costello et al., 2009). The IIRP restorative practices model includes information on self-assessment, critical reflection, and emotional intelligence (Costello et al.,

2009). Given the close alignment of restorative practices with important elements of culturally responsive praxis, successful implementation has the potential to curtail discipline disparities. As such, this study evaluates the influence of the relationship building mechanisms within restorative practices on school discipline outcomes. The subsequent section provides a detailed review of literature on the use of restorative practices to reduce high and racially disproportional school suspension rates.

2.3.2 Historical Development of Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is a practice originally used by the indigenous Maori tribes of New Zealand (Gums & Grant, 2009). The practices used by the Maori were a way to respond to offense or wrongdoing between individuals or between an individual and the community (Wearmouth, et al., 2007). Unlike Western societal practices that prioritize punitive retribution and punishment (Mulligan, 2009), restorative practices foster relationship development and restoration through mediation and respect (Gregory, Allen, Mikami, Hafen, & Pianta, 2014; Mirsky & Wachtel, 2007; Wearmouth, et al., 2007). This is supported by underlying values of “openness, empowerment, inclusion, tolerance, [and] integrity...” (Hopkins, 2004, p. 38). Mediation through meetings also known as conferences or circles have been a staple of the original restorative practices found among the Maori (Wearmouth et al., 2007). This is often operationalized through traditional practices that begin with greetings, a focus on the problem instead of a person, establishing group goals for the meeting, and obtaining multiple sides of the story (Restorative Practices Development Team, 2003, p. 20). It also follows to include

assessment of the times and locations that the problem is not present, how the problem impacts others, how “amends” or restoration can take place, strategies to overcome the harm, agreed upon next steps, and what new information can be gleaned from the collective inquiry (Restorative Practices Development Team, 2003, p. 20). These steps elucidate a sense of collectivism and validation of those affected by a problem. As such, restorative justice is often described as a framework (Hargens, 2009) or a philosophy (Vaandering, 2013). Consequently, restorative justice or restorative practices are guidelines for interaction that support relationship development and making amends between individuals and the associated community (Hopkins, 2004; Vaandering, 2013).

As a practice used to bring justice and restoration between individuals or communities, restorative practices have been both adopted and adapted for more than 30 years (Mulligan, 2009) by many communities, organizations, and companies across the world (Gums & Grant, 2009). As a philosophy with no linear or absolute rules for implementation (Gregory et al., 2014; International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2014), restorative justice has been adopted in whole or part by legal systems in Canada, Hong Kong, Israel, South Africa, countries throughout Western Europe, and the United States (Burkemper, Balsam, & Yeh, 2007; Gums & Grant, 2009). Its central and distinguishing feature from traditional criminal justice practices is the shift of retributive practices from the state to one holding the offender accountable for restoration of wrongs done to the victim or community (Burkemper et al., 2007). As modeled by the Maori, it is also a gateway to restoration through structured and purposeful communication and dialogue (Bradshaw & Roseborough, 2005; Restorative Justice Development Team, 2003). This has been

a key feature among the countries and organizations that adopt restorative practices and have been welcomed in select North American justice systems (Burkemper et al., 2004).

The use of restorative justice in the United States' legal system is a relatively new practice compared to some European nations (Burkemper, et al., 2004). Restorative justice is not only used to remediate loss to individuals and the community but is sometimes an alternative to the immediate use of criminal justice procedures (Gums & Grant, 2009). This is done by holding the 'offender' accountable before the 'victim' and the community by acknowledging wrongdoing and co-constructing a means to restore justice (Restorative Practices Development Team, 2003, p.119). Restorative practices have also found particular success in juvenile justice systems across many countries (Gal & Moyal, 2011; Morris & Maxwell, 2001; Rodriguez, 2007). They have been cited for positive change in the attitudes and behavior of students in alternative schools and day treatment programs (Mirsky & Wachtel, 2007) and even reduction of recidivism among former offending youth (Rodriguez, 2007). Given their original success among the Maori tribes of New Zealand and across many criminal justice systems throughout the world, restorative practices have subsequently proliferated among schools (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016; International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2014; Restorative Practices Development Team, 2003; Vaandeering, 2013).

The use of restorative justice was first applied in schools in Australia and was later incorporated in U.S. schools (González, 2012) as a counter to the 1990s influx of suspensions under zero tolerance policies (Teasley, 2014). As a framework and practice, students are held accountable for their behavior via "non-hierarchical dialogue" with the individuals or community they have impacted (Mullet, 2014; Suvall, 2009, p. 507, Teasley, 2014). Keeping to the early

restorative justice traditions of the indigenous tribes of New Zealand, dialogues include disclosure of guilt, community reflection of harm caused (“reintegrative shaming”), and re-entry into the community (Gunz & Grant, 2009; Suvall, 2009, p. 559). Following the tradition of dialogue, respect and justice, New Zealand schools implementing restorative practices do so by addressing the problem of concern, helping students understand the impact of the problem on others and the school community, encouraging students to take responsibility towards change, distancing restorative practices from shame and blame, and encouraging the “healing of hurt” (Wearmouth, et al., 2007, p. 40). These practices are rooted in the idea that harm or offense is done to individuals and not to the school; thus, punishment is not always a primary outcome (Restorative Justice Development Team, 2003). With the central focus on individual/community, restorative practices can be defined as the repairing of relationships of those involved in a conflict. This becomes a platform for accountability and reform which is characterized by the offender admitting their offense, all involved parties voicing their experiences, group consensus of adequate means of amends; and reinforcing the idea of respect for both the targeted person and offender (Restorative Justice Development Team, 2003). Following the notion that “respectful dialogue is ultimately the only peace-building option,” the aforementioned practices are described as “restorative conferencing” which strive to reestablish productive relationships toward the rebuilding of a unified community (Restorative Justice Development Team, 2003, p. 4; Wearmouth et al., 2007, p. 40).

Implementation of restorative practices in U.S. schools has strived to incorporate a similar relationship development ethos. Restorative justice practice is increasingly an alternative to school exclusions, as it is less punitive, has greater potential for long term impact, and assists

in rebuilding broken relationships in the school community (Mullet, 2014; Simson, 2012). The use of restorative practices has been supported by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE), the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). These government entities have invested in the exhibited international and national success of restorative practices by funding the practice across various school districts (USDOE, 2014). There are an array of restorative practice tools educators can choose to meet the needs of the classroom (Suvall, 2009). To capture the range of practices within restorative practices, an outline of eleven core yet non-linear principles are often used. Two fundamental guiding principles in a model used by the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) are the notions of “moving beyond shame” and the *fundamental hypothesis* that restorative justice is structured by strategies of supportive pressure (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2014, p. 11). By moving beyond shame, the IIRP model can assist individuals with admitting their wrongdoing, which consequently serves as supportive pressure to work towards mending relationships.

2.3.3 Restorative Justice Interventions and School Discipline Outcomes

As restorative justice interventions are in the nascent stages of development in U.S. schools, conclusions on their effectiveness for reducing both general and disproportional suspensions are still inconsistent. Select studies are reviewed to understand if these inconsistencies are a result of different research designs or inherent limitations of the intervention. Part of the difficulty in comparing outcomes between studies is embedded both in

the research design and the non-standardized application of restorative practices. For example, research conducted by the IIRP is often limited to descriptive statistics with graphs providing visual representation of change using an A-B design (International Institute for Restorative Justice, 2014; Lewis, 2009). An exception is a mixed-methods study of a West Philadelphia high school. Accounts from administrators and teachers indicated that restorative practices were effective for their urban school because it gave students better analytical skills, skill-sets to apologize and make amends, improved attitudes, and fostered an environment of academic production versus punishment (Lewis, 2009). This school had a 52% decrease in violent acts by the following year. These results reflect the great potential of restorative practices, as well as the strength in using a mixed-methods approach to study their effects. Taken together, results from each approach can inform the other by providing both a micro and macro depiction of discipline patterns which could ultimately validate the voice of marginalized students.

Gregory, Clawson, Davis and Gerewitz (2016) best display this approach in a study that examined the IIRP's Safer Saner Schools® two-year model. Using hierarchical linear modeling and regression analysis, student survey results (n=412) across twenty-nine high school classrooms demonstrated that the use of restorative practices by teachers was associated with positive relationships with students. Higher restorative practices use also was associated with fewer discipline referrals compared to when teachers used fewer restorative practices (Gregory et al., 2014). Twenty-nine classrooms (i.e., 29 teachers) were randomly selected resulting in 412 student participants after a 60% survey response rate. Unlike the teaching staff, the student sample was relatively diverse representing 44% White, 21% Latino, and 25% mixed-race students, 5% African American, 3% American Indian and 2% Asian. Although the high use of

restorative practices did not eliminate the discipline gap in this study, it became a predictor of greater teacher respect towards students of all races and ethnicities in the sample. Moreover, teachers perceived by students to have high use of restorative practices had less disparate referral rates compared to teachers perceived as having lower use of restorative practices. In sum, this study advances knowledge on the efficacy of restorative practices and highlights further need to analyze what specific practices reduced suspension rates. The ability of this intervention to reduce some disparities may be a promising sign that restorative practices can be effective in addressing racially disproportional suspensions. Further investigation is necessary to isolate if there are specific restorative practices that work best with ethnically diverse populations.

In another empirical work based on the IIRP's Safer Saner Schools® model, Mirsky and Wachtel (2007) use pre-test/post-test survey methods with over 900 youth in alternative schools and day treatment programs. Overall, results reflected positive changes in student attitudes. After controlling for age, gender, race, offense type and criminal history, students in the day treatment program were more likely to take ownership for their wrongdoings and had a more positive outlook on police officers. Restorative practices for three months with these students also were associated with lower re-offending rates. This study contributes to the literature by showing that the dialogue and relationship development components of restorative practices positively impact youth. However, with minimal reporting on study design and methodology, it is difficult to glean if there were other factors contributing to the positive findings in the study. Future research on restorative practices should offer greater transparency on procedures, design and analyses in order to significantly advance the knowledge and utility of restorative practices among youth.

A study by Simson (2012) compared schools implementing restorative practices to those that did not. A significant reduction in school suspension rates was found among schools implementing restorative practices. Specifically, t-test results showed that schools using restorative justice reduced suspensions by 3% while non-restorative justice schools only reduced suspensions by 0.9% in that same academic year. These results are especially significant as Simson (2012) details that intervention schools had higher pre-intervention suspension rates than non-RJ schools. However, due to concerns that a school with higher initial suspension rates would already be engaged in suspension reduction efforts, analyses controlled for initial suspensions. While this eliminated statistical significance, restorative practices intervention schools continued to have fewer suspensions than the control group. Additionally, after controlling for school size, poverty, and grade level, this study found that intervention schools had slightly greater decreases in suspension and a smaller black-white discipline gap than non-intervention schools ($p < .10$). Though this study lacked statistically significant results, its near significant outcomes indicate potential for other studies to find significant results. Since this study used t-tests which lack robust error terms, future studies could find significant results using different statistical analyses (Field, 2009).

Similarly limited was research on of a single case study school in West Oakland, California. This study carried out a pilot study using a selection of restorative practices. In the following year, restorative justice was integrated at a school-wide level and was included in the curriculum for 7th and 8th grade students (Sumner, Silverman, & Frampton, 2010). After this two-year period, suspensions decreased from 50 out of 100 students to 6 out of 100. While the dramatic reduction in suspension rates post-intervention suggest possible effectiveness, limited

reporting on research design and analytical procedures make it difficult to draw confident conclusions. The strengths of this study lie within its use of a mixed-methods approach which included forty classroom observations, an interview of twenty-one students, ten parents/guardians, twelve teachers/staff, and a survey of 24 students to gain their perceptions on restorative justice. However, as a single-case study this project is not generalizable. Future research on restorative practices in schools should seek to implement a similar mixed-method diverse participant study while using a more rigorous analytic approach.

Similarly, the Parkrose school district in Oregon employed the help of two community organizations to incorporate restorative practices in order to reduce referrals to the juvenile justice system, school exclusions, and the disproportional impact on students of color (González, 2012 as cited in City Council Ordinance No. 18472 2010). This effort sought to measure students' level of satisfaction after participating in the restorative practices program. Results indicated that of 132 students referred for restorative justice supports, over 98 cases were facilitated (versus sent to the juvenile justice system) and 108 days of suspension were not given (Creating Community Safety by Keeping Kids in School, 2010; *as cited in* González, 2012). Results further show that 85% of students were satisfied with the restorative justice program and 75% felt that restorative justice practices helped to reduce the harm experienced from an incident (Sumner, Silverman, & Frampton, 2010).

Schools and school districts within the state of Pennsylvania have incorporated restorative practices into teaching and discipline. Results have included improved morale among staff, reduction in fighting, improved school-wide academic performance and reduction in referrals and suspensions (González, 2012). More recently, a study on discipline disparities and

restorative practices in a large urban district (n = 90,546) revealed a reduction in discipline referrals yet found that the Black/White suspension gap persisted (Anyon et al., 2016). Thus, findings presented from these studies reflect preliminary yet promising results about the potential of restorative justice in reducing inequalities in schools.

In total, studies reviewed varied in racial and ethnic makeup, school type, school size, type of data collection procedures and analyses. While each study contributes to knowledge on the effectiveness of restorative practices, future studies will need a more rigorous design. In addition, future studies need more rigorous assessment of restorative practices intervention fidelity in the school setting. Without this, it is difficult to know if findings are the result of the intervention fidelity or extraneous factors. Further, Hargens (2012) makes the claim that a large portion of restorative justice studies utilize qualitative methods and hence suggests the need for more quantitative studies. Moreover, the ability of restorative practices to reduce racially disproportional discipline has been largely inconsistent. A plausible cause for this is that restorative practices, like many school-based interventions, are a race-neutral intervention aiming to address a race-centered dilemma. Despite this, research with near significant results for reducing disproportionality provides promise for the efficacy of restorative practices in racially diverse settings. Thus, this study contributes to literature by unveiling the contextually complicated classroom nuances that facilitate restorative practices successes or challenges. To frame this investigation, this study uses ecological systems theory and critical race theory to make sense of the of racialized discipline practices.

2.4 THEORY OVERVIEW

Ecological systems theory (EST) and critical race theory (CRT) are used as analytic frameworks for this study. As described, restorative practices have the potential to improve relationships and the school discipline ethos to ultimately reduce punitive discipline and high suspension rates. However, research detailing how restorative practices operate in the presence of competing discipline policies (i.e., zero-tolerance policies) is sparse. There also is limited research available to examine how restorative practices reduce disciplinary exclusion outcomes across race. EST is useful for capturing how micro and macro factors such as student behavior, teacher discipline practices, policy and restorative practices interact and influence school discipline outcomes. In addition, CRT further contextualizes discipline trends and restorative practices by focusing attention on how and why discipline outcomes become racialized. Together both theories are used to frame my examination of restorative practices in one high school within the Archway Public Schools district.

2.4.1 Ecological Systems Theory

To capture the diverse influences on disproportional school suspensions, ecological systems theory (EST) is used to delineate the relationships among students and their environments. As a staple of the social work profession, ecological systems theory was developed to capture the external influences on behavior that individual theories or practices could not assess (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rothery, 2008; Siporin, 1980). EST is a context specific

framework able to prioritize the individual, the environment and/or incorporate how both interact to influence behaviors and outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rothery, 2008). Given the behavior centered narrative and analysis of disproportional suspensions, a more equitable framing of disproportionality should also consider the role of school level factors such as adult racial dispositions, education policy and overall school climate. In this era of retribution-based colorblind school discipline, an equity-focused framework is necessary to counter blame-centered analysis of suspensions and the disproportional impact on students of color.

Rooted in general systems theory, EST defines a school as a social system that is an organization that assumes order yet contains inter-reliant individuals whose behaviors interact (Greene, 2008; Siporin, 1980). Thus, students and educators are agentic creators of the educational context yet simultaneously influenced by it (Rothery, 2008). However, the strength or centrality of one's agency in determining outcomes is deeply enmeshed and complicated by power relations within a setting (Bourdieu, 1984; Garrett, 2007; Houston, 2002). Ecological systems theory recognizes systems of oppression such as racism and sexism as moderators of one's power and thus are significant influential factors determining outcomes (Rothery, 2008). Therefore, schools are not gender neutral (Kane, 2013) or race neutral spaces; they are social systems in which each individual navigates and experiences differently based on their identity.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) presents that ecological systems theory necessitates multiple levels of nesting. Schools are implicated in this interlocking structure and are defined as open social systems nested within larger social, economic and political systems (Greene, 2008; Nicholas & Schwartz, 2004; Rothery, 2008). In turn they also become permeable and adaptive to external demands and pressures (Greene, 2008; Nicholas & Schwartz, 2004; Rothery, 2008).

This has bearing on education policy enactment and subsequent school climate within a school and/or district. Reference to this non-neutral open system is exemplified through the differential impact zero tolerance policies and high-stakes testing have had across school discipline and race. For example, zero tolerance policies were created to deter the possession of drugs, weapons, related contraband, and violent behavior (Brady, 2002; Hanson, 2005); yet, students of color are overrepresented in suspensions for non-violent subjective behaviors (Ayers, Dohrn & Ayers, 2001; Hanson, 2005; Mendez & Knoff, 2003). This trend has contributed to the ‘school-house to jail-house’ relationship in which students of color are similarly overrepresented (Browne, 2005, p. 7; Morrison, & Jackson, 2014).

Ball (2003) presents that the pressures from policy requirements are enduring and create a state of ‘calculation’ within schools (p. 215). This has materialized through high-stakes testing policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act (Darling-Hammond, 2006; NCLB, 2002). Figlio (2012) details this with work outlining that high-stakes testing in schools significantly predicts the suspension of academically underperforming students. Specifically, this work reports that students with a history of low academic performance had longer school exclusion periods during school testing than students without such history. These longer suspensions were also for the same behavioral violations as higher performers who were allowed to take the exam (Figlio, 2006). Thus, while accountability and high achievement are needed, the pressures of policy on an open social system contributed to the ‘test, punish, and push out’ phenomenon in the schools studied (American Civil Liberties Union of Florida et al., 2011). Such research is significant as it is a prototype of suspensions that occur for non-behavior related incidents.

This concept of competing policy aims is especially important for the way restorative practices were implemented at Restorative High School. If schools embrace restorative practices but do not remove the disciplinary policies and practices that compete with it, this can reduce the potency of the intervention. Ispa-Landa (2018) explains that punitive discipline practices, racial bias and limited classroom management skills can contribute to racial discipline disparities even in schools using discipline reform interventions. In addition, schools using zero-tolerance policies often uphold punitive discipline practices (Hanson, 2005) for non-violent and non-drug related behaviors.

If applied in a “restorative school”, this would inevitably conflict with restorative practices that aim to improve relationships, avoid shaming, produce community constructed amends and reduce referrals and suspensions. Moreover, the racialized patterns of suspensions would persist as research supports that SOC are frequently suspended for highly subjective behaviors (Ayers, Dohrn & Ayers, 2001; Hanson, 2005; Mendez & Knoff, 2003).

However, the risk of negating the potential impact of restorative practices was in part reduced by the 2014 change in the student code of conduct. Specifically, a state-wide law center noted that Archway Public Schools eliminated some of the punitive discipline practices within its zero-tolerance policies (2014). Depending on the specific practices eliminated within the zero-tolerance policies, educators will less likely have to juggle the contradictory responsibilities of punitive zero-tolerance policies and restorative practices. Yet there remains another competing area of conflict with the implementation of restorative practices. This is the extent to which restorative practices are viewed as an add-on disciplinary measure or an essential practice for the school community. Schools that lack the adequate support and buy-in may be less likely to

engage restorative practices and in turn reduce the potential impact of the intervention. Specifically, Wiley et al. (2018) describes the need for normative and political reform that would change negative social constructions about behavior and create informed stakeholders that have the power and access to resources to change discipline policies. Hence, ecological systems theory is a necessary analytic framework for this research as the absolute value of the intervention is dependent on an assortment of factors that were examined during data analysis.

EST can also account for factors that will positively support the implementation of restorative practices. Specifically, outside pressures and demands on a school as a permeable social system can also operate positively. Since restorative practice is a school-wide philosophy and intervention seeking to improve school climate and create positive relationships, it can encourage positive pressures among individuals and the environment. Several studies examining restorative practices in schools have found a similar effect concerning the salience of school leadership support of the restorative practices intervention. In a study of restorative practices by Sumner and colleagues (2010), results reflected a near significant relationship between the principal of a school and suspension reduction. Further, as exhibited by Payne and Welch (2013), the only significant predictor of engaging restorative practices was the variable *principal supervision*. Together, these studies reflect that power-holding individuals can produce pressures on a social system just as policy pressures do. Hence, as a theory able to prioritize the individual, the environment and the interaction of both (Rothery, 2008), ecological systems theory serves as a comprehensive framework that can capture the numerous variables that attenuate or sustain discipline disparities. As such, EST was used to examine how restorative practices operate in a high school as a function of macro and individual factors. To understand the race related factors

that influence the use of restorative practices across race, Critical Race Theory contextualizes how policy enactment and student behavior become racialized and thus influence the outcomes of the intervention.

2.4.2 Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory is a race-based framework with roots deriving from critical legal studies (Ladson-Billings, 1998). It holds six major principles and this dissertation utilizes four to theorize the relationship between restorative practices, race, gender and school discipline.

Scholars applying CRT to a racialized social problem often use some of its six core but non-exclusive tenets (1) racism as endemic (2) race as a social construct - developed by the U.S. legal system that has normalized racial privileges and oppression (3) interest convergence - that racial justice is initiated when the dominant group can also benefit (4) differential racialization - the ascribed meaning of one's racial group changes with the needs of the dominant group (i.e. Irish racial incorporation to white), (5) intersectionality – highlighting how identities intersect and interact to create multiple axes of oppression (6) and the counter-story - a social justice effort to capture the experiential knowledge of POC to disrupt oppressive hegemonic notions about POC (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado and Stefancic, 2007; 2001; Freeman, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Scholars also frequently use CRT to critique liberalism and Whiteness as property, a term indicating that being White provides an exclusive entry point to resources (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004; Harris, 1993). Together, these tenets and focal areas are used to reveal CRT's central critique of white supremacy which Mills (2009) describes as “Political

majoritarianism, cultural hegemony, socially recognized personhood and ownership of the normative body” (p.8). It is present in policy, social interactions and throughout systems making it appear illusive (Gillborn, 2005; Mills, 2009). Thus, the existence of white supremacy is core to CRT as it validates the need for a space to theorize race in order to dislodge the innocuous and taken for granted influence of Eurocentrism.

Critique of Liberalism. CRT holds that racism is rampant and pervasive in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Litowitz (1997) indicates that racism is intertwined with and often transcends law. I propose that a similar claim can be made about praxis and discipline policy enactment. Specifically, policies and practices are interpreted through gendered and raced lenses. This supports the work of scholars who have revealed the prevalence of institutional racism in education (Gillborn, 2005; Phillips, 2011). In turn, this analytic framework rejects behavior centered analysis of discipline trends and instead also critiques neoliberal education policy that often upholds colorblind and ahistorical assessment of discipline outcomes.

CRT holds the position that racism is able to flourish within systems that value neutrality in policy and meritocracy in performance (Cook, 1995; Crenshaw, 1995; Matsuda, 1995). Zero-tolerance policies have been the insignia for neutral and meritocratic policies with a mission of assuring school safety (Brady, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011). However, there is ample research presenting that zero-tolerance policies have specifically increased racial over-representation in school discipline (Solari & Balshaw, 2006). Hence, such neutrality is a façade. By maintaining this, a meritocratic approach fosters an environment where disproportionality can be assessed strictly in terms of behavior.

In addition, schools with high suspension rates also become feeder to prison institutions (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010). Work by Skiba and Noam (2001) support this demonstrating that zero-tolerance policies in 37 states had high school-suspension rates which in turn correlated with later incarceration. However, even more striking was the disproportional number of African-American suspended males who were more frequently later incarcerated compared to the rest of the study sample (Skiba & Noam, 2001). Hence, by failing to problematize neutrality in policy and meritocratic values, disproportional suspension can become normalized and leave marginalized students further vulnerable. Indeed, doing so appeals to ahistoricism, a framework CRT describes as a tactic to maintain oppressive racist systems.

In total, the critique of liberalism is employed to assess how restorative practices become racialized in school settings. This is salient as studies continue to show that reduction of the racial discipline gap is often lower than the reduction of overall school suspension rates (Gregory et al., 2014; Skiba, 2015; Simson, 2012). In turn, I use the critique of liberalism to challenge the taken for granted racialized patterns of school suspensions. I further use an intersectional lens to examine how both race and gender inform discipline outcomes. I present why both race and gender must be included to examine the impact of restorative practices on discipline outcomes.

