

Black Girls and School Disciplinary Mechanisms

by

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Abstract

This study explores the disproportionate discipline of Black Girls in Ontario's K-12 publicly funded schools. The current literature exploring racially disproportionate discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline obscures the ways in which Black females and males experience this phenomenon together yet differently.

Semi-structured narrative interviews were conducted with seven self-identified Black women who were able to provide retrospective reflections about their disciplinary experiences in school. Critical analysis of the data revealed inequitable disciplinary challenges for Black girls through educators' lack of compassion, Black girls' hypervisibility in their schools, and distorted self-perceptions regarding their voices. Immediate interventions are required to address specific disciplinary concerns for Black girls. This study concludes with recommendations offered by participants.

Keywords: Black Girls, Education, School Discipline, School-to-Prison Pipeline, Intersectionality

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Chapter One: Introduction

Despite the rhetoric of diversity and inclusion that pervades school district public relations, student experiences of marginalization within North American school systems have been well documented (see ARCH Disability Law Centre et al., 2018; Coddjoe, 2001; Levin, 1995; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Watt & Roessingh, 1999). For Black and other racialized children in schools, institutional, structural, and interpersonal dimensions of racism continue to impact their academic achievement adversely (see Coddjoe, 2001; James & Turner, 2017; Levy et al., 2016; Shah, 2018). The situation of Black students in Canadian schools experiencing disproportionate punishment, suspensions, and expulsion at rates higher than their peers was being discussed 20 years ago and remains relevant (see Bhattacharjee, 2003; Chadha et al., 2020; Toronto District School Board [TDSB], 2019). In other words, while attending institutions designed for their socialization and academic growth, Black students are frequently monitored and viewed as potential suspects instead of being treated as children. Such inequitable school-based disciplinary mechanisms result in disengagement and push-out. It also results in potential exposure to the criminal justice system; commonly understood as the “school-to-prison pipeline,” policies and practices work to gradually shepherd students away from positive school connections and academic success toward criminal activity (Sander, 2010).

The criminalization of Black children in schools and elsewhere is not a new phenomenon. The extensive surveillance, harassment, and policing of Black students in schools is intimately connected to systemic anti-Black racism and structures of oppression. In North America, Black people experience harm from what Maynard (2017) refers to as “state violence” (p. 6), which is systemically imposed through government policies, actions, and inactions. Maynard emphasizes that state violence is operationalized through contemporary oppressive forms such as police

surveillance, brutality, and Black children's criminalization in schools. These two Canadian state systems, the criminal justice system and provincially managed education system, are covertly engaged in criminalizing Black children (Maynard, 2017; Swain & Noblit, 2011). These institutions are intimately tied to systemic structures of policing that negatively impact Black individuals (alongside Indigenous people and other people of colour) within schools and society at large. To explore this problem, my research focuses on Black girls' specific experiences with disproportionate disciplinary mechanisms.

Statement of the Problem

A substantial amount of scholarship focuses on the school-to-prison pipeline and the disproportionate disciplining of Black male students or Black students in general (e.g., Barnes & Motz, 2018; Contractor & Staats, 2014; Equal Justice Society, 2016; Hatt, 2011; Osher et al., 2012; Pesta, 2018; Swain & Noblit, 2011); however, the specific experiences of Black girls and the effect of school disciplinary mechanisms on them have been inadequately studied, as I expound in the literature review chapter. Black female¹ students are also suspended and expelled through exclusionary discipline at significantly higher rates than their non-racialized counterparts (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Epstein et al., 2017; Gibson & Decker, 2019; Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017; Morris, 2016). While Black boys and girls both experience inequitable discipline, they also may experience it differently given the complex ways gender can intersect with race.² Indeed, consideration of the data on Black girls and school disciplinary mechanisms demonstrates that

¹ This "female" classification refers to someone who was reported as female during data collection. For the purposes of this study, "girl" and "female" are not synonymous. "Girl" refers to someone whose current gender identity is as a girl. This includes transgender, cisgender, as well as gender nonconforming and genderqueer people.

² In drawing a distinction between the experiences of Black boys and girls, my intent is not to reify the gender binary. I recognize that gender is not a binary but, rather, a spectrum. My intent is to highlight that gender is a crucial variable in the construction of inequity for Black students in schools and to highlight how a value system of maleness above femaleness risks invisibilizing the experience of Black girls.

educators' racialized and gendered perceptions influence disproportionate outcomes (Annamma et al., 2017; Morris & Perry, 2017). Black girls' identities are treated as non-normative and in direct opposition to dominant discourses surrounding femininity (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017). These experiences can gradually steer Black girls away from positive school connections, prompting many to disengage and move toward pathways of confinement (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016).

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how Black girls uniquely experience school disciplinary practices and policies by presenting counter-narratives to illuminate and amplify their voices. Historically, the stories of Black girls and women in all realms have received insufficient scholarly attention (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Still today, there is a dearth of scholarship on Black girls and the disproportionate disciplinary measure they tend to face. My research addresses the oversight by highlighting seven Black women's retrospective reflections of their disciplinary experiences in schools, offering counter-storytelling and aiding in understanding the role of implicit bias in discretionary discipline mechanisms. The following research question guided my qualitative study: *In what ways do Black girls experience school disciplinary practices and policies?*

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on Black girls and the school-to-prison pipeline within a Canadian context. It helps fill a problematic gap since, as noted above, Black girls remain overrepresented in school disciplinary data, yet their experiences have been understudied. Focusing solely on the experience of Black boys wrongfully masculinizes Black girls' disciplinary experiences or ignores them altogether (Morris, 2016). Furthermore, generalizing the Black student experience limits any proposed solutions to the problem. The

intersection of Black girls' racialized and gendered identities positions them at the margins of public schooling and criminal justice institutions. Through my research, I offer new perspectives on how K-12 public education systems unfairly disadvantage Black girls and draw out implications for anti-racist education.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality and critical race feminism are the theoretical frameworks I employed for my study. In this section, I highlight how I conceptualize each of these frameworks.

Intersectionality

The term intersectionality, coined and conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), refers not just to a collection of one's social identities but how the combination of them influence how one is perceived and treated by others. Intersectionality theory works to examine how various social identities interact or intersect to affect the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Specifically, intersectionality examines the influence that race and gender, social class, sexuality, gender diversity, (dis)ability, body size and shape, religion, and age, among other characteristics, intersect to affect people's lived experiences. It originated in the examination of Black women's experiences, focusing particularly on how race shapes experiences of gender and vice-versa (Crenshaw, 1989). The combination of Black girls' race and gender, for example, are intersecting factors that shape their educational experiences.

Black girls have shared experiences with Black boys based on racial discrimination, yet they face unique obstacles based on dominant social constructions of femininity. While Black boys and girls are overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions as a result of racial bias, the way they experience school disciplinary mechanisms is unique to societal stereotypes surrounding Black masculinity and Black femininity. Stereotypes of Black masculinity depict

Black boys and men as threatening, resulting in confrontational interactions between Black boys and their educators (Morris, 2007). Stereotypes of Black femininity, which depict Black girls and women as loud and defiant, tend to mean that educators' discretionary decisions are translated into discipline aimed at correction (Annamma et al., 2019; Epstein et al., 2017). Intersectionality theory helps to better understand the lived experiences of those with multiple oppressed identities as well as multiple dimensions of privilege, or some combination of privilege and oppression.

Tefera et al. (2018) contend that an intersectional framework helps account for the complex ways that identities shape dynamics of power and oppression in social spaces, and how they, in turn, shape individuals' identities. My desire to apply an intersectional analysis to inform my understanding of racialized and gendered discipline disparities helps to move beyond simplistic, one-dimensional approaches that focus on each category as a singular phenomenon. Observing the disproportionalities of racialized school discipline through an intersectional lens can deepen an understanding of how various social identities work together to hold oppression in place. Black students, especially those who sit at the intersections of other oppressions, are at a greater risk of ending up on a pathway to institutionalization or incarceration (Bhattacharjee, 2003; Equal Justice Society, 2016; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Maynard, 2017; Morris, 2016). An intersectional analysis may also lead to more complex ideas for interventions within publicly funded education systems as well as for preventive work within pre-service education.

Critical Race Feminism

Closely related to critical legal theory, critical race theory (CRT), and feminist legal theory, critical race feminism (CRF) highlights the unique situations of women of colour whose lives may not conform to dominant social norms of being a woman in contemporary society

(Hines & Carter Andrews, 2017). Because feminist theories applied to schooling have historically tended and continue to be concerned with the education of White girls, and race-based theories like CRT tend to be consumed with the educational experiences negatively affecting Black boys, the educational needs of Black girls have often fallen through the cracks (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). CRF seeks to identify and theorize a way to examine the experiences, including educational ones, of Black girls and women of colour in a way that CRT or feminism alone cannot address (Hines & Carter Andrews, 2017). CRF also privileges counter-storytelling as a methodology utilized to challenge dominant narratives and legitimize the voices and experiences of women of colour (Verjee, 2012).

My study embodies a CRF perspective as I paid particular attention to the educational experiences of Black girls, seeking to illuminate their voices and perspectives as those most marginalized in the discussion of school reform (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). Further, following an intersectional approach, highlighting the educational experiences of girls of colour is best achieved by centring race, class, and gender. CRF also stresses the importance of intersectionality and recognizing the multiplicity of Black girls' identities and circumstances within the complex dynamics of educational contexts (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). Like intersectionality theory, a CRF analysis works toward combating racial and gender oppression from multiple standpoints by addressing the silences of girls and women of colour in their educational experiences, seeking to challenge injustice and oppression (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

Researcher Positionality

My research into the disproportionate disciplinary experiences of Black girls in schools reflects my passion for ensuring that Black, Indigenous, and other students of Colour have a fair

chance at receiving and excelling in quality education. My experiences as a Black woman navigating not only formal education but also society, in general, have opened my eyes to social injustices experienced by many other equity-seeking groups. As a Black girl who endured K-12 public education, my firsthand experiences have taught me that there is a critical need to address disproportionate disciplinary outcomes resulting from the corresponding biases of educators.

I began thinking about this study by reflecting on my own K-12 educational experiences. At an early age, I understood very quickly that, as a dark-skinned Black girl, I was viewed differently than most students in my class. My first encounter with school discipline was at age seven. A group of us were being disciplined for unacceptable schoolyard behaviour. The only Black girl in a group of White students, I was the only one to receive a phone call home according to what I learned from the other girls. At home, I was met with my mother's frustration as she lectured me, saying, in effect, "You are Black, and you are female; you will need to work twice as hard and hold yourself to twice the standard of your peers to earn the same outcomes." At the time, I could not grasp what my mother wanted me to understand; however, as I matured, it became clear that she was describing how my race and gender combined are marginalized within society.

Throughout my K-12 schooling, I can recall multiple occasions of being surveilled, questioned, or disciplined for situations that educators often overlooked for my non-Black peers. Teachers' negative perceptions of Black students became more evident through my own experiences and witnessing how they treated my Black counterparts. Being forced to contend with these circumstances made attending school a demoralizing experience. Reflecting on these educational experiences has fostered a passion in me to critically explain, give voice to, and change observed educational inequities. Being a Black student was and remains an alienating

feeling. Schools continue to be places of physical and psychological harm for many students, including Black girls. As an educator and researcher, I acknowledge that receiving an equitable education is a fundamental human right and the foundation for a future of liberation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

There is sufficient scholarly evidence to suggest current and problematic trends in discipline exist for Black girls in K-12 public schools. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, the dominant discourse surrounding school discipline disparities and the criminalization of Black students tends to focus more on the experience of Black boys. Indeed, Black boys represent the highest percentages of dropouts, suspensions, expulsions (e.g., Crenshaw et al., 2015; Toronto District School Board, 2019), and high representation within criminal justice systems (see Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2014). However, focusing solely on Black boys wrongfully limits and masculinizes Black girls' disciplinary experiences (Morris, 2016). In what follows, I explore the scholarship on the disproportionate disciplinary outcomes for Black girls in education settings. As I explored the scholarship, I noticed a lack of comprehensive data in the Canadian context. Most of the scholarship on Black girls and school discipline has been conducted in the United States; therefore, I draw on American research to situate my study. It is unclear that these conclusions apply to Black girls attending schools across Canada. However, given the undeniable sociocultural and historical interconnectedness between Black Canadians and Americans, I believe much of the extant scholarship may be generalized to a Canadian context. Thus, I advocate an advanced academic inquiry into the disciplinary experiences of Black girls in Canadian schools.

Across a combination of 45 articles and reports, I discerned prominent themes in my analysis of the reviewed literature. In the first section of this chapter, "Black Canadian Context," I briefly outline Canada's history with slavery and segregation and situate Canada's historical legacy within contemporary Canadian society, especially within criminal justice and education systems. In the second section, "Black Girls and School Discipline Disparities," I examine

literature focused on deconstructing the ways that Black girls experience school disciplinary policies and practices. Lastly, in the final section, “School-to-Confinement Pathways: Expanding the Discussion,” I focus on the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon to focus on how Black girls are treated.

Black Canadian Context

The recent *Black Lives Matter* protests across Canada, the United States, and elsewhere have brought to light a persistent issue of systemic anti-Black racism within North American society and globally. However, compared to the acknowledgement of Black history in the United States, there is a long-standing absence of Black Canadian history from many Canadians’ general awareness. In an interview published in the *Toronto Star* (2020), Canadian historians Rinaldo Walcott and Afua Cooper suggest that Black Canadian history is deliberately buried by the gatekeepers of Canadian history and is often overshadowed by Black American history (as cited in Miller, 2020). According to Walcott, “Canadians have been able to write a history of Canada that has rendered Black people very absent” (as cited in Miller, 2020, para. 4). Walcott maintains that Canada is skilled at suppressing its relationship with the enslavement of Black people, acknowledging that many Canadians are unable to link Canada’s connection to the British Empire with its participation in slavery (as cited in Miller, 2020). Further to the point, Cooper suggests that Canada as a nation has been able to convince both Canadians and people across the globe that the political and social issues associated with Black people in the United States simply do not exist here (as cited in Miller, 2020). Khan (2017) agrees, adding that “Canadians have a deep investment in seeing themselves as more enlightened than their counterparts to the south as if racism and bigotry suddenly stop at the U.S./Canada border” (para. 7).

Black Canadian history has been minimized or deeply hidden in every institutional venue and public discourse. What has triumphed is the notion of a multicultural Canada (Miller, 2020). The narrative of Canada being a multicultural country without racism is largely contributed to by official national policies such as the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1988) that aims to preserve and enhance cultural diversity in Canada (Berry, 2020). Black Canadian history has been overshadowed by American narratives and systemically covered up by such official national policies. Thus, the notion of Canada as a racist country is not widely accepted by those who are not targeted by social or institutional racism, namely White Anglo settlers. To shift these misperceptions, education that builds an understanding of Black Canadian history can accordingly build an understanding of contemporary anti-Black racism in Canada.

