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Black Preschool Minds Matter:
A Critical Examination of Preschool Teacher Beliefs About
Discipline

By
Michelle DeJohnette

Claremont Graduate University
and San Diego State University
2022

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Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Michelle DeJohnette as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

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Abstract

**Black Preschool Minds Matter:
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By
Michelle DeJohette**

Claremont Graduate University and
San Diego State University: 2022

Preschoolers are more likely to be expelled than children in any other grade, at more than three times the rate of school-age children. Further, this phenomenon is racialized and gendered. Boys have been expelled at 4.5 times the rate of girls, and Black boys have been twice as likely to be pushed out of their preschool program than their peers (Gilliam et al., 2016). Although Black children comprise only 18.9% of the preschool population, they have been 48% of the total preschool children who received one or more out-of-school suspensions. This unequal suspension rate is one of the most important factors hindering academic progress for Black children, particularly Black boys, and sets them on the path to the preschool-to-prison pipeline. This research study built on existing theory showing teachers' beliefs and biases are a possible factor in K–12 contexts (Gregory et al., 2010; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011), further developing understanding about racial and gendered disparities in preschool discipline. Using the tenets of critical race theory and whiteness as property, this study critically examined how the construct of whiteness has influenced preschool teachers' beliefs about discipline and how they have implemented discipline. Findings suggested school discipline maintains white hegemonic school culture and has negatively affected Black children disproportionately. Building on whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), specifically the right to exclude others, I concluded discipline, as it

currently exists in early childhood education, is a form of white property that must be dismantled.

Keywords: Black boys, behavior, children, critical race theory, discipline, early childhood education, preschool, preschool-to-prison pipeline, suspension

Dedication

This research study is dedicated to my father, John DeJohnette, who always told me I could fly . . . and then somehow lost his wings.

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It has been a long 5-year journey to this finish line and there were many times that I asked myself if I waited too late to pursue a PhD. At some point, with the help of my loved ones, a shift in thinking occurred. When those negative thoughts came, I reminded myself that I was right where I was supposed to be. I want to acknowledge those who have been there through it all. From the bottom of my heart, I believe it takes a Village. This most certainly would not have been possible without mine. Starting with my family:

Imani, mi amor, giving birth to you has been my absolute greatest achievement. Thank you for being my greatest inspiration and my loudest cheerleader. I taught you, as your grandfather taught me, that saying “I can’t” is not an option. It is my hope that this achievement demonstrates that lesson for you. Please remember that no matter how many obstacles lie ahead of your goal; yes, you can.

Nikki, I do not have the words to articulate what you have added to my life. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that God sent you and your family to Imani and me. The countless conversations (even when we disagree), laughter, and tears have been instrumental in shaping my life and directing my growth. Our friendship allows me to be just me, with all my flaws, transparent and vulnerable. You knew I could do this, and you never let me lose sight of God’s plan for my life. You see me and you love me unconditionally. For that, I am eternally grateful.

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P.J., our parents told so many stories about their childhood and ours. Being born 6 days apart means that I have known you since before I can remember (but I will always remember that I am older!). I cannot count how many times you told me you were proud of me and took ownership of being able to call me “Dr. Little Mitzi.” I love you so very much.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Purpose of the Study.....	4
1.2 Research Questions	5
1.3 Definition of Terms	5
1.4 Significance of the Study.....	7
1.5 Overview	7
Chapter 2: Literature Review	9
2.1 Significance of Early Childhood Education	9
2.2 Educational Requirements for Preschool Teachers	11
2.3 The Need for a Culturally Responsive Workforce	13
2.4 Cultural Mismatch Between Teachers and Students	15
2.5 Teacher Beliefs	19
Teacher Beliefs About Social Emotional Development.....	21
Teacher Beliefs About Discipline	22
Teacher Beliefs About Black Boys	24
2.6 Race, Racism, and Early Childhood Education.....	26
Criminalizing Black Children.....	26
Implicit Bias	27
Whiteness	29
Internalized Racism	30
2.7 Discipline.....	31
Discipline vs. Behavior Guidance	34
2.8 Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support – Lack of Cultural Component.....	34
2.9 Theoretical Framework	36
Color Evasiveness	37
Tenets of Critical Race Theory in Education	38
Centrality of Race and Racism	38
Challenging the Dominant Ideology	38
Centrality of Experiential Knowledge.....	39
The Interdisciplinary Perspective	39
Commitment to Social Justice	40
Whiteness as Property	41
Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit)	43
A CRT Rationale for This Study	44
2.10 Discipline as White Property.....	45
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	47
3.1 Research Design	47
3.2 Research Questions	47
3.3 Setting and Participants	48
Setting.....	48
Participants and Recruitment.....	50
3.4 Data Collection.....	52

Interviews	52
3.5 Data Analysis.....	54
Phase 1 – Descriptive Coding.....	55
Phase 2 – Thematic Coding.....	55
3.6 Protection of Human Subjects	56
3.7 Limitations.....	56
3.8 Researcher Positionality	57
3.9 Researcher Reflexivity	58
Chapter 4: Findings	60
4.1 Whiteness as Property	62
Rules and Developmentally Appropriate Practice	64
Teacher Beliefs	68
4.2 Anti-Blackness	73
4.3 Color Evasiveness	78
Avoiding Racial Discussions.....	78
4.4 Performative Antiracism	83
Implicit Bias Training.....	83
4.5 Reactive Antiracism	87
4.6 Summary.....	90
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	91
5.1 Discussion.....	91
Whiteness as Property	93
Color Evasiveness and Implicit Bias.....	95
Performative Antiracism	98
Reactive Antiracism	99
5.2 Summary.....	100
5.3 Recommendations	102
5.4 Future Research	104
References	106
Appendix	155

List of Tables

Table 1: Participant Demographics	49
Table 2: Themes and Subthemes	61

Chapter 1: Introduction

Early childhood is a critical time for a child's development and early childhood education impacts millions of children in the United States every year (Bouffard, 2017). In *The State of Preschool 2018 Annual Report*, Friedman-Krauss et al. (2019) stated public preschool programs nationwide served nearly 1.58 million 3- and 4-year-old children during the 2017–2018 school year. Preschool is a place for young children to develop socially, emotionally, and cognitively, in addition to developing their own identities and behavior patterns (Essien, 2017; Rashid, 2009). This development builds a foundation for future academic and career success; however, quality of early childhood education and sustained access to quality services for children vary across race, gender, and socioeconomic status.

Gilliam (2005) reported, nationwide, 4-year-olds were expelled at a rate about 50% greater than 3-year-olds, and boys were over 4.5 times as likely as girls to be suspended or expelled. Moreover, Black preschoolers attending state-funded programs were expelled at about twice the rate of Latino or white children and were more than 5 times as likely to be expelled as Asian American children. The U.S. Department of Education found similar outcomes in a national data set. The purpose of the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) is to compile data on key education and civil rights issues in our nation's public schools. The CRDC (2016) compiled for the 2013–2014 school year included data from 28,783 public schools nationwide and reported white children represented 41% of preschool enrollment and represented 28% of preschool children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions. Conversely, Black students represented 19.5% of preschool enrollment; however, they comprised 48.6% of preschool children suspended one or more times. Furthermore, Gilliam et al. (2016) reported Black boys were 3 times as likely as girls to be suspended one or more

times. Additionally, Black boys comprised only 18.9% of the male preschool population but made up 45% of the total male preschool children who received one or more out of school suspensions. Similarly, the CRDC reported boys were 78% of the preschool children who were suspended one or more times during the 2013–2014 school year. Of those boys, 46% were Black.

Disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion of Black boys have continued into K–12 schooling. Beaudry et al. (2015) reported 24% of Black public-school students in kindergarten through 12th grade have been suspended at least once. This unequal suspension rate is one of the most important factors hindering academic progress, maintaining the racial achievement gap for Black boys (Aratani et al., 2011; Dancy, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Morris & Perry, 2016; Wright & Ford, 2016), and could potentially place a child on a life course trajectory of social and academic failure (Dancy, 2014; Morris & Perry, 2016; Mowen & Brent, 2016; Noguera, 2009; Rocque & Paternoster, 2019). Continued hindered progress can lead to school disengagement, dropouts, and later involvement in the criminal justice system, referred to as the school-to-prison-pipeline (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011; Skiba et al., 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003).

By fourth grade, 58% of Black students are below basic reading levels, and 40% are below basic math levels. Gregory et al. (2010) synthesized research on how disproportionate discipline may contribute to a racial achievement gap. The authors argued multiple factors contribute to racial and ethnic discipline disparities, including race, poverty, and differential behavior. They defined differential behavior as students from particular ethnic groups exhibiting unwanted behavior more than students from other racial groups. However, Gregory et al. noted both earlier and more recent studies have found no evidence of racial and ethnic differences in student behavior as an explanation for the gap in disciplinary action (Dinkes et al., 2007;

McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba et al., 2002; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Wu et al., 1982). Gregory et al. posited schools and teachers should be considered as possible contributors to the disproportionate discipline of Black students. Moreover, Toldson et al. (2015) drew a connection between academic achievement of students marginalized by race, ethnicity, disabilities, and language and the exclusionary discipline of these students, arguing “the achievement gap and the discipline gap are inextricably connected” (p. 1).