Intersectionality. It is important to employ an intersectional lens to examine how notions of both race and gender interact with the discipline process and the application of restorative practices. The work of Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw details that intersectionality is the idea that one may experience multiple angles of oppression based on the demonization of their various identities (1989). Thus, as these marginalized identities intersect, this can lead to unique and perhaps uncharted spaces of inequality. This was demonstrated in discipline data

through a national study on school suspensions since the 1970's. Findings revealed that suspensions were two times as high for all students of color except for Black girls, with suspensions as high as four times the rate of their White female peers (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

A similar trend is found among low-income African American boys with special education needs. These students are more likely to be suspended from school compared to all other students (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Teasley, 2014). Thus, using an intersectional framework helps to inform how the multiple axes of identity, specifically race and gender, inform the lived experience of individuals within structures oppressive towards race and gender. These findings make clear that both race and gender play a significant role in the chances that a student is excluded. In this vein, this research will delineate the role of race and gender in exclusion disproportionality.

Whiteness as Property. Critical race scholars hold that race is a social construction and is a non-biological form of categorization developed and sustained by society. Via this social construction, prejudice, acts of discrimination and racism are often lodged towards historically marginalized Black and Brown populations. Litowitz (1997) states that this is especially reflected among “people of color [who] are more likely to be convicted, to serve more time, to suffer arbitrary arrest and deprivation of liberty and property” (p.506). Thus, the basis by which some people earn or are stripped of power and resources hinges on attributes society's power holders assign to race. Describing the construction of whiteness as property, Harris (1993) states that:

only Blacks were subjugated as slaves and treated as property. Similarly, the conquest, removal, and extermination of Native American life and culture were ratified by

conferring and acknowledging the property rights of whites in Native American land. Only white possession and occupation of land was validated and therefore privileged as a basis for property rights. These distinct forms of exploitation each contributed in varying ways to the construction of whiteness as property. (p.1716).

As such, being White and exhibiting whiteness is itself a form of “property” that safeguards White people and those able to perform whiteness. In the education system, this safeguarding may take the form of racialized academic tracking (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004) and standardized testing normed on “White middle-class populations” (Moore, 2005, p.172). This is described as the “whiteness of evaluation paradigms” (Moore, 2005, p. 173). In this same way, whiteness as property can safeguard White students from the “disciplinary gaze” (Raible and Irizarry, 2010, p.1197). The disciplinary gaze refers to the default surveillance of Black and Brown children whose behaviors may not reflect White middle-class norms. This concept is particularly salient as research controlling for income show that Black students remain disproportionately suspended compared to their White counterparts (Wallace et al., 2008; Gregory, Skiba, Noguera, 2010). Furthermore, studies detail that students of color are more likely to be suspended for behaviors for which their White peers received lesser sanctions (Figlio, 2006; Skiba, Shure & Williams, 2011). As such, the tenant of whiteness as property may inform research on racially disproportional school suspensions. Thus, in this study, whiteness as property is used to capture if and how educators make disciplinary decisions imbued with whiteness.

2.4.3 Theory Summarization

Intervention implementation and discipline practices do not occur in a value-free environment. Policies and human behavior are crafted and delivered with embedded assumptions about ways of being and these factors inevitably influence policy and intervention enactment. To comprehensively examine the impact of restorative practices on the discipline gap, the values and presuppositions that drive policy and the intervention must be closely examined.

This is exemplified in previous research detailing that teacher and school level factors significantly contribute to disproportional suspensions, even after controlling for student socio-economic status (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011). This suggests that structural mechanisms along with the values and decisions of educators are the strongest predictors of racially disproportional suspension. Therefore, class and policy theorization are not robust alone to outline causes for racially disproportional suspensions. Instead there are nuanced micro and macro factors contributing to the discipline gap and the multi-tiered capacity of EST is suited to capture this. Moreover, CRT responds to the added layer of racialization; specifically, how purported race-neutral discipline policies and the intervention can become racialized.

3.0 CHAPTER 3

3.1 Methodological Context – Implementation and Tenets of Restorative Practices

3.1.1 Study Context

In this chapter, I describe my role in the larger data collection project facilitated by a local non-profit organization. I then provide a detailed description of the restorative practices intervention, training, and implementation. I subsequently describe the philosophies and practices that framed the intervention. This dissertation study draws from a larger National Institute of Justice funded study which a local non-profit organization was commissioned to conduct for Archway Public Schools. The overarching non-profit organization's study required the use of a quasi-experimental matched comparison group design in which the intervention *Safer Saner Schools*® was implemented by the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP). *Safer Saner Schools*® was implemented and studied in twenty-three Archway Public Schools. I was hired as research support staff for this study, and I collected data on two case-study schools within the district. Data from one high school is used for this dissertation study.

3.1.2 Why Restorative Practices?

During fall of 2014, the Archway Public Schools district was selected to receive a \$3 million grant from the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative through the National Institute of Justice to investigate and address the underlying causes of a high number of school suspensions. During previous school years, 1 in 5 students in Archway Public Schools had received a detention. Therefore, this grant covered the cost of implementing restorative practices, a relationship-building intervention designed to proactively address problematic behaviors and improve school environment. The aim of the initiative was to: “[Improve] student and staff perceptions of school safety; reduce juvenile justice involvement, violence and out-of-school suspensions; and [reduce] racial and gender disparities in suspensions.”

Initiated by indigenous communities such as the Maori of New Zealand, restorative practices were adapted by Western societies to improve outcomes within the judicial system and later the school systems. As an intervention, restorative practices have received increased attention with application across the United States. The data collection period for this overarching study started in June 2015 and ended in June 2017.

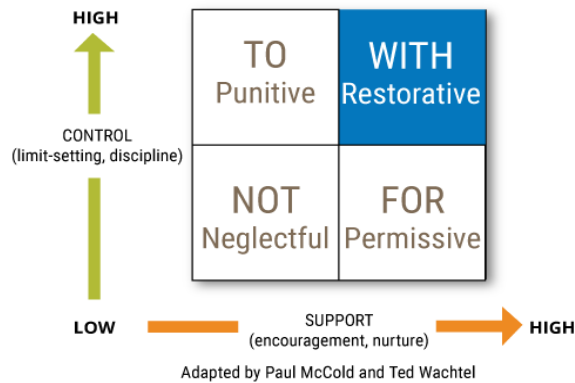
3.1.3 Intervention Training Design

Schools selected to implement *Safer Saner Schools*®, a restorative practice intervention by the International Institute of Restorative Practices, began training in June 2015. The training and intervention were implemented at 23 schools, which were paired with 23 comparison schools

within the district. The training model as outlined by the IIRP requires four training days over the two-year intervention period. By summer 2015, the twenty-three schools selected for the restorative practices intervention participated in Day 1 and Day 2 of these trainings. The day-1 training was provided in June 2015 and was titled *Introduction to Restorative Practices*, and the day-2 training took place in August 2015 and was called *Introduction to Circles*. In addition, school administrators at the twenty-three intervention schools received a separate two-day training that also took place in June 2015. Although the overall Safer Saner Schools ® intervention includes four training sessions, day-3 and day-4 were implemented in year two of the overarching non-profit organization study. The later trainings, Restorative Practice Conferences (day-3) and Community and Family Engagement (day-4) were unlike the initial two trainings as they only included select staff instead of the whole school. Year two data is not included in this dissertation study. Apart from the year-1 professional development sessions, most school staff implementing restorative practices at the case-study school did not receive additional training from IIRP beyond training received during the summer of 2015.

Social Discipline Window. The International Institute for Restorative Practices maintains that restorative practices are guided by a basic premise or “fundamental hypothesis”. This premise is that, “people (students, teachers and staff) are happier, and more likely to make positive changes when those in positions of authority (teachers, staff and administrators) do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them” (Costello, Wachtel and Wachtel, 2009, p. 7-8). The key words, “with”, “to”, and “for” align with what is described as the social discipline window (Image 1.0).

Figure 1. Social Discipline Window



Source: <http://www.iirp.edu/what-we-do/what-is-restorative-practices/defining-restorative/13-social-discipline-window>

This model suggests that educators’ behaviors toward students often fall within one of the four social discipline windows. Educators most successful in building a strong student-teacher relationship and a supportive classroom environment enact behaviors in the “with/ restorative” quadrant. This suggests that a teacher provides both high control and high support. In contrast, schools exhibiting high control without the necessary support fall within the “to/ punitive” quadrant. Practices associated with the “with/restorative” quadrant are found within the Restorative Practices Continuum (below).

Figure 2. Restorative Practices Continuum



Source: <https://www.iirp.edu/defining-restorative/restorative-practices-continuum>

The 80/20 Rule. Educators are expected to most frequently use affective statements and restorative questions; these are the first two components of the continuum. Affective statements allow educators to communicate the feelings they experienced in response to a student's behavior. For example, when students are disruptive or are not paying attention during instruction, a teacher may address this by describing how the students' behaviors make the teacher feel, for example that the students do not appreciate the time and work it took to prepare the lesson plan. The intention behind an affective statement is to educate students about the impact of their behavior while giving teachers the opportunity to show transparency.

Teachers and administrators may also choose to use 'affective questions'. All teachers are provided with a series of questions on a business sized card. These questions are used to converse with the wrongdoer after an incident has occurred. The following are from the restorative practices question card given to school staff during the summer training:

Restorative Questions 1: To respond to challenging behavior:

1. What happened?
2. What were you thinking about at the time?
3. What have your thoughts been since?
4. Who has been affected by what you did?
5. In what way have they been affected?
6. What do you think you need to do to make things right?

Restorative Questions 2: To help those harmed by others' actions:

1. What did you think when you realized what had happened?
2. What have your thoughts been since?
3. How has this affected you and others?
4. What has been the hardest thing for you?
5. What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

Together, affective statements and restorative questions are a part of what the IIRP trainers call the 80/20 rule. Although “circles” are a commonly known staple of restorative practices, 80% of restorative practices should be the use of affective statements to build relationships and restorative questions which address conflict. In contrast, the later portion of the continuum, circles and conferences, only represent 20% of the restorative practices model. However, observational data in this dissertation mostly include the use of restorative practices circles. Throughout the training days, IIRP facilitators modeled restorative practices circles by facilitating circles with staff. These circles were check-in circles – a circle used to assess how everyone in the group is feeling and ice-breaker/game circles – circles that may include, sitting standing and regular movement to get participants to actively engage (Costello, Wachtel & Wachtel, 2010). They also include community building – circles that allow participants to discuss participants' likes, dislikes or interests in order to discover group commonalities and develop group cohesion. Finally, closing/check-out circles allow participants to reflect on a concept they learned and/or how they plan to use this knowledge (Costello, Wachtel and Wachtel, 2010).

3.1.4 Safer Saner Schools® Intervention

Together, the aforementioned practices and philosophies make up components of the *Safer Saner Schools®* school-wide intervention training facilitated at the case-study school.

Archway Public Schools received school-wide training for the Safer Saner Schools® program to be implemented by the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP, 2014). Moving away from retribution or punishment as the primary response to conflict, IIRP holds eleven principles that values communication with multiple entry points for proactive and post-conflict dialogue responses. Representing these are affective statements which are person centered (i.e., teacher or student) articulations of the way a offense has impacted the individual that is making the statement; responsive conferences which are “structured and scripted meetings” involving peer support for resolution; Restorative questions – ‘response to negative behavior and conflict; Small impromptu conferences – a time to discuss thoughts and feelings by those impacted and Fair process - reasoning techniques used to help students communicate their experience (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2014, p. 11). These dialogue-based restorative practices not only serve to harness understanding but are congruent with principles of conflict intervention that recommend there be investigation of the root causes of the conflict and the utilization of problem solving to address discipline issues (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014). Taken together, dialogue focused restorative practices approaches not only change the punishment status quo but are validated by principles rooted in the study of conflict and intervention. In addition, the IIRP model for restorative practices encompasses a host of relationship building practices.

In effort to provide positive school climate, the IIRP also supports the use of Proactive circles which are efforts made to build strong community relationships before conflict; Restorative staff community - relating to the positive pre-conflict restorative examples set by school staff, and Restorative approaches with families - the consistent interaction with the families of students to develop strong relationships (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2014, p. 11). Likewise, these relationship-building philosophies are supported by principles of conflict prevention which support the authentic development of relationships with students, the development of respectful school environments and culturally relevant teaching (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014). The latter restorative practices are proactive efforts to prevent conflict since respect building and cultural relevance require active efforts to learn about the student body or individual student idiosyncrasies. Moreover, where applied thoroughly and consistently, restorative practices have been useful in establishing stronger relationships among educators and students (Drewery, 2004). These positive restorative practices contributions reflect the literature on building caring relationships with students of color. Specifically, effective work with urban students of color should include a caring learning environment (Brown, 2004) and positive teacher-student relationships (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011). Moreover, as a school-wide initiative, restorative practices require reflexive behavior evaluation from both the student and the educator; both are necessary to support a positive school climate.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, six students and all staff and administrators at the case-study high school took part in the *Safer Saner Schools*® school-wide intervention training. Students were trained separately from educators in January 2016. Both staff and students were taught the non-punitive theoretical underpinnings and practical elements of *Safer Saner Schools*

®. As such, staff were to facilitate the intervention, primarily in the form of circles. Although all staff were trained in the intervention and were encouraged by the administrators to apply the training, the content of each circle and frequency at which the intervention was facilitated varied across staff. Thus, I used qualitative methods to assess how the intervention was delivered in the school to address relationship building and school discipline. These findings were used to understand how the intervention was applied and perceived, and its impact on high and disproportional suspension rates. In the following chapter, I describe my methods of data collection and analysis.

4.0 Chapter 4

4.1 A Mixed-Methods Case-Study

4.1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the methods used to respond to the overarching research question: why do racially disproportional school suspensions remain as overall suspensions decline in a school implementing restorative practices? I continue by describing the study site, methods, procedures and analyses used to address all research questions. I describe the use of critical race ethnography (CRE) to collect data during restorative practices trainings, meetings and classroom implementation sessions. CRE was used to understand how beliefs, values and implicit knowledge about race and racial disparities were discussed and understood in relation to the intervention and discipline. Secondly, I describe how systematic observations were conducted with RP-Observe, an instrument used to measure the quality of restorative practices circles. Third, I describe the semi-structured interview process with 11 participants that included educators and staff across the school. Finally, I review the analytic procedures used to assess

changes between pre-intervention and intervention-year school suspension data. Together with reflection on my positionality, I describe how findings were triangulated to contribute to school discipline literature on restorative practices and racially disproportional suspensions.

While studies have shown that restorative practices contribute to the reduction of high suspension rates (Gregory, Clawson, Davis & Gerewitz, 2016; Lewis, 2009; Skiba, 2015; Simson, 2012), students of color remain disproportionately suspended compared to their White peers (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014; Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2013). To understand the factors that sustain this disproportionality, this study investigated the school-level and student-level factors that contributed to the discipline gap. Guided by critical race theory and ecological systems theory, multiple methods were used to investigate the systemic, interpersonal and socially constructed factors that maintain inequitable outcomes.

4.1.2 Research Questions

In this dissertation I ask, in a school where restorative practices reduce overall school suspensions, why do racially disproportional school suspensions remain? The subsequent questions asked are: (1) Will the case study school decrease its racial disproportionality in school exclusion during the 2015-2016 intervention year compared to the 2014-2015 pre-intervention year? (2) How do educators apply restorative practices? What factors influence the way that restorative practices are implemented? (3) How does the case study school use restorative

practices to address discipline? (4) Do teachers and administrators utilize restorative practices differently across race and gender? Multiple methods were used to respond to these questions.

4.1.3 Mixed Methodology

This work prioritized qualitative methods through ethnography as a primary data collection method. This approach was augmented by using a systematic observation instrument, interviewing key school stakeholders, and using secondary quantitative data analysis to capture school suspension trends at one case study schools. A mixed-methods approach is well suited for research on racial disproportionality, since use of qualitative methods are suitable to collect a “richer and more intimate view of the social world” (Engel & Schutt, 2012, p. 335). Given the reverberating and negative outcomes that school suspensions have on young people, observation data helped to unveil how policy and nuanced actions led to discipline outcomes. Thus, observation was also used to evaluate how students of color were situated within disciplinary classroom dynamics. Systematic observations were also engaged through use of a restorative practices circle observation instrument. This instrument allowed me to score constructs relating to the quality of the circle. Ultimately, scores from this instrument reinforce observations by providing structured details that informed participant meaning making on the use of restorative practices. Finally, secondary analysis of school discipline data was used to inform the discipline dynamics I witnessed. Jick (1979) cited the benefits to a mixed-methods approach offering that it

is an opportunity for “thicker, richer data; being more confident of the interpretation of results...and uncovering contradictions” (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, 2007, p. 74). Thus, this design was used to create new insights about the discipline practices that sustained suspension disparities at a school. This approach is especially important to expand understanding of why students of color are typically overrepresented in suspension statistics.

4.1.4 Site Description

As detailed in the previous chapter, Archway Public Schools implemented restorative practices to improve school climate and reduce high and disproportional suspension rates. A local non-profit organization was commissioned to conduct research on this intervention from 2015-2018, and my dissertation data came from this study. The overarching study used a quasi-experimental matched comparison group design across 23 school to study implementation of *Safer Saner Schools*® - an intervention by International Institute for Restorative Practices. As research support staff on this project, I collected data on assigned case-study schools and was given access and IRB approval to use this data for the purposes of my dissertation.

Archway Public Schools. State data from 2015-2016 indicate that Archway Public Schools enrolled 24,191 students of which 53% were defined as economically disadvantaged. Enrollment across race from the largest to smallest group was Black or African American (52%), White (33%), Multi-Racial (8%), Asian (3%), and Hispanic-any race (3%). Percent enrollment

by sex across the district was Male (51.03%) and Female (48.97%). High schools had the highest rate of chronic absenteeism, which is defined as missing more than 10% school days. Altogether, forty-one percent of high school students were chronically absent during the 2015-2016 academic year.

For the whole district, the percentages and number of suspensions across race and ethnicity were Black or African Americans at 78% ($n = 6,305$), White students at 14% ($n = 1,105$), Multi-Racial students at 7% ($n = 548$), Asians at 1% ($n = 81$), Hispanic students - any race at 1% ($n = 84$), American Indian/Alaskan at .04% ($n = 4$), and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander non-Hispanic ($n = 0$). Out-of-school suspensions across the district were given for infractions related to academics ($n = 12$), conduct ($n = 5,559$), Drug-Alcohol ($n = 114$), Tobacco ($n = 35$), Violence ($n = 2,358$), and Weapon ($n = 85$). For all racial groups except Native/Pacific Islander, conduct was the most frequent infraction type resulting in out-of-school suspensions where Black or African Americans accounted for ($n = 4, 210$), White ($n = 825$), Multi-Racial- ($n = 386$), Asian ($n = 53$), Hispanic-any race ($n = 82$), American Indian/Alaskan ($n = 3$), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander ($n = 0$). Together, both the high suspension rates and chronic absenteeism across schools had important implications for school climate and consequently the potential impact for restorative practices.

4.1.5 Case Study Schools

Of the twenty-three schools receiving the restorative practices intervention across all Archway Public Schools, four schools were chosen by the primary investigator of the local

non-profit organization facilitating the overarching study. These schools were selected to represent the K-12 grade level spectrum. In addition, schools were selected based on an administrator's consent to have their classrooms observed for a two-year period. This dissertation study uses the data of the case-study high school.

Case study high school. The case study high school, also referred to as “Restorative High School” had 1,518 students enrolled, 373 unique suspensions meted during the 2015-2016 intervention year. Black males made up 22% (n = 334) of those enrolled and 32% of students receiving at least one suspension (n=119). Black females accounted for 19% of students enrolled (n=287) and 23% of students receiving at least one suspension (n=87). Together Black males and females accounted for 52% of all students with an individualized education plan (IEP) and 46% of all students receiving free lunch. White males accounted for 18% of students enrolled and 16% of students receiving at least one suspension (n=59). White females accounted for 18% of students enrolled and 11% of individuals receiving at least one suspension (n=40). Together White students made up 36% of students with an IEP and 30% of students receiving free lunch. Asian males (n=102) accounted for 7% of students enrolled while Asian females (n=80) represented 5% of students enrolled. Together this student group made up 2% of students with an IEP and 15% receiving free lunch. Hispanic males (n=38) accounted for 3% of enrollment while Hispanic females (n=36) made up 2% of enrollment. Together Hispanic males and females made up 3% of students with an IEP status and 4% receiving free lunch. Finally, all other males (n= 45) and all other females (n= 46) accounted for 6% of enrollment, 7% with IEP status and 6% receiving free lunch.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION

4.3 OVERVIEW

This study used an ethnographic case study design at a high school receiving the Safer Saner Schools® restorative practices intervention during the 2015-2016 academic year. The first phase of this study began in the summer of 2015 with teacher training observations in June 2015 and August 2015. Observation of implementation took place between November 2015 and June 2016 for a total of 7 months. I used the following three types of data collection during this time: systematic observation, ethnographic observation, and semi-structured interviews. I triangulate my findings by also including analyses of quantitative discipline data.

4.3.1 Recruitment

There was a three-fold recruitment process. First, as a research support staff for the local non-profit, I sent a request for participation email to all faculty members at the case-study high school via my local non-profit email account. This email yielded zero responses. I subsequently used snowball sampling by asking the school-based restorative practices leader to inform staff of the study. She provided me with a list of staff actively using the intervention and after sending a request for participation email to these specific staff members, 7 teachers elected to participate in the study for classroom observation. Of these 7, two participants were lost due to attrition. Specifically, one teacher stopped facilitating circles and another teacher stopped responding to my emails to observe her classes. Finally, an invitation for study participation took place during

a professional learning group (PLG) meeting with educators. This approach did not bring additional participants to the study. Request for interview participation emails were sent between March and April 2016 to teachers, administrators, and the school social worker. Through this process, I recruited participants for 10 individual interviews and one focus group.

4.3.2 Sample

Participants interviewed and/or observed included two administrators, five teachers, and five non-teaching staff (Table 1). Observations from staff meetings and trainings include participants from the school district's central office as well as staff from other schools within the district. Pseudonyms are used for all participants. In some cases, the generic title of "teacher" or "educator" is used when conveying sensitive information.

Table 1. Case Study Staff Participants*

Position	Sex	Race
Teacher - Core Academic	Female	White
Teacher - Non-Core Academic	Female	White
Teacher - Core Academic	Male	Asian
Teacher - Non-Core Academic	Female	White
Teacher - Core Academic	Male	Black
School Leader	Female	White
Administrator	Male	White
Administrator	Male	Black
School Social Worker	Female	White
Officer 1	Male	White
Officer 2	Male	Black
Officer 3	Female	Black

* Subject area and gender pronouns are changed for anonymity.

4.3.3 Qualitative Data

Qualitative data collected include 37 circle observation fieldnotes and RP-Observe instrument data from these 37 circles. Of the 37 circle observations, 31 were classroom observations from four selected case-study teachers. These teachers were selected as they had three or more classroom observations. Data also includes staff and student intervention training fieldnotes (n = 4), fieldnotes from staff meetings (n = 4), fieldnotes from the IIRP school-based coach's site visits (n=3) and interviews with staff and administrators (n = 11). Semi-structured interviews were conducted using interview protocol designed by staff at the local non-profit.

Interviews ranged from 30-90 minutes and were conducted with teachers, administrators, school officers and the school social worker at the end of the 2015-2016 school year (Table 2).

Table 2. Types of Data Collected

Type of Data	#
Circle Observation Fieldnotes	37
RP-Observe Instrument Data	37
Individual Interviews	10
Focus Group	1
Staff Intervention Training Fieldnotes	3
Student Intervention Training Fieldnotes	1
Staff Meeting Fieldnotes	4
IIRP coach site visits	3

Finally, to measure the influence of restorative practices on racially disproportional suspensions, this study compared pre-intervention discipline data (2014-2015 academic year) for the case study school with its associated post-intervention discipline data (2015-2016 academic year).

Ethnographic Data. The primary goal of ethnography is to report on the indigenous meaning making of participants or actors within a given social setting (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Meanings are not simply discovered but are "interpretive constructions assembled and conveyed" through observation (Emmerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p.109). This was done by

observing student and teacher interactions around concepts of respect, relationship and discipline. Additionally, I observed participant meaning making to understand how interrelated behaviors reflect the classroom environment and other social expectations. Doing so helped to display more complex explanations for the “when, why, or how particular things happen” and its implications for race, gender, and class (Emmerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p.124).

To explicitly examine the interaction of race and discipline, tenets of critical race theory were integrated with ethnography to form what Garrett Duncan calls critical race ethnography (CRE; 2002a; 2002b). CRE holds that analysis void of an explicit and intentional focus on race is colorblind and therefore an incomplete assessment of behavior. Critical race ethnography highlights taken for granted beliefs, values and behaviors across race. This explicit interrogation of racialized meaning making also intends to assess the value given to the funds of knowledge and ways of being among students of color. As such, CRE is a method I used to examine behavior in the context of race, particularly implicit knowledge about race. Ultimately, ethnography was used to understand how restorative practices and discipline intersect with race. This gave further context to the behavioral precursors and the school-level factors that resulted in classroom referrals and school suspensions.