People of African descent can draw from over 400 years of historical tradition in Canada; since their forcible arrival, they have experienced various forms of racism and discrimination (Este, 2008). Throughout Canada's history, the enslavement and racial segregation of Black people were enforced through national and provincial policies and social practices. Following the abolition of slavery in Canada in 1834, Black people were (and still are) segregated, excluded, and/or denied equal access to various opportunities and services, including but not limited to: the *Common Schools Act* of 1850 that legally segregated public schools in Ontario until 1965 and in Nova Scotia until 1983; section 38 of the 1910 *Immigration Act* that permitted the government to prohibit the entry of immigrants who were deemed "unsuitable" thereby legally banning Black people from entering the country; land titles with restrictive covenant clauses that prevented home ownership or renting to people of African descent; restricted employment for Black people into low paying service sector jobs and the denial of membership into workers unions; and the

racial restriction and segregation of Black people in various commercial establishments and public accommodations (Henry, 2019).

I note also that Canada's historically discriminatory policies and practices have not been limited to its Black population. One of the most prominent examples of racial discrimination in Canada is the attempted extermination, forced assimilation, and marginalization of Indigenous peoples (Mullings et al., 2016; Wane, 2004). As well, between 1885 and 1923, when Canada was no longer in need of Chinese labour to build the Canadian Pacific Railway, Chinese immigrants were required to pay a head tax under the *Chinese Immigration Act* of 1885 to enter Canada (Chan, 2016). According to Chan (2016), the tax was the first legislation in Canadian history to exclude based on ethnicity. In like manner, the internment of Japanese Canadians (1942) occurred after fears of a Japanese invasion were sparked following Japan's attacks on Hong Kong and Pearl Harbour (Marsh, 2012). According to Marsh (2012), Japanese Canadians in British Columbia were forcibly relocated and interned, and their homes and belongings were confiscated and sold.

To offer another example, in 1914, a group of British Indians attempted to immigrate to Canada aboard the *Komagata Maru*, a Japanese steamship, but most were denied entry upon arrival (Johnston, 2006). The reason for the denial of British Indians was due to Canada's opposition to Chinese and Japanese immigration, prompting a vigorous campaign against South Asians (Johnston, 2006). In 1908, the federal government relied on two provisions meant to prevent Indian immigration (Johnston, 2006). The first regulation required that all immigrants arriving in Canada must do so by continuous journey from their home country; however, at the time, it was impossible to travel from India to Canada via ship (McRae, n.d.). The second regulation required that Indian immigrants arrive with at least \$200, which was eight times the

sum required by White immigrants (McRae, n.d.). After two months of restricted resources and limited communication with the outside world, the *Komagata Maru* was forced to return home (Johnston, 2006; McRae, n.d.). To draw a link to the present, in August of 2021, a memorial to the *Komagata Maru* in Vancouver was vandalized (Pawson, 2021).

These facts of Canadian history indicate patterns of official and social racial discrimination. The examples I discussed are not specific to Black people. Still, they reveal a pattern of racism at the level of national policy and social prejudice that pervades Canadian society even now, hidden under a discursive cloak of diversity and multiculturalism. The misconception that Canada was a safe haven for escaped slaves due to its participation in the Underground Railroad (Sadlier, 2003) or is presently a multicultural utopia (Henry, 2017; Khan, 2017; Miller, 2020) is false and obscures its history of slavery, discrimination, segregation, and anti-Black immigration laws. The lack of national support for Black people in Canada and the resulting stereotypes from their enslavement has encouraged and sustained systemic discrimination against them throughout all aspects of society, suitably known as anti-Black racism.

The African Canadian Legal Clinic (2002) describes anti-Black racism in the following way:

Anti-Black racism is prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement.

Anti-Black racism in Canada is often subtle and is generally not accompanied by overt racial slurs or explicitly prohibitive legislation. However, it is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies, and practices, such that anti-Black racism is either functionally normalized or rendered invisible to the larger White society. Canadian Anti-

Black racism in its contemporary form continues the historical practices of racial segregation, economic disadvantage, and social division. (as cited in Mullings et al., 2016, p. 23)

Anti-Black racism negatively impacts the individual and social development of a Black Canadian identity (Sadlier, 2003).

Despite the historical evidence, what Black people faced in Canada in the 1800s was hidden or eradicated from mainstream media, literature, and history books by European settler-colonizers when Canada reinvented itself as a confederation in 1867. Unfortunately, the erasure of such experience continues to this day. For that reason, the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism in Canada is deliberately denied by many European settler-colonizers. As a result, racial inequality pervades Canadian society. Considering Canada's sordid historical and social legacy and the subsequent erasure and denial of this history and legacy, the argument that Canadian society continues to operate through a system that consists of significant imbalances in power and resources, and the reality that the power and resources have become concentrated in the hands of the dominant group, particularly White men who are also affluent (Wane, 2004), remains relevant through the decades. Plainly put, understanding Black history allows one to better understand Canadian history.

Canadian education has played a significant role in suppressing Black history, and contemporary forms of anti-Black racism are apparent throughout the formal education systems. Bristow et al. (1994) argue that Canadian education has maintained and perpetuated the misconception that Black people arrived only through recent immigration and have not been here for generations, hence non-existent in the development of the country. Further, many White Canadians' negative attitudes and behaviours against Black people in their communities led to

Black Canadians being mostly excluded from public education practices (McLaren, 2004). The *Common Schools Act* of 1850 set into law what was already being practiced by many communities in Ontario; separate schooling for Protestants, Roman Catholics, and “Coloured” people (Robson, 2019). Despite such discrimination, Black Canadians fought against segregation and fought for integration (McLaren, 2004; Robson, 2019). The last segregated school in Ontario closed in 1965. Robson (2019) suggests that school officials based their refusal to admit Black students on the perceived superiority of the White race and the perceived threat that Black students posed to other students, particularly girls.

Maynard (2017) acknowledges that not only were Black students segregated spatially from White schools, but Black schools were also underfunded and unequally resourced. Even now, ongoing realities of racial discrimination remain embedded in the institutional fabric of Canada’s education system (Aladejebi, 2021; James & Turner, 2017). Such realities include, but are not limited to: the lack of Black representation and inadequate Black history in the content of the curriculum, the disproportionate outcomes as it relates to systems of disciplining students, Eurocentric focused and dominant group teaching practices, and the inequitable distribution of resources; such patterns are intimately connected to the systemic oppression of Black Canadians (among Indigenous and other racialized people) in society (see Chadha et al., 2020; James & Turner, 2017; Lewis, 1992). According to Maynard (2017), schools are often Black children’s first encounter with the systemic anti-Blackness that is present in society at large.

The bottom line from the literature that I have included in my review is that the criminalization of Black and racialized children in schools is not a new phenomenon. Canada’s historical and social legacy is that Black students feel, as though by default, invisible and marginalized in schools (Bristow et al., 1994). The practice of slavery and segregation is what set

the stage for the continued dehumanization of Black lives across Canada, including Black girls in schools.

Framing Racialized Surveillance and Punishment

There is a wealth of data that supports the existence of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism within the Canadian criminal justice system. For instance, policing, both historically and presently, involves targeting Black and Indigenous communities in preparation and maintenance of settler colonial systems of control (Maynard, 2017; Reece, 2020). It would be negligent not to acknowledge the relationship between Black and Indigenous enslavement, which may be understood as “land stolen from people and people stolen from land” (Reece, 2020, p. 1). The initial and most identifiable example of confinement is that of reservations and residential schools (Maynard, 2017; Reece, 2020). Hence, Canada’s first policing organization, the North-West Mounted Police (now the Royal Canadian Mounted Police), played an essential role in protecting the interests of White settlers by putting an end to Indigenous rebellion (Comack, 2012). Along the same lines, post-slavery, the associations between Blackness and crime unfolded as a means to legitimize ongoing state surveillance and control of Black people’s lives (Davis, 2003; Maynard, 2017). Particularly, in the United States, the primary focus became to establishing a legal way to constrain the newfound freedom of Black individuals (Davis, 2003). To be Black and seek freedom from slavery was generally recognized by the authorities as tantamount to being a criminal.

Reece (2020) emphasizes that “these stories make evident that the experiences of Black and Indigenous peoples are connected to ways in which racism and racialization were and still are central organizing features of the Canadian state, especially through the spectre of incarceration” (p. 2). Similarly, in addition to Black and Native Americans, the racialized

histories of Latin and Asian Americans have also affected the development of the United States' punishment system (Davis, 2003). Thus, race has always played a significant factor in shaping assumptions of criminality in both the Canadian and American criminal justice systems.

Maynard (2017) argues that historical state violence continues to exist in contemporary but still oppressive forms such as police surveillance and brutality. Further understood by Hartman's (1997) theory of "the afterlife of slavery," Dillion (2013) characterizes this theory as:

The emptiness left by slavery's regimes of unimaginable violence and terror, the nothingness left by the deaths of 60 million or more. Even as slavery's afterlife is crushing, visible, and pervasive, it also looks like dust floating in the air. In other words, slavery's mark on the now manifests as the prison, as poverty, as *policing technologies*; it emerges in insurance ledgers and in the organization of urban space. (p. 43; italics in original)

Reece (2020) agrees, adding that prisons have become contemporary variations of both slavery and residential schools. Davis (2003) supports this perspective suggesting that there are significant similarities between slavery and early penitentiary prisons. As an example, they both utilized similar forms of punishment and deprived enslaved humans of all rights.

Considering the racism that underscores incarceration, the current overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous peoples in Canada's prison systems is an expected outcome. As an illustration, Indigenous people represent approximately 5 percent of the Canadian population but account for 30.4 percent of the federal prison population (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2020). Similarly, Black Canadians comprise only 3 percent of the general population, yet they account for 10 percent of the federal prison population (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2014). And although Canada's overall crime rates have been declining, the population of both

Black and Indigenous peoples in federal prisons has increased disproportionately compared with those of White people (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2020; Reece, 2020). Historically, by design the Canadian criminal justice system was to the detriment of Black and Indigenous people. To use Angela Davis' words "proof that crime continues to be imputed to color."

As Maynard (2017) suggests, such racialized surveillance and brutality is operationalized not only through the criminal justice system but through other institutions such as schools. Swain and Noblit (2011) describe schools and prisons as intimately and intricately connected institutions. Davis (2003) agrees, suggesting that schools replicate the structure and routines of prison. According to Davis (2003), when schools prioritize discipline over social and academic development, they serve as preparatory schools for prison. Thus, these two Canadian systems are actively engaged in criminalizing Black, Indigenous, and other racialized children (Maynard, 2017; Swain & Noblit, 2011). Anti-Black and Indigenous oppression is operationalized through educational policies, practices, and social norms that function to deny Black children full access to their academic potential. Systemic practices of Black and Indigenous exclusion are embedded in the fabric of Canadian society.

Racialized Disproportionalities in School Discipline

In the same way that Black Canadians are disproportionately represented in the federal prison population, Black students' representation in suspensions, expulsions, and encounters with law enforcement exceeds their representation in the general school population. For example, in K-12 public education settings, Black students are disproportionately disciplined, suspended, and expelled at alarming percentages (Chadha et al., 2020; Equal Justice Society, 2016; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Toronto District School Board, 2019). As an illustration, the Toronto District School Board (2019) reported that Black students accounted for 11 percent of the student

population but were overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions, with 36.2 percent in 2016-2017 and 34.3 percent in 2017-2018. Similar findings were reported in a review of the Peel District School Board; Black students represent only 10.2 percent of the secondary school population, but approximately 22.5 percent of students receiving suspensions (Chadha et al., 2020).

Such statistics on race and the application of discipline is representative of the two largest school boards in Ontario and is easily extended to other Canadian cities as well as jurisdictions in the United States (e.g., Bhattacharjee, 2003; Equal Justice Society, 2016; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). For example, according to the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (CRDC) (2016), data collected in the 2013 to 2014 school year revealed Black students were 3.8 times more likely to be suspended and 1.9 times more likely to be expelled from school than their White counterparts. Moreover, such patterns are evident from early schooling. The CRDC (2016) also reported that Black preschool children are 3.6 times more likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions compared to White preschool children. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that there is systemic discrimination regarding disciplining Black students. The disproportionate representations of Black students in school discipline are both a multifaceted issue and a worrisome trend.

Black Girls and School Discipline Disparities

While discipline disproportionalities are most often discussed in terms of Black males or Black students in general, the issue becomes more concerning as it relates to Black girls. Morris (2016) suggests that the literature exploring racialized disciplinary outcomes obscures how Black girls and boys experience this phenomenon together *and* differently. Black female students are also suspended and expelled through exclusionary discipline at alarming percentages compared

to their non-racialized counterparts (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Epstein et al., 2017; Hassan & Carter, 2021; Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017). Data collected by the CRDC (2019) in the 2015/2016 school year reported that Black female students represented eight percent of the student enrollment and accounted for 14 percent of students who received an out-of-school suspension. Also, Black female students are three times more likely to be referred to law enforcement and two times more likely to be physically restrained compared to White female students (CRDC, 2019). While Black girls and boys share the common risk of racialized surveillance and punishment within schools, compared to other students of the same gender, Black girls face a greater chance of suspension and expulsion (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Black girls are suspended at higher rates than girls of any other ethnicity and are suspended more often than boys of most non-racialized and racialized groups (CRDC, 2016). These numbers provide insight into the conditions affecting Black girls' disciplinary experiences in schools. Gibson and Decker (2019) argue that Black girls are the highest recipients of discriminatory discipline, highlighting an urgent need to increase awareness of this phenomenon and look for solutions.

Black Girls' Behaviour: Perception and Interpretation

According to Annamma et al. (2019), the behavioural expectations of students are shaped by perception and bound by culture. As a result of racist perceptions, Black girls' identities and behaviours are routinely problematized, placing them at risk of harmful school disciplinary policies and practices (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017). Epstein, Blake, and González (2017) determined that adults tend to perceive Black girls as less innocent and more mature compared to their White counterparts, which is referred to as "adultification" (p. 1) in the literature. In addition to being perceived as more adult-like, Black girls are also perceived as being older than their age (Epstein et al., 2017). Compared to White girls, Black

girls are perceived to be more independent and need less nurturing, protection, support, and comfort (Epstein et al., 2017). Epstein et al. (2017) theorize that negative stereotypical images of Black women as loud, dominant, and hypersexual are projected onto Black girls, erasing the distinction between adulthood and childhood. Mowatt et al. (2013) substantiate this finding, suggesting that the scrutiny of Black women's bodies is commonly stereotyped as abnormal and hypersexual, and their social location is usually (mis)interpreted as deviant.