Although Gregory et al. (2010) and Toldson et al. (2015) focused on the K–12 context, Wood et al. (2017) reported minimal attention has been given to educational experiences of Black boys during early childhood years. Exclusionary discipline during this crucial time in Black children’s education disproportionately denies students equitable learning opportunities (Gilliam, 2005). Although there has been little research explaining why Black preschoolers disproportionately receive exclusionary discipline (Gilliam et al., 2016), similar studies in K–12 contexts have found teachers’ beliefs and biases are a possible factor (Gregory et al., 2010; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). In fact, Gilliam et al. (2016) identified implicit bias’s role when they discovered preschool teachers focused more attention on Black boys when they were asked to observe video clips of children to identify what the teacher believed to be challenging behavior.

Implicit bias refers to stereotypes and attitudes affecting one’s decision-making in an unconscious manner (Staats et al., 2015). Various scholars agree implicit bias has been pervasive across people and institutions, including teachers and schools (Carter et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2015; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Research has shown teachers’ implicit biases can influence how they respond to children’s classroom behaviors (McIntosh et al., 2014; Milner, 2011; Monroe, 2009; Skiba et al., 2002).

Disproportionate exclusionary discipline in early years of education may also be related to preschool teacher beliefs about discipline and what is called “challenging behavior,” as suggested by Gilliam’s (2016) identification of the role of implicit bias on teachers’ judgments about children’s behavior. Previous research has been conducted on preschool teacher beliefs, including whether teacher beliefs reflect developmentally appropriate practices (DAP; Buchanan et al., 1998; File & Gullo, 2002; Kim, 2011; Kowalski et al., 2001; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Smith, 1997), how education affects teacher beliefs (Fang, 1996; Gay, 2010; Renzaglia et al., 1997; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981), the relationship between beliefs and practices (Charlesworth et al., 1991; Smith & Shepard, 1988; Wen et al., 2011), and how teacher beliefs are shaped by participation in cultural communities (Garrity & Guerra, 2015; McGill-Franzen et al., 2002; Sanders et al., 2007; Wishard et al., 2003). However, there has been limited research focused on preschool teacher beliefs about discipline. The current study aimed to extend the research on preschool teacher beliefs by examining preschool teachers’ beliefs about discipline.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore preschool teachers’ beliefs about discipline through a critical race theory (CRT) lens to increase understanding of how these beliefs may influence how teachers decide to discipline preschool children in the classroom. CRT is a framework used to analyze race and racism and its intersections with other forms of subordination such as sexism and classism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). As such, CRT is an appropriate lens to examine teacher beliefs about discipline as possible contributors to the racially disproportionate exclusionary discipline in preschool programs.

Information from this study may be used to raise awareness of how teacher biases and beliefs may inform discipline practices, and to continue to shed light on exclusionary discipline in preschool and its specific implications for Black boys' lives beyond preschool.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How does the construct of whiteness influence how preschool teachers implement disciplinary action?

Research Question 2: How does the construct of whiteness influence preschool teachers' beliefs about discipline?

Definition of Terms

Exclusionary discipline involves removing students from the classroom learning environment as a form of punishment. There are two common forms: suspension and expulsion. Suspensions can be in-school or out-of-school. In-school suspension occurs when students are removed from the classroom but placed in a different part of the school. Out-of-school suspension occurs when the student is physically prohibited from entering the school campus. Determining whether the suspension will be served in or out of school depends usually on the severity of behavior (Wood et al., 2018). At the preschool level, there are fewer formal definitions and guidelines regarding suspension and expulsion, and in some states exclusionary discipline is not allowed (Stegelin, 2018).

Teacher beliefs were defined by Pajares (1992) as an individual's judgment about whether an idea or understanding is true or false. These personal judgments are created through a process of socialization and informed by the individual's opinions, attitudes, and values about what is deemed true about the learning environment.

Explicit bias is when someone makes a conscious, intentional action based on discrimination or negative feelings (Wesley & Ellis, 2017).

Implicit bias is based on involuntary, subconscious thoughts that may influence decision making and actions (Wesley & Ellis, 2017).

Racism refers to white racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination, supported by institutional power and authority, used to advantage whites and disadvantage people of color. Racism encompasses economic, political, social, and institutional actions and beliefs perpetuating an unequal distribution of privileges, resources, and power between white people and people of color (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

School-to-Prison Pipeline is the name for the phenomenon of suspensions and expulsions found to be a direct pathway to the criminal justice system. This journey begins in early childhood where Black boys disproportionately experience punitive disciplinary actions (Bryan, 2017).

Whiteness is the socialization process upholding a systemic white supremacist structure and can be enacted in many individual ways. i.e., normalizations and naturalizations of whiteness, white racial identity, color evasive racism, whiteness as property, white by laws, etc. (Matias, 2016).

In this research study I have borrowed from Dumas's (2016) and have capitalized the word Black when referencing Black people, as Black is understood as the socially constructed name of a group of people who share "a specific set of histories, cultural processes, and imagined and performed kinships" (pp. 12–13). Also, I have intentionally used the word Black instead of African American in this dissertation as these two terms are not interchangeable. White is not capitalized because it does not describe a group of people with shared history and kinships. It is

simply a social construct rooted in colonization and oppression. Anti-blackness and whiteness are written in lowercase because they also describe racialized social constructs, not groups of people.

Significance of the Study

The examination of preschool teacher beliefs about discipline will add to the extant literature on teacher beliefs in early childhood and extend work on exclusionary discipline in K–12 to Pre-K. Because teachers primarily initiate the discipline process, it is critical to examine their beliefs regarding student behavior (Erdena & Wolfgang, 2004). Exploring teachers' beliefs about discipline is necessary to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role they play in determining whether judgments concerning student behavior, especially of Black boys, contributes to exclusionary discipline practices.

This research supports the field of early childhood education to improve practice in terms of equitable disciplinary actions and to address the existence of teachers' beliefs and implicit biases impacting decisions to suspend or expel young children.

Overview

The organization of the proposal is as follows. Chapter 1 provides the statement of the problem and purpose of the study. Chapter 2 consists of a review of literature addressing the significance of early childhood education, teacher beliefs in different contexts related to this study, racism and implicit bias in schools, the theoretical framework, CRT, and a rationale for why I chose this framework for my research study. Chapter 3 provides an in-depth description of the research design, the study sample, the data collection procedure, data analysis, study limitations, researcher positionality, and researcher reflexivity. Findings are presented in Chapter

4. Discussion and recommendations for policy, practice, and future research are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

For this research study it is important to review the existing literature about teacher beliefs, how schools discipline students, and experiences of Black children in U.S. schools. The literature review begins with a discussion of the importance of quality early childhood education as the beginning of a child's educational journey and the varying ways teachers become qualified to teach preschool. Next, I explore teacher beliefs and different contexts of those beliefs applying to this study. The following sections cover issues of race, discipline, and the teaching workforce. The final section explains critical race theory (CRT), the theoretical framework guiding this study, and addresses why this particular framework was chosen.

Significance of Early Childhood Education

Early child development, between birth and 8 years of age, is a time when children learn critical thinking, problem solving, and social emotional skills, laying the foundation for long-term success in school, career, and life (Allen & Steed, 2016; Essien, 2017). Additionally, developing skills to create and sustain friendships, fostering healthy self-esteem and self-identity, and developing a sense of belonging in school all begin in early childhood (Flook et al., 2015; Hollingsworth & Winter, 2013; Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000; U.S. Department of Education and Health & Human Services, 2014).

The socio-emotional development of all children is substantially influenced by their participation in high quality early learning environments; especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Social-emotional development includes capacity to engage in cooperative activities, get along with others, and follow classroom rules and routines (MClelland et al., 2006; Zaslow et al., 2010). Three seminal longitudinal studies have shown significant effects of early childhood education on low-income Black children: (a)

the Abecedarian Project (Ramey & Campbell, 1984), (b) the High Scope Perry Preschool Study (Schweinhart, 1993), and (c) the Chicago Longitudinal Study (Reynolds et al., 1996). All three studies found children who attended high-quality early childhood education programs attained higher prosocial and educational levels than children who did not have these same experiences. More recently, Jones et al. (2015) examined data from 753 students to determine whether kindergarten teachers' ratings of children's prosocial skills predicted important adolescent and adult outcomes nearly 20 years later. The authors found statistically significant associations between measured social-emotional skills in kindergarten and young adulthood across areas such as education, employment, criminal activity, substance abuse, and mental health. Moreover, the authors concluded understanding characteristics of early childhood programs predicting future outcomes is important to help young children develop into healthy adults.

Despite research identifying the benefits of early childhood education, the likelihood of a child's enrollment in a high-quality preschool or childcare center differs depending on the child's race. For example, Black children were most likely to be enrolled in preschool, followed by white children, and Latino children were least likely to be enrolled (Child Trends, 2019). Although Black children may attend preschool or other early childhood environments such as childcare centers, family childcare, their early educational experience is usually of poorer quality than their white peers. Low-income children (who are disproportionately children of color), are the least likely to attend high-quality preschool programs (Duncan & Santy, 2015). Conversely, white preschoolers coming usually from more affluent families have tended to attend preschool earlier and have participated in more quality programs with smaller class sizes, higher adult-to-student ratios, and highly skilled staff (Barnett et al., 2013; Burchinal et al., 2008; Dowsett et al., 2008; Fuller et al., 2004; Hynes & Habasevich-Brooks, 2008).