Jottings and fieldnotes. Throughout the data collection period, jottings were converted into fieldnotes to capture contextual interactions. Jottings are described as writing “bits of talk and action” that assist in sketching the social environment (Emmerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p.31). As such, mnemonic devices and phrases were used to facilitate the quick capturing of information that helped to develop rich and meaningful fieldnotes (Emmerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). Jottings included concrete sensory details to illustrate objects, people and actions. Doing

so required writing with substantial detail to avoid generalizations that would yield little analytic output (Emmerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). The use of dialogue was another writing strategy I used to capture the authenticity of what was observed. Through this technique, direct and indirect quotes were captured to extrapolate meaning while avoiding summarization that would suppress the voice of participants in the setting (Emmerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). Together, these jotting strategies were utilized to construct detailed fieldnotes that adequately characterized the environment, interactions, participant meaning making and cause and effects.

Organization and iterative analysis. Fieldnotes were organized as sketches or episodes. Sketches were used to convey vivid imagery to provide an underlying idea of the environment and people occupying it (Emmerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). I wrote to relate to the senses such as smell, sight and sound (Emmerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). In contrast, episodic organization was used to maintain linear reporting of interactions. This strategy was useful when I observed restorative practices circles where students at times spoke in a consecutive manner.

Finally, fieldnotes were organized and analyzed by using asides, commentaries, and memos. Asides and commentaries were produced when writing fieldnotes and intermittently an idea arose that gave further insight about a social interaction. As needed, in-process memoing was used to "develop analytic themes while still actively in the field and writing fieldnotes" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p.100). In so doing, my fieldnotes provided necessary details about participant personality and disposition to assess everyday classroom interactions. My fieldnotes also reflected how teachers and their students related to the intervention, each other and discipline policy enactment. Finally, fieldnotes were used to identify how race and gender were understood and negotiated in the classroom setting.

Systematic Observation. Systematic observation was used to identify specific pre-determined behaviors related to dimensions on the restorative practices observation instrument (RP-Observe) (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, Gerewitz & Korth, 2013). Hintze, Volpe and Shapiro (2002) recommend that systematic observation have standardized procedures, have standardized scoring methods and are conducted in specified locations. I followed these recommendations by using RP-Observe to assess constructs related to safety, belonging, and student voice. Dimensions on this instrument were scored low-to-high from 1-7. Along with a team of research assistants from a local non-profit, I was trained to use this instrument by Dr. Anne Gregory, the principal author of RP-Observe. Observing pre-recorded videos of restorative practices circles, our team practiced the use of RP-observe yielding strong inter-rater reliability (IRR=.80; Wang & Lee, n.d.). The research team also collectively observed other circles throughout the year to monitor inter-rater reliability. Subsequently, I independently conducted these systematic observations in classrooms with teachers who responded to my call for research participation.

This instrument was designed to assess the quality in delivery of proactive circles, which are daily or weekly circles where students discuss a topic that helps build community. This instrument was also used for responsive circles, which are circles that take place after a moderately serious incident occurs. Dimensions of the circle include *Safety* – when pre-circle agreements on fairness and rules of the circle are established, three different types of *Belonging* which are adult-student respect and responsiveness, student-student respect and responsiveness, and relevancy- whether or not the circle discussion was relevant to the student’s life. There are also three dimensions of *Voice* which include: student ownership of the circle process, risk taking that displays appropriate personal disclosure, and when applicable problem solving done

in a collaborative effort. The final dimension is *Student Circle Commitment* which relates to student engagement and buy-in to the circle.

After each circle observation, a score ranging from 1-7 was given to each of the seven circle dimensions. This score range equates to a high to low score and is designed to indicate quality of the circle. Score ranges represent 1-2 (low-range), 3-5 (mid-range), and 6-7 (high-range). Ratings from this instrument were used to augment and give further context to the ethnographic fieldnotes maintained for each school. In all, the RP-Observe instrument was used to provide increased analytic acuity for this study.

Semi-structured Interviews. Eleven semi-structured interviews were administered to obtain the self-reported experiences of teachers, administrators and a social worker (Table 2). The interview protocol for this study was established by the local non-profit I worked for. As recommended by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), questions were open-ended, and the interview remained flexible enough to allow for new questions that emerged based on information provided by the interviewee (Horton, Macve & Struyvwen, 2004). Interview times ranged from 30-90 minutes and were recorded and conducted in places that provided privacy for each interviewee. Interviews were transcribed verbatim in preparation for analysis.

4.3.4 Quantitative Data

Using data provided by Archway Public Schools through the local non-profit organization, quantitative analyses were used with 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 discipline data at the case-study high school. Initial steps to examine the relationship among variables was done

through frequency distributions, graphs and measures of central tendency (Engel & Schutt, 2009). Primary focus was given to variables that explained the relationship between student characteristics (i.e. race, gender, behavior) and discipline outcomes (i.e. referrals, suspension, expulsion). Specifically, binary logistic regression analysis of pre-intervention (2014-2015) and post-intervention (2015-2016) data for the case study school were used to predict the probability of suspension (Field, 2009). Thus, I use binary logistic regression to examine changes in racially disproportional suspensions at the case-study high school.

4.4 DATA ANALYSES

4.4.1 Qualitative Data Analyses

Qualitative analysis allows the researcher to understand participant meaning making, the influence of the social environment on a participant, the linearity or discontinuity of behavioral precursors, the observation of untheorized interactions within an environment and finally the creation of implications to contextualize behavior, environment and theory building/confirmation (Bazeley, 2013). I used NVIVO 11.0 for systematic storing and analysis of data catalogs, literature, models, memos, interviews, fieldnotes and media sources associated with the study. As the data were collected, analysis began through the memoing process where important connections were made between the environment, policy and behavior. Codes were generated based on memos and stored for later analysis. These connections supported the early theming of

data which is the grouping of “manifest and observable” concepts that emerge from the data (Saldaña, 2013, p. 175).

Data sources from the same participant were grouped where possible to create a case in NVIVO. As described by Bazeley and Jackson (2013), a case structure includes all data sources for one case into a file that can be comprehensively analyzed in NVIVO. As such, case study units included, memos, several fieldnotes, one interview, and where relevant, pictures of associated artifacts from the school site. This structure allowed me to make sense of data patterns for a specific case in a date ordered-sequence of initial collection. I immersed myself in the data by reading through the transcripts, literature, fieldnotes and memos. This began the iterative process of data analysis. Thus, I moved between raw data and associated sources by reading and reflecting, and open coding, which helped to fracture data sources and then refine my analytic approach (Bazeley, 2013; Galman, 2013; Green et al. 2007). Both inductive and deductive coding were used during the initial coding stages to confirm and differentiate parent codes and nested codes. Parent and nested codes are recommended for ethnographic research as they can be further deconstructed to elucidate the density of nuanced meanings in the themed data (Saldaña, 2013, p. 77).

Several cycles of pattern coding were used to generate meta-codes that organized codes to draw greater meaning (Saldaña, 2013) between actions, policies and discipline outcomes. Thus, the data was further reduced and group to unveil “rules, causes, and explanations in the data” related to disproportionality in school exclusions (Saldaña, 2013, p. 210). Following each coding session, I wrote memos about the coding process or a specific case to expand ideas about the relationship between codes and how they related to my research questions.

Once all the qualitative data was analyzed, interpretations were triangulated with findings from RP-Observe data and school discipline data. In chapter 6 both qualitative data and quantitative data from RP-Observe were interpreted together, which Creswell and Clark (2007) describe as the “point of interface” (Morse & Niehaus, 2009; as cited in: Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 66). To provide further context to the quantitative relationships found, data obtained through ethnographic fieldnotes were used to inform suspension outcome patterns. This methodological approach complements the strengths of each method and allowed for data triangulation that supported rich, robust, comprehensive and well-developed findings (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 66; Engel and Schutt, 2009, p. 335; Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin & Cohen, 2014).

4.4.2 Validity

The use of qualitative data analysis software such as NVIVO played a vital role in safeguarding from threats to validity (Bazeley, 2008; Siccama and Penna, 2008). Steps to safeguard validity for the creation of trustworthy findings were taken at each stage of this study. Siccama and Penna (2008) recommend the following strategies to ensure validity: interview recording and verbatim transcription, following interview protocols, use of open-ended questions, and using member checks. Each of these steps were taken in addition to systematic coding procedures and data triangulation.

First, the interview protocol was developed by all team members of the local non-profit. Procedures and questions were also developed based on relevant literature. Secondly, along with

research team members, I was trained to use RP-Observe to measure circle quality. Together, the research team had strong inter-rater reliability (IRR=.80; Wang & Lee, n.d.). Third, whenever possible, I engaged in member checks by asking teachers clarifying questions after each classroom observation. Doing so allowed me to confirm or reject my understanding about behaviors and interactions in the classroom. Participant interviews were conducted at the end of the school year and thus provided another opportunity for member checks. Fieldnotes were written in rich detail including but not limited to actions representing body language and characteristics such as perceived race and gender, and how these characteristics may have related to other outcomes. Likewise, all interviews were transcribed verbatim to reduce misinterpretation of participant meaning making.

This study also used multiple data sources to investigate the mechanisms that contributed to the discipline gap at Restorative High School. With several sources of data to draw from, I was able to triangulate findings to confirm emergent themes. Siccama and Penna (2008) recommend using at least five types of data to triangulate, in this study I used ten. Specifically, data included classroom observations, staff meeting observations, semi-structured interviews, RP-observe scores, school suspension data, district code-of-conduct policy, newspaper, school-site artifacts, state data, and the report of a local community organization. In doing so, I was able to uncover the relationship between practices, beliefs, behaviors and policies with high and disproportional suspension rates. Finally, monthly team meetings with the local non-profit staff provided opportunities to compare observations, draw inferences and further refine data collection procedures. In all, several steps were taken to ensure that data

collection and analysis were transparent and systematic in order to produce trustworthy and credible results.

4.4.3 Researcher's Role (Positionality)

To understand the daily minutia of student behavior, discipline practices and restorative practices in schools, I took on the role of observer as suggested by Spradley (1979; in Graue & Walsh, 1995). In this role, I observed daily interactions in hallways, classroom, and staff meetings. I engaged in this research as a Black female, and a doctoral student who served as research support for a local non-profit. Holding this professional role was beneficial because it provided a vetted reputation and access to the school site. Without this position, staff at the school-site might have been less willing to participate in this study. Indeed, this position both provided credibility and may have made staff feel compelled to participate.

As I observed in classrooms and took down jottings, I perceived that both teachers and students were curious about my notetaking. When a sudden or significant interaction would happen, the educator or students would look at me – I assume to see if I would document the interaction. In the early stages of data collection, some teachers would apologize for student misbehavior or a student would exclaim to their peers “hey, we have a guest” as if to remind their peers to exhibit better behavior. I would often interject stating that I was a researcher seeking to understand restorative practices and not affiliated with the school district. I also spoke with the teacher afterwards to share that my notes were not associated with his/her professional evaluation and were confidential. Although I presented myself as a researcher, during the first

few months, teachers would ask me for feedback during our post-circle discussions. I, in turn, reminded the educator of my position as a researcher and referred the teacher to the school-based teacher-trainer who supported staff with restorative practices circles. Although I did not provide feedback, their interest in my opinion suggests that I was viewed as an expert.

After some time, I became a familiar face in the school setting. The school security guards greeted me with familiarity, hall monitors no longer mistook me for a student, and teachers and students not only came to expect me but on occasion expressed disappointment if I missed a successful circle. Additionally, as I spent more time at the school, I was invited to trainings, meetings and unique circles that I would not have otherwise known about. These additional observations helped to support rapport building, trust, and familiarity. In fact, among the students that did not remember my name, they at minimum referred to me as the “restorative practices lady.” Thus, through my extended presence, I developed trust and rapport that may have worked to partly quell a Hawthorne effect. Nonetheless, my position as an outside evaluator remained constant and perhaps contributed to the emails that were never replied to when I asked to observe teacher restorative practices professional learning groups (PLGs).

In addition to my role as a research assistant, I also entered the research site as a Black female professional who has worked in an array of school settings on issues related to identity-based bias and inequity. My professional experiences provided important cultural capital, which helped me to navigate through rules and relationships and exhibit empathy. This form of capital contributed to the buy-in I had with several staff members. In addition, I believe that my identity as a Black woman created comfort for some participants to discuss race and inequity with me. Without prompting, some participants not only discussed racially biased incidents they had

witnessed, but they described how they have been implicated in racial bias themselves. Yet, the inverse could also be true. This is the idea that because I am a Black person, some staff may have not felt comfortable discussing issues of race and bias with me.

My overall interest in research on race and racial disparities is driven both by the inequities faced by Black and Brown people in society and my own experiences with race and gender bias in society. Thus, when I first started site observations, I observed the ways that teachers and staff interacted with students of color in comparison to White students. However, in doing so, I discovered that I oversimplified the way that race and belief systems operated within a setting. First, because I was a Black female observer, it was unlikely that participants would knowingly display race and gender biases. Second, as described by Derrick Bell (1992), racism in society is endemic, thus making it widespread in ways that can appear subtle or normal even to me. Finally, as described by one participant, people of color can also espouse Whiteness in their beliefs systems. Thus, I tried to remain constantly reflexive about my own beliefs on student behavior, appropriate discipline, and the interactions I deemed “normal.” Through reflexivity, data triangulation and widening my observational lens to include the subtle ways that racial bias operated, I was then able to see and hear tensions in ways I did not previously. For example, when recording student behavior, particularly for a student of color, I recorded both the way that the teacher interpreted the behavior and the way that I interpreted the behavior. In some cases, a student’s questioning of a teacher could appear confrontational or assertively inquisitive. Although I did not witness any student receive a classroom referral for their candor, there were several students of color in the detention hall for the way they spoke to their teacher. Often, these students were simply advised to convey their thoughts in a nicer way.

Likewise, I did not witness unfair treatment toward girls of color at Restorative High. However, there were a notable number of Black girls in the detention hall sessions I attended throughout the year. They received detention for behaviors I witnessed throughout the school population. These behaviors included tardiness, roaming the hallways, cellphone use, and classroom disruption. Although I was unable to pinpoint the cause of their constant representation in detention, I troubled this idea from an intersectional perspective. Namely, the constant representation of Black and Brown girls, and rarely White girls, was an indication of how their race and gender made them hyper-visible and a subject of an educators' "disciplinary gaze" in ways that White girls were not. As I reflected on this and triangulated my various data sources through memos, I began to recognize the way that discipline was racialized at Restorative High. In all, my professional role as a research assistant, former experience with school-based equity work, and personal experiences with racism and sexism all shaped the way that I entered the field and perceived interactions. However, it was my continued attempts to be reflexive that expanded how I made sense of race and discipline disparities at Restorative High School.

4.4.4 Quantitative Analyses

RP-Observe Scores. To assess the RP-Observe data, frequencies, measures of central tendency and correlations were computed. Variables included in the analyses of RP-Observe scores were circle topic, circle type, circle duration, circle size and teacher and student circle dimension scores. *Circle topic* was a string variable, which listed the question asked during a

circle. SPSS was used to randomly select 30% of these questions for textual analyses. *Circle type* (i.e., proactive, responsive, instructional, restorative and other) was recoded into 5 separate dummy variables to calculate frequencies of each circle type. Next, circle size was a continuous variable that represented the number of students in a given circle, which ranged from 4-33 with an average of 17 students. The circle duration variable was also a continuous variable with a range of 1-23 minutes and an average of 14 minutes. Finally, teacher and student circle score dimensions were ordinal and represented 1-2 (low-range), 3-5 (mid-range), and 6-7 (high-range) for circle quality.

Frequencies and mean circle scores. Frequencies were generated to assess the number of circles facilitated and the types of circles facilitated. The mean, standard deviation, and range was calculated for the number of students in a circle, the duration of each circle facilitated, and the score given for each dimension representing circle quality (Table 2 – Chapter 6). There were a total of 37 circles observed. This included proactive circles (n = 23), responsive circles (n=13), instructional circles (n = 3) a restorative circle (n=1) and one circle labeled as “other” (n=1) (Table 1 – Chapter 6).

Circle Dimension Correlations. To assess the relationship between teacher circle scores and student circle scores, a Spearman’s rho correlation matrix was generated. Spearman’s rho was used because the data were non-normal and violated parametric assumptions (Field, 2009). Additionally, the variables were both categorical and ordinal making Spearman’s rho a suitable test for non-parametric data (Field, 2009). The circle scores of four teachers were used as they each had at least three observations. In total, RP-Observe scores from 31 circles were correlated. Variables representing dimensions of circle quality included: Teacher circle agreements (TCA),

Teacher circle respect (TCR), Student circle respect (SCR), Circle Relevancy (CR), Student circle ownership (SCO), Student Risk-taking (SR), Problem-Solving (PS), and Student Circle Commitment (SCC). Other variables included circle duration and circle size – the number of circle participants. Teacher dimension scores largely fell within the mid-range scores while student circle scores fell within the low-to-mid range.

Descriptive Statistics. Descriptive statistics for school suspension data from the 2014-2015 pre-intervention year and the 2015-2016 intervention year were analyzed by exploring frequencies and percentages across race, gender, enrollment, suspension lengths, individualized education plan (IEP) status, and free lunch eligibility. These variables among others have been used across a range of school discipline studies and thus were used in this study (Gregory, et al., 2011, Mirsky & Wachtel, 2007; Skiba et al., 2000; Wallace et al., 2008). Race and gender were recoded to create a combined categorical variable representing 1) Black male, 2) Black female, 3) White male, 4) White female, 5) Hispanic male, 6) Hispanic female 7) males of all other racial groups and 8) females of all other racial groups. Enrollment totals were tabulated by aggregating across race and gender for students at restorative high. In total, 1,515 students were enrolled during the pre-intervention year and 1,518 students were enrolled during the intervention year.

Suspension data were recoded into unique suspensions and three different suspension lengths. Specifically, the variable unique suspension was computed to represent the number of students who had received at least one suspension of any length. By doing so, I controlled for inflation related to students receiving multiple suspensions. Thus, during the 2014-2015 academic year, 565 unique students were suspended. Likewise, during the 2015-2016 academic year, 373 unique students were suspended.

Suspensions were calculated using attendance data. Student absences related to school suspensions were aggregated into suspension lengths ranging from 1-13 days during the pre-intervention year and 1-14 days during the intervention year. Absences due to suspension were recoded into 1-day suspensions, 3-day suspensions, 10-day suspensions and suspensions greater than 10 days. Based on findings from school site-observations and interviews, 1-day suspensions were typically given to students that missed detention and 10-day suspensions were given for fighting. Behaviors associated with 3-day suspensions were unknown but were disaggregated due to high relative frequency.

Finally, frequencies and percentages for IEP status and free and reduced lunch were calculated across race and gender. IEP status was recoded into a dichotomous variable representing (0=No IEP and 1 = IEP), while free lunch status was also recoded into a dichotomous variable representing (0= No Free Lunch and 1 = Free lunch). Thus, during the 2014-2015 academic year, 270 students received an IEP and 1,046 students received free-lunch. During the 2015-2016 academic year, 283 students received an IEP while 865 students were eligible for free lunch.

Relative Risk Index – A Measure of Disproportionality. To examine the presence of disproportionality, a relative risk index was calculated across race and gender for each student group to compare suspension risk. Smaller racial groups were combined into an “other” category as Roy (2012) cautions statistical interpretation of small numerators. Thus, these groups were combined to support more accurate interpretation. This measure is used by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, which identifies RRI as a valid measure of disproportionality (Tobin & Vincent, 2011). RRI was calculated for enrollment and suspension

from the pre-intervention and intervention year enrollment and suspension data. By dividing the number of students suspended by the number of students enrolled, the suspension risk for all students was calculated for the pre-intervention and intervention year (Equation 1). Results indicated that suspension risk for all students enrolled decreased during the intervention year. However, risk percentage calculated for each student group across race and gender indicated that suspension risk across race remained disparate (Described in chapter 5). In fact, by calculating a comparative risk percentage (Equation 2) for all other racial groups, Black males, Black females, and non-white males all had a higher suspension risk compared to the rest of students enrolled.

To calculate a risk ratio for each race and gender category, risk percentage for one group was divided by the risk percentage of all other students suspended (Equation 3). Risk ratio's greater than 1 indicated the specific student group was disproportionately suspended. Finally, within gender risk-ratios were calculated to examine rates of suspension across race among each gender category. To examine the extent to which covariates such as socio-economic status and special education status accounted for differences in suspension rates, binary logistic regression was also performed.

Equation 1. Risk Percentage

$$\text{Risk \%} = \frac{\text{Number of student group suspended}}{\text{Number of student group enrolled}}$$

Equation 2. All Others Risk Percentage

$$\text{All others Risk \%} = \frac{\text{Number of students suspended excluding comparison group}}{\text{Number of student group enrolled excluding comparison group}}$$

Equation 3. Risk Ratio

$$\text{Risk Ratio} = \frac{\text{Risk\% of group suspended}}{\text{Risk\% of all other others suspended}}$$

Risk Ratio > 1 = Overrepresentation

Binary logistic regression. Binary logistic regression was performed on pre-intervention (2014-2015) and intervention-year (2015-2016) data. By using binary logistic regression, the predicted probability of the dichotomous dependent variable suspension (0 = suspended and 1 = not suspended) was analyzed using categorical independent interaction variables for race and gender (Example: Black Female). This analysis also included individualized education plan (IEP) status and free lunch eligibility as control variables to protect against influences on the outcome variable (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2009). This methodological approach complemented the strengths of each method and allowed for data triangulation that ensured that findings were rich, robust, comprehensive and well-developed (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 66; Engel and Schutt, 2009, p. 335; Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin & Cohen, 2014).

4.4.5 Conclusion

Methods described in this chapter were employed to respond to the overarching research question, why do racially disproportional school suspensions remain in a school where restorative practices reduce overall school suspensions? A mixed-methods approach was suitable for this study as the quantitative school suspension data did not have school-level factors pertaining to policy and educators' discipline ethos. Thus, classroom observations, interviews, meetings, trainings and school-based artifacts provided necessary contextual information about perspectives, processes, policy, social constructs and interactions at the school-site. Data were subsequently triangulated to provide rich and thick description about school suspensions at Restorative High School.

In the next chapter, I report results on school exclusions at Restorative High School. This chapter represents 1 of 4 findings chapters. I begin with this chapter because it provides context for subsequent chapters. Specifically, I report on suspension rates across race and gender so that I can explain the processes, policies and beliefs that influenced these suspension outcomes in the following chapters.

5.0 CHAPTER 5

5.1.1 Racial Disproportionality at Restorative High

5.1.2 Introduction

In chapter five, I respond to the research question, will the case-study school decrease its racial disproportionality in school exclusions during the 2015-2016 intervention year compared to the 2014-2015 pre-intervention year? As exhibited in school suspension literature, overall suspensions were decreased during the intervention year while racially disproportional suspensions remained. Moreover, within gender analyses indicate that the discipline gap was greater between Black girls and all other girls compared to Black Boys and all other boys. Subsequent chapters will discuss factors that contributed to these disproportional suspension rates.

Similar to the pre-intervention year, Black students accounted for 53% of students with an IEP and 46% of students receiving free lunch (Table 2). White students accounted for 36% of students with an IEP and 29% of students receiving free lunch. While enrollment rates were relatively similar to the previous year at 40% and 36% respectively (Table 1), Black students accounted for a greater share of students receiving school suspensions. By calculating a relative risk index for students across race and gender, I later report on student's risk for

suspension relative to their peers. Subsequently, I control for free lunch and IEP eligibility using binary logistic regression.

5.1.3 Descriptive Statistics

During the 2014-2015 pre-intervention year, there were 565 students who received at least one suspension (unique suspensions). By the 2015-2016 academic year, only 373 students received at least one suspension representing a 34% reduction in unique suspensions during the intervention year (Table 6). While the absolute number of suspensions decreased for all students during the intervention year, racial disproportionality remained.

During the intervention year, Black and White students made up similar enrollment percentages at 40% and 36% respectively (Table 3). Yet, Black students had higher overall rates of suspension where Black males represented 32% of students ever suspended and Black females represented 23% of students ever suspended. In contrast, White males and White females accounted for 16% and 11% of students ever suspended.

During this same year, students at Restorative High School received suspensions ranging from 1-14 days. The three most frequently given suspension lengths were the 1-day suspension (n=471; Table 7), 3-day suspension (n=127; Table 8) and 10-day suspension (n = 41; Table 9). Like the pre-intervention year, these suspension lengths include repeat suspensions across the same student. However, the number of suspensions meted significantly decreased across two categories. During the intervention year, 1-day suspensions decreased by 60% while 3-day suspensions decreased by 48%. However, the number of 10-day suspensions increased by 59%

from 17 to 41 during the intervention year. This increase corresponds with qualitative data that reflects that 10-day automatic suspensions were reinforced for fighting during the intervention year. Despite the decrease in 1-day and 3-day suspensions, Black students received twice the number of 1-day and 3-day suspensions compared to White students. Further, Black students received 5 times the number 10-day suspensions compared to their White counterparts. Finally, of all suspensions over 10-days, Black males and females accounted for 100% (n=6) of suspensions over 10-days. Subsequent analysis will describe the risk of suspension for each student group relative to each other. Moreover, within gender analysis will highlight how gender relates to relative risk outcomes for suspension.