Carter Andrews et al. (2019) suggest that nonconforming attitudes and behaviours are perceived as “self-advocacy/agency, independence, and creativity when exhibited by White girls, but seen as disruptive, aggressive, and/or arrogant when exhibited by Black girls” (p. 2539). Viewing Black girls as older than their age contributes to harsher punishment by educators and school personnel (Epstein et al., 2017). Furthermore, Morris (2007) found that teachers described Black girls as socially but not academically mature, which can be interpreted as acting older than their age. Calling into question Black girls' intellect yet positing social maturity is not only contradictory but also subjects them to lowered academic and unreasonably high behavioural expectations by teachers and other school personnel (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). In addition, the perception of social maturity and self-reliance may sometimes lead Black girls to get less attention from teachers than their male counterparts (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Crenshaw et al. (2015) observed that such lack of attention might diminish Black girls' sense of belonging and attachment to their schools. Epstein et al. (2017) suggest that adultification robs Black girls of their innocence, which is a crucial characteristic of childhood.

Morris (2007) also determined that teachers often stereotyped Black girls as challenging authority, loud, or unladylike. These perceptions based on their race, gender, and class are shaped by the stereotypes that Black women experience and are connected to a history of slavery

and controlling images (Annamma et al., 2017; Spillers, 1987). According to Spillers (1987), the physical and sexual violence of slavery enacted an “ungendering” for Black women that stripped them of femininity. Collins supports this point (2002) arguing that this disruption of gender roles stems from the destruction of the Black family during slavery which created reversed gendered roles. Such stereotypes include the image of the *mammy* or *matriarch*, an unattractive Black mother who is nurturing, loving, and sexless; the *sapphire*, which is the image of an overly aggressive, emasculating, loud, and angry Black woman; the *jezebel*, as the immoral, hypersexualized woman; and more recently the *welfare queen*, the Black woman who is conniving and refuses to work but has many children to take advantage of the system (Annamma et al., 2017; Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016). Collins (2000) suggests that racist and sexist ideologies against Black women are so endemic in social structures that implicit racism is normalized and barely noticed. These historical and contemporary stereotypes of Black women have been fundamental to their oppression (Collins, 2000). Thus, Black girls are often punished for discretionary infractions such as perceived insubordination, defiance, loudness, aggressive, or rude behaviour (Annamma et al., 2017; Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017; Morris & Perry, 2017).

Related to stereotyping is the existence of implicit biases of educators. Implicit bias refers to unconscious attitudes and stereotypes that shape our perceptions of certain groups, especially around race, class, and gender (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017; Morris & Perry, 2017). Implicit biases operate without one’s awareness and against one’s stated intentions or beliefs (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017). Complex biases emerge at the intersection of race and gender (Morris & Perry, 2017). Hassan and Carter (2021) suggest that stereotypes of Black women as loud, aggressive, and hypersexualized underlie the implicit biases that shape many educators’ perceptions of Black girls. Many educators may also believe they are being fair when

disciplining Black students, yet they implicitly or explicitly maintain prejudices about Black identities.

Implicit prejudices of race and gender underscore the ways that Black girls are subject to disciplinary action. Black girls are subject to disciplinary action rooted in cultural misunderstandings of racialized and gendered stereotypes and biases. Annamma et al. (2017) observed that the reasons for Black girls' office referrals, such as being disobedient and defiant, are deeply connected to historical stereotypes of them being too loud (the sapphire trope), having a bad attitude (also sapphire), or acting "ghetto" (the welfare queen trope). Along the same lines, Morris and Perry (2017) observed that Black girls were three times more likely than White girls to receive an office referral. In both studies, it was found that Black girls were more likely to experience disciplinary outcomes for subjective reasons influenced by racialized and gendered perceptions rather than objective reasons that require material evidence to substantiate (Annamma et al., 2017; Morris & Perry, 2017). Indeed, patterns indicating that Black girls are punished primarily for subjective reasons suggest that perceptions of their behaviour, unconscious or not, influence their disproportionate disciplinary outcomes (Epstein et al., 2017; Hassan & Carter, 2021; Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017).

Morris and Perry (2017) also observed that while Black girls are 3.26 times more likely than other girls to be referred for subjective infractions, the gap is wider than that between Black boys and boys of other races (2.13 times greater). Similar to Black girls, Black boys are too misperceived as older than their actual age. Consequently, they are also viewed as guilty of suspected crimes, deserving of harsh punishment, and face police violence if accused of a crime (Epstein et al., 2017). Black boys are widely perceived as threatening, resulting in confrontational interactions between them and their educators (Morris, 2007). It is evident that

the effects of disciplinary practices rooted in the perceptions of Black males may be more visible but are not necessarily more harmful, suggesting that the differences in racialized and gendered stereotypes, specifically of Black girls, is also significant.

Black Girls' Behaviour vs. White Femininity

Deliofsky (2008) describes normative White femininity as “the White capitalist patriarchal compulsion to adopt styles and attitudes consistent with an imposed White feminine aesthetic” (p. 50). Normative White femininity may be characterized by passiveness, quietness, and helplessness in the face of men (Annamma et al., 2017). North American societal norms around femininity, which are defined by Whiteness and White, upper/middle-class values (Annamma et al., 2017; Fordham; 1993), place White women at the top of the social hierarchy and Black women at the bottom (Fordham; 1993). According to Collins (2002), Black women’s failure to adhere to these expectations of traditional White femininity provides a powerful foundation for their social construction as inferior. Thus, Morris (2007) observed that Blackness, along with perceptions of class and family background, impact how Black girls are treated in schools.

Considering that Black girls are usually perceived as less feminine, the perceived (mis)behaviour of Black girls violates dominant discourses of normative White femininity (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Morris, 2007; Morris & Perry, 2017). According to Carter Andrews et al. (2019), “Black girls are held to unrealistic and impossible standards predicated on notions of Whiteness and perfection in which they cannot manifest by virtue of existing in a Black girl body” (p. 2539). To put it another way, Black girls are stereotyped in ways that exclude them from the standards of White femininity that are imposed upon them. Standards of normative White femininity have direct consequences for Black girls since perceptions of

nonconforming attitudes and behaviours are translated into discipline aimed at correction (Morris, 2007). For example, Hassan and Carter (2021) suggest that subjective offences can also be code for a student's failure to conform to dominant gender stereotypes. They determined that Black girls are more likely to experience subjective disciplinary outcomes for failure to conform to standard expectations of White femininity.

In addition, Black girls' nonconformity may prompt educators to respond more harshly when they misbehave (Morris, 2016). Annamma et al. (2017) illustrate this point when they write, "if a Black girl acts in a way that contrasts normative femininity, she is at risk of being thrown out of the classroom and school, increasing the likelihood that she will interact with the criminal legal system" (p. 233). Dominant discourses of White femininity shape teachers' perceptions of what is appropriate feminine behaviour. Perceptions of appropriate feminine behaviour result in patterns of discipline intended to reform Black girls' femininity into behaviour that is deemed acceptable (Morris, 2007). Black girls who are situated differently due to race and gender embody femininity differently and face unique implications in their schools.

Black girls are not mere victims of prejudice and systemic racism; however, as Morris (2007) suggests, the historical exclusion from White femininity and the requirement to be independent of men has forged outspokenness in many Black girls. While many continue to construct loudness as unfeminine, loudness is a survival strategy and defence mechanism for Black girls. For example, Lei (2003) observed that Black girls utilized loudness as an act of resistance to a perceived counterproductive construction of femininity. By contrast, Fordham's (1993) study of academic success observed that Black girls used loudness as a method to deny stigmatization and resist a status of lesser femininity than White girls.

Loudness is a way for Black girls to reject the oppressive restrictions on their identities. Morris (2016) acknowledges that in defiance of the legacy of slavery, Black girls do not interpret defiance or loudness as inherently bad. Countless Black women have had to speak up to reject oppression. Thus, she encourages us to observe the Black feminine in the following way:

For Black girls, to be “ghetto” represents a certain resilience to how poverty has shaped racial and gender oppression. To be “loud” is a demand to be heard. To have an “attitude” is to reject a doctrine of invisibility and mistreatment. (p. 19)

For Black girls, these survival characteristics and defence mechanisms are punished rather than recognized as resiliency. The contemporary reality of Black girls in Ontario schools is inextricably connected to the historical context of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

School-to-Confinement Pathways: Expanding the Discussion

In schools, Black students are often treated as suspects instead of as children. Commonly understood as the school-to-prison pipeline, these systemic setbacks gradually shepherd students away from positive school connections and academic success toward increasing criminal activity (Sander, 2010). In other words, the school-to-prison pipeline is a process of criminalizing children carried out by school disciplinary practices and policies that disengage, push out, and criminalize Black (among other marginalized) students. According to Morris (2016), many Black girls experience confinement beyond jails and prison, including but not limited to, detention centers, house arrest, electronic monitoring, and other forms of social exclusion. When describing the criminalization of Black girls, she suggests “school-to-confinement pathways” over the traditional “school-to-prison pipeline” narrative (Morris, 2016).

In addition to criminalization, Crenshaw et al. (2015) broadened their definition to include underachievement and “other negative outcomes” (p. 5). Wun (2016a, 2018) further

suggests that anti-Black contexts outside of schools and the conditions of disciplinary practices inside of schools create a “condition of confinement” for Black girls’ sociopolitical identities. When discussing school-to-confinement pathways for Black girls, the conversation should not be limited to incarceration.

Policies and Practice

Disciplinary policies such as the Ontario *Safe Schools Act* (2000) and the implementation of school resource officers (SROs) are two key policies that produce and maintain school-to-confinement pathways (Daniel, 2017; Equal Justice Society, 2016; Hatt, 2011; Swain & Noblit, 2011). In 2000, Ontario’s Progressive Conservative Party passed the *Safe Schools Act* promising a zero tolerance policy for bad behaviour in schools. The *Safe Schools Act* (2000) was soon followed by Ontario’s first Code of Conduct that proposed amending the *Education Act* (1990) to provide principals and teachers with more authority to suspend and expel students (Bhattacharjee, 2003; Winton 2012). Prior to this amendment, Ontario’s *Violence-Free Schools Act* (1994) required school boards to develop and implement policies to prevent and respond to violence (Winton, 2012). According to Bhattacharjee (2003), the authority to suspend a student was limited to principals, and the authority to expel was limited to school boards. Winton (2012) suggests that the *Safe Schools Act* (2000) adopted a much tougher approach to addressing school safety. The *Safe Schools Act* (2000) outlined specific infractions that would result in an automatic suspension or expulsion from Ontario schools (Winton, 2012).

Such “zero tolerance” may be understood as a “policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behaviour, mitigating circumstances, or situational context” (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 852). To put it another way, a zero tolerance

approach in schools mandates that students who commit specific acts be punished equally, without consideration of extenuating factors. The new policy reflected many of the zero tolerance policies introduced throughout the United States in the 1980s, following an effort to combat the expansion of drug use in what became known as the war on drugs (Swain & Noblit, 2011). Swain and Noblit (2011) suggest that “zero tolerance rhetoric was taken up by politicians eager to be perceived as taking a stance against drugs, violence, crime, poverty, et cetera” (p. 469). As a result, various national policies were implemented to advance overly harsh drug policies, unfairly targeting Black and other racial minorities (Swain & Noblit, 2011).

In a similar fashion, Canada’s war on drugs intensified legal consequences for minor drug offences and further criminalized non-habitual drug use (Khenti, 2013). The enactment of these drug war policies has produced a pattern of structural violence, over-policing, and high incarceration rates that is exemplified by the overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous folks in the Canadian federal prison population (Khenti, 2013). Swain and Noblit (2011) suggest that media reports of violence heightened educators’ concerns about the safety of their schools. The zero tolerance rhetoric was then introduced to schools, and like the broader societal impact, Black and other racial minority students became unfairly targeted (Swain & Noblit, 2011).

There is a robust body of research to support the argument that zero tolerance disproportionately impacts Black (among other marginalized) students (see Crenshaw et al., 2015; Daniel, 2017; Equal Justice Society, 2016; Swain & Noblit, 2011). While there is no disagreement that schools need to be safe, disagreement remains when it comes to zero tolerance practices. In a review to determine the effectiveness of zero tolerance in schools, the American Psychological Association (APA) Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) determined that zero tolerance has not been shown to improve school safety. According to Bhattacharjee (2003),

contradictions in the practice of zero tolerance resulted in the inconsistency of its application. For example, some educators practiced true zero tolerance while others practiced zero tolerance with the application of mitigating factors, and true zero tolerance would conflict with anti-discrimination legislation. In 2007, Ontario's Ministry of Education amended its zero tolerance approach by *requiring* principals to consider mitigating factors (ACLC, 2012).

One might argue that the reason for these disparities is because Black students are prone to misbehaviour. Still, there is no evidence to support the assumption that Black students exhibit higher rates of disruption or violence that would warrant higher rates of discipline (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). The APA Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) suggests that the disproportionate discipline of students of colour may be instead due to racial stereotypes, which is what has become evident in the scholarship on the topic.

Along the same lines, the implementation of School Resource Officers (SROs) and unnecessarily involving law enforcement renders Black students increasingly vulnerable to criminalization (Maynard, 2017). While Peel Region implemented its SRO program over two decades ago, it took off in 2008 after a rare and high-profile shooting at C.W. Jeffreys Collegiate (Nasser, 2017). In the incident, grade 9 student Jordan Manners was murdered (Nasser, 2017). On top of the heightened moral panic about crime that, as previously mentioned, resulted in targeted policing of poor and racialized neighbourhoods, Toronto police offered to place armed police officers in schools at no expense to the school boards. Currently, SRO programs are implemented in various school divisions in Ontario, Alberta, and Manitoba (Public Safety Canada, 2018). According to the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police (OACP) (2020), "SRO programs are utilized by many police services in Ontario as collaborative, community-based initiatives to promote safe environments for members of educational communities" (para. 1).

Such a link between increased safety and zero tolerance, however, is largely rhetorical. Since the SRO program was enacted, it has been experienced the same way as policing has been experienced nationally, disproportionately impacting Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized students, exposing them to harassment, surveillance, and criminalization (Maynard, 2017). For example, Teklum (2012) observed that school administrators contact the police for minor infractions, thereby preventing students from coming to school, often for months. Furthermore, Crenshaw et al. (2015) observed that increased levels of law enforcement within schools sometimes made Black girls feel less safe and less likely to attend school. Such sentiment has also been echoed by Black students in the Greater Toronto Area (see James & Turner, 2017). In 2020, SROs were removed from some school boards in Ontario, yet their abolition has not been consistent throughout the province or the country. Although zero tolerance policies and the implementation of SROs were amended in 2007 and 2020, respectively, racially disproportionate results in discipline still hold today.