Because of the development of socioemotional skills discussed above, quality of a young child's educational environment is critical to providing positive experiences and setting the foundation for academic success. Essien (2017) stated educational success of Black boys in the early learning context has been largely under examined. The teacher–student relationship is one aspect of a quality early learning environment; it has significant correlation with student outcomes including school adjustment, academic performance, and social-emotional learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). The importance of a positive student–teacher relationship in early childhood cannot be understated, as students' perceptions of school belonging and learning habits are formed during this time (Johns, 2016).

Educational Requirements for Preschool Teachers

Teachers take several different paths to become prepared for the classroom. According to the National Council on Teacher Quality (Putman et al., 2016), there are varied minimum requirements regarding course requirements and subject knowledge nationwide for K–12 teachers, but there is a typical baseline requirement of having at least a bachelor's degree and completing a teacher preparation program. However, national education requirements for preschool teachers lack even minimal consistency as different federal, state, and local programs have their own requirements (Putman et al., 2016). As of 2013, the federal Head Start program has required at least 50% of all Head Start teachers to hold at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood or a related major. Because this is a federal requirement, some Head Start preschool programs could be staffed with teachers who all have a bachelor's degree, and other centers could be staffed without any teachers with this degree (Putman et al., 2016). Forty-one states offer state-funded preschool programs, which all have different academic requirements for their teachers (Barnett et al., 2015). Twenty-four states require lead teachers in public preschools to

have a bachelor's degree (Barnett et al., 2015). Thirty-three state-funded preschool programs in 27 states require all teachers to have a bachelor's degree; 12 programs in 10 states require an associate degree, child development associate (CDA), or similar degree; and 12 programs in 10 states require a bachelor's degree for teachers in public settings, but not for teachers in non-public settings, where teachers may only need an associate degree, CDA, or high school diploma, even if the program receives public funding (Barnett et al., 2015). School districts in many states have their own educational requirements for preschool teachers. For example, teachers in a state-funded preschool program in California must have a child development permit or a teaching credential (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, n.d.). However, educational pathways vary depending on whether the preschool program is privately owned, a Head Start Program, or a nonprofit center (Putman et al., 2016).

Though many states are raising the minimum education requirement, with nearly half of all states requiring lead teachers in preschools to have earned at least a bachelor's degree, inconsistent teacher qualification standards in early childhood education have continued (Barnett et al., 2011). Prior research has shown teachers with more early childhood education have been more skilled than their peers with less formal education (Burchinal et al., 2008; Cassidy et al., 1995; McMullen, 1999; Howes et al., 1992; Howes, 1997; Whitebook et al., 1989). However, more recent research has not found consistent correlation between teacher education levels and classroom quality (Early et al., 2006; Early et al., 2007). Importantly, raising education requirements for early childhood teachers may add to the already racially imbalanced teacher workforce (Bassok, 2013) because white teachers typically obtain higher levels of education than teachers of color who are underrepresented among early childhood educators with 4-year degrees (Ackerman, 2005; Bassok, 2013; Early & Winton, 2001; Maxwell & Lim, 2006). It is important

to support educational opportunities for early childhood teachers, as research has shown teacher training increases the appropriateness of teacher beliefs and practices (Heisner & Lederberg, 2011).

The Need for a Culturally Responsive Workforce

Underrepresentation of teachers of color has been well established in the literature (Branch, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 2010; Matias & Grosland, 2016; Sleeter, 2017; Souto- Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). Because multicultural education in pre-teacher training has been scant, many teachers have started their careers with lack of exposure to people of differing cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2017). Teaching with little to no cultural awareness may often result in inaccurate beliefs about racially diverse children and families. Teacher education students have continued to be predominantly white, and they have grown more culturally and ethnically diverse. Gay (2010) mandated a shift in “ideological orientations” (p. 143) so culturally diverse children are not forced to conform to “Eurocentric norms” (p. 143) to receive a quality education. Therefore, teacher education programs must require preservice teachers to reflect deeply and critically on their beliefs and attitudes toward ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity and understand how these beliefs affect their classroom decision making. Howard (2016) posited white teachers have often been expected to be culturally competent when they have not been taught. Additionally, he argued “there will be no meaningful movement toward social justice and real educational reform until there has been a significant transformation in the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of white Americans” (Howard, 2016, p. 6).

Though much of the scholarly literature in education has focused on the need to increase the number of teachers of color (Branch, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2004, 2009; Milner & Howard, 2004; Quirocho & Rios, 2000; Toldson, 2011) to improve educational equity in K–12, fewer

studies have examined the racial disparity in the early childhood teaching force (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). This may be because although most teachers in preschool have been white teachers, there has been a higher percentage of non-white teachers in Pre-K than in K–12 (Whitebook et al., 2018). Additionally, disaggregate research of early childhood educators in elementary school (i.e., Grades K–3) has usually excluded many early childhood teachers of children ages 0–5 years (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016). It is also important to note only 30% (11% Black) of preservice teachers of color have entered the early childhood education field through traditional teacher education programs. This number is much higher (87%) for white teachers entering teacher certification programs through a college or university (Feistritzer et al., 2011; Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016).

The argument for increasing the number of teachers of color states if more teachers shared racial and cultural experiences with the students they teach, the pedagogy would be more culturally relevant. Research has indicated teachers of color have served as role models for all students (Villegas & Irvine, 2010), have improved academic experiences of students of color by serving as “cultural mediators” (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016, p. 11), have developed caring and trusting teacher–student relationships (Cheruvu et al., 2015), have been more sensitive to challenges encountered by students of color, and may have been more likely to implement a culturally sustaining pedagogy (Cheruvu et al., 2015; Gay et al., 2003; Irvine, 1998; Quicho & Ríos, 2000; Ríos & Montecinos, 1999; Villegas et al., 2012). However, there has been no evidence white teachers cannot be effective in educating students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Paley, 2000; Souto-Manning, 2013) or all teachers of color have created more equitable learning environments for Black children (Carter et al., 2017; Emdin, 2016; Laughter, 2011). Kunjufu (2002) similarly asserted race or gender of the teacher is not the most important in terms

of the academic achievement of Black students, but the teacher's expectations of students are most important.

Boutte et al. (2011) postulated anyone can contribute to systemic racism unless intentional actions are taken to avoid it. Further, Kohli (2014) argued many non-white people hold on to social perspectives advantaging white cultural norms. Teachers who have been socialized in a country built on white supremacy and educated in the same oppressive schooling system in which they now teach have internalized racist worldviews oftentimes resulting in negative perceptions of themselves, their racial group, and other minoritized racial groups (Huber et al., 2006). This can lead to teachers reproducing racist behavior unconsciously in teaching students who look like them.

Cultural Mismatch Between Teachers and Students

Although the early childhood teaching force has been racially, ethnically, and linguistically more diverse than the K–12 workforce, it has still been disproportionately white and female (Aud et al., 2013; Cheruvu et al., 2015; Earick, 2009; Phillips et al., 2016). Phillips et al. (2016) reported the early childhood workforce ethnic profile as 63% white, 17% Black, 14% Latino, and 5% other; although, the ethnic profile has varied depending on the setting and the occupational role in the setting (e.g., teachers versus assistant teachers and aides). Importantly, this racial diversity in the early childhood workforce has been mostly present in the lowest teaching positions. People in leadership positions have been more likely to be white and English speaking (New America, 2019).

Although the U.S. teaching force has remained predominantly white, the student population has been increasing in diversity (Bireda & Chait, 2011; Boser, 2014; Howard, 2007; Hussar & Bailey, 2019). In K–12 public schools, 77% of teachers have been female, 80% were

white, and more than half of students in U.S. public school classrooms have been children of color (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2019; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). The CRDC (2016) reported the prekindergarten population was 42% white, 19.5% Black, and 30% Latino. Krogstad (2019) posited racial demographics of current birth rates have given an indication of future student populations. In 2018, over 25% of babies born in the United States were Latino and Latinas/os are projected to make up 27% of the U.S. population by the year 2060. This trend is expected to continue as the projected U.S. population is expected to increase from 40% to 56% communities of color by the year 2060.

Oftentimes teachers have grown up in white suburban neighborhoods, attended predominantly white colleges and universities, and have had limited interactions with people of color (Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2010). This lack of interaction has left white teachers unprepared to teach a diverse student population effectively. Though many white preservice teachers have foreseen working with children with diverse cultural backgrounds, generally they have brought little knowledge and experience teaching diverse students (Sleeter, 2008). This cultural mismatch has often resulted in Black students taught by teachers with lower expectations of their academic ability and inability to form positive teacher–student relationships (Sleeter, 2008). This is especially important in early childhood education when development of critical social-emotional skills is a major developmental task. Research has shown social emotional development is connected to, and can even be facilitated by, quality of the teacher–student relationship, positively or negatively affecting student academic success (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Hughes et al., 2005; Pianta et al., 1995; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004).