Table 3. Enrollment at Restorative High School

Variables	<u>2014-2015</u>		<u>2015-2016</u>	
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Black	302 (20%)	267 (18%)	334 (22%)	287 (19%)
Asian	115 (8%)	89 (6%)	102 (7%)	80 (5%)
Hispanic	31 (2%)	31 (2%)	38 (3%)	36 (2%)
White	282 (19%)	311 (20%)	278 (18%)	272 (18%)
Other *	46 (3%)	41 (3%)	45 (3%)	46 (3%)
Total	1,515		1,518	

Table 4. 2014-2015 Percent of Students with IEP Status and Free Lunch

Race	<u>IEP Status</u>		<u>Free Lunch Status</u>	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Black	77 (29%)	58 (21%)	247 (24%)	214 (20%)
Asian	6 (2%)	3 (7%)	82 (8%)	63 (6%)
Hispanic	5 (2%)	3 (28%)	21 (2%)	16 (2%)
White	73 (27%)	33 (12%)	147 (14%)	191 (18%)
Other	7 (3%)	5 (2%)	32 (3%)	33 (3%)

Table 5. 2015-2016 IEP Percent of Students with IEP Status and Free Lunch

Race	<u>IEP Status</u>		<u>Free Lunch Status</u>	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Black	97 (35%)	50 (18%)	223 (26%)	172 (20%)
Asian	3 (1%)	2 (1%)	71 (8%)	57 (7%)
Hispanic	6 (2%)	3 (1%)	16 (2%)	15 (2%)
White	67 (24%)	34 (12%)	131 (15%)	125 (14%)
Other	9 (3%)	10 (4%)	26 (3%)	29 (3%)

Table 6. Percent Students Ever Suspended (Unique Suspensions)

<u>Race</u>	<u>2014-2015</u>		<u>2015-2016</u>	
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Black	163 (29%)	124 (22%)	119 (32%)	87 (23%)
Asian	32 (6%)	11 (2%)	19 (5%)	5 (1%)
Hispanic	19 (3%)	11 (2%)	15 (4%)	1 (.3%)
White	91 (16%)	72 (13%)	59 (16%)	40 (11%)
Other *	26 (5%)	16 (3%)	13 (3%)	15 (4%)
Total	565		373	

*Multi-racial, Hawaiian, Native-America

Table 7. One-Day Suspensions by Race and Gender

Race	<u>2014-2015</u>		<u>2015-2016</u>	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Black	416 (41%)	216 (19%)	175 (37%)	94 (20%)
Asian	52 (4.4%)	12 (1%)	20 (4.2%)	7 (1.4%)
Hispanic	35 (3%)	13 (1%)	19 (4.0)	0
White	176 (15%)	138 (12%)	78 (17%)	50 (11%)
Other*	64 (5%)	42 (4%)	18 (3.8%)	10 (2.1%)
	Total = 1164		Total = 471	

*Multi-racial, Hawaiian, Native-American

Table 8. Three-day Suspensions by Race and Gender

Race	<u>2014-2015</u>		<u>2015-2016</u>	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Black	94 (39%)	66 (27%)	38 (30%)	31 (25%)
Asian	10 (4.1%)	0	7 (6%)	0
Hispanic	5 (2.0%)	5 (2.0%)	5 (4%)	2 (2%)
White	29 (12%)	16 (7%)	14 (11%)	11 (9%)
Other*	10 (4.1%)	8 (3.3%)	13 (10%)	6 (4.7%)
	Total = 243		Total = 127	

*Multi-racial, Hawaiian, Native-American

Table 9. Ten-day Suspensions by Race and Gender

Race	<u>2014-2015</u>		<u>2015-2016</u>	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Black	7 (41%)	6 (35%)	20 (49%)	11 (27%)
Asian	0	1 (6%)	0	1 (2%)
Hispanic	0	0	0	0
White	2 (12%)	0	3 (7%)	2 (5%)
Other	1 (6%)	0	3 (7%)	1 (2%)
	Total = 17		Total = 41	

5.1.4 Pre-Intervention & Post-Intervention Suspension Disproportionality

During the intervention year, relative risk for suspension decreased for all students. Overall, there was a 25% relative risk (Table. 11), which is a 12% reduction in suspension risk compared to the pre-intervention year (Table 10). During the intervention year, Black males held a 36% relative risk which is 17% reduction from the pre-intervention year. Likewise, during the intervention year, Black females held a 30% relative risk of suspension which is a 16% reduction compared to the pre-intervention year. Suspension risk for White males during the intervention year was 21% percent which was an 11% risk decrease from the pre-intervention year. Suspension risk for White females during the intervention year was 15% which was an 8% decrease in risk of suspension compared to the pre-intervention year. Suspension risk for non-Black and non-White males during the intervention year was 25% which represents a 15% decrease in suspension risk compared to the pre-intervention year. Finally, all other non-Black and non-White females had a 13% risk rate which represents a 9% decrease in risk compared to the pre-intervention year.

Although overall suspension risk decreased, Black students and non-White males remained overrepresented during the intervention year. Black male relative suspension risk remained relatively the same across both years where Black males were 1.6 times more likely to be suspended in the pre-intervention year and 1.7 times more likely to be suspended during the intervention year compared to all other students. Black female students remained 1.3 times as likely to be suspended during both years. Non-Black and White males also remained

disproportionally suspended across both school years. In contrast, calculated risk-ratios for White males, White females and non-Black/White females was less than one indicating underrepresentation in suspension risk.

Table 10. 2014-2015 Suspension Risk Percentage and Risk-ratio

	BM	BF	WM	WF	OM	OF	Total
Total Enrollment	302	267	282	311	192	161	1,515
Total Suspended	163	124	91	72	77	38	565
Risk %	53%	46%	32%	23%	40%	24%	37%
All other risk %	33%	35%	38%	41%	37%	39%	
Risk Ratio	1.6	1.3	.84	.56	1.09	.62	

Table 11. 2015-2016 High School Enrollment and Suspension Risk by Race and Gender

	BM	BF	WM	WF	OM	OF	Total
Total Enrollment	334	287	278	272	185	162	1,518
Total Suspended	119	87	59	40	47	21	373
Risk %	36%	30%	21%	15%	25%	13%	25%
All other risk %	21%	23%	25%	27%	24%	25%	
Risk Ratio	1.7	1.3	.84	.55	1.04	.52	

5.1.5 Within Gender Differences

Pre-intervention. To determine if within gender group differences were significantly different during the pre-intervention year, bivariate analyses were conducted using Pearson's chi-square test of independence revealing significant differences in suspension rates across race among females ever suspended ($\chi^2 = 42.19$, $p = .001$) and males ever suspended ($\chi^2 = 28.76$, $p = .001$) during the pre-intervention year (Table 12). Pre-intervention year within-gender risk-ratios reflect that Black females were twice as likely to be suspended than all other girls. This within gender risk is greater than Black male students who were 1.5 times more likely to be suspended than all other males (Table 13).

Intervention-Year. Pearson's chi-square test of independence was also performed to detect for significant differences across race among females ($\chi^2 = 28.18$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$) and males ($\chi^2 = 16.49$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$) ever suspended during the intervention year (Table 14). Subsequently, within-gender risk-ratios were calculated reflecting that Black females were 3.2 times more likely to be suspended than all other girls during the intervention year. This within gender risk was also greater than the risk experienced by Black male students who were 2.1 times more likely to be suspended than all other males (Table 15). Ultimately, risk-ratios calculated on disaggregated suspension data not only indicate that within-gender risk increased but it demonstrates that Black females have more than three times the risk of suspension compared to all other females. To assess variance in suspension accounting for covariates, logistic regression analysis was also performed.

Table 12. Pre-Intervention Year Results of Pearson’s Chi-square Test for Suspensions Within-gender Across Race During the Pre-intervention Year

Classification	Black Female	White Female	Other Female
Never Suspended	143 (54%)	239 (77%)	123 (76%)
Ever Suspended	124 (46%)	72 (23%)	38 (24%)

	Black Male	White Male	Other Male
Never Suspended	139 (46%)	191 (68%)	115 (60%)
Ever Suspended	163 (54%)	91 (32%)	77 (40%)

$X^2 = 42.19, p = .001$

Males: $X^2 = 28.76, p = .001.$

Table 13. 2014-2015 Within-gender Suspension Risk

	BF	WF	OF	Total	BM	WM	OM	Total
Total Enrollment	267	311	161	739	302	282	192	776
Suspended	124	72	38	231	163	91	77	331
Risk %	46%	23%	24%	31%	54%	32%	40%	43%
All other risk %	23%	37%	33%		35%	49%	43%	
Risk Ratio	2.0	.62	.73		1.5	.65	.93	

Table 14. Intervention Year Results of Pearson’s Chi-Square Test for Suspensions Within-gender Across Race During the Intervention Year

Race/Gender			
Classification	Black Female	White Female	Other Female
Never Suspended	200 (70%)	232 (85%)	141 (87%)
Ever Suspended	87 (30%)	40 (15%)	21 (13%)
	Black Male	White Male	Other Male
Never Suspended	215 (64%)	219 (79%)	138 (75%)
Ever Suspended	119 (36%)	59 (21%)	47 (25%)

Females: $\chi^2 = 28.18$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$ Males: $\chi^2 = 16.49$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$

Table 15. 2015-2016 Within-gender Suspension Risk

	BF	WF	OF	Total	\BM	WM	OM	Total
Total Enrollment	287	272	162	721	334	278	185	797
Suspended	87	40	21	148	119	59	47	225
Risk %	45%	23%	24%	21%	49%	32%	48%	28%
All other risk %	14%	24%	23%		23%	31%	29%	
Risk Ratio	3.2	.96	1.04		2.1	1.03	1.6	

5.1.6 Binary Logistic Regression

Holding Black males as the reference group and controlling for IEP eligibility and free lunch status, Black males had significant greater odds of suspension in comparison to Asian males, Asian Females, White Males and White females during the pre-intervention year (Table. 16). Black males continued to have significant greater odds of suspension across these groups during the intervention year which also included Hispanic females (Table 17).

Thus, compared to Black males, White males were less likely to suspended (OR = .517, $p < .001$) controlling for IEP status and free lunch eligibility during the 2015-2016 intervention year. Likewise, Asian males (OR = .377, $p < .001$), Asian females (OR = .107, $p < .001$), Hispanic females (OR = .054, $p < .004$), and White females (OR = .319, $p < .001$) all had significant lower odds of suspension compared to Black males. As exhibited with the risk-ratios, Black females and Hispanic males were disproportionally suspended; as such, Black males did

not have greater odds of suspension compared to these two student groups. Finally, having an IEP (OR = .720, $p < .043$) or being eligible for free lunch (OR = 1.53, $p < .001$) was associated with a greater odds of suspension during the intervention year. This represents a slight change from the pre-intervention year where having an IEP was not associated with a greater odds of suspension. This change may be related to increased IEP enrollment among Black males during the intervention year (Table. 5).

Table 16. 2014-2015 Odds of Suspension Across Race, Gender, Free Lunch and IEP

Variable	OR	SE	Z	p > z 	95% C.I.
Black Females	.75	.13	-1.70	.089	0.53 – 1.05
Asian Male	.34	.08	4.40	.001	.211 – .548
Asian Female	.124	.043	6.10	.001	.063 – .243
Hispanic Male	1.28	.509	.60	.536	.586 – 2.80
Hispanic Female	.506	.210	1.70	.099	.225 – 1.13
White Male	.470	.085	4.20	.001	.330 – .670
White Female	.284	.051	6.90	.001	.200 – .407
Other Male	1.18	.390	.51	.610	.620 – 2.26
Other Female	.561	.194	1.67	.094	.284 – 1.10
Constant	0.77	0.13	1.60	.111	0.56 – 1.06
Individualized Education Plan	.857	.127	1.04	.299	.641 – 1.14
Free Lunch	1.73	.232	.05	.001	1.33 – 2.25

Model $\chi^2 = 6.81, df = 11, p < .001$

Table 17. 2015-2016 Odds of Suspension Across Race, Gender, Free Lunch and IEP status

Variable	<i>OR</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i> > <i> z </i>	<i>95% C.I.</i>
Black Females	.77	.133	-1.50	.127	0.50 – 1.20
Asian Male	.377	.107	-3.40	.001	.217 – .657
Asian Female	.107	.051	-4.70	.001	.042 – .274
Hispanic Male	1.25	.446	.60	.521	.626 – 2.52
Hispanic Female	.054	.056	-2.90	.004	.007 – .401
White Male	.517	.097	-3.50	.001	.357 – .748
White Female	.319	.067	-5.46	.001	.212 – .481
Other Male	.736	.258	0.87	.384	.371 – 1.47
Other Female	.866	.292	-0.43	.669	.448 – 1.68
Constant	.454	.061	-5.23	.001	.339 – .611
Individualized Education Plan	.720	.117	-2.03	.043	.524 – .990
Free Lunch	1.53	.198	3.27	.001	1.18 – 1.97

Model $\chi^2 = 5.72$, *df* = 11, *p* < .001

5.1.7 Conclusion

As reflected in the literature, my study found that risk of suspension was reduced for all students when comparing the pre-intervention suspension rate to suspensions during the intervention year. Yet, during both years, Black males and females were suspended at greater rates than their non-Black counterparts. Black students continued to have greater odds of suspension after controlling for IEP and free lunch status. Indeed, after controlling for these covariates, there was no significant difference in Black female odds of suspensions compared to Black male odds of suspension. Although the raw suspension numbers between Black males and females differ, they both have similar odds of suspension. This concept was confirmed with observational data that revealed the Black females were a constant presence during after-school detention. This significant observational trend reaffirmed the need to conduct with-in gender analysis.

Within-gender analyses revealed a significant difference in suspension rates among males and females. Specifically, Black females were twice as likely to be suspended compared to all other females while Black males were 1.5 times more likely to be suspended compared to all other males. These within-gender analyses indicate that the discipline gap between Black females and their counterparts of other races is greater than the discipline gap between Black males and their male counterparts. These findings underscore the importance of disaggregating data both by race and gender as they reflect suspensions patterns that are different from overall suspension rates. Specifically, male and female students may experience school discipline differently which calls for an intersectional approach to school discipline practices and school suspension research. In the following chapter, qualitative classroom observations are used to

understand the application of restorative practices and how this may have impacted suspensions meted during the intervention year.

6.0 CHAPTER 6

6.1 ASSESSING CIRCLE QUALITY

6.1.1 Introduction

Chapter six addresses the following research questions: (1) how do educators apply restorative practices? (2) What factors influence the way that restorative practices are implemented? I contribute to the literature by describing micro and macro factors that influence the way that restorative practices are implemented. These factors served either as barriers or facilitators and thus influenced the quality of restorative practices circles facilitated. Ultimately, I argue that intervention barriers contribute to low circle quality which hinders relationship-building and potential impact on discipline outcomes.

The chief aim of implementing restorative practices at Restorative High School was to reduce the number of suspensions and the disproportionate suspension of students of color. However, the effectiveness of the intervention was contingent upon a variety of factors which include but are not limited to the quality of training educators receive, the commitment of educators to the intervention, as well as the way that the intervention is implemented. This chapter describes how restorative practice circles were used, the quality of circles facilitated, and

factors that were barriers or facilitators of the intervention. During the summer of 2015, the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) provided two days of the four-part¹ *Safer Safer Schools® Whole School Change* training to administrators, teachers and staff at Restorative High School. Despite its comprehensive training efforts, there were a number of extraneous factors that influenced the way that restorative practices were implemented at Restorative High School. This chapter addresses the following research questions: (1) how do educators apply restorative practices? (2) What factors influence the way that restorative practices are implemented? Findings demonstrate that there are a variety of facilitators and barriers to implementing the *Safer Safer Schools®* model. Facilitators of the model included student training, observations that indicated high circle quality, and having a staff member dedicated to supporting restorative practices in the school. Barriers to intervention included a lack of time to implement circles, large class sizes, type of circle questions asked, and low circle quality. Despite in-school supports and teachers' commitment to the model, barriers to intervention were a present factor for all participants. Thus, this chapter demonstrates how the quality of implementation can impact the ability of restorative practices to change discipline trends.

¹ The *Safer Safer Schools®* model provided to the district was divided into four separate training sessions over two years. During year one, all case study schools received *Introduction to Restorative Practices – Basic restorative concepts and skills* (day-1) and *Using Circles Effectively - How to use circles for a broad range of behavioral and academic purposes* (day-2). During the 2016-2017 academic year, (not discussed in this dissertation), day-3, *Facilitating Restorative Conferences – How to facilitate structured meetings that effectively respond to wrongdoing* and day-4, *Family Engagement – How to effectively engage and empower families using restorative practices* were offered to select staff and administrators.

6.1.2 The Training Model

The IIRP describes the *Safer Saner Schools*® model as a *Whole School Change* intervention (IIRP, 2011). This method is used to ensure “100% staff participation” to improve cooperation, strengthen relationships, improve academic outcomes and reduce misbehavior and subsequent discipline (IIRP, 2011, p. 1). In addition to four days of training, the *Safer Saner Schools* model also includes “Distance Preparatory Activities” such as conference calls with school leaders, an “Implementation Startup Session” which includes establishing and supporting a professional learning group (PLG) for staff, “Follow-up Activities” such as site visits from an IIRP trainer/coach, and the provision of resources such as IIRP books, videos and a “talking piece” (IIRP, 2011). These concepts and practices were assessed through ethnographic observation while circle quality was evaluated by using RP-Observe, an instrument that measures circle quality (described in chapter 4)

6.1.3 Restorative Practices Circles

Factors Influencing the Intervention. As restorative practices were implemented throughout the school year, the quality of circles varied based on factors such as questions discussed and the degree to which the students or the educator engaged in the circle. Specifically, while there were significant correlations between teacher circle scores and student circle scores, students across all classrooms had lower scores in the dimensions of risk-taking. Thus, on average, circles in classrooms observed did not foster levels of trust in which students would be

transparent about their experiences. Finally, barriers to intervention such as lack of time, large class size, and circle type impacted the quality of circles. Ultimately, I describe how the intervention was applied across case study classrooms. If representative of the larger school setting, which I believe these to be, these findings have important implications for overall intervention fidelity and its potential for impact on discipline trends.

6.1.4 Implementing Restorative Practice Circles

Circle types and frequency. In order to provide sufficient transition time between the training and early attempts to implement restorative practices at the school, classroom observations began in November of 2015 and ended in May of 2016. During this time, case study teachers utilized the four circle types (i.e., proactive, responsive, restorative, instructional) taught during the summer training. Circles falling within any of these categories (n = 37; Table 18) were assessed using RP-Observe, an instrument developed by Anne Gregory and colleagues (2013). RP-Observe accounts for the quality of restorative practice circles according to specific restorative practices constructs. The majority of circles observed were proactive circles (n = 23). Costello and colleagues (2010) describe how these circles can help to improve school climate. In classrooms observed, proactive circles allowed participants to discuss likes, dislikes, and common interests. The second most used circle was the responsive circle (n = 13). Responsive circles are facilitated to address and respond to conflict and co-construct group ideals (Costello et al., 2010). Other circles observed included a restorative conference (n=1) which is a circle used to make amends between impacted parties. Circles also included an instructional circle (n = 3)

which educators used to give academic directions or reflect on an assignment. Circles topics that did not fit in these categories fell in the “other” circle category (n =1). Circle interactions and discussions were measured using RP-Observe across the dimensions of *teacher safety, belonging, voice, student ownership, risk taking, problem solving, and student circle commitment*.

Ideally, I would have observed more circles to contribute to more robust findings across teachers. However, there were an array of factors that impacted the number of circles I was able to observe. Circle observation was contingent upon: (1) a teacher inviting me to their classroom, (2) how regularly a teacher held a circle, (3) if the circle qualified as a restorative practices circle, (4) if there was a school holiday, vacation or snow day, (5) if my schedule aligned with the teacher’s schedule, (6) if the teacher cancelled a circle and (7) state exams took place during the month of May in which case I was unable to observe more circles as they were cancelled for the month. In all, the circle type, frequency of circles and content of discussion in each circle helped to shape the relationships in each classroom and the overall classroom climate.

Table 18. Types of Circles and Frequency

Circle Type	N
Proactive	23
Responsive	13
Restorative	1
Instructional	3
Other	1
Total = 37	

Circle dimensions and quality. Circles are scored low-to-high on RP-Observe using the numbers 1-7 (Gregory and colleagues, 2013). Score ranges represent 1-2 (low-range), 3-5 (mid-range), and 6-7 (high-range). This study focuses on the circle scores of teachers who had three or more observations ($n=4$). On average, teachers had mid-range ($\bar{x} = 5.4$) scores for the circle safety dimensions which indicates that teachers generally established circle agreements/rules (i.e. students not talking while others talk) and reinforced them (Table 19). Significant correlations were present with teacher safety and *student belonging* ($r_s = .698$, $p < .01$), student ownership ($r_s = .470$, $p < .01$), and *student circle commitment* ($r_s = .668$, $p < .01$). This indicates that the degree of safety established by a teacher was associated with how students created belonging for their peers, exhibited agency in the circle and participated in the overall process.

Teachers also had mid-range scores for the teacher belonging dimension ($\bar{x} = 5.7$) indicating that teachers generally showed respect toward students and created circle environments where students felt included in the circle. Significant correlations were present with the dimensions of *student belonging* ($r_s = .657$, $p < .01$), student ownership ($r_s = .546$, $p < .01$), and *student circle commitment* ($r_s = .612$, $p < .01$). Thus, the degree to which a teacher exhibited respect and inclusion was associated with how students created belonging, exhibited agency in the circle process, and participated.

Despite these significant teacher-student dimension correlations, student scores were generally lower than teacher scores falling within the mid-to-low range. The average student-belonging score ($\bar{x} = 5.4$) and circle relevancy scores ($\bar{x} = 4.2$) were mid-range suggesting that

students fostered peer-to-peer inclusive environments centered on discussions that were relevant to their academic or interpersonal experiences at school. However, constructs pertaining to student circle *risk taking* ($\bar{x} = 2.4$) and *problem solving* ($\bar{x} = 1.6$) received low-range scores. Low-range scores for student *risk-taking* indicated that students were not transparent about their experiences (i.e., did not share about ‘harm’ experienced or repaired) while low-range scores on problem solving typically indicated that the circle topic did not require a problem to be solved. Finally, on average, student circle commitment ($\bar{x} = 4.1$) fell within mid-range scores indicating that students had moderate contribution to the circle conversation and only displayed moderate levels of off-task behaviors (i.e., side conversations and cell phone use). To better understand the variation in these scores, I describe how technical factors such as time spent in the circle, classroom size, and number of circles facilitated also influenced circle quality and therefore its potential to strengthen student-teacher relationships and reduce discipline rates.

Case Study Teachers. Of the 37 circles observed at Restorative High, 31 were facilitated by four case-study teachers (Table 1.6). Data from these circles were selected for analysis as each teacher had at least 3 circle observations throughout the academic year. Ms. Jacobs, one of several detention teachers, facilitated her circles during afterschool detention. There I observed 11 of her restorative practices circles and she had mid-level teacher dimension scores for *safety* ($\bar{x} = 5.5$) and *belonging* ($\bar{x} = 5.8$; Table 1.5). Of the 10 circles I observed in Ms. Compton’s non-core classes, she had mid-level teacher dimension scores for *safety* ($\bar{x} = 5.8$) and *belonging* ($\bar{x} = 5.8$). Next, I observed 7 circles facilitated by Ms. Singer in a core-academic special education course. She was the only teacher to have high-range *safety* ($\bar{x} = 6.0$) and *belonging* ($\bar{x} = 6.1$) scores. Finally, I observed three circles facilitated by Mr. Barron who had low-range scores for

teacher safety ($\bar{x} = 2.3$) and mid-level scores for belonging ($\bar{x} = 4.7$). Mr. Barron was the only teacher to have circle score dimensions below the group mean for *teacher safety* ($\bar{x} = 5.4$) and *teacher belonging* ($\bar{x} = 5.7$). While variation across these dimensions are indicative of the different circle experiences for students; there were a host of factors that influenced teacher dimension scores. Each classroom varied based on subject taught (core academic vs. non-core academic), average circle duration in minutes ($\bar{x} = 14$) and average classroom size ($\bar{x} = 17$) (Table 1.5). Together, these factors influenced the way restorative practice circles were implemented across classrooms observed.

Number of students in a circle. The number of students in a classroom also impacted the delivery of the intervention. The number of participants across all circles ranged from 4-33 (Table 19). However, Ms. Compton indicated that “under 20, 25 [was] more manageable.” Therefore, a larger class size is associated with greater difficulty in facilitating a classroom circle and thus may impact circle quality. The number of students in a given circle was negatively correlated with *teacher safety* ($r_s = -.348$, $p < .05$), *teacher belonging* ($r_s = -.343$, $p < .05$), *topic relevancy* ($r_s = -.686$, $p < .01$), and problem solving ($r_s = -.409$, $p < .01$). This suggests that the average class size of 17 was negatively associated with lower attempts to maintain circle rules/expectations, fairness, topics pertaining to student experiences at school and opportunities to solve issues or harm done.