In addition to formal types of discipline that often occur because of zero tolerance and SROs, Black girls are also subject to informal punishment. According to Wun (2016b), Black girls experience everyday occurrences of punishment that do not register under formal conceptualizations of disciplinary practices like suspensions, expulsions, and arrests. Such covert punishment often takes the form of perpetual humiliation and neglect. For example, students reported that even their slightest movements in class, such as chewing gum or getting up out of their seats to throw away trash, are often subject to punishment. Wun (2016b) suggests that only focusing on formal discipline policies as the sole condition for disciplinary disparities misses other everyday occurrences to which Black students, particularly Black girls, are subject to varying levels of discipline.

Disengagement, Pushout, and Criminalization

Black girls' racialized and gendered experiences with school discipline create unique barriers to their academic success. The landscape created by constant surveillance and control has produced conditions where Black girls often feel misunderstood, confined, and spurned within the educational environment (Wun 2016a). In turn, Black girls' experiences with school discipline prompt a cycle of disengagement and withdrawal that may include dropping out of high school and increased contact with the criminal justice system (Morris & Perry, 2017; Wun, 2016a). To put it another way, the emphasis on discipline turns some Black girls away from school, compromising their educational future, professional opportunities, and life chances (Crenshaw et al., 2015).

Hassan and Carter (2021) determined that Black girls tend to receive a disproportionately higher percentage of out-of-school suspensions and school-related arrests than their White counterparts. Time spent outside of school greatly reduces a student's academic success since students who have been excluded from school are more likely to fall behind their peers (Wun, 2016b). A further point is that, during a suspension or expulsion, students are more likely to be involved with an existing criminal element (Daniel, 2016). The results of continuous discipline are Black students "dropping out," or more appropriately worded, being "pushed out" of schools. The standard way of thinking about students who drop out is that it is a "choice, made solely by students who chose not to be focused" (Dei, 1995, p. 29). However, such a viewpoint fails to address how teachers, administrators, and other school personnel apply Ministry policies that are counterproductive to keeping students in schools. The more appropriate term, then, is "pushout," which acknowledges institutionalized policies and practices of exclusion and marginalization (Dei, 2003). As Maynard (2017) writes, "Black youth are pushed out by various school

structures and policies that neglect their needs, single them out and cause them to disengage” (p. 222). According to Daniel (2016), students refuse to attend school altogether to avoid what can be regarded as “ongoing abuse” (p. 109). The evidence supports that Black students are indeed pushed out of schools at significant rates. James and Turner (2017) reported that in the Greater Toronto Area from 2006-2011, 20 percent of Black students dropped out of high school compared to 11 percent of White and 9 percent of other racialized students.

Hassan and Carter (2021) emphasize that disproportionately, compared to White girls, Black girls who drop out of school too frequently end up in the juvenile justice system and later in prison. Ministry policies, disciplinary practices, pushout, and exposure to the criminal justice system create the nexus of forces referred to as school-to-confinement pathways. Morris (2016) suggests that failure to interrupt school-to-confinement pathways for Black girls affects future generations of Black children as well, as they are more susceptible to being involved with criminal justice as a result of their mother’s incarceration. The intersections of Black girls’ identity, that is, their race, gender, and actual or perceived socioeconomic status, position them at the margins of public schooling and criminal justice institutions (Morris, 2016).

Conclusion

In my review of the literature, I highlighted some of the prominent scholarship and data focused on Black girls and their experience with school disciplinary policies and practices. Born into a legacy of slavery, Black girls must contend with heightened racialized, gendered, and classed surveillance of their behaviours and actions (Maynard, 2017). Much of their disciplinary experiences are rooted in historical stereotypes and racist perceptions of their behaviour (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Epstein et al., 2017; Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017; Morris, 2007). These perceptions are then implicitly or explicitly judged and disciplined against dominant discourses

of White femininity (Morris, 2007; Morris & Perry, 2017; Morris, 2016). For Black girls, disciplinary experiences either work to confine their identities (Wun 2016a, 2018) or prompts them toward pathways of confinement (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Maynard, 2017; Morris, 2016), including underachievement, disengagement, and leaving school in addition to incarceration.

Their disproportionate disciplinary outcomes require urgent attention. My review of this literature provides context and a rationale for my study on Black girls and their disciplinary experiences within Canadian schools. As I argued in the introductory chapter, there is a lack of reliable race-based data that is particularly intersectional (i.e., race alongside gender, class, sexuality, and ability) on the effects of school disciplinary practices in Canada. For example, American research has demonstrated that disproportionate outcomes increase as it relates to race and ability (see Losen & Gillespie, 2012) or for Black students who are gender and sexual minorities (Morris, 2016). The goal of my research, then, was to learn from Black women's retrospective sense-making on how K-12 public education's disciplinary mechanisms unfairly disadvantage Black girls, and to draw implications for anti-racist education in schools and pre-service education programs.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the research methodology and methods used to collect and analyze data on the recollections of seven Black women's experiences with school disciplinary mechanisms when they were girls. Taking a qualitative methodological approach informed by narrative inquiry and critical race feminism's emphasis on counter-narratives, I utilized a semi-structured interview process. This chapter will also discuss the participant recruitment and data analysis process.

Qualitative Research Methods

This study addressed the ways in which Black girls experience school disciplinary policies and practices. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the primary goal of all qualitative research is to interpret and understand how people make sense of their experiences. Methodologists such as Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Hatch (2002) indicate that one of the distinguishing characteristics of qualitative research is maintaining a focus on the participants' perspectives. In other words, participants' meanings about the phenomenon under study should be prominent in any qualitative report. Marshall and Rossman (2016) also suggest that qualitative methodology is best utilized in research that elicits tacit knowledge, subjective understandings, and interpretations. The rationale, according to them, is that lived experiences cannot be understood unless the meaning humans assign to those experiences is understood.

The primary goal of this study was to interpret and understand how Black women retrospectively reflect on their disciplinary experiences, including the implications that these experiences have on their education and their life trajectories. Qualitative methodology privileges individual perspectives and lived experiences, and in this instance, helped to increase my understanding of Black women's insights into school disciplinary mechanisms. In other

words, gaining insight into how school disciplinary mechanisms affect Black girls, specifically, means to deeply examine how the women in my study perceived and assigned meaning to their experiences.

Narrative Inquiry

The underpinning qualitative design utilized to inform this study is narrative inquiry. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that narratives are “how we make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us” (p. 33). Accordingly, narrative inquiry was the most suitable methodology for understanding how Black girls make sense of their disciplinary experiences.

Clandinin and Caine (2008) insist that, in addition to being a research methodology, narrative inquiry is also a way of understanding experience. Thus, narrative inquiry also enabled me to enrich my insights into the phenomena of school-to-confinement pathways. More specifically, narrative inquiry provided a methodology for inquiring into experience, allowing me to explore Black girls’ disciplinary experiences within school contexts. Clandinin (2006) suggests that there exists a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space that researchers must work within throughout the inquiry, namely: “the personal and social (interaction) along one dimension; past, present and future (continuity) along a second dimension; and place (situation) along a third dimension” (p. 47). Narrative inquiry allows the possibility of understanding how the relational engagement between the researcher and participant (interaction) is entwined over time in the participant’s lives (continuity) and is situated within broader cultural, social, and institutional narratives to which I, the researcher, also belong (situation). By highlighting this three-dimensional space, Clandinin (2006) urges narrative researchers to find ways to inquire

into participants' experiences and their own experiences as they, too, are a part of the same social landscape.

Clandinin and Caine (2008) suggest that narrative inquirers must begin their inquiries with narrative self-studies. As a Black woman educator and researcher examining Black girls' disciplinary experiences, I thus have drawn on my own experiences and understandings; my autobiographical reflection in the first chapter was the starting point that initially shaped this research query. Such self-inquiry also draws attention to two more distinguishing characteristics of qualitative research; the acknowledgement of the researcher as a key instrument and the importance of researcher reflexivity in practice (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hatch, 2002). According to Hatch (2002), the logic for characterizing the researcher as a key to qualitative research is that the human capacities needed to participate in social life are the same capacities that allow qualitative researchers to make sense of the actions, intentions, and understandings of participants. Along the same lines, researcher reflexivity guides understanding of how one's background, culture, and experience hold the potential to shape the direction of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As I stated in the introduction, I approached this study as a Black woman who was once a Black girl who attended K-12 public education in the Greater Toronto Area. These past educational experiences, which I believe were impacted by how my social identity was perceived, shaped my interpretations of the data (see Chapter 5). My connection to the study mirrors a reflexive methodology which Clandinin and Caine (2008) endorse. According to them, such a methodology offers a pathway for narrative inquirers to continually explore their experiences before, during, and after each inquiry.

Counter-Narratives

Inspired by critical race feminism, I also employed a counter-narrative methodology for centring the lived experiences of Black girls as it relates to school disciplinary mechanisms. Across decades of scholarship, the stories of Black women, including all other marginalized groups, have been overlooked altogether. This exclusion essentially produced homogenous, White-dominant perspectives and a limited understanding of marginalized experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) define counter-narratives as “naming one’s own reality” or “voice” through “parables, chronicles, stories, counter-stories, poetry, fiction and revisionist histories to illustrate the false necessity and irony of much of current civil rights doctrine” (p. 56). Furthermore, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) suggest that the counter-story is a tool for “exposing, analyzing and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 32). In other words, counter-narratives may be understood as counter-dominant narratives, a method of telling the stories of individuals whose experiences are not often told. The counter-stories run “counter” or opposite to widespread perspectives and work to challenge dominant discourses surrounding the stereotypes of Black girls.

My study focused on Black women’s counter-narratives to inform the ways in which they experienced school disciplinary policies and practices. Listening to Black women’s lived experiences provided me, as the researcher, with a deeper understanding and extra insight into perspectives that are often critically missed within dominant discourses. Cox (2015) illustrates this point when they write:

Understanding how everyday Black women make sense of their lives by theorizing the present and imagining the future is essential for supporting ways of living that resist the dehumanization implied in normative scripts. (p. 25)

Further, Miller, Liu, and Ball (2020) contend that the educational experiences of institutional racism are captured in counter-narratives voiced by students of colour. Counter-narratives work to document and bring awareness to how race influences the educational experiences of Black, Indigenous, and students of colour, whose lived experiences may counter the stories of dominant groups who are considered “normal” and neutral (Miller et al., 2020). Counter-narratives thus provide the researcher with the possibility to challenge dominant discourses on race and push for racial reform (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

My research, then, was an effort to understand school disciplinary mechanisms and school-to-confinement pathways as encountered by Black women. Narrative methodology allowed me to explore the impact of school disciplinary mechanisms on Black girls’ life trajectories while delving into the complexities of social factors such as race, gender, and class (among other identities) that many Black girls and women are forced to contend with in school settings. In general, a qualitative counter-narrative methodology was an approach to explore and understand the meaning Black girls ascribe to the social phenomenon of disproportionate school disciplinary outcomes to counter the widespread perspective that school disciplinary policies and practices are fair and neutral.

Research Design

Participant Selection Process

This study was based on seven semi-structured interviews with adults aged 18-25 who self-identified their race as “Black” and their gender as “woman” and who attended school in Ontario. To be inclusive of the experiences of both cis- and trans-Black women, the criterion for this study was to self-identify as a Black woman regardless of biological sex. In addition to race, sex, and gender, participants were also asked to describe their identities related to their current

socioeconomic status and childhood social class identification, and any other salient identities they wished to share. The rationale for asking them to identify their gender and other identities is in line with the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and critical race feminism. I chose to interview young adults because they may have some distance from their elementary or secondary school experiences, which allowed me to learn from their retrospective sense-making about their experiences at school. For those adults who are still engaged in formal educational systems, it also had the potential to provide insight on the impact of school disciplinary practices that have continued into their adulthood. Although nine participants initially expressed interest in the study, I was unable to complete interviews with two of them. One of the potential participants did not return the signed consent form, and the other did not attend K-12 schooling in Ontario. Table 1 provides is a list of participants and demographic overview.

Participant Pseudonym	Racial Background	Age	Gender	Highest Level of Completed Education
Trinity	Black African	22	Woman	Graduated from College
Chevonne	Black Caribbean	25	Woman	Graduated from College
Kiyana	Black Caribbean Black Canadian	18	Woman	1 Year of Post-secondary School (College/University)
Raven	Black Caribbean	25	Woman	Graduated from College
Serena	Black Caribbean	25	Woman	Graduated from University
Jayda	Black Caribbean	25	Woman	Graduated from College

Arielle	Black Caribbean Black Canadian	25	Woman	2 Years of Post- secondary School (College/University)
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In addition to utilizing my personal contacts, I recruited participants through advertisements (see Appendix A) on various social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. As a Black female researcher, my membership in the affected group provided me with crucial access to the research population. However, I found that my age difference from those I sought for the study posed a significant barrier to recruitment. Thus, my initial recruitment process was also followed with a limited snowball technique where early participants recommended other participants for me to contact. Ultimately, all of the participants I interviewed via Zoom were located in the Greater Toronto Area. Participants were invited to choose their own pseudonyms, and I inserted additional pseudonyms to protect the identities of other individuals or places mentioned.

Data Collection

According to DeMarrais (2004), a research interview is defined as “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (p. 54). A research interview relies on the development of rapport between the researcher and participant to discuss in detail aspects of the phenomenon under study (DeMarrais, 2004). Engaging in conversation, developing rapport, and building trust with participants is vital to understanding participants’ lived experiences from their points of view. To build rapport, I shared my positionality with participants, briefly detailing my schooling experiences that shaped my reasons for conducting this research. For the participants to speak freely about their experiences with school disciplinary mechanisms, a comfortable environment needed to be

established to encourage the disclosing of potentially sensitive information, and perhaps them knowing that I, too, had experienced unfair disciplinary practices in schools helped them open up to me.

This study utilized semi-structured interviews ranging from 25 to 60 minutes long. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe semi-structured interviews in qualitative investigations as a mixture of structured and more open-ended and flexibly-worded questions. I used a pre-interview questionnaire to gather the aforementioned demographic data. The remaining interview questions were flexibly positioned to investigate how Black women ascribed meaning to their school disciplinary experiences (see Table 2). In addition, I asked extension questions to further develop rapport and gain a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon. Interview topics included individuals' memories of disciplinary experiences, the impact of these experiences on their schooling and later lives, and a discussion of what they believe is required by school personnel to practice effective discipline and create inclusive environments.