An educator’s race or ethnicity is less important than their ability to identify problems of race in our society and schools. Teachers with knowledge of race and racism in our country and

how it relates to children of color in school can reflect critically on race-related issues in their classroom. Howard (2016) argued teachers cannot teach what they do not know, so reflective practice must go further than superficial talk about teaching a diverse student population. Therefore, there is a need to “actively engage pre-service teachers in discourses about how race plays out in schools, how students make meaning of race, and to what degree race and race-related issues influence students’ prospects for learning” (Howard, 2010, p. 125). Additionally, Milner and Laughter (2015) argued many teachers in preschool through secondary school are very uncomfortable discussing race and are more comfortable teaching children living below the poverty line than teaching Black students. When these teachers teach children who are Black and are living in poverty, they adopt colorblind ideologies and see their teaching practices as race neutral, claiming they treat all students the same. This begs the question, the same as who?

After the Civil Rights Era, some people have falsely believed they live in a “post-racial” society (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Howard & Flenbaugh, 2011) and therefore, a more meritocratic society (Williams & Land, 2006). This colorblind philosophy of teaching has exempted participants from facing issues of race or how race and class have played out in the learning process. Consequently, students have been held often to a standard of “normal” constructed from an ideology of whiteness, not inclusive of the diversity in ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Williams & Land, 2006). Additionally, teachers adopting a colorblind approach in viewing their students have failed to understand how social and systemic racism affects the lives of students of color inside and outside of the classroom (Allen, 2015), and their educational outcomes subsequently. Howard and Flenbaugh (2011) also pushed against the term post-racial and the perception race and racism are not significant factors in U.S. institutions, policies, and life

experiences. Allen (2015) compared relationships between Black male students and white teachers in the United States to experiences of communities of color in countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. The author argued students in these countries have also attended schools where white teachers have had deficit views of Black boys, and these students experienced disproportionate discipline. This comparison elucidates the ways “white ideological hegemony impedes educational progress for boys of color across geographical and social contexts” (Allen, 2015, p. 72). For example, Black boys have been marginalized continually in U.S. schools, as these institutions have reproduced the social stratification existing in the United States. This argument aligns with one of the main tenets of CRT stating race and racism are endemic and permeate the fabric of our society. Teacher educators must be willing and able to push their students to a state of disequilibrium about racial issues and help them to understand this feeling of discomfort is necessary for them to learn and grow. Teacher educators must be aware of their own cultural identity, biases, and how these beliefs and values have shaped their thinking about other cultures to foster equitable pedagogical practices effectively for future classroom teachers (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010).

Much of the scholarship discussed above (Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2006; Howard, 2010; Lewis & Toldson, 2013; Milner & Laughter, 2015; Sleeter, 2008) has addressed the need to focus on equity and diversity issues in preservice teacher education situated in Grades K–12. However, educational background requirements have differed for K–12 teachers and preschool teachers (Coplan et al., 1999; Harwood et al., 2013). Therefore, although many scholars have emphasized the importance of preparing teachers to address equity and diversity issues in their teaching and schooling practices (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 2010, 2018; Howard, 2006,

Jennings, 2007; Sleeter, 2001), establishing this as a requirement for Pre-K teachers has been undertheorized.

To address equity issues, teachers must be aware culture has informed expectations of certain behavioral “norms”. There is evidence disproportionate discipline has been influenced by teachers’ subjectivity of students’ behavior based on a cultural disconnect and negative beliefs white teachers often have had about Black children (Edwards, 2016; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Monroe, 2005).

Teacher Beliefs

Research has indicated teacher beliefs may be an underlying factor in foundations of student–teacher relationships (Gregory & Roberts, 2017; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019) and in decision-making about classroom discipline (Gilliam & Reyes, 2018; Hedge & Cassidy, 2009; Monroe, 2005). Kagan (1992) defined teacher beliefs as “tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught” (p. 65). Similarly, Kennedy (1997) and Pajares (1992) contended all teachers hold beliefs about their work, the subject they teach, their students, and their roles and responsibilities as a teacher when they enter the teaching field. These beliefs could be a product of their own upbringing, life experiences, socialization experienced in school, or current teaching contexts (Charlesworth et al., 1993; McMullen, 1997; Spodek, 1988). Additionally, Kennedy (1997) stated when teachers begin their career, they many believe “they already have what it takes to be a good teacher, and therefore they have little to learn from the formal study of teaching” (p. 14). Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981) posited many hours spent in pre-teacher education also help to shape teacher beliefs, and this may not become apparent until they begin practicing in the classroom. Although beliefs arise from several different sources, they are usually intermixed to form the teacher’s

belief system (McMullen, 1997) and are inseparable from their teaching practices (Holzberger et al., 2014).

A great deal of research on early childhood teachers' beliefs has focused on using developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), a construct foundational to conceptualizations of high-quality preschool programs. Therefore, tools measuring alignment of beliefs and practices were developed to measure teacher beliefs about DAP (Charlesworth et al., 1991, 1993; Hoot et al., 1996; Hyson & Lee, 1996). Researchers have measured the extent beliefs about DAP were reported or observed (Charlesworth et al., 1993; McMullen, 1997, 1998; Sherman & Mueller, 1996; Stipek & Byler, 1997), and whether teachers' beliefs about DAP aligned with their classroom practice (Charlesworth et al., 1993; Dunn & Kontos, 1997; Hatch & Freeman, 1988).

Hedge and Cassidy (2009) reported teacher beliefs have likely affected teacher practices and child outcomes. Studies of early childhood teachers have shown a consistent, yet moderate, relationship between teachers' reported beliefs and their observed practices (McMullen et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2008). Charlesworth et al. (1991, 1993) used the Teacher Beliefs Scale and the Instructional Activity Scale to measure 204 kindergarten teachers' self-reported DAP beliefs. The authors found teachers' reported practices were more likely to align with their beliefs. Additionally, teachers' beliefs have been shown to correlate with teacher-student interactions (Brunning et al., 2004), student outcomes (Davis, 1993; Kagan & Smith, 1988; Maxson, 1996; Yonemura, 1986), and school policy (Smith & Shepard, 1988). Clark and Peterson (1986) posited beliefs were a salient part of teachers' knowledge and reflected how teachers interpret, process, and execute decisions made in the classroom. Some scholars have argued the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practice may be different for teachers depending on the number of years they have worked as a teacher or the amount of professional development

the teacher has obtained (Peters & Sutton, 1984; Rosenthal, 1991); however, Wilcox-Herzog (1999) found no interaction effect in the relationship between beliefs and professional development with novice or veteran teachers. More recently, Trivette et al. (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of practitioner belief measures and different measures of early childhood practices and found early childhood teachers' beliefs do correlate to their classroom practice and their adoption of specific content. However, Cash et al. (2015) reported importantly how little has been known about early childhood teachers' beliefs contributing to children's development. The following sections discuss the aspects of teacher beliefs contributing to discipline decisions in preschools more specifically.

Teacher Beliefs About Social Emotional Development

Social emotional learning (SEL) is necessary for development of self-awareness, relationship skills, self-regulation, and problem solving, which are important to short- and long-term student achievement. It is critical for educators to address children's social emotional development as an important component of academic success (Banerjee et al., 2014; Durlak et al., 2011; Hollingsworth & Winter, 2013; Longstreth & Garrity, 2018; Zinsser et al., 2014). Studies have found preschool teachers have rated children's socialization skills in early childhood as more important than language and early math skills for kindergarten readiness and long-term school success (Hollingsworth & Winter, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2001; Zinsser et al., 2014). Additionally, Lee (2006) found teachers believed the preschool classroom should be a fun, stress-free environment with more focus on social and emotional wellness and less focus on academics.

Importantly, teachers' implementation of SEL has been influenced by their own SEL beliefs; therefore, it is critical to understand teacher beliefs about SEL (Collie et al., 2015;

Zinsser et al., 2014). These beliefs vary depending on the training and support teachers receive, their social emotional capacity, and/or school and geographic location (Brackett et al., 2011; Collie et al., 2012). Zinsser et al. (2014) conducted a mixed-methods study of about private preschool and Head Start teachers' SEL strategies. Though all teachers agreed preparing children emotionally and academically for kindergarten was important, their beliefs differed about emotions, the value of SEL, and the teachers' role in teaching children socialization and emotional regulation, informing their teaching practices in this area. Interestingly, this study also found teachers who felt responsible for teaching emotional skills did not always exhibit highly supportive teacher-child interactions. The authors reported this was important because their focus groups represented average U.S. preschool teachers. Even small differences in classroom quality can be traced back to teachers' individual beliefs about SEL and can have significant effects on preschoolers' classroom experiences and how teachers handle children's behavior (Zinsser et al., 2014); therefore, Brackett et al. (2012) argued it was important to assess these beliefs

Teacher Beliefs About Discipline

Disciplining students is one of the major responsibilities of being a teacher (Charles, 1996; Langdon, 1996; Lewis, 1999). According to Howard (1991), discipline refers to “systems of teaching, learning, and nurturing . . . which include procedures that encourage appropriate behavior and deter misbehavior according to the child's developmental abilities. The systems' ultimate goals are for the child to achieve competence, self-control, and self-direction” (p. 1351). Effective discipline is a major factor in education for two reasons. First, the teacher must maintain discipline in the classroom so teaching and learning can happen (Spettel, 1983). Secondly, teachers are responsible for teaching appropriate social skills to students (Peisner,

1991). Teachers discipline students according to their beliefs and expectations on appropriate behaviors (Erdena & Wolfgang, 2004). Glickman and Tamashiro (1980) developed a taxonomy for teachers to elucidate their beliefs about discipline so they could choose the strategy with which they were most comfortable. The authors posited teachers held assumptions about discipline and their behavior toward students either validated or invalidated their assumptions.