Circle Duration. The time each teacher spent facilitating a circle had a notable relationship with the quality of the circle they facilitated. The average circle duration was 14 minutes with a range of 3-21 minutes. Of the 10 circles I observed in Ms. Compton’s non-core

classes, she had an average circle length of 11 minutes and mid-range teacher dimension scores. In contrast, Mr. Barron taught a core academic course, had the lowest teacher dimension scores, and an average circle length of 3-minutes. However, Ms. Singer, also a core-academic teacher had the highest teacher dimension scores and an average circle length of 16 minutes. The difference in these teachers' scores was not only related to the duration of their circles, but the specific ways they each facilitated.

While Ms. Compton always started the classes I observed with a seated circle, Mr. Barron facilitated standing circles near the classroom exit during the last few minutes of the period. Often, I was unable to score his circles because he ran out of class time or the bell rang within the first few moments of the circle. In all, the number of minutes a circle was facilitated significantly correlated with the dimensions of *teacher safety* ($r_s = .343, p < .05$), *topic relevancy*, ($r_s = .444, p < .01$) *risk-taking* ($r_s = .470, p < .01$), *problem solving* ($r_s = .601, p < .01$) and *student circle commitment* ($r_s = .006, p < .05$). This suggests that the amount of time spent in a circle was related to the degree of safety and order a teacher maintained during the circle (Table. 22). With an average circle length of 14 minutes, this perhaps corresponds to the significant correlation between circle duration and student *risk-taking*. This relationship suggests that the length of a circle was related to the degree that students were willing to be transparent about their experiences of feeling *harm*, causing *harm* or making amends. Similarly, the significant relationship between circle duration, topic relevancy and problem solving suggests that the length of time in a circle was related to circles that discussed school-based experiences as well as

provided opportunities to solve problems. Despite these positive relationships, the significant yet weak relationship between *circle duration* and *student circle commitment* might suggest that students were less engaged as circles extended for longer amounts of time.

Table 19. Average Circle Duration and Circle Ratings for all Teachers

	N	Circle Duration (min)	Circle Safety (Teacher)	Teacher-Student Belonging	Student-Student Belonging	Circle-Topic Relevancy	Student Circle Ownership	Student Risk-Taking	Student Problem Solving	Student Circle Commitment
MEAN	7.1	14*	5.4	5.7	4.0	4.0	4.3	2.4	1.6	4.0
STD. DEV	.9	8.2	1.2	.75	1.4	1.8	1.4	1.6	.909	1.5
RANGE	- 33	2 - 30	2 - 7	4 - 7	2 - 6	1 - 7	2 - 6	1 - 6	1 - 4	1 - 6

n =36 Circles

*Excludes a restorative conference of 180 minutes

Table 20. Participant Pseudonyms and Descriptors *

PSYUDONYM	POSITION	SUBJECT	SEX	RACE
MS. SINGER	Teacher	Core Academic	Female	White
MS. JACOBS	Teacher	Non-Core Academic	Female	White
MR. BARRON	Teacher	Core Academic	Male	Asian
MS. COMPTON	Teacher	Non-Core Academic	Female	White
MS. RIZA	Teacher	Non-Core Academic	Female	White
MS. HOLDSMITH	School Leader	N/A	Female	White
MS. GOLD	Administrator	N/A	Male	White
OFFICER CLAIRE	Officer	N/A	Male	Black
MR. BARNES	Administrator	N/A	Female	Black
MR. LEROY	Teacher	Non-Core Academic	Male	Black

* Gender pronouns and/or professional titles for some participants have been changed.

Table 21. Average Circle Duration and Scores

	Subject	Circle Duration (min)	Teacher Safety	Teacher- Belonging	Student- Belonging	Topic Relevancy	Student Ownership	Risk-Taking	Problem Solving	Circle Commitment	
ALL TEACHERS	All	36	14	5.4	5.7	4.0	4.0	2.4	1.6	4.0	
MS. COMPTON	NA	10	11	5.8	5.8	4.8	2.5	4.4	2.0	1.0	5.1
MS. JACOBS	NA	11	21	5.5	5.6	3.18	4.82	3.36	2.36	2.36	3.09
MR. BARRON	A	3	3	2.3	4.7	2.0	2.67	3.3	1	1	2
MS. SINGER	A	7	16	6.0	6.1	5.0	5.71	5.57	3.57	1.57	5.14

Table 22. Correlation of Circle Dimensions

	Circle Duration	N	Teacher Safety	Teacher Belonging	Student Belong	Topic Relevance	Student Ownership	Risk-Taking	Problem Solving	Circle Commitment
CIRCLE DURATION	1									
NUMER PARTIC.	-.268	1								
TEACHER SAFETY	.343*	-.348*	1							
TEACHER BELONG.	.219	-.343*	.560**	1						
STUDENT BELONG.	.045	-.154	.698**	.657**	1					
TOPIC RELEVANT.	.444**	-.686**	.274	.314	.154	1				
STUDENT OWN.	-.035	-.308	.470**	.546***	.584**	.245	1			
RISK-TAKING	.470**	-.277	.232**	.168	.067	.422*	.321	1		
PROB. SOLV	.601**	-.409*	.274	-.039	-.058	.542**	-.125	-.337	1	
CIR. COMMIT.	.006*	-.182	.668**	.612**	.906**	.052	.627**	.091	-.104	1

6.2 QUALITATIVE FACTORS INFLUENCING CIRCLE QUALITY

6.2.1 Facilitators of Restorative Practices

Participants described their own indicators of success within their classrooms and at the school. Ms. Holdsmith (Table 20), a school leader, began to cultivate restorative practices for her school stating, “I’ve created a framework for teachers as to how they can use restorative practices based on our trainings.” She facilitated on-going restorative practices professional development sessions with other teachers which were called professional learning groups (PLGs). She also created an agenda for the IIRP visiting coach during his quarterly visits. During my observation of these visits, the IIRP coach would participate in PLG’s, observe teacher circles and provide feedback, and help to resolve conflict between teachers and students. This level of individualized feedback was given to teachers who requested it or were identified by Ms. Holdsmith as needing individualized support. Describing her role she said,

I provide support to all teachers in the school if they ever need strategies, tips, assistance for mediation or circles, conferences and I schedule them in and I also schedule the students I work with so that way they can support me, and I can support them in teaching and training the students and the teachers.

As a school leader, Ms. Holdsmith’s supportive role coincides with the *Whole School Change*® model as she provides continuity and feedback to staff on circle facilitation. In doing so, her role as the school-based restorative practices support personnel coincides with research indicating

that schools most successful with restorative practices have staff members who are committed to suspension alternatives (González, 2015). Furthermore, through her role, she could support consistent and sustainable implementation which ultimately can impact relationship building and discipline trends. Ms. Jacobs specifically describes how Ms. Holdsmith's support was used to change discipline practices saying, "when two kids have issues, instead of sending both to in-school [suspension] they are sent to Ms. Holdsmith ... and it's dealt with in a different way. So, if they can nip it in the bud before it becomes a fight, that's great because it keeps the kids in school and they keep learning, that's just the whole point." These accounts describe the intentional support needed to ensure the effective roll-out of restorative practices within a school. Additionally, Ms. Holdsmith managed the restorative practices student leaders within the school. Taken together, Ms. Holdsmith was an important facilitator of the intervention within the school.

Through funding from a local organization, Restorative High School was also able to select a group of students to receive restorative practices training from IIRP. Students participated in a full-day training which was an introduction to restorative practices and how to run circles. The intention of this training was to prepare students to participate in and take ownership of the integration of restorative practices at Restorative High. This student training opportunity contributed to IIRP's *Whole School Change* model as it allowed students to take greater ownership of how the intervention was implemented in their school. During their training, students responded to the question, "How will your group use circles?" Their responses included, "relationship building, solving conflict, hav[ing] an open mind to different opinions, group projects, behavior, fund raising, [and] goal setting." Throughout the academic year, Ms.

Holdsmith met with these student leaders and prepared them to facilitate circles requested by teachers as well as conferences.

During a 3-hour long post-suspension re-entry circle (restorative conference) related to a school fight, two student leaders participated in the circle by asking questions about behavioral accountability. This was one of the first formal re-integrative conferences held at Restorative High. It included parents, guardians, community members, administrators, officers, a police officer, central office staff and community members. The trained student leaders helped to establish circle *safety*. For example, one Black male student leader helped to establish circle *safety* by describing the “one voice” rule which indicates that only one person should talk at a time. For most of the circle, this rule was followed. To solve the issues that caused the fight, student leaders also asked critical follow-up questions of the student participants (i.e., *ownership*).

Other successes during the school-year related to the strengthened relationships between students. Ms. Compton described this stating, “I think everything I’ve said... has been beneficial, I feel like there is a positive vibe in my room.” Likewise, Ms. Jacobs described the way that a 12th grader redirected the distracted behaviors of 9th graders during a detention circle. She stated:

He felt safe in that space to say that and I think partly that was a factor of being the old head in there. He was a senior and mostly nobody else was. They were freshman so he knew they were not going to talk back to him. But he felt safe with me and the other teacher and knew that he could speak up and speak his mind and knew there would be no repercussions.

Thus, concepts of circle *safety* and school-based restorative practices support were key facilitators of the use of restorative practices. Ms. Holdsmith's support of both students and teachers through training and circle modeling served to aid circle quality and consistency across the school. Despite these supports, I observed an array of logistical barriers that teachers faced in their attempt to facilitate restorative practices circles.

6.2.2 Barriers to Restorative Practices

During the summer training, the IIRP trainers repeatedly expressed to educators and staff that restorative practices wasn't "more on the plate" but instead the plate itself. However, many teachers remained unconvinced expressing that it would take away from instruction time. Although the average circle I observed was 14 minutes, on occasion, circles would last up to 30 minutes out of the 45-minute classroom period. Yet, this intervention was only one of several non-curricular commitments for which educators across the school were responsible. Describing the commitments that detract from restorative practices, Ms. Gold laughed when she said, it's "everything else that we're expected to do as educators... Like evaluations, teaching content, being social workers, being nurses, [and] figuring out technology that is never going to work. All of those and just being human at the same time." Therefore, by the end of the year, several teachers interviewed described that time was one of the greatest barriers they experienced with using the intervention.

Ironically, even though Ms. Gold felt that educators had to take on the role of a social worker among other roles, the employed school social worker did not have an integral role with

restorative practices at Restorative High School. Instead, the school social worker stated, “I guess they really had no idea for me in this process, I was taken aback by that, I thought I would be a little bit more involved.” While in theory the school social worker could have contributed to implementation and helped to alleviate time as a barrier for teachers, the school social worker likewise felt that time was a barrier by stating, “...I have enough on my plate, but again...as a social worker, [I thought] that [restorative practices] would be a little bit more in my job description.” Thus, not only was time a barrier for most staff members, but the underutilization of staff with behavior modification knowledge (i.e. School social worker and counselors) may have contributed to the “frustration” Ms. Holdsmith expressed staff had. Specifically, she stated that teachers were looking for “a magic fix” which “just doesn’t happen” because students’ behaviors are entrenched and take time to change. Yet, teachers did not have time as a resource, nor did they have integrated support from a school social worker that could have helped to facilitate understanding about behavior.

In contrast, Ms. Compton suggested that she was able to have more flexibility with her time because she did not teach a core curriculum class, “for me I have a lot more flexibility because it is not a core academic class, I think that a lot of the core academics feel pressure because...they have to get things done for their kids to score well on the [standardized tests] or whatever [and] fit everything in before a certain amount of time.” Therefore, although all teachers work within 45-minute classroom periods, time scarcity was experienced differently across teachers. This ultimately impacted whether and how restorative practices were implemented.

This time scarcity likewise impacts levels of buy-in. Describing levels of teacher buy-in for restorative practices, Ms. Singer said, “Boy you’re asking me in May [Laughs]. No one’s buying into anything this week, it’s very stressful this time of year.” Additionally, for some teachers, buy-in varies according to their classroom size. In Ms. Compton’s non-core course, she found it difficult to facilitate a restorative circle in a classroom of more than 25 students. She says, “My 8th period and 7th period class, we did try circles, [but] with 33 students it’s just ah, I just haven’t been able to culture that with that many students. Under 20, 25 is more manageable.” Therefore, the sheer size of her class hindered her ability to successfully deliver restorative practices to all of her classrooms. Thus, despite the IIRP assertion that restorative practices is the “plate”, this concept does not remain true depending on classroom size, time scarcity and other job responsibilities.

Other teachers implementing restorative practices circles felt time was a barrier because it did not allow teachers to facilitate restorative conversations in depth. Mr. Leroy described this stating:

Some things require thought that is longer than what you can do in a circle...If you wanted a reflective comment you would have to run the circle that would be over hours and that’s just not practical.

Ms. Jacobs similarly felt that time was a restraint on restorative practices saying:

I need more time with my students because on the few occasions that I felt like a restorative circle was really necessary, I always have in the back of my mind, that this is taking away instructional time

Time was a consistent barrier for most educators. However, Ms. Compton, a regular facilitator of restorative circles found that she was able to reduce the amount of time it took run these circles. “I’d say it’s the time it takes and you have to be okay that you are losing that time...The first two weeks of doing it, it was like pulling teeth. But now it looks like... it will take 10 minutes or less. The first few weeks it was like 20 minutes, 25.” Since class periods at Restorative High are less than an hour, Ms. Compton’s ability to reduce the circle time from 25 to 10 minutes demonstrates that restorative practices circles can be facilitated in shorter time frames. However, the lack of time was not the only barrier to implementation. Ms. Holdsmith described that at one point, some teachers were resistant and displayed “constant negativity...push-back and contradiction” during monthly restorative practices professional learning groups (PLGs). Similarly, one officer said:

...the first time they felt that it didn't work, they were like, “I told you this wasn't going to work.” I mean I had teachers coming in here like read an article from such-and-such it shows that restorative practice doesn't work, didn't work in three schools in Chicago. I mean they were digging deep to prove that it wasn't going to work. So they were shut off before it even started.

Thus, the effective implementation of an intervention is not only contingent on training, but the commitment from staff and availability of time. School administrator Mr. Barnes suggested that some teachers felt, “all circled out.” The term “circled-out” was also used by teachers and students to describe a level of boredom or circle over-saturation. Yet, Mr. Barnes did not accept this narrative wholesale stating, “in my eyes, I think that if they're all circled out that means that you're not trying other things, you're doing the same methods...” A similar concern surfaced

during the January 2016 student restorative practices training. A participant asked, “What if circles are in every class?” A Black male student leader responded, “you gotta be open minded so it's not boring. Each class is different and you learn new stuff from new students.” The concern behind the question reflects the idea that circles can become redundant and boring. During the student training, the IIRP facilitator offered that circle questions should be purposefully catered to a group of students instead of generically applied. He stated, “We need to stop using restorative practices without catering to needs. Don't ask restorative questions out of routine because it loses authenticity. Educators need to truly respond to the needs of the youth ... It has to be purposeful and intentional.”

However, a gap existed between a teacher’s intent to facilitate circles and the availability of meaningful questions to ask. During the summer 2015 day-2 training (Introduction to Circles), participants were directed to pages within their book that provided circle questions. However, with less than 35 proactive and responsive circle questions provided, these examples were not exhaustive or diverse enough in topic to last teachers for the school year. Ideally, teachers should customize circle questions to meet the needs of their students. However, doing so detracts from the IIRP stance that restorative practices are not an “add-on” intervention or an additional responsibility for teachers. Ms. Compton regularly developed questions with her students and described the need for “deeper questions” saying:

I feel like a lot of the circles I’ve been doing are still very surface, like they have started to go a little bit deeper but, I even would like to see more in depth like how do you get to doing circles the kids are really actually enjoying and actually look forward to...sometimes I feel like that they’re actually walking through the motions a little bit

maybe now because they want to please [me]... I just think that if we had ... a bank of like example questions that we can either ask that were more of that, personal get to know you, but also that deeper learning...

The idea that students were “walking through the motions” of the circle to simply please the teacher correlates with the narrative that teachers and students were feeling “circled out.” Given the limited number of questions provided to teachers during the IIRP circles training, feelings of circle fatigue could be the consequence of being required to facilitate circles questions that lacked depth and variety. Ms. Jacobs expressed similar sentiments, stating:

I know we have a list of questions, but I would like a whole list of questions to get things started because that's the hardest part. If you can get the kids talking about things they don't feel strongly one way or the other about, then they are more likely to get into [it]. So just like you know, “how’s your day going?” ...“what did you have for breakfast”, [a student responds] ‘well I didn't eat breakfast because...’ [Tone of sarcasm]. So it's hard for me to figure out what's a safe question I can ask [that] everybody can answer, because once they have open their mouth and use their vocal cords then they're more willing to speak about things [that] might be a little tougher. So I could use some help with coming up with those questions...

The circles described by Ms. Jacobs reflect proactive/community building circles. During the summer training, the IIRP coaches suggested using these circles to learn more about students and to “check-in” with students to assess their emotional state. Questions asked most commonly pertained to students’ plans for the weekend, holidays or reflections on their favorite color or activities (Table 23.). While community building questions help students and teachers to learn

more about each other and build trust, teachers who exclusively facilitated these proactive circles were less likely to engage in deeper conversations that could give insight to student behavior and dispositions. Reflecting this, a Black female student during the restorative practices students' training said, "we do circles for every and anything. For example, "what is your favorite color?" This isn't building community. We're three months in and we shouldn't be asking that." In response, the IIRP facilitator said, "Your teacher is doing it wrong". Subsequently, a community organization staff member said, "we have to give the teachers a chance because they are just learning this." As with any intervention, a learning curve is an expected part of the learning process. Since the IIRP training only provided a limited number of questions, a teacher's ability to reduce student boredom and circle monotony relies on their ability to creatively think of new questions.

Ms. Singer, is an example of a teacher who successfully made her own questions. She facilitated circles weekly and had high-levels of teacher dimension scores for safety ($\bar{x} = 6.0$) and belonging ($\bar{x} = 6.1$). She described creating her own questions saying, "I created some of my own questions to spark discussion and hear the **student voices**. Just [with] the resources I had or things that I had used in the past..." Despite being able to utilize past resources to create questions, she still felt that she would benefit from having more circle questions available saying she needed, "more thought-provoking question starters or discussion starters." Each teacher's desire for more questions or "deeper" questions indicates interest in purposefully using restorative practices circles to learn more about their students. By learning more about their students, teachers can better develop relationships with their students which is a core feature of the intervention. Scholars contend that student-teacher relationship building is a fundamental

way to improve academic outcomes (Brown, 2004; Rucinski, Brown & Downer, 2017), and reduce potential for conflict (Gregory, Bell, Pollock, 2014). Although restorative practices have the conceptual structure and tools to accomplish this, limitations such as poorly developed questions, low-level circle quality, limited time, and other competing priorities hinder the relationship-development abilities even among the most committed teachers.

Table 23. Random Selection of Observed Circle Questions Across Teachers*

Circle Type	Circle Question / Topic
Proactive	<p>Check-in circle: I'm glad when..., I'm mad when..., I'm sad when... or I'm scared when...</p> <p>Who is one teacher you would fight? On the flip-side who is one teacher you would invite over for Thanksgiving?</p> <p>Where is your happy place?</p> <p>Does your name have special meaning to it?</p> <p>What is your name and your two favorite colors?</p> <p>If you could go back to 8th grade what advice would you give to yourself?</p> <p>What are your plans for spring break?</p> <p>Tell a story about your life from the age of 10 and under</p> <p>What is your favorite dessert?</p> <p>What is your name, age and DOB?</p> <p>Take a selfie expression of how you really feel today.</p> <p>Say something positive about someone in the classroom today.</p> <p>What are you guys doing this weekend?</p>
Responsive	<p>What do you have to do to convince someone of something?</p> <p>Detention has an effect not just on you, it has an effect on others. Who does it affect when you have a detention?</p> <p>What are your goals for the school year? What is something you are hopeful for? (Asked at the start of a new term)</p>
Proactive/Responsive Restorative	<p>How have you been a responsible learner? What happened?; Who was affected? ; What were you thinking at the time?; What have you thought of since?; Who has been affected by what you have done?; What do you think you need to do to make things right?</p>

*Questions were randomly selected using SPSS

6.2.3 Conclusion

Overall, both the way that restorative practices are implemented and the extraneous micro and macro factors that influence it contribute to the potential of restorative practices within the school setting. This is in line with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) outline of ecological systems theory. Namely that systems have multiple levels of nesting that influence each other. This has bearing on praxis and subsequent school climate within a school. Thus, the implementation of restorative practices can vary based on the buy-in exhibited by the educator and/or students or by factors such as time to implement, class sizes, and circle questions asked. Guided by ecological systems theory, I answered the following research questions, (1) how do educators apply restorative practices? (2) What factors influence the way that restorative practices are implemented?

Findings demonstrate that there are a variety of facilitators and barriers to implementing the *Safer Saner Schools*® restorative practices model. This includes intervention training and implementation and the way it impacts relationship development and discipline. Ultimately, I conclude that the barriers in the training and implementation significantly impacted the quality of the intervention thus hindering the relationship building components of restorative practices that support less punitive discipline outcomes.

7.0 CHAPTER 7

7.1 THE INTERSECTION OF POLICY, STUDENT BEHAVIOR AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

7.1.1 Introduction

In chapter 7, I respond to the research question: how does Restorative High School use restorative practices to address discipline? I also respond to the question: what factors influence the way restorative practices were implemented? Findings suggest that educators' discipline ethos, policy and practice conflicts, and unintended consequences of policy and practice all influence the way the intervention was implemented. Specifically, I describe how punitive policies leading to automatic disciplinary sanctions disrupt the core relationship building efforts of restorative practices.

In this chapter, I discuss the intersection between student behavior, educators' discipline ethos, and discipline policy. This chapter responds to the overarching research question: how does Restorative High School use restorative practices to address discipline? Additionally, as described in Chapter 6, I continue to respond to the research question: what factors influence the way restorative practices were implemented? Emergent themes include, educators' discipline

ethos, policy and practice conflicts, and unintended consequences of policy and practice. Through these themes I describe how punitive policies conflicted with and disrupted the aims of restorative practices. This was exhibited through several suspensions meted during restorative detention circles for students who broke a detention rule (i.e. side conversations, cell phone use etc.). I also describe how restorative practices did not appear to drive teacher discipline practices as much as a teacher's discipline ethos drove discipline practices.

7.1.2 Discipline in the Hallways – Policy & Practice Conflict

At Restorative High School, there were more than 1000 students between the 9th and 12th grade. During the 3-minute hallway transition time between classes, the hallways are an ongoing social setting for most students. On most days, there are students hanging out on the 2nd and 3rd floor landings. Some are leaning against the wall in groups talking with friends, while other students run into the embrace of a boyfriend or girlfriend for a kiss. As I transition between classes, I usually hear, "let's go" in a loud male voice – this is the school officers. As I get to the next landing I also hear, "get going" in a deep male voice. By the final bell, most students have left the hallways and entered their classrooms.

However, at times it takes more than suggestions and nudging to usher students into their classrooms. On one occasion, Officer Claire, a Black male officer, stood at the second step at the top of the staircase and waved her hands while saying, "So don't nobody have class? Nobody have class?" A black girl standing in front of her sarcastically said "no." Officer Claire replied, "No, you got class but everyone is standing right here like it's outside." This time, there were

only 25 students in this section of the hallway landing. On other days, there could be nearly 100 students in the hallway after the final bell. The third and final bell indicates that class has just started and now everyone is late. Suddenly, I hear another officer blow his whistle for students to get out of the hallways. Depending on the leniency of a teacher, a student will be allowed into class late or be given a referral to detention. On average, the names of 70-100 students were on the detention list each week hung in the hallways. However, the detention hall was an average sized classroom that could only accommodate up to 30 students. While most referred students did not attend detention, the number of students on the detention list often outnumbered the number of seats in the detention hall. Therefore, the school-wide referral rates were beyond the school's capacity to implement detention as a form of discipline for all referred students. As such, both the students' lack of attendance at detention and the schools' inability to facilitate a large detention indicted the limited capacity of existing discipline policy to change student behavior.

Another policy attempt to change student behavior included the use of hall-sweeps. Hall-sweeps are conducted at random to identify and round-up students who roam the halls. During an interview with Ms. Holdsmith, the third and final bell rang and an administrator spoke over the school-wide intercom saying, "Staff, do not let any more students into your classroom. Send them to the cafeteria." I later asked Ms. Holdsmith, to describe the hall sweep process, she stated:

So kids love to be in the halls, like if they are very late we have hall sweeps... If they were caught in a hall-sweep they would receive a detention after school. I mean the

detentions are restorative..., however; the whole part of it is to get kids in on time and to have them stay in class and not in the hallways.

Similar to the irony of the school's inability to hold 70-100 students in the detention hall, using hall-sweeps to send students to the cafeteria for the rest of the period conflicts with the school's aim to keep students in class and maximize instruction time. In addition to detention, students constantly found in the hallways at inappropriate times would also be placed on the Chronic Hall-Walkers List. This list is a sheet of paper placed on several hallway walls that listed the name and grade of students that were considered chronic hall-walkers. Ms. Holdsmith explained the significance of this list during an interview:

They are not allowed to use a bathroom pass or a hall pass to go see a teacher, counselor or whoever during class time. They were placed on that list because I would ask teachers monthly 'are there any' you know...? So [if] we notice a kid always in the hallway we put that kid on that list. I always verify with their teachers, so maybe it's a problem with one teacher, we can solve that before it's put on that list, but if it's with all your teachers, there is a problem here, so that's how they get the list. Like I said, they could get off with me, if they do the activity, the restorative activity.