<i>Table 2: Interview Guide</i>	
Background/Demographic Questions (Pre-Interview Questionnaire)	
<i>Self-Identifying Questions</i>	
1.	Please identify your race.
2.	Please identify your sex.
3.	Please identify your gender.
<i>Socioeconomic Status Identification Questions</i>	
4.	What is the highest level of education you have completed?
5.	What is your current occupation?
6.	Which of these describes your personal income last year?
	\$120,000+
	\$80,000 - \$119,999

\$60,000 - \$79,999

\$30,001 - \$59,999

< \$30,000

Childhood Social Class Identification

7. How would you identify your social class/parent(s) or guardian(s) socioeconomic status growing up?

<i>Upper Class</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top-level executives • Inherited wealth • Celebrities • Politicians
<i>Upper Middle Class</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly educated • Salaried professionals • Middle management
<i>Lower Middle Class</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-professionals • Average standard of living • Some college education
<i>Working Class</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low job security • High risk of poverty
<i>Lower Class</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very low income • Sometimes supported by government assistance

8. Are there any other social identifiers that you wish to share? For example, sexuality, disability, citizenship, etc.

Semi-structured Interview Questions

School Disciplinary Experiences

9. What were your experiences of being disciplined in school? (Prompt: Can you share one or two examples of getting in trouble in school that stand out in your memory?)
10. What were the reasons given to you for the discipline you experienced?
11. How did you feel or respond to being disciplined in school?

Intersectionality

12. Do you recall any differences in the disciplinary experiences of Black girls and Black boys? Please describe examples if you can.
13. Do you recall differences in the disciplinary experiences of Black girls and non-Black girls? Please describe examples if you can.

14.	Do you recall differences in the disciplinary experiences of Black girls who were perceived to be of lower class (poor) versus more affluent? Please describe examples if you can remember one.
<i>Critical Race Feminism</i>	
15.	Did being a Black girl impact the way you were disciplined? How so?
16.	If you felt unfairly disciplined, did you ever speak up to defend yourself? If so, did you face any repercussions for speaking up to defend your position?
17.	What are some challenges that you believe are unique to Black girl's disciplinary experiences in school?
<i>Retrospective Reflection</i>	
18.	Did your disciplinary experiences impact how you felt about attending school?
19.	Did your past disciplinary experiences have any impact on your present self?
<i>Recommended Future Action</i>	
20.	What would make school more positive for Black girls? Are there things you can imagine that might help promote more positive disciplinary experiences for Black girls?
21.	Do you have any final comments or thoughts you would like to share?

The interviews were conducted using Zoom, which allowed me to audio-record the interview (with participant consent) and procure an initial, albeit likely somewhat inaccurate, transcription. Interview data were transcribed and saved as files using rev.com. I made corrections when I reviewed the transcripts for the first time. Participants were also invited to verify and make edits to their interview transcripts.

Data Analysis

Analysis of interview data may be simplified as the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, among other unstructured text-based data, to increase understanding of the phenomenon under study (Wong, 2008). The process of analyzing transcripts primarily involves coding relevant data. Coding involves categorizing raw information into identified themes and analyzing that information to find commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures (Seidel & Kelle, 1995). Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019) suggest that coding interview data may be carried out using an inductive approach, a deductive

approach, or a combination of the two. In practice, the most used approach is a blended approach, sometimes referred to as “abduction” (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). According to Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), beginning the coding process with an inductive approach ensures “closeness” or “giving voice” to the data by utilizing phrases or terms used by participants, allowing for the possibility of unfolding theory later. Employing a deductive approach following the initial coding process can ensure theoretical relevance by focusing on essential issues in the existing literature. Cycling back and forth between the data and scholarship allows the researcher to remain open to revelations in the data while at the same time remaining in accord with existing theories (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). According to Thornberg and Charmaz (2014), the process of breaking coding down into at least two phases is referred to as initial and focused coding, respectively.

In the initial phase of the coding process, I read the transcripts to identify material related to the interview questions and then inserted descriptive codes beside select excerpts to provide an overview of what the segment was about. Specifically, my main focus at that stage was adding a descriptor to each disciplinary experience. Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019) state that descriptive codes create an overview of the data and allow for subsequent exploration of patterns, similarities, and differences in later cycles of analysis. This initial inductive process allowed me to follow the data closely and “give voice” to the participants’ experiences within the data collected. The interview data underwent a few rounds of analysis, one to identify patterns in the descriptive codes and the other to group them into general categories. Following the initial phase of the coding process, I prioritized, synthesized, and conceptualized related codes by utilizing a deductive and focused process to connect the data with identified themes in the literature. To be more sensitive to other theoretical possibilities, I cycled back and forth between inductive and

deductive coding phases as I narrowed down my overarching themes. Table 3 below provides an example of what the process looked like in my study.

<i>Table 3: An Example of Qualitative Data Coding Process</i>			
Specific Observation	Pattern Recognition	General Trend	Literature Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heightened Aggressiveness • Increased Severity • Embarrassment/Humiliation • Accused of Stealing • Accused of Vandilization • Threatened with Police 	a. Disciplined Harsher b. Criminal Accusations	Lack of Compassion	<i>Harsher Disciplinary Interventions in Comparison to White Counterparts</i> <i>Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Punished for Bonnets, Du-Rags, Headscarfs • Oversexualization • Too Short • Too Revealing • Comments on Natural Hair • Followed around school • Heightened Awareness in Groups of Black Students 	a. Dress Code Violations b. Oversexualization c. Bonnets & Natural Hair d. Groups of Black students	Hypervisibility	<i>Historical and Stereotypical Perceptions of Black Femininity</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disturbance/Disruptive • Attitude/Talking Back • “Angry Black Girl” • Unheard • Ignored • Dismissed • Invisible/Ghosted • Disengaged/Shut down • Internalized Shame • Self-Correcting • Self-Silencing 	a. Too Loud b. Voices Not Valued c. Dismissed / Unheard	Distorted Self-Perceptions	<i>“Otherness” & Disengagement</i>

Ethical Considerations

Creswell and Creswell (2017) suggest that ethical considerations must be anticipated and reflected upon throughout the research process in all stages of research. In my study, various ethical issues were taken into consideration. Prior to beginning the study, each participant read and signed an informed consent form. The letter of information identified me as the researcher and Lakehead University as the institution, fully disclosed the purpose of the study, identified the benefit of participating, described the level and type of participant involvement, noted potential risks to the participant, guaranteed participant confidentiality, assured the participant of the right to withdraw, and provided the participant with my contact information (see Appendix B). As previously mentioned, confidentiality was guaranteed by utilizing pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants, individuals, and locations mentioned. I ensured all participants read, understood, and asked clarifying questions before they signed the informed consent form.

During data collection, I empathetically listened to the participants' narratives while seeking to balance the researcher/participant relationship. I was prepared for the interview to elicit unpleasant memories and anticipated that some participants might become distressed during the interview. If that had been the case, I would have stopped the interview, supported the participant as best as I could, and referred them to appropriate counselling services. If talking did not regain control of the situation, the participant would have been reminded of their right to withdraw. However, none of this happened and participants were instead highly eager to share their stories.

To ensure accurate and adequately depicted representations of the participants' narratives, they each had the opportunity to review, edit, and sign off on their interview transcripts. All raw research data has been securely stored by me in password-protected files on

my personal computer while completing the thesis. Additionally, anything linking names to pseudonyms has been securely and separately stored by me in a password-protected file separate from the research data until the Master of Education requirements are fulfilled. Upon fulfillment of my program, anonymized and coded information will be kept for a period of five years on a password protected PDF. Finally, each participant was provided with the option to request a copy of the final thesis of which all seven women requested a copy.

To close, let me summarize. My study focused on exploring how Black women remembered their experiences as girls with school disciplinary mechanisms. I conducted this study utilizing a semi-structured interview process, analyzing participant narratives through critical race feminist and intersectional frameworks. The initial and focused coding phases allowed me to identify patterns and thematic trends within their stories. In the following chapter, I turn to my participations stories which allowed me to delve into the factors contributing to Black girls' school disciplinary experiences.

Chapter Four: Findings

My study explored the ways in which Black women remembered their experiences as girls with school disciplinary practices and policies. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, I employed a semi-structured narrative interview process to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon. I interviewed seven self-identified Black women who were able to provide retrospective reflections about their disciplinary experiences in Ontario's publicly funded schools. Intersectionality and critical race feminism were used as theoretical frameworks to examine these educational experiences by highlighting the importance of their multiple identities and voices as well as perspectives on school reform. Counter-narrative methodology served as a means of gaining insight into the lived experiences of the seven participants. A blended inductive and deductive approach was used to analyze the data. This process was utilized to prioritize "giving a voice" to the participant's experiences while connecting the data to themes within the literature.

This chapter highlights some of the disciplinary circumstances that these Black girls were forced to contend with in their schools allowing me to respond to the following research question: *In what ways do Black girls experience school disciplinary practices and policies?* Analysis of the data collected from these interviews resulted in three distinct themes emerged from the data that highlighted how these Black women experienced disciplinary practices and policies within Ontario's publicly funded schools: (1) Lack of compassion; (2) Hypervisibility; and (3) Distorted self-perceptions.

Lack of Compassion

"Nobody is playing saviour to Black girls who cry." – Chevonne

For most participants in this study, receiving compassion from their educators appeared to be non-existent when it came to their disciplinary experiences. Not only did six of seven women feel that they received harsher punishments than their counterparts, but they reported a general lack of compassion during the process. For Chevonne, this lack of compassion was obvious:

I feel like non-Black girls were coddled more, especially when it came to being disruptive. I felt like there was more compassion and understanding and coddling and trying to find out the “Why are you acting this way”? Versus when maybe Black girls were being disciplined, and it was just, oh, it’s just her attitude. And it was never trying to find out why her behaviour was like that.

She elaborated by sharing an interesting viewpoint on what happens when Black girls cry:

There is no compassion for Black girls crying. When Black girls cry, they’re seen as weak and not in a good way, versus when White girls cry, they are seen as weak, but that they also need a saviour, and nobody is playing saviour to Black girls who cry.

Chevonne’s narrative suggests that educators’ lack of compassion for Black girls is not only evident but may also be perceived as Black girls requiring less protection than their White counterparts.

Along the same lines, Raven recalled that her teacher’s star pupils, who she noted were exclusively White female athletes, were provided “more chances” than she and other girls of colour. Raven, who was also a student athlete, acknowledged, “It’s rare that I could say in [my high school] that despite doing the same thing as the White girls that I wouldn’t be getting a detention, they definitely would not because there’s no way they’re missing practice.” She also

detailed how her disciplinary experiences could have been different if she was at least afforded some compassion:

If I was given the ability to have... Given that second thought, that maybe I didn't do something wrong, or maybe I do wanna pay attention – you just caught me at a bad time. I definitely could see things [disciplinary experiences] being completely different.

Both Chevonne and Raven's recollections of their teachers' lack of compassion resonated with what was expressed by other participants and were evident in stories of their disciplinary interactions. For instance, Kiyana described an experience of being humiliated in front of her classmates for forgetting to bring a form back to school:

I was in the second grade, and I was really bad at bringing things home and bringing them back... So one day, my teacher got fed up with it and didn't say anything to my parents [about it] [and instead] she dumped out my bag in front of the whole class on a desk and would not let me clean it up. She just left it there for everyone to see all my stuff and would not let me pick anything up and take it home. I had to leave everything on my desk for a week... Singled me out in front of the whole class... and she's like, this will teach you not to forget things in your backpack anymore.

Kiyana noted that this particular experience left her feeling embarrassed because her eczema cream and other personal belongings were left on display for her classmates to observe. She recalls: "There were other kids that forgot stuff, but never, no one ever got penalized the way I did in class," prompting Kiyana's parents to remove her from that school. In this example, Kiyana was publicly humiliated by her teacher, who demonstrated a lack of compassion.

Jayda, too observed educator's lack of compassion when disciplining Black girls, indicating that

non-Black girls would often get just a little discussion, spoken to, or like what we would call that light tap on the wrist. Whereas Black girls would be yelled at in front of the entire class, humiliated, and then detentions, sometimes suspensions, but lots of detention and time outs.

These various recollections illustrate the extent to which, in comparison to their White counterparts, Black girls appear to be the object of public humiliation, disciplined more harshly, and are afforded less compassion when being disciplined.

Moreover, educators' lack of compassion became particularly apparent in the ways these girls were criminalized. Indeed, as the participants spoke about their disciplinary encounters, it was clear that their educators routinely treated them as criminals. For example, Arielle received an in-school suspension for drawing on another student's shirt. Arielle, who was in grade three then, recalls receiving permission from the student to draw on his shirt. Thus, it was a shock to Arielle when she was accused of "vandalizing" this student's clothing without permission. Using the term vandalize to describe Arielle's behaviour transformed the innocent behaviour of consensually drawing on someone's shirt into a criminal action.

In other examples of criminal accusations, Trinity recalls an encounter of being wrongfully accused of stealing:

In high school, they thought that me and my other friend took someone's earphones in [our] class because we were all around that area... but, we never took it. We still got in trouble, had to go to the office... even though we explained to 'em that it wasn't us and it was another person who was, like, trying to [play] a joke. But, simply because we were there, they're like, nah, you guys did it. You guys took it. And then even when that

person said, “Oh actually, I was the one who took it,” we didn’t really get any apology or anything like that.

Although Trinity maintained her innocence throughout the ordeal, she was still threatened with an in-school suspension. The wrongful accusation and lack of apology from Trinity’s educator depict an apparent lack of compassion and illustrate how Black girls are perceived as less innocent than others of their gender.

For Jayda, her educator’s accusations of criminality went so far as to threaten her with going to the police:

Back in grade five, there was a Spanish girl in my class, and she slapped me, so I slapped her back. I guess my slap was a lot harder than hers. So it did leave a mark on her skin, but my skin isn’t gonna show the mark. But she hit me first, and I was excluded from the school dance. I explained to them numerous times that she hit me first, you know, they threatened me with the police and told me her mom wanted to call the police on me because there was a big mark on her skin... And it wasn’t until I told one specific teacher...she hit me first; why is it that no one’s listening?... Then she was pulled out of the school dance, but it took me, you know, really for a whole week talking to, speaking to, different teachers until I found the right one...No one threatened her that they would call the cops.

Ultimately, the criminalization of these girls’ behaviour subscribes to the notion that Black youth are guilty and malicious instead of innocent and immature. Arielle summarizes this viewpoint:

...you’re a child you’re allowed to like act out in certain ways as a means of, like, growing up and exploring who you are and [finding] your voice in society. And I just felt like as a Black person, you weren’t really allowed to be expressive in that way...

These various recollections illustrate that, at these study participants were not afforded the same compassion nor allowed to make mistakes to the same degree as their White counterparts. Harsher punishments and the criminalizing of Black girls' behaviour sets the foundation for school-to-confinement pathways. The lack of compassion observed in disciplinary practices has produced school environments where Black girls feel misunderstood, which can force some to withdraw. Furthermore, this observed lack of compassion is deeply seated within historical and stereotypical perceptions of Black women and girls.