Coplan et al. (2014) examined preschool teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and emotional reactions to hypothetical preschool vignettes displaying different forms of classroom behavior. The authors found preschool teachers were less tolerant of "socially defiant and externalizing behaviors" (Coplan et al., 2014, p. 122) than more socially immature behaviors, similar to previous research on this topic situated in elementary school (Algozzine et al., 1983; Arbeau & Coplan, 2007; Chang & Sue, 2003; Cunningham & Sugawara, 1988; Safran & Safran, 1984). Hurd & Gettinger (2011) extend this research about elementary school teachers to preschool teachers because research has been very limited about preschool teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward behavior and discipline in early childhood classrooms.

Wolfgang (1999) argued teachers may have three different philosophies about discipline: relationship-listening, confronting-contracting, and rules-consequences. Relationship-listening is a humanistic approach (Gordon, 1989) to handle children's behavior, using minimum power and stems from the belief students can improve their own behavior. Confronting-contracting is grounded in social and developmental psychology where the teacher confronts the student about the behavior, and they agree on how the behavior will be changed. Lastly, the rules-consequences philosophy is the most controlling discipline process and is informed by experimental behaviorist psychology (Alberto & Troutman, 1990). The teacher using this

method of discipline identifies classroom rules and uses rewards and/or punishments to reinforce desired behavior.

Erdena and Wolfgang (2004) used the Beliefs About Discipline Inventory (BADI) to examine 130 female prekindergarten, kindergarten, K/1, and first-grade teachers' beliefs about using different discipline ideologies to address behavior of male versus female students. The study revealed teachers believe in using different discipline methods for male and female students. The authors found teachers used rules and consequences more often for male students' behavior than for females. Other researchers have found suspension or expulsion were some of the most severe consequences for a student exhibiting challenging behavior in early childhood classrooms (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Meek & Gilliam, 2016). Gilliam and Reyes (2018) determined it was difficult to pinpoint the exact factors contributing to a teacher's decision to expel a child from school; however, Martin et al. (2018) suggested preschool expulsion resulted from a series of adult decisions based on a combination of teacher bias and program needs. Though some program types like Head Start and public preschools have expelled students less often than faith-based or private preschools (Gilliam, 2005), research has shown Black preschoolers, particularly Black boys, have been at highest risk for this type of exclusionary discipline (Cyphert, 2015; Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam et al., 2016).

Teacher Beliefs About Black Boys

Excessive discipline has seemed to be a symptom of a deeper issue affecting how Black boys experience education. Previous studies have reported on issues of race and culture in schools and society and found the school discipline experience of Black children mirrored the unfair and targeted marginalization they experienced in the larger societal context (Bryan, 2017; Coles & Powell, 2019; Howard, 2010; Wood et al., 2019).

In their analyses of discipline data from several years at a U.S. high school, Gregory and Mosely (2004) found Black students represented approximately 37% of the school enrollment and approximately 80% of them received an in-school suspension, largely due to a predominantly white (73%) teaching staff punishing a predominantly Black segment of the student population consistently. Results showed most teachers' beliefs about discipline were "culture- and race-blind and could not account for the discipline gap" (Gregory & Mosely, 2004, p. 18). Gregory and Mosely posited when teachers do not see the gap, they are given an opportunity to avoid reflecting on their own beliefs, which may influence their discipline decisions. More recently, Bradshaw et al. (2010) found Black students had a higher chance of receiving disciplinary action than white students in elementary school. Similarly, Gallagher et al. (2013) studied a diverse group of kindergarten and first-grade students (30.9% white/non-Latino, 45.5% African American, 17% Native American, and 8% other) and 20 majority white female teachers. Teachers reported more conflict with boys and Black students at the end of the year, even after controlling for initial conflict levels with these students. Further, teachers reported they had less conflict with girls and white students over the course of the school year. These disparities may have resulted from internalized negative beliefs about Black students, likely stemming from societal views of Black people as criminals (Edwards, 2016; Ferguson, 2010; Wesley & Ellis, 2017; Wood et al., 2018). Daily student–teacher interactions are built on these underlying beliefs and may guide how teachers discipline their students (Edwards, 2016; Monroe, 2005; Weinstein, 2002).

Coles and Powell (2019) asked high school students to explore educational and societal issues negatively impacting Black and Brown urban youth. Most students described school suspensions as specifically targeting Black students. However, there has been little research

about how social constructs (Monroe, 2005) and teacher processes (Gregory & Mosely, 2004) relate to school discipline. Gregory and Mosely (2004) asserted teachers decide which students are considered a discipline problem; however, Monroe (2005) argued little has been known about how societal influences have possibly informed teachers' perceptions of Black students' behaviors. Monroe (2005) stated:

There is a particular need to understand how and why teachers' views of these students, particularly males, mediate their disciplinary actions in the classroom. Specifically, how do images of Black men and boys in society at large relate to teachers' notions about effective disciplinary strategies based on race and gender? (p. 46)

Interestingly, though preschoolers have been expelled more than 3 times as many times as K–12 students (Gilliam et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2014), research on teacher beliefs as contributors to disproportionate discipline has lacked in early childhood. This study contributes to literature by addressing discipline in preschool. However, history has shown negative treatment of Black students in education has not been a novel occurrence.

Race, Racism, and Early Childhood Education

Criminalizing Black Children

In the school discipline context, stereotypes about race and gender have criminalized Black children continually, reifying beliefs about Black boys as inherently deficient and in need of “social correction” (George, 2015, p. 102). These “assumptions of criminality” (Wood, 2019, p. 78) have been expressed in numerous ways in educational trajectories of many Black male students. Deficit perceptions of Black boys begin very early in their schooling experience and continue to be embedded in school as a reflection of society (Bryan, 2018; Carter et al., 2017), replicating inequities in school, society, and school discipline historically (Darensbourg et al.,

2010) and currently impacting educational outcomes due to educational and disciplinary disparities (George, 2015; Wood, 2019). Wood (2019) identified nine patterns in classrooms demonstrating assumptions of criminality for Black boys. The patterns associated with how teachers have identified perceived misbehavior in Black boys are (a) subjecting to continuous surveillance, (b) engaging with a sense of caution, (c) being singled-out for discipline, (d) receiving harsher punishments (often for minor actions), (e) misidentifying when no wrongdoing has occurred, (f) receiving quicker punishments (g) degrading and disrespecting for perceived slights, (h) subjecting to reverse causality, and (i) viewing actions through a disorder-based lens.

Importantly, these patterns of identifying Black male students as discipline problems are experienced not only in high school, middle school, or elementary school, but research has also shown deficit perceptions of Black male criminality are often displayed in preschool classrooms (Bryan, 2017; Vargas, 2021). Essien (2012) presented narratives from parents of Black children who described their early childhood experiences with discipline. Parents described how their children were often assumed as the perpetrator of wrongdoing when they did nothing or were singled out to be punished when a group of children all behaved similarly. The classroom has played an important role in preparing children for participating in society. However, preparation has still been dominated by white norms and values (Brown et al., 2010; Simson, 2013) rooted in negative perceptions of Black children. Internalized negative beliefs about Black children turn into subconscious biases influencing teachers' disciplinary practices (Gregory & Roberts, 2017).

Implicit Bias

Black students' behavior has been viewed more negatively compared to white students (Allen & Steed, 2016; Bryan, 2018; Carter et al., 2017; Gibson et al., 2014; Gilliam et al., 2016; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Skiba et al., 2002; Wesley & Ellis, 2017). These studies have all

suggested implicit bias may be a contributing factor in this racial disparity. Implicit bias refers to unconscious thought driving involuntary actions and decision making (Gilliam et al., 2016; Okonofua et al., 2016; Staats et al., 2015). Lewis and Toldson (2013) stated it was possible for teachers to operate “under an implicit association bias” (p. 19). Subconsciously, they may view Black children as aggressive, dangerous, and troublemakers (Devine & Elliot, 2000; Ferguson, 2010). As a result of this subconscious bias, their judgments and behaviors can be subjective and negatively biased, and when compounded with external negative messages received from other people and the media, teachers can have dismissive and condescending attitudes toward Black students and Black culture.

Additionally, studies have revealed a correlation between implicit bias and the use of exclusionary discipline in K–12 schooling (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Gregory & Roberts, 2017; Okonofua et al., 2016; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011; Skiba et al., 2014; Staats et al., 2015). As such, teachers’ implicit biases have been identified as salient components of teacher beliefs and subsequent decision-making in school discipline. Preschool teachers have also exhibited implicit bias. Gilliam et al. (2016) identified implicit racial bias in a study including 132 preschool and early childhood teachers who responded to young children’s behavior by watching videos of expected challenging behaviors. Participants viewed twelve 30-second video clips and were asked to identify children who the teacher felt may potentially exhibit a behavior problem. The authors used eye-tracking software to track how long a teacher dwelled on particular children versus how long they dwelled on all children. Though no challenging behaviors were present and typical preschool behavior was balanced between children of different races and genders, teachers stared longer at and expected challenging behavior from Black children, and Black boys more specifically. Results indicated the teacher’s perception of the child’s behavior

was negatively impacted by the child's race and gender (Gilliam et al., 2016). There is a need for preschool educators to examine how these biases may influence their use of exclusionary discipline, especially with Black preschool boys (Wesley & Ellis, 2017).