Ms. Holdsmith describes "the restorative activity" as an "alternative consequence" such as a conversation, a conference, or writing an essay. These activities move towards a restorative method as it encourages the student to think through the impact of their actions and take responsibility (Wearmouth et al., 2007). Yet, the public placement of a student's first and last name on the chronic hall-walkers list requires a level of shaming which conflicts with core restorative practices philosophies. Research indicates that restorative practices should be

distanced from shame and blame and instead should focus on behavioral accountability (Wearmouth et al., 2007). According to Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel (2009), shaming students typically results in one or more of the following behavioral responses: “attack other,” “attack self,” “avoidance,” or withdrawal (p. 69). In this definition, the term attack is not exclusive to a physical response but also includes possible psycho-social responses. In each of these cases, students who feel shame are less likely to take responsibility for their behavior which is the goal of the intervention. Nonetheless, Ms. Holdsmith attributes these disciplinary methods to a reduction in suspensions at Restorative High stating:

Our suspensions went down by 5 percent which is awesome. So, it’s definitely working just giving them that alternative. With creating a more positive climate, like I said having the students being able to have a voice and being heard is what’s most important here. Instead of just being shunned and you go home for 10 days and we’ll see you when you come back and there is no re-entry process, you’re not learning anything from it so...

While the “restorative activities” could be anecdotally linked to the reduction in school suspensions, she did not describe a causal link between alternatives to suspensions and the reduction in suspensions. Ultimately hall-sweeps, the chronic-hall walkers list and detention hall were all disciplinary methods used with the intent to reform student behaviors. Yet, to get students to change their own behaviors, Costello, Wachtel and Wachtel (2009) state that discipline must intersect between both “control” and “limit setting” in a “caring” and “supportive manner” (pp.50-51). Ms. Holdsmith’s one-on-one restorative activities with the students reflected this caring and supportive model. However, the ongoing use of the chronic hall-walkers list and the list of 70-100 students on the weekly detention roll indicate that the policies

were better equipped to control and ascertain student whereabouts than to help students understand and reform their own behaviors – a core goal of the intervention.

7.1.3 Teachers' Discipline Ethos and Student Behavior

In addition to discipline policy, teachers' disciplinary ethos or disposition also factored into how discipline was meted. This disposition informed behavioral expectations, relationships established, and the way restorative practices were used across classrooms. For example, as the year progressed, Ms. Compton and Ms. Singer, both White female teachers, were able to get students to form their circles with less prompting. The IIRP trainers described this as the creation of "tradition." Thus, by consistently facilitating circles, students readily placed their chairs in a circle, identified the talking piece and at times asked to be the first to participate. In a fieldnote from a spring 2016 circle from Ms. Compton's class, two Black girls vied for the teacher's attention with their hands raised saying, "I wanna go" and "No! I wanna go." Ms. Compton was consistent in facilitating circles once a week, 7 periods a day. She was intentional about building community and at the start of a new academic quarter, she said to the students, "This should be a quick circle today. I want everyone to get to know each other again." Once the class ended, I asked Ms. Compton about her reflections of the circle, and she stated, "I wanted the students to get to know each other again because they tend to stick to their own bubbles and they don't know each other's names. Even in my yearlong classes some students don't know each other's names and I think that's terrible." This type of purposeful and caring classroom environment was

cultivated by both Ms. Compton and Ms. Singer both who were exhibited disciplinary flexibility and rapport with students.

Like all other teachers I observed at Restorative High, Ms. Compton would regularly reprimand students for using their electronics in school, yet I never witnessed her issuing a disciplinary referral for cell phone use. Instead, she at times joked in an assertive manner:

Compton: [In response to disruptive student talking] “You guys stop acting like you’re 6 years old! [Said to a White male and Black Male student].

Male Student (Race not noted) [In a playful voice points to the other male] “He's 5!”

Other Male (Race not noted) “He's 6”

Both students: [Laugh at their commentary]

Ms. Compton: [Lets out a deep sigh but with a bit of a smile] “Put these phones away! They are all distracting. Wish I could throw them out the window. [Points to classroom window].

Black Male: [Playful rebuttal] Throw my phone away? You'll be chasing it!

Ms. Compton: [Firm yet playful voice], “No I will not. I'd be watching it fall.

Ms. Compton was usually successful in getting students to put their phones away for a period of time. Teachers regularly asked students to put their cell phones away (1) because it caused distraction and (2) because the student code of conduct handbook states, cell phones and electronics should not be “on” or “visible... on school grounds”. Given the pervasive use of personal electronics in the classroom, student cell phone use led to regular disciplinary moments. In a post-circle disciplinary moment, the following fieldnote excerpt describes how Ms. Singer confiscates a White male student’s phone after telling him several times to put it away:

I observed a White male student get up to check his phone several times as it was charging a few feet away from his desk. When he sat back down, Ms. Singer walked to his phone, gently picked it up and unplugged it. Standing a few feet away, she looked directly into his eyes. He said nothing. As she walked away with it to her desk, the boy under his breath says “bitch.” A Black male student across the circle asks the White male student, “What happened?” The White male student responded, “Oh, she just took it to charge at her desk, I don't care, either way it's charging.”

In this disciplinary moment, the teacher was able to assert her authority without giving the student a referral for detention. Also, the student displayed minimal resistance to having his phone confiscated. As one of the only teachers with high RP-Observe student circle scores, perhaps Ms. Singer's ability to discipline without being punitive was associated with the student rapport and trust she garnered through community building circles. For example, students in Ms. Singer's class would regularly describe the positive or negative experiences of their home lives, community, future goals, academic progress or reflected on the class assignment at hand. In a spring 2016 fieldnote, group cohesiveness was exhibited in a classroom circle with Ms. Singer when two Black male students expressed their concerns about a chronically absent classmate:

Black male 1: [Action: Gets the ball talking piece] “(Name deleted) continues to skip class and even miss gym! [Tone: Frustration].

Black male 2: Like why would you skip class and be held back for another year? [Frustrated and surprised voice]. If she drops out, he will drop out [too] [In reference to absent boy's girlfriend].

Ms. Singer: You can support a friend but don't let their actions affect you.

Black male 2: I know what you're talking about, but I don't want to see him fail. I don't want to see anything bad happen to him.

However, levels of rapport and trust varied across classrooms. Student disruptions or constant cell phone use regularly led to referrals for detention, interaction with school officers and/or suspension. As described in the following fieldnote excerpt, during class time, Ms. Riza gave a White female student a detention for using her cell phone in class:

Ms. Riza walks over to a table of students who were constantly giggling. Ms. Riza approached a White female student who was giggling while on her phone. Mr. Riza then said, “give me the cell phone or get a detention.” The student quickly puts her phone in her pockets. Ms. Riza reiterates “you can give me the cell phone or get a detention.” The white female student says, “I’d rather get a detention.” Ms. Riza asks “why” and the student replies, “cause’ I don’t want to give you my phone” Ms. Riza says, “Why would you rather a detention?” Without eye contact, the student responded, “I just want to keep it.”

In another case, a White male student-teacher speaks with the IIRP coach about the disciplinary difficulties he is having with four Black female students in his class. In the following fieldnote excerpt, he describes students’ constant use of their cell phone in class and the disciplinary actions he uses when they will not put it away:

IIRP Coach: So what is the most common issue that you are dealing with?

Mr. Cummings: Phone usage for sure. I have a two-strike rule. If I ask them a third time they have to put it in the bucket upfront but many of them do not. So then eventually I have to call security. I honestly don't mind but if admin walks in here I can get in trouble.

Thus, in both Ms. Riza and Mr. Cumming's case, they exercised their right to take policy-based disciplinary measures in their class. Yet, I never witnessed this with Ms. Compton and Ms. Singer despite the on-going student cell phone use. Instead, student electronics were at time incorporated into the classroom lecture or circle. In one case, students in Ms. Compton's class described the next steps they would take on their art project and I heard the distinct ring of a FaceTime call. There was a Black male and White male student holding an iPad and suddenly, the face of a student that was absent from class appeared on the screen. The boys smiled at Ms. Compton and then said to the Black male student on the iPad, "we're describing our project and stating if it's a bust or figure". The Black male student on the iPad then virtually participated in the circle saying, "it's gonna be a bust". The students laughed, Ms. Compton smiled and then looked at me saying, "look, you can put that in your notes." Although it was technically a violation of school rules to use the IPAD in class, it appeared that the students felt enough community among each other, or with Ms. Compton, to virtually include an absent student into the circle without fear of receiving a detention. Thus, both the teacher's disciplinary ethos and level of community in the class created an inclusive circle opportunity versus a disciplinary moment.

Each teacher's reaction to a student's behavior reflects how their disciplinary ethos inform the disciplinary measure they take. Thus, the use of restorative practices as a less punitive

discipline tactic is mediated both by a teacher's disciplinary ethos and the discipline policies within the school. Additionally, restorative practices ultimately have their limits. The restorative threshold of each educator can vary widely and when this threshold has been met, the default discipline method is punitive.

7.1.4 Detention Hall and Discipline

At Restorative High, detentions take place after school twice a week beginning at 3:00. As described by Ms. Jacobs, students usually received a detention for “not putting their phone away, getting caught in hall sweeps and if [they're] really late”. During each of my observations, student ID's were scanned by a teacher or administrator to account for their attendance. As students prepared to enter the detention room, posted on the walls were the names and grade of the students throughout the school who received a detention for the day. Also hanging on the wall are the detention rules and expectations posted on newsprint sized paper. The rules indicate that (1) detention starts at three and no late students will be able to serve detention, (2) electronics are not permitted, (3) an essay must be completed, (4) all students must participate in a restorative circle and (5) violation of these rules and expectations will result in dismissal from detention and will result in a 1-day suspension. Of the 70-100 students' names posted on the detention list weekly, only 15-40 students attended detention on a weekly basis. As such, any student not present during detention would automatically receive a one-day suspension. This not only reflects how classroom referrals became the gateway to suspension for some students, but

how through default, students received a suspension for minor offenses. Thus, the school's attempt to create a restorative community was readily buffered by such zero-tolerance policies.

As detailed in a Spring of 2016 fieldnote, Ms. Jacobs asked detention hall students in a circle, "how has this detention affected you?" During this exchange, Ms. Jacobs passed the talking piece to each student and they expressed both indifference or immediate impact from receiving a detention. Yet, what was most clear was the antagonistic tenor of the conversation:

Black male 2: Detention is relaxing and doesn't affect me.

Ms. Jacobs: [With a voice of exclamation] This is relaxing? Ok! Ms. Jacobs walked to my side of the room to capture the response of another student.

Male Student: [Huffed out loudly] "This is boring, this is stupid".

Ms. Jacobs: Please respond to the question.

Male Student: Nothing

Black Female 1: Nothing, I would be watching tv...

Ms. Jacobs: But now you're not.

Black Female 1: I don't care.

Black Female 2: It affects me I should not be here...

Latina female 1: It affects me because I can't babysit.

White Male: This doesn't faze me [repeats three times].

Ms. Jacobs: [With a confused facial expression] What do you mean?

White Male: This doesn't bother me at all [Tone of bragging].

Ms. Jacobs: That's not what I asked

White Male: Nothing, it doesn't affect anything

Ms. Jacobs: What do you do after school?

White Male: Nothing [Declarative tone].

This exchange underscores how both context (i.e. detention) and the tone set by the teacher can impact the quality of a restorative circle. By displaying resistance or indifference with responses such as “nothing”, students gained a modicum of control by not having to submit to forced, false or real sentiments of remorse. Thus, instead of using the circle to “repair harm” as detailed in restorative practices philosophy, the restorative detention circle at times reflected displays of power and control which often led to tension and punitive discipline tactics. Following the above responses, Ms. Jacobs continued by asking, “what do you have to do to not get detention again?” The exchange between the White male student and Ms. Jacobs became exponentially abrasive leading to dismissal from detention which, according to policy, equates to a one-day suspension:

White Male: Damn how many questions you got? [Stated loudly and causing other students to snicker and laugh loudly].

Ms. Jacobs: You're gone, bye!

White Male: Naw miss, chill, chill, Ms. Jacobs I can stay.

Ms. Jacobs: [Walks over the classroom phone and calls school security].

White Male: [Argues and pleads with Ms. Jacobs about not having to leave, he eventually walks out and says] You're a weird as hell, fucking ass lady, get some new shoes bitch.

Although the restorative circle is intended to be a non-punitive and non-hierarchical space to repair harm, its context and tenor facilitates power relations that unseat the philosophies of restorative practices. With the detention dismissal-to-suspension policy as the default discipline

practice in place, the restorative detention circle is inherently hierarchical and remains connected to the gateway that treats suspension as a viable discipline practice. Ultimately, if an educator's disciplinary ethos is a primary indicator of disciplinary measures taken, this can lead to inequitable discipline trends. At Restorative High, these inequities were most visible during the after-school detention hall where Black and brown students made up most of the detention goers.

7.1.5 Restorative Detention – Intervention, Practice and Policy Conflict

Detention hall at Restorative High symbolized the complicated intersection between the intervention and on-going punitive practices and policies. The creation of restorative detention was an attempt to develop comprehensive and restorative discipline reform throughout the school. However, it was absent of policy and practice changes that would allow the intervention to be effective. When I first began to observe Ms. Jacob's restorative detention hall in November of 2016, she exhibited a high level of control of the circle process by (1) requiring students to sit in parallel lines facing each other instead of the traditional circle and (2) by creating her own questions and using the same questions most sessions and (3) by passing the talking piece to each student instead of allowing students to pass it among themselves. These tools of control reflected typical disciplinary tools; however, these tools contrasted with the IIRP *Fundamental Hypothesis* which states, "human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them" (IIRP, 2013, p.3). In addition, her high level of circle control was situated in the authoritarian quadrant within the IIRP social discipline window framework.

In contrast, the IIRP social discipline window suggests that educators should be authoritative which includes both high control and high support. Although Ms. Jacob's gave students more agency as the year progressed, the onset of restorative detention fell short of exhibiting the relational, non-punitive and community building components of restorative practices. Moreover, since less than half of all students assigned detention attended, most students assigned detention received the automatic 1-day suspension. Given the low detention attendance, restorative detention did not foster the opportunity to "repair harm" nor was it successful in deterring future detentions. Ms. Jacobs, confirmed this occurrence stating:

Our kids are not going to detention. And you can tell because the 1-day suspensions are usually if they don't go to detention. And they don't go to detention for a variety of reasons, often they have jobs after school so they can't. And so that's not working, you know, all that's doing is making them miss a day at school. Some of them can't go because they have responsibilities at home, they have younger siblings that they have to watch or have to pick up after school. And again, so the consequence is that they get a day off from school [suspension] and they're missing more instructional time and that's not right.

Not only was a student's absence from detention a gateway to suspension and missed instruction time, but the missed detention policy disposed students with work and family responsibilities to suspensions. As such, the persistence of this policy at Restorative High underscores the way that punitive policy measures maintain high suspension rates even in the presence of a less punitive intervention. Ultimately, the discipline policy within this school was a significant driver of discipline outcomes.

Describing the purpose of detention, Ms. Jacobs says, “Well in detention I’m trying to get the kids to modify their behaviors, so they don't come back to detention.” Yet, she likewise critiques the efficacy of the approach since many of the students are repeatedly receiving detention:

...it's obviously not successful because I keep seeing the same faces over and over again and so I'm struggling to figure out what is the source of this. I'm not sure that restorative practices is really going to solve it, I think there are other things going on in their lives and so for them being on time to class is just not a priority.

This statement highlights the inefficiency of the discipline procedures and policies. Ideally, discipline policy is put in place to curb unwanted student behavior. Yet, the disciplinary practices appear to yield minimal change in student behaviors. Despite this acknowledged inefficiency, these policies continue to contribute to a cyclical school discipline pattern. Without specific aims to use restorative practices to augment or replace certain discipline procedures, the intervention is reduced to an add-on disciplinary tool versus a transformative disciplinary process.

While I never observed a student of color receiving a referral for detention in the academic courses I observed, classroom referrals throughout the high school played a significant role in their discipline rates as Black and Brown students accounted for the majority of detention goers. With students of color only representing 41% of all students enrolled, the major presence of Black and Brown students during detention suggests that they were overrepresented in discipline rates throughout the school. The visual overrepresentation of students of color attending detention for behaviors also observed among White students reflect a unique intersection between discipline ethos, practice, policy, and race. The racialized detention patterns

and the suspension of students for minor infractions represent the ways that discipline disparities are formed even within a school using restorative practices.

7.1.6 Detention and Suspension – Policy, Practice and Unintended Consequences

In addition to inequity, the discipline patterns at Restorative High represented inefficiency. As earlier described by Ms. Jacobs, the purpose of detention was for students to think about and change their behaviors. Yet, the discipline tactics at Restorative High controlled students versus reformed student behavior, which reflected the unintended consequences of the discipline policies. Ms. Jacobs described that students who received suspensions for minor infractions were getting a “day off from school” and were “missing more instructional time”. Despite her acknowledgment of how counterproductive this was, during my 2015-2016 detention-hall observations, students were regularly dismissed from detention and received a suspension for using their cell phone or having disruptive side conversations. Thus, awareness of these unintended consequences alone still did not spur the use of alternative discipline practices. This is indicative of the ways that a teacher’s disciplinary tactics not only drive discipline patterns but are situated within a larger system of discipline. Students regularly challenged, submitted to, or undermined this system revealing its problems and thus creating combative environments. This exchange is captured in a detention-hall observation fieldnote from the spring of 2016:

[**Context:** I observed a Black girl pull out her phone during detention. She is sitting right next to Ms. Jacobs.]

Ms. Jacobs: You got to be kidding!

Black Female: My mom is calling to see if I am ok, she is worried about me.

Ms. Jacobs: Doesn't matter, you're out! [Said under her breath].

Black Female: [Smiles and stays seated].

Ms. Jacobs: Out!

Black Female: [Hesitates to get up as though unsure. She then more assuredly gets up and walks out while saying] Well I'm not getting suspended because you guys don't have my mom's new number.

After the detention, I inquired about the student's comment and Ms. Jacobs said, "when the calls go to the homes of students that have detention, many house numbers are out of order or are old numbers. Sometimes the kids erase the messages. So, her mother may not know if she has a detention or suspension because we don't have her number." As such, if parents are unaware that their child has received school discipline, the disciplinary action loses its already remote potential to modify student behavior. Instead, the detention dismissal-to-suspension policy is reduced to a punitive disciplinary tool. Yet, for some students, even the punitive intent of this policy is negated given the lag-time between the suspension meted and record keeping. This concept was uncovered in an interview with the school officers.

Officer Claire is one of three school security officers at Restorative High. In addition to ensuring that students are in class, he checks the bags of all students and ushers them through the metal detectors at the beginning of every school-day. During the focus group interview with the officers, I asked them, "If a kid is suspended, do you know who is suspended when they enter the school for the day?" He responded,

Officer Claire: They put out a list, but I rarely look at it because sometimes they work it out with an administrator like not to be suspended and then like, you don't know. And then you keep kids down there [**Note:** "Down there" in reference to the first-floor entrance].

Officer 2: You're arguing with them and they already got a readmit.

Officer Claire: Right, so, I don't even pay attention to it, I just let them come. And sometimes, they'll say like. The ones that they really want us to get, they'll say it like if, 'John' comes, don't let him in." You know but otherwise, because you never know... It's inconsistent and then they don't communicate things well.

Similarly, in an interview, Ms. Jacobs describes that suspended students sometimes sneak into school. I asked her if teachers had a roster of the students that have been suspended, she replied, "We don't always get it. Only if the student was suspended for a really serious issue." This suggests that many faculty, staff and students were aware of the inadequacy of the discipline policies at Restorative High. Although some students were able to reclaim some of their instructional hours by covertly returning to school, there still remains the disengaged student who may not attempt to come back to school at all. Therefore, despite the loopholes identified by students and staff, the policy remains punitive and detrimental to the education of students who are already at risk of academic underperformance or dropout.

Finally, discipline policy loopholes also created inequity in how suspension was experienced by students. During an interview with the school officers, one participant described how students were able to get their suspensions reduced through parental advocacy. However,

not all parents knew how to navigate the school discipline system successfully enough to reduce their child's suspension length. In this interview the officer stated:

We had two boys fight here [and] they got 10 days [suspensions], but then their parents fought so then they got 3. But their parents knew the steps to go through. They were White. We had Black girls that were fighting and they were honor roll, high honor roll and honor society students [who] got into a fight, which they shouldn't have; but the girl is getting jumped so they jumped in – they got 10 days. The parents didn't know what to do so a teacher came to me and said this is not fair. Can you say something....? So I talked to the administrator [who] said it would [be] taken off. I saw the parents, the administrator called some of the parents... No one ever got back to them so the girls ended up doing the whole 10-days. That's not fair, because the boys have never been in trouble and the girls have never been in trouble. First mistake in all their career [in] high school and they're good kids. And I said to the [administrator], "what can I do to make parents aware that these are the steps to take?" And the administrator was like, you can't, you're not allowed to tell them just like I am not. So how are they supposed find the information? ...They should be able to find the information because it's out there somewhere. But the reality is they're not. So since we know that they're not and we know that the majority of the White kids' parents know what to do, and the Black kids don't. How can we be a better help to get the information out, so it could be a fair playing ground, and... no answers.

This account highlights how discipline policy, even when ineffective in changing behavior, and inefficient as a disciplinary system, does not lose its punitive ethos. Yet, given the appropriate

social capital, the degree to which the policy is punitive can be circumvented. This sustains systemic inequity of which the most disenfranchised students are likely to experience the brunt. Without intentional use of restorative practices for the structural functioning of the school discipline system, the intervention was reduced to a classroom practice versus the whole school change model it was intended to be.

7.1.7 Conclusion

In sum, this chapter addressed the factors that influenced the intervention and describes the ways that restorative practices were used to address discipline. The common behavior-centered narrative associated with disproportional suspensions must be challenged with evidence pointing to the role of school-level factors such as an educator's disciplinary ethos, punitive policies and the conflict between policy and intervention implementation. The conflict between restorative practices and discipline policies at Restorative High School represented both challenges in the beta year of an intervention and the underlying school discipline ethos. Additionally, educators' beliefs about discipline played a significant role in how discipline was meted, if at all.

Few disciplinary referrals were given in the case-study classes I observed; yet, the twice-weekly detention list indicated that educators regularly gave referrals for detention throughout the school. Daily student infractions such as tardiness, in-class cell phone use, and roaming the hallways frequently led to after-school detentions or even suspensions. Therefore, minor infractions were at times met with punitive discipline consequences. I suggest that these

discipline responses were not only an indication of student behavior but also a reflection of discipline policy mediated through an educator's discipline ethos. A teacher's discipline ethos is influenced both by their own beliefs about punishment and the discipline tools available to them. Attempts to incorporate restorative practices into the discipline process included a restorative detention circle and one-on-one restorative detention activities. However, as punitive discipline practices were used alongside restorative discipline practices, the detention halls and suspension lists were continuously populated, particularly by Black and Brown students.

There were also discipline policy loopholes that created inequity in the way that some discipline policies were utilized. This underscored both the punitive ethos of the policies and the low-likelihood that the associated practices would help students take ownership of their behavior. As such, the ongoing use of discipline practices that did not harness student behavioral accountability conflicted with accountability as a core aim of restorative practices. Thus, responding to the question: how does Restorative High School use restorative practices to address discipline, I offer that the case-study school made deliberate efforts to integrate restorative practices into its discipline structure. However, these efforts were often overshadowed by on-going punitive discipline policies, practices and dispositions.

8.0 CHAPTER 8

8.1 RACE AND DISCIPLINE DISPARITIES

8.1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I respond to the following research question, “What mechanisms sustain the racial discipline gap in a school using an intervention that reduces overall suspensions?” Likewise, I address the research question, “How does the case study school use restorative practices to address discipline?” I use both interview and observational data to describe how restorative practices were implemented as a race-neutral intervention to attempt to address racially disproportional suspensions. Thus, I describe how race and discipline were discussed during the initial restorative practices training, on-going training through professional learning groups (PLG), and in relation to disciplinary moments. Emergent themes include (1) restorative practices – a “race neutral” intervention, (2) racial discourses and implications, (3) whiteness as capital and discipline outcomes, (4) inconsistent discipline and student “push-back”, and (5) racialized discipline trends. Together, these themes explain how restorative practices as a race-neutral intervention lacked the capacity to help educators address racial disparities at Restorative High School.

Schools reflect the race and class stratifications found within society. It has long been argued that schools serve to sustain power differentials along race and class lines, reproducing inequities (Kupchik, 2009). This relationship is exhibited in the disproportional number of people of color who are incarcerated (Alexander, 2012; Annamma et al., 2014) and the disproportional number of Black and Brown students who are disciplined or suspended (Skiba, 2015). Despite the use of restorative practices as a multi-level school-wide intervention to build relationships and reduce high and disproportional suspensions, students of color remained overrepresented in discipline outcomes. Findings suggest that Whiteness was a construct that shaped how discipline was meted and understood. However, my classroom observations did not lead to this conclusion. It was instead the perspectives of staff and the disproportionate number of students of color in after-school detention that informed this finding. Although the intent behind restorative practices was to reduce high and racially disproportional suspensions, I describe that fear and misunderstanding in conversations about race helped to undermine this potential. In all, I use critical race theory to underscore how racial disparities flourished within systems that value racial neutrality in policy while upholding “meritocratic” measures to address racial disparities (Cook, 1995; Crenshaw, 1995; Matsuda, 1995).