Hypervisibility

"I'm only seeing you." – Chevonne

The theme of hypervisibility was evident in participants' descriptions of the over-surveillance of their actions and the over-sexualization of their bodies. Five of the participants detailed their experiences with being disciplined over their school's dress code policy. Many of them felt their school's dress code policy provided a means for educators to over-surveil and over-sexualize their bodies compared to their counterparts. Chevonne recalled a punitive experience of being sent home to change her clothes before she was allowed to re-enter the school building:

I remember one day it was really hot outside and I had worn a pair of rugby shorts to school. At the time, the rule was that the shorts had to be as long as your fingertips. And, you know, my shorts were probably like one or two centimetres shorter than my fingertips, but I thought it was alright because there were other girls that had shorts that were way shorter than me. So, I remember when the teachers were coming out to bring us inside... [one teacher] prevented me from going inside. She basically was, like, "How long are your shorts? Put your hands down by your side so we could see how long your

shorts are.” And, because obviously, my shorts were 2 centimetres shorter than my fingertips, I got in trouble. She basically was telling me that I was inappropriate and that I shouldn’t have worn these shorts to school if I had known. And so I said to her, “There are other girls that are wearing shorts that are a lot shorter than what I’m wearing.” And she says, “Well, I don’t see them right now. I’m only seeing you”... I was forced to go home and change my shorts and then come back to school.

This teacher’s statement, “ I don’t see them... I’m only seeing you, “ exemplifies how the Black female body is hypervisible in its social space.

Other participants also were required to contend with the hypervisibility of their bodies, recalling that educators consistently targeted them for dress code violations. Along the same lines, Trinity, expressed:

Some of the White girls, some of them will be able to pass the dress code and some obviously cuz of how their figure is, they’ll be like, “Okay, no, you need to put something on.” But it was always one of those that if I’m wearing like a tank top, obviously, especially shorts, shorts are the main one, if I’m wearing shorts, it’s like, “Oh those are too short.”

Jayda, echoed a similar sentiment stating, “We got in trouble for our shorts being too short, whereas the White girls would wear the shortest shorts and not get in trouble.” Simply put by Serena, “White girls would get away with a lot more.” Serena also cited shorts as being a focus of concern, noting how if two girls, one Black and one non-Black, were wearing the same shorts, it would be the Black girl who is “curvier” who would be disciplined. These narratives demonstrate how educators perceive the Black female body as “other” in relation to its

counterpart. This perceived otherness contributes to the hypervisibility of the Black female body in schools, placing them under greater surveillance than their peers.

Kiyana, remembers this surveillance being very excessive, and recalled being followed around the school by an administrator who insisted that she change her shirt, which was a Halloween costume:

I remember that she's like, "Yeah, that's not appropriate." And I'm like, "Well, that's the costume." And there are a whole bunch of other girls, like non-Black girls who are walking around in basically the same thing as I am, actually might even be worse. And nothing was said to them, but me, it was a problem. Always, always a problem.

The participants' recollections of their disciplinary experiences around dress code policies suggest they are more likely to be disciplined than their non-Black peers for what they are wearing.

Three of seven participants explicitly indicated that they felt that the discipline they received for not adhering to the dress code policy was rooted in the stereotypical over-sexualization of their bodies. Chevonne, for example, straightforwardly asserted that the reason she was singled out for having shorter shorts was due to the over-sexualization of her body:

To me, that really stands out because as a young Black girl who [reached] puberty early on, to me, it just felt like the over-sexualization of my body because I had been developing. And to me as a child, you know, you shouldn't be so focused on what kids are wearing. The weather is hot, you know, we're gonna wear shorts and yeah, if my body's more mature, that shouldn't [have] an effect [on] what I'm wearing.

Likewise, Jayda reflected on her own experiences with dress code:

I think the thing about that [dress code] is just naturally, you know, on the back end area, like on our bums. Black girls are usually more developed in that area and have larger bums and larger breasts sometimes, just based on like, you know, history [genetics]. Um, and then on top of that, we, some of us, have the issue of discoloration on our bums. So if we wear something that's a little bit shorter. Like, we see this discoloration, it automatically just looks like your whole butt is out. Whereas White girls don't experience that. Right. So it's more sexualized on the Black girls' end.

Trinity summarized the issue simply: "We're probably more looked at for the stuff we wore just 'cuz how we wear it and how our body is compared to like the other White girls."

The theme of hypervisibility was also apparent in participants' stories about educators punishing them for adopting stereotypical Black girl characteristics such as natural curly/kinky hair, and following fashion trends like bonnets and head scarfs, big hoop earrings, and long acrylic nails, among other things. Two participants in the study detailed experiences of being chastised for their appearance. Trinity shared:

They would definitely judge like the tattoos, like, "Oh, you're part of a gang" or like, "Why are you wearing that?" Especially this [points to her head], our, um, bonnets. Oh my goodness. They would question the bonnets so hard. "What is that on your head? What is it for? You can't wear that in here. You need to take that off..." I would definitely feel like I would've been like, you know, the centre of attention but not the right attention.

Trinity's reference to "not the right attention" illustrates to an extent how Black girls feel under particular surveillance at school.

Chevonne expressed similar sentiments, recalling that teachers consistently had an issue with headscarves. She also mentioned, “You could not wear your hair in an Afro...in its natural state.” For Chevonne, educators perceived natural hair as “unprofessional” or “like you didn’t take care of yourself.” Similarly, for a few other participants, natural kinky hair remained a subject of contention between them and their educators. Serena recalls teachers commenting, “I didn’t know your hair was so long or so puffy.” As reflected by Chevonne, “They would consistently make comments like ‘You don’t have a hair tie for your hair?’ or ‘Did you wash your hair this morning?’ or ‘It looks like you just got outta bed.’” These microaggressive verbal attacks from educators may not at first glance necessarily seem like a traditional form of discipline but they do represent a form of psychological punishment. Microaggressive comments aimed at characteristics exclusive to Black girls connect to the theme of hypervisibility and reveal unique racialized and gendered experiences Black girls have in school.

Another key feature of the theme of hypervisibility is the predictability of Black girls being disciplined when in the company of other Black students. Three of the seven participants detailed experiences of heightened surveillance when in groups of Black students. Serena recalls an experience preparing for multicultural day:

I do remember, during high school, we did this thing called Multicultural Day and all the Caribbean and the African groups would always be watched heavily. Like sometimes, we would practice after school for our performance or whatever. And one time we actually got singled out, and we got kicked out of the school too, like [prevented] from practicing. And then the next day, everyone from our pavilion had to go to the office, and they were trying to tell us that we weren’t able to do our performance.

Serena mentioned that the reason for being excluded from the performance was “practicing without teacher supervision,” but she recounts that students representing other countries practiced without supervision. Administrators told the group of Afro/Caribbean students, “We don’t really care what the other groups are doing.” Kiyana echoed this idea of educators not worrying about what other students were doing and zeroing in instead on Black students:

I remember it being a problem constantly, but there was this one group of girls [who were] not of colour. And like the teacher would let them do whatever they wanted. And then whenever someone in my friend group, which would be, none of us are like White or Caucasian, [when] we asked to do anything, and it’s always like, we need an explanation.

The above examples illustrate how the hypervisibility of Black students contributes to their heightened surveillance and an educator’s disciplinary gaze. It was interesting too to learn about the impact hypervisibility had on White students who socialize in groups of Black students. Arielle, shared what she had observed:

I felt like the White girls that got disciplined were more so the ones that hung around Black girls and they ended up being more like on the brawlish³ side, or I guess you could say like exhibiting more like Black characteristics... We did have the White girls that hung around the Black girls, and if they ended up getting in a fight, um, I just found that the Black girl would get more repercussions than the White girl.

Arielle’s recollection is nuanced, suggesting that White girls are not regularly disciplined unless they exhibit Black characteristics and socialize in groups of Black students, yet even then it was the Black girls who would be punished more severely than their White friends. Her observation

³ A way to describe a person who is considered ghetto or ratchet, who talks very loud and often wants to fight.

illustrates how Black girls are hypervisible in their social spaces, and are likely to be disciplined harsher than their counterparts.

Finally, Raven shared an insightful commentary regarding the hypervisibility of Black females in their schools:

If you don't look like you're almost on the verge of smiling or at least a hint of a smile, you're already [perceived to be] in a mood and you're already gonna disrupt my class. I've seen it a lot of times, like you roll your eyes once or you look the other way once, you're getting in trouble 'cuz of that. Um, you know, not having your clothes up to standard, especially for schools that have uniforms... Even if it's just like putting a little pin on it, right. If you were a Black chick who sat in the back of class, you're a hundred percent not listening, you're getting in trouble. If you sat with, uh, if it was Black girls and guys in the back of the class, don't even bother coming [to] class.

As the participants' stories illustrated, overall, the hypervisibility of the Black female aesthetic contributes negatively to their disciplinary experiences. These disproportionate outcomes appear rooted in historical perceptions of their bodies, increasing their hypervisibility. Equally as important is the evidence to support the distorted self-understandings that Black girls developed due to their disciplinary experiences in schools.

Distorted Self-Perception

“Big mouth girl.” – Jayda

This section focuses on the self-understandings that participants developed based on their school disciplinary experiences. The most common disciplinary experience for participants occurred for being perceived as too loud or disruptive. All seven participants in this study recalled being disciplined for their “loudness.” More specifically, the following narratives

demonstrate how participants contended with disciplinary experiences relating to the sapphire trope that paints Black girls as loud and aggressive.

All of them recalled being singled out in a group of students for being “too loud.” For example, Jayda recounted:

I feel like it was always something that a group did but because I was deemed as the loudest or, um, something my teachers would say was “I had a loud presence.” I would get like the short end of the stick and get in trouble over everyone else.

Kiyana provided another example of being singled out in a group of students for being too loud:

I remember being, um, in class and having free time to do and work on whatever. But if the girls, like we could be all talking the same and you get called out. Like, I remember it was always the loud Black girl who always got called out in class.

Chevonne recalled a similar example: “I wasn’t doing anything differently. I wasn’t even the one talking the most. Like, yes, I have a loud laugh, but I don’t think that really warrants me to be moved because I laugh louder than the other students.” The notion of being singled out in a group of students for being loud is closely connected to the hypervisibility of the Black female body. As a consequence of disrupting normative femininity, educators’ perceptions of the loudness of Black girls often led to discipline to correct this behaviour.

Multiple participants also described instances where they surrendered to the negative perception of the “loud Black girl.” Jayda provided an example of how being disciplined for her loudness affected her self-perception:

I think it was grade two or three. One of my teachers called me a chatterbox and he named me and one of my friends Chatterbox One and Chatterbox Two, but like, it just made me feel like I was like a big mouth girl, you know...and whatever I was saying, or

whenever I was talking, it was unnecessary chatter to the teacher. Like, it wasn't anything of substance that was coming outta my mouth, you know?

Serena described a similar experience of questioning how her initial self-perception contrasted with that of the educators and how that later impacted her self-perception:

I felt like sometimes everyone else would be louder than me, and I felt like I wasn't the loudest person within the classroom. Um, [still] so I felt that I probably needed to work on being quieter...I like always thought to myself, "Oh, am I speaking too loud?"

For Jayda and Kiyana, educators' tainted perceptions of the loudness of Black girls painfully forced them to question the value of their own voices in the classroom. For Jayda, this indifference toward speaking up extended into her adulthood:

I feel like that made me a little bit more shy to talk out and to voice my opinion, to the point where I would stay quiet when things bothered me and then, you know, the anger gets bottled up, and then I would freak out as I got older.

Arielle echoed that sentiment:

It's kind of like me now. It's like, I'm more like reserved, or I guess shut down. Like, I don't really go into detail about things because it's like, you know, why bother? You know what I mean? You're also not gonna listen to me anyway. You're not gonna hear my side of the story anyway. So it's just like, I think now, not even my present self, but just being more of an adult and aware of who I am as a person, I've tried to be more expressive because I think it's important to let people know how you're feeling, because if you don't then that too kind of confirms their idea of you that they have.

These narratives demonstrate how self-perceptions gained from school disciplinary experiences are not a singular one-time event, but have the potential to stretch across and impact a Black woman's entire life experience.

In other examples of distorted self-perceptions, participants recalled that they no longer felt the need to speak up in disciplinary situations because their educators often dismissed their viewpoints anyway. Arielle shared:

I don't wanna have to defend myself cause I feel like these people [educators] won't understand me, even if I do say something, you know what I mean? So I guess that is the way you as a Black woman kind of start to go about things is because, like, why bother? Because I won't be heard or things won't be changed, even if I do say something.

Kiyana expressed a similar sentiment when she said, "I find it hard to speak up about a problem just because like, I don't wanna be, dismissed again." These two examples illustrate how as Black women grow throughout the school system, the frequent dismissal of their perspectives can lead them to withdraw or dampen down aspects of their personalities.

Along similar lines, Chevonne recalled feeling like she "didn't have a voice" but also that "Black girls' voices are considered weapons," suggesting that when Black girls speak up for themselves when being disciplined, it can be perceived as somehow inflicting harm on their educators. For educators in this instance, harm might be understood as having to deal with attitude, defiance, or disrespect. In contrast, however, participants perceived their loudness as a byproduct of being unheard by their educators. Arielle expanded on what these displays of loudness meant for her:

It's not even like we're being loud, but it's, like, I feel like we have to be loud in order to be heard. They never hear us unless we're shouting and we're making a big spectacle.

And then it's, like, okay, then they sit us down.

Jayda echoed that sentiment, asserting that in her experience, "Black girls aren't heard the first time when they say things." She explained:

As opposed to a conversation like we're human, it becomes this "You're disrespectful," and you know, we get spoken down to, and then we have to kind of compensate. Like, for not being heard. We have to try to compensate with some sort of attitude or speaking a little bit louder just to be heard.

These insightful observations about the perceived loudness of Black girls, then, should be rightfully understood as a means to counter being unheard by educators.

The narratives in this section revealed that these Black woman were painfully aware as girls that their voices were not valued in their school communities. Participants observed that their voices were perceived as too loud, disruptive, disrespectful, or about having an attitude. Further, disciplinary experiences as a result of their perceived loudness prompted many of them to question their self-perceptions or to dampen aspects of their personalities. For some participants, negative self-perceptions and adopting behaviours that were not true to themselves extended past their time in school and into their adulthood.

Summary of Findings

The themes presented in this chapter serve to answer the underlying research question: *In what ways do Black girls experience school disciplinary practices and policies?* Table 4 summarizes the themes and sub-themes that emerged, with an exemplary excerpt from the data.