Whiteness

Whiteness is an ideology and social construct “uphold[ing] a white supremacist structure” (Matias, 2016, p. 185) manifested in areas of white privilege, including white normative values, white racial identity, colorblind racism, and other advantages granted to whites and denied to people of color (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). CRT traces how whiteness, white dominant ideology, and white privilege are operationalized in institutions to create hierarchies benefitting some communities and oppressing others (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Leonardo, 2002). Schools and school districts are examples of institutions of whiteness. The following two studies used the lens of CRT to examine whiteness in schools with nearly identical results, illuminating how societal institutional patterns and structures are mirrored in the U.S. educational system. Vaught and Castagno (2008) examined interview data from teachers and administrators from two different school districts who attended antibias, professional development training. The authors found the training not only failed to give the teachers and administrators a deeper understanding of how whiteness and white privilege manifests in schools, but also confirmed existing racist school structure “reify[ing] existing, culturally constructed racist frameworks” (Vaught & Castagno, 2008, p. 110). Specific to the preschool context, Adair (2014) interviewed 50 preschool teachers in five cities across the United States and found whiteness prevented these teachers from positive engagement with young children of color in border communities. It is important to understand critical race

discourse and scholarship on whiteness is not a fundamental assault on white people, but rather a denouncing of power constructed from the ideology of whiteness (Gillborn, 2005).

Internalized Racism

You don't have to be white to be anti-Black.

– personal communication, E. Martinez Jr., PhD

Although teachers in previously described studies by Vaught and Castagno's (2008) and Adair's (2014) were nearly 100% white, having adopted white hegemonic ideology as shown by their actions and attitudes as educators, white teachers and administrators are not alone in adopting this perspective. Because of the racialized attitudes and actions pervasive in every institution in the United States (Bell, 1992) and reproduced in U.S. school systems for centuries (Adair, 2014; Anyon, 1997; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Howard, 2019; Khalifa, 2015; Kozol, 2012; McKenzie, 2009; Perez Huber et al., 2006; Vaught & Castagno, 2008; Weissglass, 2001), many people of color have internalized the racism they have experienced (Murtadha & Watts, 2005) and have accepted racial hierarchy as part of life (Fanon, 1967; Gilman, 1986; hooks, 1995; Memmi, 1965; Perez Huber et al., 2006). This internalized racism, usually defined as the racist beliefs and stereotypes started by white supremacy with the intent of oppressing people of color, permeated the psyche of the oppressed (Khalifa, 2015; Kohli, 2014; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Kunjufu (2002) posited teacher's expectations of Black students are more important to the student's academic achievement than the teacher's race or gender.

People of color in these roles are also culprits of racist behavior and attitudes (Howard, 2010; Kunjufu, 2002; Laughter, 2011) as they have been socialized in a society normalizing white dominant culture as "normal" (Omni & Winant, 1994). Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) defined socialization as "our systematic training into the norms of our culture. Socialization is

the process of learning the meanings and practices that enable us to make sense of and behave appropriately in that culture” (p. 36). Teachers of color who have experienced internalized racism can consciously or subconsciously reproduce behaviors creating negative outcomes for Black children if they do not engage in deep, critical self-reflection to disrupt reproduction of racism based on ideologies of white supremacy (Kohli, 2014).

In schools, Black teachers and administrators have disciplined Black students even more harshly than white students to force them to assimilate to the status quo (Khalifa, 2015). This perspective has been viewed ironically as a method of protecting Black students from the “white world in which [they] live” (Khalifa, 2015, p. 15). Many Black people believe if they do not conform to the white-dominant culture, which dictates, in part, how one behaves, it is impossible to be successful in society (hooks, 1995). This internalized racism and self-hatred has existed for decades (Fanon, 1967; Gilman, 1986; hooks, 1995), allowing some Black educators to “mimic the behavior and attitudes of their oppressors, and themselves victimize others of their own group over whom they have power” (Anyon, 1997, p. 18).

Discipline

There was a time when discipline was viewed very differently than it is today. Before *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which ruled separate schools for Black and white students unconstitutional, students in all-Black schools succeeded because of positive teacher–student relationships and nurturing and supportive discipline practices more in line with the definition given by pediatricians discussed earlier (Howard, 1991). Pre-*Brown*, Black students were disciplined in a manner fostering academic achievement and developmental skills rather than excluding children from the learning environment (Milner, 2020). Currently, school discipline

has been conflated with punishment. Milner (2020) has asserted the word “discipline” has been a misnomer and using the word “punishment” would more accurately describe current practices.

Research has shown punishment has been used as a means of disciplining children since the public-school system began (Dupper & Dingus, 2008; Durkheim, [1925]1973; Losen, 2011; Lyons & Drew, 2006; Morris & Howard, 2003). Punitive methods have included verbal warnings, corporal punishment, detention, and in- and out-of-school suspensions (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Sugai & Horner, 1999; Townsend, 2000). Educators began using out-of-school suspension to enforce desired behavior in the 1960s (Adams, 2000) and have continued this practice. According to Sugai and Horner (2002), many educators have created discipline policies with the goal of teaching students they have violated a school rule and their choice of behaviors would not be tolerated. However, research has shown punitive forms of discipline, though common, have been ineffective in changing children’s behavior over time (Garnes & Menlove, 2003; Sugai & Horner, 2002) and have only created temporary solutions to behavioral issues in school. Sugai and Horner (2002) stated, “By themselves, these reactive responses are insufficient to meet the challenge of creating safe schools and positive school climates and maximizing teaching time and learning opportunities” (p. 26).

The high rate of school suspensions and expulsions has partially resulted from the U.S. public school’s “zero-tolerance policy,” enacted in 1986 as a result of President’s George H.W. Bush’s war on drugs and the “broken window” policing theory created by Wilson and Kelling (1982). The authors argued small incidences of misbehavior would eventually turn into larger ones and schools would prevent more severe behavioral misconduct such as fighting or physical aggression by not tolerating small issues (Dupper & Bosch, 1996; Imich, 1994; Menacker et al., 1988; Skiba et al., 1997; Stone, 1993). Further, the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act mandated

schools to suspend students who brought weapons to school for 1 year or they would risk losing federal funding (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Since then, students have been removed from campus for far less violent behavioral issues such as violating the dress code, missing school (Morgan-D'Atrio et al., 1996; Richart et al., 2003), and bringing Tylenol to school without a doctor's note (Hanson, 2005). In these contexts, the objective has been to remove the students not following the rules from school and deter others from following suit (Ewing, 2000). In turn, this would keep the campus safe and allow other students to learn (Darensbourg et al., 2010; Ewing, 2000). In practice, there has been no evidence this policy has in fact kept schools safer (APA, 2008; George, 2015; Gregory et al., 2010). In fact, the American Psychological Association (2008) stated removing children from school "appears to have negative effects on student outcomes and the learning climate" (p. 10). Remarkably, discipline policies implemented to keep students safe from weapons and school violence in secondary schools (Morris & Perry, 2016) have trickled down to suspension and criminalization of young children in elementary school (Rocque & Paternoster, 2011; Stelloh, 2019) and preschool for innocuous behaviors educators have deemed worthy of punishment (Unruh, 2015). These discipline policies have appeared to have a disproportionate effect on children of color (Cyphert, 2015; Howard, 2008; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Mitchell, 2014; Skiba et al., 2004; Skiba, 2014).

Like other inequities in education, racially disproportionate discipline, including suspension and expulsion is not a new concept. Carter et al. (2017) argued racial discipline disparities have been a result of biases and stereotypes created by a history of racial division in the United States. Therefore, it is impossible to tell the entire story of racial discipline disparities without including the full range of racialized current and historical factors framing the educational experience in the United States.

Discipline vs. Behavior Guidance

Schmidt (1982) posited behavior guidance rather than discipline has been a more constructive approach to teach appropriate behaviors to young children. Gartrell (1997) concurred with these views by stating teachers should think beyond “conventional classroom discipline” (p. 34) to a behavior-guidance approach with a goal of developmentally and culturally responsive education to create a more positive learning environment. Children must be taught how to be responsible through developmentally and culturally appropriate guidance rather than reactive methods of control. Gartrell (1997) further stated children learn social-emotional skills needed to work together, make decisions, and solve problems verbally through the method of behavior guidance. Teachers using guidance instead of punishment understand children make mistakes and learning these social skills takes many years to master. The teacher helps children learn from their mistakes rather than punishing the student for making them. Rather than relying on traditional, punitive disciplinary actions when attempting to manage student behavior, comprehensive systems of behavior support have been implemented in many schools nationwide.

Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support – Lack of Cultural Component

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is defined as a framework consisting of a systems approach to enhance capacity of schools, families, and communities to design effective environments improving teaching and learning environments (Sugai et al., 2000). PBS is not a new construct. It has roots in psychology via the theory of applied behavior analysis, but it has progressed from special education settings to general education (Safe & Civil Schools, 2019). Sugai and Simonsen (2012) reported the need to improve student behavioral interventions began in the 1980s. As a result, the University of Oregon created an approach to decrease behavioral issues in schools and increase positive student behavioral and social outcomes. Subsequently, the

Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997 (IDEA) created a Center on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) for students with challenging behaviors (Carr et al., 2002). According to Sugai and Simonsen (2012), PBIS was created to establish evidence-based behavioral interventions for students with behavior disorders, but thereafter moved to a school-wide behavior support for all students.