8.1.2 Restorative Practices – A “Race Neutral” Intervention

Prior to the intervention year, students of color at Restorative High were more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts. Thus, in addition to reducing overall suspensions rates, restorative practices were introduced during the 2015-2016 academic year to begin to remediate

this discipline gap. Yet, specific strategies to address racial disproportionality were not covered during the general two-part restorative practices training for educators and staff. However, an anecdotal suggestion on customizing restorative practices was mentioned by two male IIRP facilitators. One facilitator stated that students on the autism spectrum would need a different type of restorative practice than students who were not on the autism spectrum. Likewise, a Black male IIRP facilitator also explained that if a school's primary goal was to "address suspension disparities," they would need to "address implicit bias more so than overt racism." He further recommended that they use the on-line Harvard implicit bias test. No further strategies were given beyond this recommendation nor was there explicit dedication to addressing racially disproportional suspensions on the two-day training agenda.

Since school-level factors such as policy, referral rates, bias and administrators' discipline ethos contribute to suspension disparities, participants in this training were left without tools to examine how their actions may sustain discipline disparities. Royster and Taylor (1997) hold that educators must interrogate their own identities and critique the relationship between personal identity and instruction. Although restorative practice circles can be used to reflect on one's own identity, reflexivity also was not discussed during the two-day educator or school administrators' training. Apart from this training, the district maintained its own commitment to equity on its website where it lists the aim of "accelerating student achievement and eliminating racial disparities". However, the district's overarching commitment to equity was not reviewed or explicitly connected to the restorative practices training. In an interview at the end of the academic year with Mr. Leroy, he described this disconnect stating:

I've asked for [it] over the years and I need to know more about how to eliminate racial disparity... but part of what's come of my professional learning group (PLG) this year is a very interesting comment is they said, you know, "there is nothing else" and it was kind of like wait a minute that's disheartening because ... I want to be spoon fed just like everybody else, I want the answers, just give them to me.

Mr. Leroy's desire to be "spoon fed just like everyone else" indicates that non-race related topics are easily delivered during professional learning group sessions. However, there is a dearth of professional development information in relation to race. Thus, teachers like Mr. Leroy who are eager to address disproportionality lack the practical tools and support to address it. Although the high and disproportional suspensions rates were the impetus for the implementation of restorative practices, the absence of conversations on the racialized contexts that students and staff lived in made the intervention inadequate to support these aims.

8.1.3 Racial Discourse and Implications

While the two-day restorative practices training was introduced using a race-neutral format, Restorative High did have its own school-based approach to integrate concepts of equity into teacher training. Through the monthly professional learning groups (PLGs), attempts to pair academic and socio-emotional topics with restorative practices and equity programming was an underlying commitment of the school administration. School administrator Ms. Gold described this saying, "We spend a lot of time doing Courageous Conversations and the equity work..." I was invited to attend one such PLG session which had an explicit focus on empathy building.

The session agenda made important connections in pairing equity and restorative practices. The following bullet points are from this session agenda:

- Between the equity and restorative work we partake in together, we want to look at how both of these policies tie in together, more so, what is their commonality?
- Empathy is the common value that keeps coming up in both RP and equity.
- With this in mind, do we know what empathy really is? How can we connect and apply empathy, equity, empower and enable with our students?

However, school administrator Ms. Gold also described the “need to align those two things [equity and restorative practice] more.” Specifically, “aligning their conditions [and] their agreement. Like [the] framework for having those courageous conversations more with restorative practices.” I did not witness the use of Courageous Conversations programming throughout the year and also found that the way that issues of equity and race were discussed lacked critical reflection and practical application. For example, during a PLG session on empathy, a White male teacher expressed his confusion about terminology on race and the presence of inequity at Restorative High. The following fieldnote excerpt demonstrates this:

White male teacher: I have a question, we received an email [from an administrator] on Black and Brown students not having similar opportunities at Restorative High. First of all, I thought that Black and Brown would be the same. But anyway, what opportunities are students not getting access to? I don't understand that, can we talk about that?

PLG Facilitator: [Responds with a pause and facial expression of confusion.] What email was that? I don't remember that email.

White Male Teacher: Well, maybe she knows about this. [Points to me] Does she receive emails from [the administrator]?

[The PLG Facilitator looks at me.]

Andrea: No.

PLG Facilitator: Yes, we received the email last week. [She continues to appear confused.] I don't remember but can we talk about this after?

White Male Teacher: [Even calm tone] Well I just thought that this would tie in because we are talking about equity.

PLG Facilitator: Yes, yes, yes race is very important to equity conversations, but we are talking about all aspects of a student right now” [With what appeared to be a quick and slight glance at me] But can we talk about it later?

White Male Teacher: [Glances back at me] Yes, I just didn't understand her email, I guess I didn't have any empathy for it. [“Empathy” said forcefully with a tone of sarcasm.]

[**Note:** Although Ms. Holdsmith did not respond to his question, she provided insight about inequalities within the school.]

Ms. Riza: Yes, I saw that email too, I think some of it is systemic and we can't do anything about it. For example, I can understand how that relates to which students can stay for after school activities. White students are more likely to have rides home and can stay after versus Black students. So while we may not be able to do anything about it, these are issues that exist. Although we provide them the opportunities, there are situations that reduce their chances of taking advantage of the opportunity.

While Ms. Riza's contributions helped to inform the group on racial inequity, it simplified these inequities to systemic issues. However, students of color regularly experience low expectations, which contribute to the inequitable outcomes they experience within schools (American Civil Liberties Union of Florida et al., 2011; Figlio, 2006). Both this singular view on inequities and the PLG facilitator's delay to respond to the White male teacher represented a missed opportunity to pair the restorative practices framework with practical tools to address racial inequity and the district's equity commitments.

During this same PLG, a conversation on the difference between empathy and sympathy ensued. In response, a White female teacher explained her perspective on empathy:

I find it hard to have empathy for kids who want a new pencil [from me] everyday. You have a better iPhone than anyone. You have better shoes than me or any other student in this classroom or better shoes than I can ever give my children. So no, I don't feel empathetic towards that.

Subsequently, the room was silent and PLG facilitator nodded her head in agreement saying, "Yes, we don't want to enable students." However, by discussing this topic as an issue of "enabling students," the classed language used by this teacher was ignored. While students should be held accountable to be prepared for class, the idea that a teacher can use classist language to judge a student's behavior with no rebuttal from others suggests that the teachers in this session lacked critical analysis of the developmental and socio-political context students live in. Specifically, the assumption that a student's material goods signify that they are in a better economic position and need less empathy shows how a teacher's values can influence their perceptions of a student. Researchers suggest that the majority of pre-service teachers are White,

come from middle-class backgrounds and often receive training from universities that discuss issues of diversity “superficially” (Raible & Irizarry 2010, p.1199; Sleeter, 2001). In turn, most educators have vastly different lived experiences from the students they educate. Therefore, implementing an intervention like restorative practices to close the discipline gap may first require closing the empathy gap – this is the socio-economic disconnect between teacher and student that when left unchecked contributes to inequitable practices. Thus, well intentioned equity training and interventions absent of practical tools for critical racial consciousness and understanding of systemic inequities reduce the racial equity capacity of an intervention. Mr. Leroy described this saying:

Right, so racial equity is this thing that the district says everybody in Archway Public Schools should acknowledge and be striving for. But right now, it’s just a policy, it’s one that definitely has solutions, but to get to those solutions requires just so much, if you will, energy and commitment and so right now it’s just a thing on paper.

Despite the attempt to create a restorative and equitable school, administrators must have both the buy-in and critical awareness of staff to create such an environment. Moreover, leaders must be equipped with the skill-sets to constructively disrupt biased dispositions that become counterproductive to the commitments of equity. Research indicates that instruction tools such as culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) use the “intellectual, moral, and sociopolitical awareness of student diversity” which can enhance learning outcomes and shape the way educators interact with students and families (Gay, 2013; Warren, 2013). While tools such as CRP could begin to respond to the “solutions” Mr. Leroy described wanting, research indicates that equity initiatives

like CRP conflict with “traditional” education indicating that the guiding principles of Whiteness may predominate (Morrison, Robbins & Rose, 2008, p.444).

8.1.4 Whiteness as Capital and Discipline Outcomes

During a restorative leadership team meeting in the month of March 2016, a White Female teacher stated that teachers are inflexible in the way that they observe behaviors and perceive discipline. She described this in a whisper saying, “Teachers want it their way, the White way.” She did not expand on this point, nor was it further discussed among the small group of three to whom she expressed this. This suggests a teacher’s racial identity informs how he/she makes sense of a student’s behavior. In so doing, teachers are likely to make judgment calls about behavior that are based on their own beliefs and values associated with their racial identity. Similarly, research outlines that there is an “overwhelming sense of whiteness” within the training that pre-service teachers receive (Sleeter, 2001, p.101). Whiteness, a term within racial discourse, describes how White racial experiences appear illusive and ordinary while all other racial identities are compared with it as a benchmark (Gillborn, 2005). The standardization of Whiteness in schools becomes a form of power that marginalizes and vilifies students of color placing them within the “disciplinary gaze” (Raible & Irizarry, 2010, p.1197). Also found in teacher training, many pre-service teachers integrate the normalcy of Whiteness in their pedagogy and classroom management skills (Sleeter, 2001). Yet, this phenomenon is not exclusive to White educators alone. A male educator of color described how he too is implicated in Whiteness:

So to come in with judgment and though it's a natural thing to do, we certainly then make comments and we say things [that are] racially unbalanced, basically we are, even myself [states race hits hand on chest), living in America your frame of reference, even if you don't want it to be, is normed in White middle-class and so the kinds of things that you do and say and want for kids, even when it's not your intention, will unbalance things so that it's kind of like you're trying to pull them towards White middle-class and it's like - but that's not a necessary goal, what's a necessary goal is for people to understand that.

Both this male educator of color and the White female educator describing the "White way" discuss the ways that Whiteness was a framework some teachers used to understand students and make sense of their behaviors. Yet, doing so can lead to a teacher's misunderstanding of non-verbal communication by students of color and low-income students which have elicited concerns of confrontation and threatening student behaviors (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005). Thus, the educator-student relationship, the identities held by the educator and student, and the degree to which an educator is racially reflexive all influence overall discipline decision making and disproportional discipline trends.

The importance of relationship building was discussed in a focus group with officers in which one described how a better relationship with an African male student would have prevented his involvement with the school police:

Officer Claire: There was another incident here where one of the kids were trying to come through the doors in the cafeteria. He didn't know a teacher was on the other end and he was going through and he hit the teacher... Somebody else said that he left something on the table and that's why he went out there. And instead of them calling [us]

because like myself... I have a good relationship with the African students, I know that he is one that you can't grab. You can't, that's just how he is. They didn't call [us]. The administrators tried to take care of it. And the administrator just tried to grab him, and he was pushing. And he wasn't pushing him like get your hands off of me. And he was just doing this [shows a sideward motion of hands.] The administrator got frustrated and called school police over and they end up wrestling him and it got ugly real quick. When we felt like if you would have called [us], you would never be wrestling like that because we know him. He's been here since 9th grade. We know how to approach him.

Here Officer Claire describes his frustration with the student's treatment because he felt that his relationship with the student could have prevented the subsequent school police involvement.

Ideally, as a relationship building tool built on communication, restorative practices should help educators to build stronger relationships that would foster empathy and reduce biased beliefs.

However, as described in chapter 6, teachers often struggled with using and finding circle questions that would develop insightful dialogue. Therefore, using circles to be reflexive and address bias and inequity would have needed guidance and support that did not appear readily available.

During her end of school-year interview, I asked Ms. Holdsmith, "Do circles help teachers to address any stereotypes they have? She replied saying, "I haven't [witnessed this] but I mean, like I said, it opens up the dialogue at least to have those relationships to get to know your students. So hopefully, I would hope." Ms. Holdsmith's comment speaks to the idealisms of restorative practices. As a leader within the school, by the end of the academic year, she hadn't yet witnessed the contributions of the intervention to addressing stereotyping. As the inaugural

year of the intervention at Restorative High, it is possible that more time and guided use of the intervention could help to support the way restorative practices can help reduce stereotypical beliefs. However, as described at the beginning of this chapter, the intervention itself was based on a race-neutral premise that did not include tools to help educators challenge their own belief systems on race. This is a critical absence from the intervention as it allows the status quo about race and disparities to be maintained. This notion is confirmed by Mr. Leroy who states:

When you mention race, people get all scared, and that's where race is very subtle. And don't take this the wrong way, but I am going to mention it deliberate, but typically White people hear race and think of it as not a problem that White people have; race is a problem that people with a race have.

Thus, restorative practices at Restorative High were not simply an intervention that could run their course unassisted. Without strategic means of creating mutual understanding to disrupt bias, restorative practices remained a framework with potential and not an intervention capable of disrupting how educators' biases contributed to discipline trends. In addition to the ways that Whiteness influenced discipline practices, I describe in the following section how some teachers were also timid about discipline due to concerns about how it could be racialized.

8.1.5 Inconsistent Discipline Practices and Student “Push-Back”

Common behaviors leading to reprimand or discipline at Restorative High included, class tardiness, distracting side conversations during instruction, cell phone use and cursing. Student cursing, specifically the use of “fuck,” “bitch,” and “nigga” was evident in classrooms and

throughout the school, and staff both addressed and ignored it. When an administrator was asked if restorative practices could help teachers address student cursing, the participant agreed saying, "I think it can. [But] teachers struggle with like beginning that conversation – how to be diplomatic, and sensitive." Asking the participant what caused this difficulty, the participant stated, "The race issues, it makes teachers uncomfortable – and just when a student pushes back...the like majority of the teaching staff is White so, the student population is 45 or 48% Black and then 40% white and then Asians and Latino and everything else, but it's pretty much Black and White pretty even." This administrator's comment is suggesting that some teachers are challenged with addressing student language for fear of perceived racial implications of addressing their cursing. Since the student body is more racially diverse than the body of staff, this can become the gateway for cultural mismatch. This is a form of social and cultural misalignment that can shape harmful hegemonic teacher attitudes toward a student, leading to negative discipline and academic outcomes (Kozlowski, 2015; Warren, 2015). In contrast, an educator that is culturally reflexive can shape his or her relationship with students and may aid in recognizing the diverse social cues and social and cultural capital present at a diverse school like Restorative High. However, the need for a more culturally diverse or reflexive staff does not negate that the administrator's comment assumes that cursing is mostly a problem among students of color or that teachers find it more difficult to address cursing among students of color. I did not witness that students of color cursed more or less than White students, instead, it was clear that both White students and students of color used curse words in their language. Perhaps due to its frequency, few teachers consistently addressed student cursing in the classroom.

Student cursing happened so frequently it was a normal feature of the larger school and classroom environment. On one occasion, I sat observing students in Ms. Riza's class, I heard a loud and subsequent rapid knocking on the classroom doors. It was the knocking of a Black female student that was locked out of the classroom after returning to the room from obtaining additional art supplies. After a few moments of knocking, Ms. Riza walked across the room to open the door for the student. As the student walked into the classroom, in a loud and frustrated voice she yelled at a Black male classmate who was sitting at a table near the door saying, "you ain't open the fucking door, nigga?" She then sucked her teeth and attended to her project. The Black male student who she cursed at said nothing in response, nor did Ms. Riza. Yet, at times Ms. Riza, and other teachers did address student cursing. In one instance, Ms. Riza had a circle about cursing by centering the conversation on respect. The circle question was, "how can you be kind and respectful? For example, not cursing." After several students gave their input on respect, one Black male student stated in a declarative voice, "don't throw us under the bus for cursing when teachers also curse. And don't say they don't." Ms. Riza shook her head in agreement saying, "It matters how it is said. Saying it because you jammed your finger is different." The student then replies saying, "teachers curse at students." This in turn suggests that teachers curse beyond the jamming of their fingers. He explained, "this happened to me when I was at [previous school]." Mr. Riza replied, "I can't speak to that, but I am simply trying to help you understand what it takes to succeed in the professional world."

In this example, Ms. Riza was able to use a circle to have a short conversation about language as a form of respect. She also communicated multiple subjective messages (1) that student cursing was in conflict with her definition of respect, (2) that her definition of respect

would give students important cultural capital for the workplace, and (3) that cursing had conditions in which it was acceptable. The benefit of this circle is that it created a space for the teacher to establish expectations and for the students to express what they believed about her expectations. Thus, the Black male student was able to present the disconnect between teachers' behaviors and expectations by noting that teachers also curse. However, the teacher's response that, "it matters how it's said" gives insight to the subjective nature of behavioral expectations. Indeed, for some targeted by the "disciplinary gaze" this statement can easily become, "it matters *who* says it." These subjective interpretations of behavior contribute to inconsistent disciplinary moments and unclear expectations of behavior. Therefore, student "push-back" may be related to inconsistency and inequity in discipline as much as it is their own resistance.

The relationship between student "push-back" and inconsistent discipline practices was also unveiled during a circle conversation with a teacher and subsequently the students he identified as disruptive. During a day-long visit with an IIRP coach, Ms. Holdsmith arranged for a circle with Mr. Cummings, a White male student teacher who was experiencing student behavior challenges. The following fieldnote reflects his frustrations in the classroom:

...I feel frustrated. The students generally seem to dislike me. I've been called a fucking stupid teacher or you're a terrible teacher. There are students that like to learn but there is a core group of students who make it difficult...

During this meeting, the teacher identified four Black female students he felt were giving him a difficult time in the classroom. In a separate circle apart from Mr. Cummings, Ms. Holdsmith, the IIRP coach and a central office equity team member attempted to understand the girls' perspective.

IIRP Coach: So what's going on in Mr. Cumming's class?

Nadiene: I don't really like him, he needs to slow down, he does too much.

Courtney: He is nice but doesn't know how to manage the class, he thinks we're hard, but he stoops to our level. He rolled his eyes at me, so I thought "oh I quit."

Michelle: He is trying to skip the student-teacher level, but he can't. I was doing better with the other teacher. I liked him when he was helping...

IIRP Coach: Is he better one-on-one?

Students [In Unison] Yes!

Courtney: He gets really frustrated too easy

Nadiene: He doesn't give us enough time to finish what he is doing. He erases the board so quick ...

Erica: [In a low tone with a smile] I don't like that he tries to take everyone's phone.

IIRP Coach: But is that a school rule?

Erica: Yes, but he is strict with it. He calls security on us!

IIRP Coach: Are you ok if we talk we him later today?

Students: Yes

Courtney: [With a slight smirk] He'll probably cry.

Whereas Mr. Cummings felt that the students simply did not like him, the restorative circle with the girls indicates that one of the underlying problems they had was the fast pace at which Mr. Cummings taught the course. Several studies have described that students who become academically disengaged are more likely to display disruptive behavior (Toldson, McGee, Lemmons, 2015; Tyler-Wood, Cereijo, & Pemberton, 2004). Ideally, if these girls felt more

included in instruction, they may have exhibited less disruptive behavior. The restorative circle also revealed that the students were frustrated by his classroom management and disciplinary style which included using school security for minor infractions. Researchers describes that punitive discipline styles disrupt the relational bonds between students and a teacher which ultimately can cause further misbehavior in the classroom (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010). However, not only were the girls frustrated by Mr. Cumming's teaching and discipline style, one student identified how both gender and culture interact with discipline meted:

IIRP Coach: ... What happened when someone called Mr. Cummings stupid?

Nadiene: I said that his class is stupid not him.

Ms. Holdsmith: Remember that still reflects on him.

IIRP Coach: What if you are sensitive?

Courtney: Then you shouldn't be working with...[paused and smiles] African-American students. You're too grown and too old for that!

Ms. Holdsmith: But he is new and maybe this is not for him but he needs time because he is learning.

IIRP Coach: So how could he discuss this with you all if he is sensitive?

Courtney: If he came with that, I wouldn't respect him as a man. We are kids we are gonna do stupid things.

Nadiene: [Looking at Courtney Nadiene says in a defending tone] She is more hard... I don't want anyone to feel bad.

Courtney: If he came emotionally, "oh my God bye" people are gonna say stuff all the time ...

Andrea: [Asks, Courtney] You said, he needs to be able to work with African American students. Can you give an example of what that means?

Courtney: No not just African American students, he just needs to be able to work with all students. Restorative High is diverse.

Nadiene: He needs more patience.

Although the students should be held accountable for the way they interact with and show respect to Mr. Cummings, it appears that part of their conflict with Mr. Cummings was that his disciplinary style was inconsistent and vacillated between an authoritarian figure who calls school security to a more permissive figure that is easily “frustrated” and “would probably cry.” Based on the IIRP’s social discipline window, educators are more successful in building a strong student-teacher relationship and a supportive classroom environment when their discipline strategies come from the “with/ restorative/authoritative” quadrant (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2009, p. 7-8). This suggests that a teacher provides both high control and high support. In contrast, educators’ exhibiting high control without the necessary support fall within the “to/ punitive/ authoritarian” quadrant (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2009, p. 7-8). Enhancing the student teacher-relationship is especially important for academically underperforming students, as a caring relationship positively influences academic outcomes for students who are at risk of dropping out (Muller, 2001). Further, studies support that effective work with urban students of color includes a culturally relevant and caring learning environment (Brown, 2004) and positive teacher-student relationships (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011). Culturally-relevant caring entails the use of assertiveness, authority, high expectations, and general concern toward the student (Brown, 2004). Thus, the student’s comment that Mr. Cummings needed to learn how to work

with “African American students” or with students from diverse backgrounds indicates that acknowledgment of culture, cultural competency and cultural reflexivity are important factors in developing student-teacher relationships. Perhaps it is the absence of a teacher’s cultural awareness that disrupts the building of trusting relationships which contributes to the student “push-back” the school administrator discussed. Describing the illusive yet present role of a teacher’s own cultural ethos and values, Mr. Leroy stated:

...how do you deliver instruction if you believe everybody thinks like you? You deliver it in a certain way and ... it impacts people who aren’t like you and you’re not even aware of it. So until we can crack that little nut if you will, we are going to suffer this achievement disparity because people are going to suffer from getting education that isn’t tailored to them...

In this context, analysis of “student push-back” and a teacher’s discipline decision making should consider both the cultural and policy environment the behaviors are situated in. The notion that some teachers are concerned that students of color push-back during disciplinary moments implies that some students have power to evade or subvert discipline, therefore making it difficult for teachers to use disciplinary tools. However, this shifts blame to students when educators ultimately have the power of both Whiteness to define behavior and discipline policy to assert their authority to discipline. Together, a race neutral intervention, inconsistent and inequitable discipline patterns, student push-back and whiteness all can work together to create racialized discipline patterns throughout the school. In Mr. Cummings case, his identification of four Black females as the most difficult students in his classroom was true for him. Yet, this also was a microcosm of the larger racialized discipline trends at Restorative High School.

8.1.6 Racialized Discipline Trends

During my 6 months of classroom observations at Restorative High, I only witnessed one student receiving a classroom referral. This referral was given to a White female student from a White female teacher for inappropriate cellphone use in the classroom. Had I based the discipline trends at Restorative High solely on the classrooms I observed, I would not have observational data to substantiate any claims of high referral usage or disproportionality. Instead, through observation of the twice-weekly detention hall, I was able to gain insight on the number of students receiving referrals and a visual representation of the proportion of those students who were Black or Brown.

The restorative detention hall typically had a list of names that ranged from 20-100 students. Typically, no more than 25 students actually attended the mandatory restorative detention hall. Students who did not attend received an automatic one-day suspension. With only a few exceptions, students attending the restorative detention hall were always Black, Nepali and Latino/a students. Together, students of color at Restorative High made up 41% of student population; yet, they represented the majority of all detention goers. This racialized trend suggests that the discipline measures taken within the academic classes I observed were significantly different from the classrooms in which the detention goers came. Based on each student's own disclosure during the restorative circle, detention goers received their referrals for behaviors such as tardiness, cell phone use, disrespect and disruption. Yet, based on my observation in academic classrooms, these behaviors were not exclusively exhibited Black and Brown students. However, the vivid Black and Brown hue found within the detention hall might

suggest that students of color were more likely to engage in these behaviors. This finding reflects how discipline trends, even if unintended can become racialized.

Since students received detention for non-punitive and non-drug related infractions, the over-representation of Black and Brown students at restorative detention coincides with previous studies that suggest that students of color are more likely to receive discipline for non-violent, non-drug related and subjective infractions (Cregor & Hewit, 2011; Office of Civil Rights, 2000 as cited in Dupper, 2010). Since the detention hall was mostly comprised of students of color, the proportion of students of color receiving a one-day suspension for ‘misbehaving’ and thus being dismissed from detention was also high. Likewise, I estimate that a significant portion of the students receiving a one-day suspension for missing detention is largely comprised of students of color. Without additional classroom observation, I do not have the relevant data to interpret the reasons for the Black and Brown overrepresentation during restorative detention hall. However, Bourdieu (1977) presents that codes within the ‘field setting’ and differential capital perpetuate such inequalities.