<p><i>Table 4: Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes</i></p>

Theme	Sub-Themes	Example Response
Lack of compassion	a. Disciplined harsher b. Criminal accusations	<i>"...there were other kids that forgot stuff, but never, no one ever got penalized the way I did in class."</i>
Hypervisibility	a. Dress code violations b. Oversexualization c. Bonnets and natural hair d. Groups of Black students	<i>"...we're probably more looked at for the stuff we wore just 'cuz how we wear it and how our body is compared to, like, the White girls."</i>
Distorted self-perceptions	a. Too loud b. Voices not valued c. Dismissed and unheard	<i>"I find it hard to speak up about a problem just because like, I don't wanna be, dismissed again."</i>

The participants' narratives about their disciplinary experiences at school revealed many similar concerns and outcomes. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the in-depth, semi-structured interviews with seven Black women demonstrated that educators' racialized and gendered perceptions of their Black female students resulted in inequitable disciplinary experiences for Black girls. Common experiences shared by participants suggest a general lack of compassion on the part of educators when disciplining Black female students compared to their White counterparts. The Black girls in this study recalled receiving harsher punishments, and their behaviours were routinely criminalized. Additionally, the hypervisibility of Black female students positioned them in such a way that they were more likely to be disciplined for their decorum as compared to their White counterparts. They were also likely to be punished for characteristics perceived as exclusive to Black girls, such as wearing bonnets and their natural hair. Lastly, participants reported that disciplinary experiences, especially those concerning loudness, made them doubt their self-perceptions. For some, these self-perceptions endured into

their adulthood as did certain behavioural tendencies, like being quieter than they might otherwise have been. The reality of these Black women's lived experiences provides insight into how race and gender influenced their school disciplinary experiences. Together, their narratives counter the wider perspective that school disciplinary policies and practices are fair and neutral. In the next chapter, I connect these findings back to the literature and discuss their implications.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In this chapter, I contextualize my analysis of the interview data within the literature and my theoretical framework to address the research question: *In what ways do Black girls experience school disciplinary practices and policies?* To begin, I present a critical summary and discussion of the significant research findings making connections to the scholarship that I discussed in Chapter Two, the literature review. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the implications of my study for practice and policy and make recommendations for future research.

Major Research Findings

The in-depth, semi-structured interviews with seven Black women revealed narratives that reflected similar concerns and outcomes. As a reminder, three overarching themes emerged from my analysis of participants' reflections about their disciplinary experiences at school: (1) Lack of compassion; (2) Hypervisibility; and (3) Distorted self-perceptions. Separately and together, they illuminate three major findings that help me grapple with my research question. The first, *Harsher Disciplinary Interventions*, provides an analysis of Black female students' disciplinary experiences compared to their White female counterparts. The second, *Historical Perceptions of the Embodied Black Girl* addresses the racialized and gendered perceptions of their embodiment. The third, *Development of Self-Understandings and Disengagement* contextualizes the internalized oppression of the "loud Black girl" and conceptualizes how self-fulfilling prophecies in the classroom may occur and lead to disengagement from the learning process. Each of these major findings is discussed independently in this section, where I connect my participants' experiences with the research literature.

Harsher Disciplinary Interventions

Participants in this study shared the common experience of encountering a general lack of compassion when being disciplined and noticed a pattern in how Black female students compared to their White female counterparts were treated. As indicated in Chapter Four, the Black women in this study very vividly recalled receiving harsher disciplinary interventions compared to their White counterparts. Participants described their White counterparts being “coddled more” and receiving “more chances” as it related to their disciplinary experiences. Participants also shared experiences of being “embarrassed” and “humiliated” in front of the entire class and their behaviours routinely criminalized. Compared to their White counterparts, this study’s findings demonstrate that Black girls are afforded less compassion and are routinely criminalized, which is consistent with the existing scholarship.

Crenshaw et al. (2015) and Hassan and Carter (2021), among many others, came to similar conclusions suggesting that Black female students disproportionately experience harsher forms of discipline compared with White female students in public school systems. As Annamma et al. (2019) mention, “even when Black girls are referred to the office for the same behaviours as other girls, holding for other identity markers, Black girls are punished more harshly” (p. 232). Despite exhibiting the same behaviours and decorum or wearing the same things as non-Black girls, the Black girls in this study were the ones who were consistently disciplined. One explanation for harsher disciplinary interventions is that perceived innocence is a privilege of Whiteness (Annamma, 2015; Carter Andrews et al., 2019). As defined by White middle-class culture, traditional standards of femininity cast Black girls as unworthy of the compassion and protection provided to White girls (Blake et al., 2010; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Epstein et al., 2017). For Chevonne, it was particularly evident that Black girls are not

considered worthy of protection. As noted in the previous chapter, she observed that when White girls cry, they are perceived as requiring a saviour whereas “nobody is playing saviour to Black girls who cry.” This lack of protection is also evident throughout participants’ recollections of being “singled out,” “humiliated,” “yelled at,” and “embarrassed” by their educators.

According to Carter Andrews et al. (2019), Black girls are less likely to be associated with and protected by traditional notions of White femininity. They observe that “characteristics, attitudes, and behaviours that are perceived as self-advocacy/agency, independence, and creativity when exhibited by white girls, are considered to be disruptive, aggressive, and/or arrogant when exhibited by Black girls” (p. 2539). Thus, perceiving Black girls as less innocent problematizes their behaviour and positions them at risk for harsher disciplinary interventions. This was evident in my student when participants recalled teachers criminalizing their age-appropriate behaviour. For example, Arielle was accused of vandalization for drawing on a classmate’s shirt in third grade and Jayda was threatened with the police for returning a slap to a classmate in grade five. Arielle and Jayda, like other participants, were subjected to criminalizing responses. The perception of Black girls as less innocent and threatening police involvement for minor infractions sets the foundation for disproportionate disciplinary outcomes and school-to-confinement pathways (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017). These findings resonate with the work of Hassan and Carter (2021) who determined that disproportionately, Black girls receive a higher percentage of out-of-school suspensions and school-related arrests than their White counterparts.

Ultimately, my analysis demonstrates that Black girls’ nonconformity tends to prompt educators’ to respond more harshly to their actions compared to their White counterparts (Morris, 2016). Repeatedly, the participants in the study spoke of the striking differences in the disciplinary experiences between them and their White counterparts. Harsher disciplinary

interventions from educators poses a significant threat to Black girls' education and fosters and maintains adverse effects such as disengagement, dropout, and/or contact with the criminal justice system. The findings of my study support that Black girls' harsh disciplinary interventions and the criminalization of their actions originate in educators' racialized and gendered perceptions. Thus, educators must be aware of how their perceptions generally shape disproportionate outcomes and negatively contribute to the systemic disregard of Black girls' well-being and achievement.

Historical Perceptions of the Embodied Black Girl

As noted in the literature review, Black females are historically and stereotypically scrutinized for their deviance from White normative femininity (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Morris, 2007; Morris & Perry, 2017). In addition to harsher disciplinary interventions, this perceived "otherness" results in the hypervisibility of Black girls' bodies in social spaces such as schools (Mowatt et al., 2013). Participants had a strikingly incisive grasp on educators' perceptions of their bodies because of their disciplinary experiences with school dress code policy. Many participants recalled being targeted and disciplined for their shorts being "too short," especially compared to their non-Black peers. Participants also recalled being sent home to change and followed around the school by administrators.

According to Epstein, Blake, and González (2017), the differences in physical development between Black girls and their counterparts can play a role in their disciplinary experiences, especially when they are in the age range of 5-14. Indeed, the participants provided further evidence of this phenomenon when they described almost identical experiences of wearing similar clothing as their non-Black counterparts, yet often were the only ones punished. Trinity, Serena, and Jayda, among others, provided assessments of why they believe they were

targeted for dress code violations, and in each of their accounts they noted the curvaceousness and development of their bodies. Many participants in this study were acutely aware that their experiences with dress code violations were explicitly connected to the stereotypical over-sexualization of Black women. As mentioned in the literature review, Black girls experience stereotypes that are connected to a history of slavery and controlling images (Annamma et al., 2017; Davis 2003). The over-sexualization of Black girls and women's bodies is rooted in a long history of perceiving Black women as hypersexualized (Hassan & Carter, 2021). The hypersexualized Black woman, also known as the Jezebel trope, has real consequences for Black girls and their disciplinary encounters. Thus, while many educators may feel they are being fair and impartial when enforcing a dress code policy, they may, in reality, be perpetuating the historical Jezebel stereotype that underlies their implicit bias. This is congruent with the notion of adultification based on the differences in physical development between Black girls and their counterparts. Adultification and the associated hypersexualization of Black girls' bodies contribute to their hypervisibility and how that influences disciplinary experiences within schools. As a result, dress code violations are one area in which educators must be aware of how their biases may manifest as oppressive to Black girls.

My study further revealed that some participants were the recipient of microaggressive comments aimed at characteristics exclusive to Black girls. When participants were asked about disciplinary challenges that they believe are unique to Black girls, their responses clustered around educators' resistance to bonnets/hair scarves/coverings and remarks about their natural hair. For instance, Trinity described this as "the centre of not the right attention." According to Wun (2016b), Black girls experience everyday occurrences of punishment and neglect that do not register under formal conceptualizations of disciplinary practices such as suspensions,

expulsions, and arrests. Microaggressive verbal attacks by educators may not be conceptualized as a traditional form of discipline but it does represent a form of psychological punishment for Black girls. Acknowledging the impacts of microaggressive attacks on kinky natural hair and hair bonnets is vital because it is an informal racialized and gendered punishment unique to Black girls. Examining only formal discipline policies for disciplinary disparities overlooks other serious impositions to which young Black girls are subjected (Wun, 2016b).

My discussion of historical stereotypes and psychological punishment reveals the ways that implicit bias develops into inequitable disciplinary outcomes. Black girls are subjected to disciplinary action rooted in cultural misunderstandings of racialized and gendered stereotypes and biases. Their educators scrutinized the participants' bodies and found them to be deviant, resulting in inequitable disciplinary actions or microaggressive attacks. Further to the point, my examination additionally revealed that participants were more likely to be disciplined when in the company of other Black students. These findings suggest that the heightened surveillance of Black students increases the chances that Black girls will be subject to disciplinary gaze and punishment. These findings have significant consequences for the broader domain of discipline disparities and school-to-prison pipeline research, demonstrating how the hypervisibility of groups of Black students results in an increased risk for scrutinization and over-monitoring. Therefore, educators need to learn about the behaviours and challenges that Black students face, looking beyond socio-cultural differences, and challenging their own personal biases to ensure they are culturally responsive in their disciplinary practices.

Development of Self-Understandings and Disengagement

In a study by Morris (2007), the most common description of Black girls was that they were too loud. Similarly, as indicated in Chapter Four, the most cited disciplinary experience by

far centred on participants' experiences with being perceived as loud and/or disruptive. Every participant in this study recalled being disciplined for their alleged loudness. Just as Black girls are stereotyped as immoral and hypersexual (jezebel), they are also stereotyped as loud and aggressive (sapphire). As a deviation from normative qualities of White femininity, perceptions of the loudness of Black girls often then translates into discipline aimed at correcting this behaviour (Morris, 2007). My findings demonstrate the same phenomenon, with disciplinary disparities resulting from Black girls' alleged loudness and/or defiance. As such, my findings bolster the argument that dominant narratives about femininity and perceptions of Black girls influence their disciplinary outcomes.

I found it particularly significant to learn about the self-understandings that participants developed because of their disciplinary experiences with being "too loud." According to Hines-Datiri and Andrews (2017), schools are spaces where Black girls conceptualize and materialize new self-understandings based on their interactions with adults and peers. Many participants spoke of developing negative self-understandings about the value of their voices in a classroom environment. For some participants, disciplinary actions regarding their perceived disruptive and loud behaviour in group settings led them to question the value of their voices in the classroom and, in turn, prompted them to internalize the oppressive message that they were "too loud." As an illustration, Jayda considered herself a "big mouth girl," Serena felt she needed to "work on being quieter," and Arielle described the disciplinary encounters as causing her to be "more reserved or shut down." For other participants, their loudness and defiance were a byproduct of being unheard by their educators. When participants felt dismissed by their educators, they responded loudly to be heard. Jayda noted that "Black girls aren't heard the first time when they

say things,” suggesting that some Black girls compensate for this dismissal by overcompensating with attitude, disrespect, and/or loudness.

The stereotypical perception of Black girls as loud, disruptive, disrespectful or having an attitude results in educators intentionally or unintentionally dismissing their claims. The frequent dismissal of their voices either prompts Black girls to internalize these stereotypical beliefs about themselves or influences them to be louder, disruptive, or disrespectful in order to be heard – a self-fulfilling prophecy. For some participants, these self-perceptions have endured into adulthood. The psychological effect of constraining Black girls’ voices poses a unique barrier to academic achievement given it has the potential to disengage them from the learning process. As Morris and Perry (2017) suggest, feeling spurned by educational institutions can prompt a cycle of disengagement that can escalate to dropout and contact with the criminal justice system. Further, loudness for some Black girls is a survival strategy and defence mechanism that is utilized to reject invisibility and mistreatment (Morris, 2016). Educators thus should be mindful of interpreting Black girls’ defiance and/or loudness as inherently disrespectful. Instead, they should recognize such defence mechanisms as a proactive effort to deal with oppression.

I hope that me highlighting my participants’ lived experiences provides extra insight into how race and gender influence Black girls’ disciplinary experiences generally, and particularly in Ontario’s K-12 publicly funded schools. Based on a critical analysis of the participant’s experiences, I discuss in the next section the implications of this study for school policy, pre-service education programs, professional development of educators, and future research. To highlight and honour their perspectives, I conclude this section with specific recommendations offered by participants.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of my study contribute to the existing literature on Black girls and school discipline disparities, particularly within a Canadian context. I hope that my study can raise awareness of school policymakers, pre-service and in-service teachers, administration, and educational stakeholders about the various issues affecting school disciplinary outcomes for Black girls. This type of anti-Black racism in schools explicitly targets Black girls, and their unique racialized and gendered experiences need to be considered.

Implications for School Policy

The results of this study suggest that school dress code policies disproportionately harm Black girls. The regulation of short/skirt length, clothing styles, headwraps, and hairstyles affects Black girls differently, especially curvier Black girls. I am not the first to note this serious problem; it is evident in the aforementioned scholarship that physical differences in development and stereotyped perceptions of Black girls as hypersexual contribute to dress code disparities (Annamma et al., 2017; Epstein et al., 2017). Thus, teachers and administrators must exercise discretion when enforcing dress code violations and recognize how biases impact disciplinary decisions that may result in serious consequences for Black girls. Policymakers thus should consider reforming dress code policies to ensure they are equitable, culturally responsive, and give students a sense of empowerment over their bodies.

Implications for Practice

A key idea emerging from the findings is the role of implicit or explicit bias as the root cause of discipline disparities. Black girls are subject to harsher and more frequent punishment due to historical stereotypes and their deviation from normative White femininity. These results have implications for both pre-service teacher education programs and in-service professional

development. As mentioned in the literature review, there is a longstanding lack of awareness of Black Canadian history and resulting systemic anti-Black racism in Canada, including how it permeates Canadian schools. It follows then that educating educators on systemic inequalities and the impacts these have on Black girls would help to mitigate these challenges.