The pyramid model was developed as a framework of PBS for early childhood environments (Hemmeter et al., 2006). The pyramid model is a multi-tiered system of support which includes universal, secondary, and tertiary supports paying specific attention to nuances of early childhood settings and social emotional needs of young children and their families (Hemmeter et al., 2016).

Use of PBS in schools has been criticized because it is based on dominant cultural hegemonic norms (Utley et al., 2002). Responding to the immediate need to address disproportionate rates of exclusionary discipline and critiques of current PBS use in schools, researchers have conceptualized more culturally inclusive behavior-guidance frameworks. Gregory and Mosely (2004) proposed a culturally relevant discipline (CRD), which included race and culture when disciplining a student. Additionally, a conceptual framework for a culturally relevant School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SW-PBS) was developed for K–12 students (McIntosh et al., 2014; Vincent et al., 2011). However, a comparable model had not been created for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers until Allen and Steed (2016) proposed a conceptual model of culturally responsive PW-PBS including culturally relevant factors for use in diverse early childhood education classrooms. Early childhood programs have an ideal opportunity to implement behavior guidance policies and practices consistent with these

evidence-based best practice guidelines (Garrity et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2018) to support positive development of young children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study is CRT, developed originally from the work of legal scholars including Bell (1992) and Delgado and Stefancic (2017). CRT was created as a response to critical legal studies—a movement started in the mid-1970s with the objective of challenging the meritocratic legal system in the United States (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano, 2013). Critical race theorists alleged critical legal studies neglected to include issues of racial inequality and discounted issues of race and racism in the foundations of the U.S. legal system (Crenshaw, 1988; Harris, 1993). Informed by civil rights scholarship (Martinez, 2014) and radical feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), CRT identifies racism as systemic and ingrained in the fabric of our society and uncovers the intersection of race and other forms of social oppression (e.g., class and gender). Henneman (2014) stated critical examination of daily interactions and racial relationships with people allows for identification of how U.S. laws, policies, systems, beliefs, attitudes, and values have been deeply forged by racism. There are five major tenets of CRT:

- Racism is permanent and not aberrant (Bell, 1992) and because it is so ubiquitous in American society, its mutations must be exposed and unmasked, rather than questioned (Ladson-Billings, 1998).
- Counterstorytelling is a method of centering the narrative of people of color. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), counterstorytelling is a method used to “cast doubt on the validly or accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (p. 144). Centering the narratives of marginalized communities

allows for exposing and critiquing the narratives of the privileged (e.g., male, white, heterosexual) majority, often fraught with racial stereotypes (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

- Whiteness as Property (Harris, 1993) is based on the notion, due to the history of racism and slavery, whiteness can be conceived as valued property.
- Interest Convergence (Bell, 1980) suggests civil rights are given to people of color only as they converge with the economic interests of white people.
- Critique of Liberalism (Crenshaw, 1988) argues the liberal legal philosophies of colorblindness, legal neutrality, and incrementalism are flawed. Historically, societal rights and opportunities were both granted and denied based on race (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Though CRT was formulated initially in the legal discipline, it has expanded and is now used as a lens to view how systems work in other disciplines as well.

Color Evasiveness

The ideology of colorblindness is ironically the process of attempting to avoid the subject of race in discussions, policy, and practice in equity efforts while reifying whiteness and racism by upholding white privilege; therefore, the marginalization of Black children in education (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Chapman, 2013; Tarca, 2005). Past research has used colorblind terminology, equating the denotative meaning of the word “blind” with denial or failure to “see” race (Jupp et al., 2019). However, Annamma et al. (2017) used disability studies and CRT in education to critique the term. Annamma et al. (2017) argued the term colorblindness centers another socially constructed category, disability, and is considered deficit framing. Further, the

authors argued the process of avoiding race to be polite or politically correct is an active evasion, rather than blindness, more accurately describing this marginalization of people of color.

Tenets of Critical Race Theory in Education

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced CRT to education by arguing race has remained undertheorized, and although race had been examined “as a powerful tool for explaining social inequity, the intellectual salience of this theorizing has not been systematically employed in the analysis of educational inequality” (p. 50). After Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995) seminal article on CRT in education, many authors have applied CRT to educational research (Solórzano, 1998; Tate, 1997). In the following section, I describe these tenets and how they relate to this study.

Centrality of Race and Racism

Creating theories about how racism and other areas of oppression, such as sexism and classism, intersect in the foundation of school curriculum. CRT examines issues facing students of color during their educational trajectory from preschool to higher education (Howard & Navarro, 2016). White dominant culture permeates everyday status quo in educational settings (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011). Accordingly, there has been a perpetual need for understanding the “nuances of racialized practices within early-childhood settings” (Brown et al., 2010, p. 514). For example, setting standards for normal and acceptable behaviors are examples of whiteness ideologies manifesting in schools (Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

Challenging the Dominant Ideology

Historically, U.S. learning institutions have claimed their practices are color blind and gender neutral and offer equal opportunity to all students; this must be challenged. After the 1954 landmark decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, many people believed integration of

public schools meant students received an equal education (Howard, 2014; Williams, 2005). Because of this belief and the more contemporary common belief people are living in a postracial society (Bhopal, 2018; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011; Howard & Flenbaugh, 2011), many customary long-standing educational practices have gone unexamined (Brown et al., 2010). Schools have maintained a position of objectivity and neutrality yet have continued to uphold white, middle-class cultures and values (Grant et al., 1996). Meanwhile, Black students have been held to dominant group practices and expectations not valuing their words, actions, and interactions (Heath, 1983). Further, Black students have been often positioned as needing early intervention and viewed through a deficit lens (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Ford et al., 2001; Goodwin et al., 2012 Howard, 2013).

Centrality of Experiential Knowledge

By including counterstorytelling as a reliable and trustworthy tool in exploring examples of racial oppression, CRT has built on oral traditions of many communities of color around the world, centering narratives of people of color in its attempt to understand social inequality. Public schools have colonized Black students by negating their “rich experiences and culturally relevant knowledge brought to school” (Brown et al., 2010, p. 514).

The Interdisciplinary Perspective

Interdisciplinary methods of examining race and racism in education are placed in historical and contemporary contexts (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001) and incorporate various discipline studies, representing the multidimensional world. Additionally, Ladson-Billings (2006) posited if the racial achievement gap is framed in an ahistorical context, racial disparities will continue to persist.

Once the conversation of equitable education has been centered on the history of public schools and sociopolitical policies, understanding about what race and racism have to do with Black students' educational success becomes clear. Additionally, understanding how race, racism, inequalities, and discrimination influence academic achievement disparities can be more visible (Howard, 2010). According to Ladson-Billings (2004), schools are a direct result of the culture. As such, racial analysis can be used to better understand educational hurdles for Black students and to explore how to resist and overcome these hurdles (Taylor et al., 2016). In the context of exclusionary discipline of Black boys in early childhood, CRT allows a critical examination of the systemic practice of excessively disciplining Black boys and how practice plays a part in the larger sociological context of racism (DeMatthews, 2016; Simson, 2013). I have proposed using CRT as a theoretical framework for examining teacher beliefs about discipline because these topics and the disproportionately negative effects they have imposed on young Black boys in preschool classrooms have been undertheorized in the literature.

Commitment to Social Justice

Targeting (a) elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty and (b) empowering of underrepresented minority groups. Critical race researchers have acknowledged educational institutions have operated in contradictory ways as they have had the potential to oppress and marginalize and, alternatively, the potential to emancipate and empower (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). Therefore, “the pervasive and punishing presence of race and racism in social and institutional contexts” (Chapman, 2013, p. 102). DeCuir and Dixon (2004) asserted CRT researchers must uncover how policies implemented under the guise of remedial action toward educational disparities have not served the best interest of Black students and were in the best interest of the dominant group.

It has been difficult to achieve social justice in schools when white dominant ideology has continued to be upheld. Zamudio et al. (2011) argued “negotiating education through the use of standardized tests provides one of the many means of maintaining the property interests of whiteness” (p. 32).