Similarly, embodying ‘disruptive behavior’ is a concept Vavrus and Cole (2002) posit is fluid in meaning and is differentiated based on the power relation dynamics in a classroom. In turn, it is reasoned that the catalyst for referrals and later suspension is indicative of a transgression of the ‘common-sense’ or seemingly innate behavior expectations of a particular classroom (Bourdieu, 1991). This often works to the student’s detriment as seemingly common-sense expectations are not explained in school rules (Vavrus & Cole, 2002), thus, highlighting why some students are more likely to be suspended for subjective behaviors (Mendez & Knoff, 2003). This occurrence coincides with Bourdieu’s (1977) theory on habitus indicating that a

student did not embody the 'sensible and 'reasonable' behavioral cues within the school's contrived habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 79). As a result, when students did not internalize the school habitus, they became hyper-visible.

Yet, as a school with a large student-body of color and mostly White teaching staff, race and racial bias remained significant contributing factors since (1) CRT contends that racism is endemic (Bell, 1992), (2) Black and Brown students have been historically hyper-surveilled (3) restorative practice as a relationship-building tool did not explicitly include anti-bias or racial identity training. Providing more insight on the relevance of race to racialized outcomes was a school officer. The school officer described facilitating a circle between students who were African immigrants and African American students. This circle was initiated due to cultural misunderstandings between the two student groups. The officer stated, "I had a circle with the African kids in my group because I felt like the kids didn't come together and the African kids and the African Americans were having the same experiences within this school and they didn't know." He described these specific experiences saying,

Racism, teachers not helping, adults not respecting them. The way they treat one another, the way they're treated by everyone else. Similarities inside the school, outside the school, in the communities, with the police, teachers, the administrators, I mean, they talked about everything. And they were surprised that they were going through the same exact things in the classrooms. As far as being ignored, not being helped, not being taught properly, not being represented properly, not being listened to. I mean all of that and they were experiencing the same exact things and they didn't know. And now they have a better relationship.

His statement that these racially similar but ethnically dissimilar groups were experiencing the same issues in the school and community is indicative of the ways that the students were viewed and their behaviors racialized. The similarity in treatment that these Black students received reflects the way that Black and Brown bodies are viewed.

8.1.7 Conclusion

The district's implementation of restorative practices at Restorative High School aimed to facilitate teacher-student understanding and to increase positive interactions by developing relationships. Increasing student-teacher interaction is noted as an effective tool for urban schools as it fosters more teacher support of students (Waxman, Huang, Anderson, & Weinstein, 1997). Thus, the relationship building mechanisms within restorative practices were intended as a gateway to reduce overall and disproportional school suspensions. However, research also details that attempts to reform systems without considering the racialized socio-historical legacies and on-going factors contributing to inequity perpetuate inequity and represent race-neutral neoliberal reform (Cook, 1995; Crenshaw, 1995; Matsuda, 1995). The implementation of restorative practices at Restorative High mirrored a neo liberal application, as the educators' and administrators' training did not cover (1) how restorative practices could be used to reduce disproportionality, (2) how to change school level factors that contributed to suspensions, or (3) critical awareness of faculty's identities, biases and how this influences decision making. As such, the intervention was implemented in a race-neutral format and within a punitive disciplinary structure. Thus, from its inception, restorative practices as an intervention to address

disproportionality lacked key factors that could facilitate the reduction of disparities. Therefore, the intervention was an add-on training tool unable to dismantle the interpersonal and systemic practices that contributed to disproportionality.

Nonetheless, attempts to integrate concepts of equity into teacher professional development was an aim of the school's administration. However, the quality and depth of those attempts did not appear to yield greater understanding on racial inequity. Instead, data suggest that conversations on race were met with fear, misunderstanding and avoidance. Further, participants described how whiteness shaped educators' expectations, beliefs, and disciplinary actions, which I suggest created student push-back/resistance. Although I did not witness discipline practices that appeared motivated by racial bias, I noted that Black and Brown students were overrepresented in afterschool detention for behaviors I observed across all racial groups. This trend may suggest that Black and Brown students were more likely subject to what Raible and Irizarry call the "disciplinary gaze" (2010, p.1197). This concept reflects how school settings standardize White middle-class cultural capital thus making hyper-visible all students who do not espouse it. For example, students from low-income backgrounds (thus with lower economic capital) are less likely to possess the same cultural experiences, language skills, and social skills of students with higher economic capital (Kane, 2013; Houston, 2002). This appears consistent with research that states that the walking style, dress, communication, and body language of Black students, especially males, are frequently demonized and made threatening (Ferguson, 2000; Youdell, 2003). Thus, despite the schools attempts to integrate equity frameworks into teacher training, additional support was needed to engage critical and transformative

conversations and actions about race and inequity. Therefore, as described by one participant, the district's commitments to equity was just a "thing on paper."

In sum, my research demonstrates that racially equitable reform cannot be race neutral. Instead, it must be strategically intentional, by including the culturally and experientially relevant lived experiences of students of color. Moreover, it must consider the punitive status quo of discipline policies and practices that have a disproportionate impact on students of color. The success of school-wide reform efforts like restorative practices hinges on this. Intent and effort towards achieving equity cannot be effective interventions. The framework, implementation, process and follow-up must all be race conscious, structurally transformative, and explicitly focused on equity.

9.0 CHAPTER 9

9.1 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

9.1.1 Introduction

In chapter nine I describe the significance of my findings within the context of ecological systems theory and critical race theory. Overall, I describe how structural, social and interpersonal factors impacted the way that restorative practices were delivered. I start by describing how punitive discipline policies contributed to suspension outcomes and thus hindered the aims of restorative practices. Next, I discuss how barriers such as lack of classroom time or limited circle questions hindered the quality of circles facilitated. Subsequently, I describe the race-neutral application of the intervention and how this contributed to discipline inequity and racialized discipline outcomes. Lastly, implications for social work, policy and interventions with diverse populations are discussed.

As a multi-tiered school-wide intervention, restorative practices in theory can be an ample approach for systemic change. Further, as a set of practices that include on-going student-teacher dialogue, community building, accountability and continued professional development, restorative practices also have the micro-level mechanisms for empathy development and

improving school climate. The potential of restorative practices has garnered rapid national attention with several schools and entire districts implementing them to improve student-teacher relationships and reduce school suspensions (Gregory, Clawson, Davis & Gerewitz, 2016). However, as exhibited in several studies, restorative practices have contributed to reducing overall school suspension rates while disproportional suspensions remain (Gregory et al., 2014; Skiba, 2015; Simson, 2012). Using school suspension data, I found that this phenomenon was likewise found at Restorative High, the school on which this dissertation focuses. The aim of this research was to investigate the factors that contributed to the on-going discipline gap. Overall, my research reveals that there were multiple structural, theoretical, and practice-level factors that diminished the potential for restorative practices to reduce inequitable discipline outcomes.

9.1.2 Theoretical Implications – Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological systems theory outlines how organizations like schools are nested within multiple systems that impact the daily practices within schools. As such, classrooms are nested within schools, schools are nested in school districts, school districts are situated in communities with diverse needs, and communities are located within political jurisdictions that make fiscal, policy, and curricular decisions about schools. The interconnectedness of these relationships indicates that changes and power dynamics at one level can impact decision making and outcomes at another level. The significance of this type of nesting was apparent during this study, wherein punitive discipline policies at the school district level and school level superseded the non-punitive and relationship-building efforts of restorative justice implementation in the

classroom. Furthermore, factors such as classroom size, limited classroom time, and standardized testing all influenced the frequency and depth with which restorative circles were facilitated. Some teachers expressed not having the right questions or enough time to engage in-depth conversations that would better facilitate relationship building. I argue that these barriers, along with the race-neutral application of restorative practices, hindered the promised relationship-building outcomes of restorative practices. This in turn contributed to the continued disproportional disciplining of students of color during the intervention year compared to the pre-intervention year.

9.1.3 Theoretical Implications – Critical Race Theory

Using critical race theory (CRT), I critique the race-neutral application of the intervention at Restorative High School. CRT demonstrates how racism flourishes within systems that value neutrality in policy and meritocracy in performance (Cook, 1995; Crenshaw, 1995; Matsuda, 1995). In my research on restorative practices at Restorative High School, I found that there was (1) a lack of understanding in racial discourse, (2) that whiteness was a form of capital that impacted discipline outcomes, (3) inconsistent discipline practices created inequity and tensions among students and (4) that these factors contributed to racialized discipline outcomes as exhibited in detentions and suspensions.

The race-neutral application of restorative practices at the case-study school is a significant finding in this study. Specifically, ahistorical reform efforts do not account for the racialized socio-historical legacies and on-going factors contributing to inequity. Thus, while overall

suspensions were reduced, rates of disproportionality for Black and Brown students remained relatively unchanged across both years. Furthermore, study findings indicate that Black girls had a greater risk for suspension than all other girls during the pre-intervention year and intervention year. Specifically, I found that the discipline gap between Black girls and all other girls was larger than the discipline gap between Black boys and all other boys. As such, the interaction of race and gender for Black girls' suspension outcomes indicates that intervention should both be race critical and intersectional to reduce inequities for Black students. Although the school district had an equity office and received funding to implement restorative practices for high and racially disproportional suspensions, the school-wide restorative practices training did not address racial inequity. The training also did not provide educators and administrators with tools to evaluate their role in contributing to and addressing interpersonal and systemic racial inequity. As a result, Black and Brown students continued to be overrepresented in school discipline practices.

I posit that the continued overrepresentation of students of color was in part a representation of color-blind interest convergence. CRT theorists describe interest convergence as an attempt toward justice that is initiated when the dominant racial group can also benefit (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; 2007). Similarly, racially disproportional suspensions have been reported across the United States since the 1970's (Edelman, Beck, & Smith, 1975); however, national attention was most recently garnered when suspension rates for all youth spiked as a result of zero-tolerance policies (Brown et al., 2009; Teasley, 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003). Subsequently, zero tolerance policy amendments were made through the No Child Left Behind Act to limit the number of students who were being suspended for weapon-less behaviors

(Hanson, 2005). Given the on-going high suspension rates, additional federal efforts included a call for a moratorium on zero-tolerance policies (Spiller & Porter, 2014) and later the support of school-wide interventions such as restorative practices (USDOE, 2014). Yet, after each of these political initiatives, overall suspensions were reduced, while Black and Brown students remain disproportionately suspended, particularly for subjective infractions. I suggest this is in part related to an ahistorical and race-neutral approach, one in which districts including the case-study school are implicated. Despite the continued overrepresentation of students of color in disciplinary exclusions at Restorative High School, there is potential for reducing disproportionality if the intervention is augmented and collaborative efforts are introduced. In the subsequent sections, I describe the implications of my research for policy, practice, and school social work.

9.1.4 Implications for School Social Workers and Educators – Collaborations

In addition to exploring the impact of restorative practices on the discipline gap, this study intentionally included the experiences of a school social worker to understand the contributions of school social work to restorative practices. Traditionally, school social workers serve as student advocates and liaise between the school, home and community (Sherman, 2016). Yet, the value that school social workers bring to schools are at times minimized (Sherman, 2016). Perhaps, as described in chapter 6, this provides insight to the limited interaction the school social worker had with implementing or facilitating restorative practices circles. In schools where the social worker is valued but simply has too large of a caseload, their knowledge

from home visits could provide context about student behavior. Specifically, given the home visitation responsibilities of many school social workers, a school-based social worker could provide socio-emotional insights about a student's disposition within the school setting. This would provide information about a student's behaviors, beliefs, and relationships and how this intersects with classroom behaviors and the student-teacher relationship. This type of model would necessitate intentional collaborative efforts between teachers and school social workers.

According to research by Allen-Meares (2005), there is great potential for social workers and teachers to use collaboration models to support students who are at risk of suspension. Thus, if both professions could strategically align their efforts around restorative practices or another relationship building intervention, this could become an important step toward closing the discipline gap. Educators and school social workers could also collaborate by developing restorative practice circle questions that are relevant to the interests of students. This collaborative effort would have been useful at Restorative High School where several teachers expressed not having relevant questions to ask during circle facilitation. Furthermore, teachers trained in culturally responsive pedagogy would pair well with school social workers as they are trained to use social justice and anti-oppression frameworks. Thus, collaboration between educators and school social workers committed to social justice could forge a pathway to a more racially and culturally affirming model of restorative practices that could reduce racially disproportional school suspensions.

In all, social workers and educators individually do not have the skill-sets to educate the whole child. Students need the collective level of expertise from both professions to create a culturally responsive wraparound service to reduce racially disproportional school suspensions.

Moreover, while individual efforts can be made across schools or districts, the greatest change would come from restructuring teacher and social worker training through the auspices of The National Association of Social Workers and the National Education Association. Together, both associations could create systemic change that better values the work of school social workers and capitalizes on the collaborative potential between both professions.

9.1.5 Implications for Policy

Despite little evidence to suggest that school exclusions are developmentally appropriate or deter negative behaviors (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003), the current discipline ethos within many schools remains punitive. The 2015 Every Child Succeeds Act requires that students are protected from “aversive behavioral interventions” (p.72). It suggests that this is remedied through a multi-tiered system of supports (i.e., restorative practices), addressing discipline disparities, involvement of mental health professionals, and providing professional development on discipline practices. Given the national interest in school-wide interventions and the call to involve mental-health professionals, the social work profession is poised to respond to this call from a systems and health perspective. However, it is also important that federal, state and local responses to school suspensions include framing that acknowledges and acts on the socio-historical legacy of disenfranchisement that continues to impact poor communities and communities of color. While race-centered policy changes may not be prioritized under the current federal administration, the messaging of racial and social justice among social workers and the National Association of Social Workers must not relent.

In conclusion, barriers to intervention included race-neutral application, punitive policies, and educators discipline ethos. This research highlighted how policies intended to uphold higher educational standards were operationalized punitively and thus contributed to school suspensions. Thus, those concerned with the academic and developmental progress of marginalized students should problematize “the meritocratic” policy status quo. In addition, special attention is necessary to address the way policy pressures enforce biased constructions upon students. Without greater awareness in this area, there will be continued negative social-psychological, academic, and developmental outcomes as students are unfairly excluded. Despite the micro and macro discipline practices that appear to normalize the overrepresentation of students of color, this is not a fate that must be accepted for marginalized students within our school systems. Instead, school social workers and educators can advocate within their respective associations to demand structural changes that will evaluate punitive discipline policy and implement anti-oppressive frameworks.

9.1.6 Intervention Implications

Restorative practices at the case-study school lacked key tools that could facilitate the reduction of disparities. In chapter 8, I described the necessity of anti-bias training and culturally responsive pedagogy. Further, I describe the potential to integrate these frameworks into restorative practices. The purpose of integrating these practices would be to support educators and staff with self-reflection about their biases and how this may impact their decision making with youth. Additionally, by engaging with culturally-responsive pedagogy, educators can learn

to instruct students from a culture-informed and strengths-based perspective. Yet, incorporating these practices may not be sufficient for students who have experienced or are experiencing ongoing trauma in their life. The case-management and clinical skills of school social workers could provide a vital collaboration point.

In chapter 4, I noted that seventy-five percent of all students enrolled at Restorative High School were eligible for free lunch. This eligibility status serves as a proxy for low socioeconomic status, which is correlated with childhood traumatic experiences (Dreyer, Chung, Szilagyi, & Wong, 2016). Therefore, it is likely that suspensions are also an indication of student behaviors related to traumatic experiences. For example, while fighting may not be a first line of defense for all Black girls, for some, a physical reaction to an altercation is an expected response if they are regularly subject to violence in their communities (Blake, Butler, & Smith, 2015). Thus, interventions such as restorative practices that seek to reduce disparate discipline referrals should include trauma-informed practices. Moreover, research suggests that students who have experienced trauma may not respond to traditional modes of school discipline (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017). Instead, it may lead to further conflict. A growing number of school districts now recognize the benefits of trauma-informed practice, as students are exposed to an array of risk factors that negatively influence their schooling experiences and academic success (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). At the federal level, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (Pub. L. 114–95) emphasizes the need for trauma-informed training among school-based personnel (Prewitt, 2016). Thus, I demonstrate the need for school social workers and educators to collaborate and provide restorative practices that are trauma informed and culturally relevant.

9.1.7 Future Research – Toward a Culturally-responsive, Trauma-informed, Restorative Practices Model

As described in chapter 6 and chapter 8 respectively, the school social worker and counselors had minimal involvement with restorative practices and the intervention was implemented in a race-neutral format. I offer that a race centered, and culturally responsive model may have helped to address the role of bias in school discipline. Further, intentional integration of a school social worker could have helped to address the role of a student's trauma in discipline outcomes. As such, future research should include designing a culturally-responsive, trauma-informed, restorative practices (CRTIRP) model. The purpose of this model would be to strengthen teacher-student relationships, bridge cultural divides and misunderstanding, and support students to understand the impetus for their behaviors. After two years of data collection examining the implementation of restorative practices in two public schools, I observed that students most often received discipline (detention and suspension) for minor and subjective misconduct (verbal disrespect, adult defiance, cell phone usage, tardiness, skipping class) and secondly for fighting. Therefore, research should explore how the discipline gap is a product of educator and policy bias as well as student misconduct related to trauma. Studies suggest that trauma experienced during childhood is associated with emotional dysregulation (Marusak, Martin, Etkin, & Thomason, 2015) and later behavioral problems (Davies, Winter, & Cicchetti, 2006). As such, interventions used to address student behavior must also incorporate how behaviors are also a product of trauma. Given the persistent racial discipline disparities, future research should examine the culturally-responsive, socio-emotional,

regulation tools that teachers, counselors and school social workers can use to support students who exhibit persistent disruptive behaviors.

CRTIRP collaboration model. A CRTIRP model would be data driven, practice informed and based on a teacher and school social worker collaboration model. Ideally, a practice informed, trauma-centered and culturally responsive model would reflect a bio-psycho-social framework which meets the needs of the whole child. School social workers can also support schools by giving carefully crafted professional development training sessions which are imperative to enhancing relationships between students and staff. As recommended by Gay (2005), this training would be best orchestrated in a program that entails ‘diagnosis, development and implementation, analytical debriefing, reflection, and refinement’ (Gay, 2005, p. 235). This represents structured accountability for effective training. This recommended structure in turn offers guidance that will aid the production of a culturally-competent, trauma-informed, empowered teaching staff. Educators could continue this work by integrating trauma informed training with their culturally responsive pedagogy practices. To create a unified front of commitment to a CRTIRP model, institutional reform would require the centering of youth perspectives and the application of resources to augment curriculum. Together, these strategic efforts would work toward changing normative behavior among adults in educational institutions for greater equity (Banks, 2004). Thus, I propose that collaboration models between teachers and social workers on culturally-responsive trauma-informed restorative practices are both possible and necessary.

9.2 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

While the overall study findings are robust given data triangulation to support conclusions and related implications, factors such as selection bias, intervention time-frame, and implementation fidelity may have had an impact on study conclusions.

9.2.1 Selection Bias

Participant recruitment began with call for participation letters sent to all staff via email. However, this approach did yield any participants. After two mass email attempts with no responses, a school leader provided me with a list of teachers who were actively engaging with restorative practices in their classrooms. While sending the call for participation letter to these select educators was a successful strategy, it is possible that the type of educator/participant on the school leader's list was different from an educator not on this list. Specifically, educators on the list I was provided with may have reflected teachers with greater motivation to engage with restorative practices thus not accurately reflecting the way restorative practices were implemented across Archway High School.

9.2.2 Intervention Time-frame

Although data was collected for two academic years for the overarching study, findings for this dissertation study draw from the first year of the intervention within Archway Public Schools. As such, results from this study may primarily capture the nascent and developmental

stages of the restorative practices intervention in Archway Public Schools. For example, during year one of implementation, educators were encouraged to primarily implement “proactive” circles over other circle types. Thus, the diversity of circle data collected during this school year was limited. Specifically, educators were not trained to use conferences for problem solving during year one. As such, there were few opportunities to understand how educators dealt with and overcame conflict to improve relationships. This in turn contributed to the low “Problem-Solving” and “Risk-taking” scores because the circles were mostly proactive circles which did not always necessitate that a problem was solved or that students took a risk.

9.2.3 Observer Effect

Volpe, DiPerna, Hintze and Shapiro (2005) described that participants may react to a researcher’s presence by changing their behavior in response to a new presence in the classroom. This reactive behavior could lead to incorrect interpretations of behaviors observed. Similarly, it is possible that circle scores were impacted by my presence as an outside member of the classroom. Indeed, some of my earlier fieldnotes record students reprimanding one another for behaving inappropriately in front of a visitor. To counter any performative behaviors, I would assure students and educators that I was there only to observe the use of restorative practices and was not affiliated with any evaluative processes within the school system. Additionally, Volpe et al. (2015) suggest that repeated classroom observations can create familiarity and therefore limit participant reaction to an observer’s presence. In this study, classrooms were observed between

3-10 times for each teacher. As such, these repeated observations may have countered a Hawthorne or observer effect over time.

9.2.4 Intervention Fidelity

Intervention fidelity refers to the extent that the implementation adhered to the required structure of the intended intervention model (Mowbray, Holter, Teague & Byee, 2003). Additionally, both timing and delivery quality correspond to intervention fidelity (Mowbray et al., 2003; O'Donnell, 2008). Thus, if an intervention significantly deviates from the intended model, both internal and external validity are impacted, making findings less reliable (O'Donnell, 2008). After attending all the intervention training sessions with educators and staff for Archway Public schools, I found that some staff viewed the intervention with excitement while others expressed doubt and apprehension. For example, some held the concern that the intervention would cause emotional vulnerability which some teachers lacked the skillsets to handle. These varied responses possibly foreshadowed what later turned into varied application approaches to restorative practices. On the technical level, some teachers did not use a talking piece to dictate who had the opportunity to speak or did not facilitate the conversation in a circle. Thus, at times students spoke over each other when there was not a talking piece. In addition, when students were not asked to sit or stand in a circle, there was often less participation in the circle. For instance, one teacher often facilitated a 1-3-minute standing circle minutes before the end of class. This caused the circle process to be interrupted by the school bell before all students had the opportunity to participate. As such, both the measurement constructs of "circle safety"

and “belonging” may have been impacted. Additionally, as described in chapter 6, several teachers struggled to come up with appropriate circle questions which at times led to negative circle discussions and/or a lack of student buy-in. Ultimately, the lack of circle discussion topics may have impacted the construct of student circle “commitment”. In all, restorative practices were not uniformly applied across all the classrooms. This is an ongoing critique within restorative practices literature (Gregory et al., 2014), which has the potential to create measurement challenges.

9.2.5 Measurement Limitations

In addition to the impact of intervention fidelity on circle score outcomes, measurement challenges also relate to the nested structure of the RP-Observe circle scores. All RP-Observe data were analyzed using Spearman’s Rho correlation. Since classroom observations were conducted across each teacher’s class between 3-10 times, RP-observe data across each teacher are nested. The nested structure of this data can lead to intra-correlation and underestimation of standard errors. As such, the underestimation of error terms can make correlation coefficients less reliable and thus are a limitation in this study (Meinck & Rodriguez 2013). Nonetheless, as a mixed-method study using data that reflects policies, beliefs, behaviors, and practices, my methodological approach helped to unveil important contextual nuances that ultimately facilitate the challenges or successes of restorative practices.

9.3 CONCLUSION

Despite these outlined limitations, important implications concerning the discipline gap and the role of restorative practices remain. Findings from chapter 5 indicate that suspensions during the intervention year declined compared to the pre-intervention year. While this study is unable to assure a casual relationship, what remains clear is that a reduction in school suspensions does not equate to a decline in the discipline gap. Findings from the qualitative data in chapter 8 shed light on how intervention delivery corresponded with the quality of circles delivered and how this may have impacted student buy-in and student-teacher relationships.

In chapter 7, I discussed the impact of discipline policy on the intervention. Specifically, because punitive discipline policies leading to suspension were constant during the intervention year, it conflicted with the less-punitive aims of restorative practices. Therefore, the suspension reduction of restorative practices at the school-site were influenced both by intervention fidelity and on-going punitive discipline practices.

Finally, in chapter 8, I describe racialized discipline patterns and how this corresponded with educators' beliefs, punitive policies, a race-neutral intervention and misconceptions about race. Specifically, I describe how punitive discipline policies and the "disciplinary gaze" work together to make Black and Brown students hyper-visible by comparing their actions and behaviors to a White middle-class norm. Additionally, the discipline gap between Black girls and White girls was greater than the discipline gap between Black boys and White boys. This suggests that both gender and race influenced discipline outcomes. Thus, as exhibited at the school site, restorative practices cannot be implemented with a race-neutral framework. Doing so

ignores the historical legacy of race and inequality and how it continues to have a present-day impact. In contrast, restorative practice implemented in a racially diverse school settings should be intentionally integrated with an intersectional, trauma informed, anti-bias or culturally responsive framework.

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