Pre-service Education Programs. Currently, some B.Ed. programs in Ontario offer a single course, or maybe even a few courses, grounded in culturally responsive (CRP), anti-oppressive (AOP), and anti-racist (ARP) teaching pedagogies. However, from personal experience both taking and instructing a course that considers issues of power, privilege, oppression, and social difference, I can say that most B.Ed. students' previous exposure to critical social justice theories is disjointed and limited. In addition to offering a B.Ed. course explicitly focused on critical social justice, I argue that teacher education programs must ensure tenets of CRP, ARP, and AOP are embedded throughout the program. If pre-service educators were continually taught about CRP, ARP, and AOP across all facets of their program, it would become easier to identify, and work to eliminate, potential biases in their future teaching practice.

That said, I recognize that due to fear, personal, or political beliefs (among other factors), there is potential for resistance to CRP, ARP, and AOP. Yet, pre-service educators must acknowledge that a multifaceted approach has the potential to simultaneously deepen B.Ed. students' understanding of power relations in educational cultures and work to create more equitable disciplinary outcomes. To mitigate potential resistance, frequent exposure to CRP, ARP, and AOP could demonstrate how significant these matters are, yield a level of comfort with subject matter, and provide tangible examples of how to consider the implications for their own learning practices.

In-service Professional Development. Along the same lines, professional development must continue beyond the B.Ed. to foster an understanding of systems of anti-Black racism (ABR) and a commitment to taking action against it for those more experienced teachers who have had little exposure to these ideas in the past or to deepen the understanding and commitment of those who have had. According to the Ontario College of Teachers (2023), teachers have an ethical responsibility to be competent in anti-racist teaching practices. In addition, the *Ministry of Education's Equity Action Plan* (2107) and *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) provide blueprints for identifying and eliminating discrimination and systemic barriers within Ontario's 72 school boards. Although the Ministry of Education has outlined these expectations, there is no standardized approach for meeting these goals nor very little monitoring of how well, or even whether, the effects of systemic imbalances have been diminished, perhaps especially regarding Anti-Black racism. There is an important role for Ontario's certified teachers to play in committing to ongoing professional learning on the adverse impacts of anti-Black racism and how to address it.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on Black girls and school discipline disparities within a Canadian context, illuminating the disproportional discipline experienced and resultant educational outcomes for Black girls. The intersection of Black girls' racialized and gendered identities positions them at the margins of public schooling and criminal justice institutions. Therefore, as outlined above in my discussion of the implications for policy and professional development, it is my hope that my research will challenge educators to consider how their biases perpetuate anti-Black systems of oppression for Black girls. To deepen and expand upon the findings of this study, however, more research is needed at a national level.

My data was gathered from seven interviews with participants I recruited primarily through word-of-mouth. This snowball technique thus meant that participants were from the Greater Toronto Area. That is a limitation because the experience of seven participants do not necessarily represent the experiences of Black women across the region, province, or country. To accurately identify and address discipline disparities that Black girls experience, we need more nation-wide information and counter-narratives that corroborate the credibility and application of my research findings to a variety of Black female socio-political identities is needed. Hearing from more Black women and girls from across the country would strengthen our understanding and contribute to Canada's intersectional and race-based data.

Speaking of intersectionality, another aspect to consider for future research is the effect of school disciplinary practices on Black girls who sit at the margins of other oppressed groups in Canada. For example, all seven participants self-identified as cisgender Black women of lower-middle class status, which precluded me learning from the experiences of Black trans women and Black women from other socioeconomic groups. Future research should include the diverse identities of Black women to disrupt the tendency to view them incorrectly as a monolith. As I already stated, American research has demonstrated that disproportionate negative outcomes increase when race intersects with (dis)ability (see Losen & Gillespie, 2012) or for Black students who are gender and sexual minorities (Morris, 2016). Thus, future research should seek out and value the voices of diverse Black girls to improve disciplinary outcomes for all.

In addition, this thesis did not address issues of colourism and featurism. A few participants in this study described educators' resistance to bonnets/hair scarves/coverings and remarks about their natural hair. As this thesis focused broadly on Black girls' racialized and gendered disciplinary experience in schools, delineating between the experiences of proximity to

Whiteness are details that I did not ask of participants. Thus, I recommend further investigation into how proximity to Whiteness, for example, lighter skin tone and looser hair texture, enable Black girls to navigate more effortlessly within an institution that continues to uphold white Eurocentric ideals.

Although my thesis focuses on Black girls' disciplinary experiences and the link to school-to-confinement pathways, none of my participants could speak to the experience of being incarcerated. Many participants in this study described mechanisms of punishment that are not considered formal types of discipline such as suspensions, expulsions, or arrests. Thus, this last recommendation is two-fold. First additional research should focus on Black women's reflections who have actually been incarcerated to add to the conclusions drawn. Secondly, future research should also consider informal forms of punishment that subject Black girls to humiliation and microaggressions. According to Wun (2016b), focusing only on formal disciplinary policies and their effects overlooks how Black girls are criminalized for seemingly normal behaviours. To truly address disciplinary disparities, future research needs to recognize how everyday forms of punishment are ingrained into systems of oppression for Black girls in their schools (Wun, 2016b).

Participant Recommendations

One of the main reasons I preferred to interview adult Black women who had completed their K-12 education rather than current students was so that I could hear their recommendations. Specifically, besides hearing the stories of their experiences, I also wanted to hear and honour their ideas for how to promote more positive disciplinary encounters for Black girls. When I asked for their ideas, every participant spoke passionately about the changes they feel are urgently required to counter the prevailing anti-black disciplinary outcomes. These changes

would need to be made by school personnel if they are sincere about improving disciplinary encounters and promoting inclusive environments. Because the participants' practical solutions were very similar, I have chosen to summarize them in Table 5 below.

<i>Table 5: Participants' Proposed Recommended Future Action</i>			
Major Research Finding	General Recommendation	Practical Application	Example Response
Harsher disciplinary interventions	Strengthen relationships with Black girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Acknowledge their strengths b. Listen to understand c. Provide opportunities for cultural expression 	<i>"I think if things were more of a conversation with Black girls, as opposed to speaking down to them and not giving them a chance to really explain... I think teachers and principals, they hear us but they're not listening to understand us. That would change the feeling of the disciplinary action."</i>
Historical perceptions of the embodied Black girl	Offer professional development on Black culture and on implicit bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provide specific training on Black culture b. Challenge racial biases c. Scaffold disciplinary outcomes for students d. Include third-party mediators when needed 	<i>"I just think that no matter how much unlearning people try to do, their unconscious bias still jumps to the forefront when it comes to disciplining Black female students. I think the only way that we can make a positive experience for Black female students is to really challenge and change your unconscious bias towards how Black women are perceived. I honestly just think it comes down to education and personalized experiences that would really help people open their eyes and try to change their way of thinking."</i>
Development of self-understanding and disengagement	Increased representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Hire more Black educators who understand the system 	<i>"Teach me more about my culture and my history. Obviously more Black teachers will be more fun. I feel like we'll be more open and then</i>

		b. Include more Black cultural content in the curriculum	<i>obviously they understand us. They understand what we're trying to do. I feel like they will have a way of getting into our heads or just being a role model for us at school."</i>
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Conclusion

By utilizing a counter-narrative research framework to honour Black women's voices, my thesis examined the ways in which seven Black women experienced school disciplinary mechanisms as girls attending Ontario's publicly funded K-12 schools. As a Black female educator and researcher myself, I was particularly interested in this area of research as I have strong memories of my own disciplinary experiences in school. White girls faced discipline, too, but as I reflected on memories of what it was like as a young Black girl in school, I am reminded of an environment where I was constantly seen but rarely heard. I was often singled out in groups of students for being loud or disruptive and known by my school teachers for having a "bad attitude." In my school community, I was frequently reprimanded about my choice of attire. The length of my skirt or wearing a headscarf resulted in multiple conversations with the administration and a long history of needing to speak out in my defence. I was rarely afforded the privilege of asking questions and I was often discouraged from speaking my mind. Having now worked in Ontario's public schools for over a decade, I have noticed that very little has changed. Young Black girls now turn toward me for empowerment as they try to navigate their encounters with stereotyping, microaggressions, and discriminatory discipline.

My semi-structured interviews with seven self-identified Black women demonstrated how critical it is that we address discipline disparities for Black girls. The stories the study participants shared revealed that Black girls are subject to disciplinary action that is influenced by their educator's preconceptions of historical stereotypes. For the Black women in my study,

such preconceptions led to harsher disciplinary encounters, punishment that is deeply rooted in historical perceptions, and the development of harmful self-understandings.

I thus call for a change to disciplinary practices that perpetuate Black girls' oppression in schools. As the participants highlighted in their recommendations, educators need to find ways to build relationships with Black girls in order to understand cultural differences. I encourage educators to use instances of perceived attitude, defiance, and/or loudness as opportunities for self-reflection and to consider how they may be contributing to the oppression of Black girls in their learning environments. In addition, educating educators on the systemic inequalities faced by Black girls and the need to adjust discriminatory thinking patterns could help mitigate these challenges. Finally, I suggest that policymakers consider reforming dress code policies to disrupt disproportionate disciplinary outcomes.

Through analyzing and consolidating the experiences of participants, my study contributes to scholarship concerning Black girls and school discipline within a Canadian context. Still, given the limitations of my study, further research is needed, including on informal forms of punishment and the multiplicity of Black girls' identities. Despite such limitations, this study serves as a domain for Black girls' voices to be heard. Let us all learn from their experiences.

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Appendix A



CALL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS!

- **Are you of Black or African Descent?**
- **Do you identify as a woman?**
- **Have you ever been unfairly disciplined, suspended, or expelled in a K-12 school in Ontario?**
- **Are you 18-25 years old?**

If you answered **YES** to all of the questions above, then **I WANT TO INTERVIEW YOU** for an REB-approved master's thesis study! Interviews will be about 1 hour long and will inquire about your disciplinary experiences in school. If you are interested in participating or have additional questions about this study please **DM ME** or contact me at:
blmckenl@lakeheadu.ca

Appendix B



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Letter of Information

Dear Potential Participant,

The purpose of this letter is to provide information about my research project that you are invited to participate in. Taking part in this study is voluntary. Before you decide whether or not you would like to take part in this study, please read this letter carefully to understand what is involved. After you have read the letter, please contact me with any questions you may have.

PURPOSE

The title of my research project is Black Girls and School Disciplinary Mechanisms. The purpose of this study is to examine how Black girls experience school disciplinary practices and policies. To attain this data, I plan to ask participants to reflect on their disciplinary experiences in schools. The following research question will guide my study: *In what ways do Black girls experience school disciplinary practices and policies?*

I am a second year, Master of Education student at Lakehead University and secondary school teacher. My experiences as a Black woman navigating not only formal education but also societal experiences have opened my eyes to social injustices experienced by many marginalized groups. My goal is to further understand the disciplinary experiences of the participants, and to utilize this data to address any observed educational inequities.

WHAT INFORMATION WILL BE COLLECTED?

In a pre-interview questionnaire, you will be asked 5 self-identifying questions and 3 socioeconomic status identification question. You will be asked to self-identify your name, age, race, sex, and gender. To be inclusive of the experiences of cisgender, transgender, and gender non-conforming Black womxn, the criterion for this study is to self-identify as a Black woman regardless of biological sex. In addition, you will also be asked to describe your current socioeconomic status, childhood social class, and any other identities you wish to share. This information will be stored by me in password protected files on my personal computer while completing the research project. All personal data will be destroyed following completion of the program.

WHAT IS REQUESTED OF ME AS A PARTICIPANT?

I would like to interview you for data gathering purposes. You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that will take approximately 1 hour to complete. You will be asked to reflect on your experiences with school disciplinary practices and policies. You may decline to answer any question.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?

Your participation in my research project is entirely voluntary. As a research participant, your rights include: the right to not participate; to withdraw at any time during the data collection phase without prejudice to pre-existing entitlements; to continue any meaningful opportunities whether or not you choose to continue to participate; to opt out without penalty; to have any collected data withdrawn and not included in the study (until completion of the data collection phase of the study, if you choose to opt out any data pertaining to your participation will be destroyed); to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality;



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and to safeguards for security of data. If audio taping of the interview is needed, your consent to do so will be obtained.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND BENEFITS?

Your participation in this research project will provide viewpoints to challenge educational inequities and to promote anti-racist education within schools. Some potential benefits may include self-acknowledgment, a sense of purpose, self-awareness, empowerment, healing, and providing a voice for future generations of Black girls. You will be notified directly when you can receive a copy of the final thesis. There is no foreseeable harm associated with participating in my research.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE MAINTAINED?

Your interview data will not be associated with any self-identifying information. Your confidentiality will be guaranteed as I will replace the identities of participants, individuals, and locations mentioned with pseudonyms. Your data will be safely stored in password protected files on my computer and only I as the researcher will have access to this information. All self-identifying data will be destroyed following completion of the program. Anonymized research data will be kept for a period of five years, after which it will be destroyed.

RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION:

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study **OR** if at any time you wish to withdraw from the study, please contact me:

Bryana McKenley, BA, BEd
Email: blmckenl@lakeheadu.ca.

In addition, you may also contact Dr. Gerald Walton (supervisor) by email at gwalton@lakeheadu.ca or the Faculty of Graduate Studies Education at (416) 736-5016.

To have any collected data withdrawn and not included in the study please request it at the time of withdrawal.

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL:

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at [807-343-8283](tel:807-343-8283) or research@lakeheadu.ca.

Your support as a participant will be a valued component to my study.

Thank you,

Bryana McKenley



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Participant Consent Form**Study Title:** Black Girls and School Disciplinary Mechanisms

I, _____, (participant name) have read and understood the above information, including the potential risks and benefits of the study. I hereby consent to my participation in the research.

I understand:

- The potential risks and benefits of the study;
- My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the study at any point during the data collection period;
- I may choose not to answer any questions;
- All information gathered will be treated confidentially;
- All data will be securely stored by the researcher while completing the program, and will then be securely stored for 5 years before being destroyed, as per Lakehead University's policy; and
- I will not be identifiable in any written documentation resulting from this research, unless I explicitly agree to have my identity revealed.

Furthermore, I understand that I will be notified upon completion of the thesis and if I request it, I will be provided with a copy.

(Print Name)_____
(Signature)_____
(Date)

If requested by the student researcher, I hereby consent to be audio recorded as indicated by my signature below

(Print Name)_____
(Signature)_____
(Date)

Please sign and return this form to me, the student researcher. A copy of this consent form will be provided to the instructor. For further information concerning the completion of this form, please contact:

Bryana McKenley, BA, BEd
 Email: blmckenl@lakeheadu.ca