Whiteness as Property

In their seminal article, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) asserted race has been a significant factor in both society and education. By proposing CRT as a lens to examine the role of race and racism in education, the authors emphasized the intersection of race and property rights and how this construct could be used to explain educational inequities because the construct of whiteness has been used as a right to exclude non-white students from the use and enjoyment of schooling. This concept was built upon Harris’ (1993) work, who argued white people have historically owned basic human rights not given to Blacks because whiteness itself has been a social construct based on white subordination and suppression of Black people. The rights of whiteness could not exist without the social construct and subsequent categorization of people of color as non-white. Therefore, the construct of race became an objective fact and the laws protecting the construct of race gave value to whiteness (Zamudio et al., 2011). According to Harris (1993), though the concept of property has been a physical object usually, property has been a right historically rather than an object. When property is perceived this way, it is possible to view whiteness as valued property (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006). Harris (1993) argued the core component of whiteness as property was “the legal legitimation of expectations of power and control that enshrine the status quo as a neutral baseline, while masking the maintenance of white privilege and domination” (p. 1715). Since the U.S. public education system has been centered in the construct of whiteness, this institution could also be considered white property as educators

have often upheld its hegemonic norms. Harris (1993) further argued whiteness fit a nuanced example of property. She stated:

In addition to the theoretical descriptions of property, whiteness also meets the functional criteria of property. Specifically, the law has accorded “holders” of whiteness the same privileges and benefits accorded holders of other types of property. (p. 1731)

Over time, more intangible concepts of property have been added to the list of what holders of whiteness have owned (i.e., time, and education; Harris, 1993). Additionally, one of the property functions of whiteness has been the absolute right to exclude (Harris, 1993). Accordingly, holders of the property of privileges and benefits have had the right to use those privileges to exclude others. This absolute right to exclude has historically and currently been demonstrated in education by initially denying Black students access to schooling altogether and subsequently creating and maintaining separate inequitable schooling (Anderson, 1988; Anyon, 1997; Duncan, 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2012), differences in teacher quality (Clotfelter et al., 2007), inequitable access to resources (Kozol, 1991; Mickelson, 2002), standardized testing (Duncan, 2005; Ferguson, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006), student tracking (Leonardo, 2007; Tyson, 2011), and white flight (Annamma, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Williams & Land, 2006). These are all examples of policies and practices maintaining exclusivity to education by denying Black children access to safe, well-equipped schools with high-quality teachers and curricula, thereby demonstrating the conception of whiteness as property. Whiteness as property has been weaponized historically to grant social rights and benefits, from abstract to physical, to those who are white and to punish those who do not, literally and figuratively (Annamma, 2015). More recently, this right to exclude has been demonstrated by excluding Black children from educational spaces via disciplinary action. Borrowing from these ideas, I contend discipline is

white property (Bryan, personal communication, November 7, 2019) and can be used as an analytical tool for examining racially disproportionate exclusionary school discipline.

Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit)

Building on CRT, Dumas and Ross (2016) introduced BlackCrit. These scholars argued although CRT addresses race broadly and draws on Black examples of racism, it is not specific enough to describe how schools and other American institutions are anti-Black or uphold a particular disdain for Black people. As such, Dumas and Ross proposed although racism is endemic to U.S. society, anti-Blackness describes the marginalized experiences of Black people more narrowly. Further, Coles and Powell (2019) used CRT and BlackCrit to create a framework to examine suspension disproportionality. The authors asserted racially disproportionate exclusionary discipline was “anti-black symbolic violence” (Coles & Powell, 2019, p. 2) and the practice has been structurally designed to exclude Black children from educational institutions. Of course, not every Black student will be suspended from school. However, research has suggested the threat of suspension is constantly looming (Coles & Powell, 2019) as Gilliam et al.’s (2016) research of early childhood teachers’ observations of Black children more closely, especially Black boys, for expected demonstrations of challenging behavior connects with an anti-blackness lens. Dumas and Ross argued the discourse on disciplining Black students must go further than focusing on a discipline gap or disproportionate discipline as a precursor to the school-to-prison pipeline. To clearly understand this heinous example of anti-blackness, scholars must situate this phenomenon in the context of racism and oppression.

CRT and BlackCrit were used as conceptual frameworks to analyze the presence of racism and hegemony in school discipline policies and preschool teacher discipline beliefs. These lenses also influenced how data was collected and analyzed, informing interpretation of

the research findings (Howard, 2008). CRT was an appropriate theoretical lens for connecting disciplinary experiences of Black boys with systemically racist institutional policies creating barriers to academic success for these young children (Chapman, 2013; Milner & Laughter, 2015).

A CRT Rationale for This Study

Critical race theorists have considered issues of race and racism as permanent and endemic to the structure of the United States and should be researched and theorized (Cook & Dixon, 2013; James, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker & Lynn 2002). As such, issues of racial inquiry and examination should be centered in every aspect of society, including education (Milner & Laughter, 2015). Schools reflect society (Davila & Bradley, 2010; Willower, 1994; Wood, 2019). CRT in education intends to transform education to better serve the needs of all students; however, the role of race and racism in school policies and practices has been one of the most common arguments given for racialized school outcome disparities (Dixon, 2014; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Leonardo, 2013). Based on this framing of CRT, race should be central in justice and equity discourse as critical race theorists work to challenge and disrupt racially oppressive policies subordinating certain communities and benefit others (Tate, 1997).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) built on the work of critical legal studies by proposing three areas to create a foundation for educational inequity:

- Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.
- U.S. society is based on property rights.

- “The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity.” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p.48)

CRT allows researchers to examine the unique ways racism is connected to inequities in education (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Grounding this study in CRT, I have employed the following tenets to demonstrate the criminalization and subsequent excessive discipline of Black boys in preschool: (a) the centrality of race and racism, (b) challenging the dominant ideology, (c) commitment to social justice (i.e., whiteness as property), and (d) interdisciplinary perspective.

Additionally, BlackCrit has extended the work of CRT on race and racism to focus more specifically on anti-Blackness and how it informs white hegemony and institutional racist practices targeting Black people in society and in schools (Dumas, 2014; Dumas & Ross, 2016).

Discipline as White Property

By examining school discipline through the lens of whiteness as property as a CRT tenet, it is reasonable to describe discipline, as part of whiteness, as a tool owned by the dominant culture historically used to oppress Black people; and by extension, discipline can be described as white property (Coles & Powell, 2019; Harris, 1993). Bryan (2018) stated white children benefit from racism and have privilege Black children do not. This has been foregrounded in disciplinary policies and practices resulting in excessive suspension of Black children, oftentimes for the same behaviors of white children not resulting in suspension (Carter et al., 2017; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba et al., 2002). A Black boy has been considered threatening even if he has done nothing to pose a threat to individual educators or the school environment (Coles & Powell, 2019). Often Black children have been disciplined at school, not due to

warranted behavior, but because of noncompliance of “arbitrary rules of conduct steeped in whiteness” (Coles & Powell, 2019, p. 4). The practice of exclusionary discipline has demonstrated how schools have been complicit in maintaining white hegemonic school culture as a part of a larger societal culture of racism and anti-blackness rooted in power and control rather than teaching social-emotional skills to young children (Coles & Powell, 2019; Townsend, 2000). Whiteness must maintain the right to exclude for it to hold value. Giving away any of those rights to other races devalues the property (Zamudio et al., 2011). Harris (1993) stated, “The exclusion of subordinated ‘others’ was and remains a central part of the property interest in whiteness and, indeed, is part of the protection that the court extends to whites’ settled expectations of continued privilege” (p. 1758). Therefore, I contend discipline is white property (Bryan, personal communication, November 7, 2019). The value of being white has afforded white students the privilege of exhibiting the same behaviors as their Black peers, without the same consequences.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this research study was to explore preschool teachers' beliefs about discipline and understand how these beliefs may influence how they decide to discipline preschool children in the classroom. In the following sections, I describe the research setting and participants, data collection procedures, data analysis, protection of human subjects, limitations, researcher positionality, and reflexivity.

A basic qualitative research study approach was used to address the research questions. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "Qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon" (p. 23). Qualitative research designs fill a gap quantitative research fails to address, specifically focusing on why circumstances occur rather than research designed to isolate variables and minimize the effects of context to make a generalization of data to a population represented by the participation sample (Stake, 1995). In addition, qualitative research was useful for this study because it provided an opportunity to conduct in-depth interviews, generating rich, authentic narratives directly from the participants' perspective based on their experiences, training, and culture (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the research questions used to examine preschool teachers' beliefs about discipline through this qualitative method of inquiry were particularly appropriate for this study.

Research Questions

As discussed in the literature review, much has been written about the existence of racially disparate exclusionary discipline in schools (Brown & Steele, 2015; Carter et al., 2017; Darensbourg et al., 2010; Gilliam, 2005; George, 2015; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Wesley &

Ellis, 2017; Wood et al., 2018). However, there has been little research on why these practices have occurred. Indeed, scholars have not reached consensus on specific causes of inequitable discipline (Brown & Steele, 2015) or why Black preschool boys have been at greatest risk for exclusionary discipline (Gilliam et al., 2016). Studies in K–12 contexts have found teachers’ beliefs and biases have been a possible factor (Gregory et al., 2010; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). There has been little literature about preschool teachers’ beliefs about discipline, especially from a critical race theory (CRT) lens. Therefore, this study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How does the construct of whiteness influence how preschool teachers implement disciplinary action?

Research Question 2: How does the construct of whiteness influence preschool teachers’ beliefs about discipline?

Setting and Participants

Setting

Participants in the study were 12 preschool teachers working in California state-funded or Head Start programs serving a racially diverse preschool population, including children identifying as white, Black, Latina/o/x, Hispanic, Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or Native American/Indigenous. Head Start and state-funded programs have policies against expelling children. Participants represented five cities between southern and northern California. Although 11 participants were female, the sample was diverse in terms of race, location, level of education, and years teaching. Table 1 provides a summary of participant characteristics.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Race	Gender	Location	Education	Program	Years teaching
Amber	White	F	Contra County	3 AAs	State funded collab	15
Kat	White	F	Temecula	AA & BS	State funded	4
Sofia	Latina	F	San Diego	BS	State funded	25
Autumn	White	F	San Diego	AA	State funded	9
Martha	Mexican	F	San Diego	AA	Head Start	13
Rose	Pacific Islander	F	San Diego	BA	Head Start collab	7
Elizabeth	Latina	F	San Diego	AA	Head Start	19
Nicole	White	F	Pomona	AA	State funded	8
Xiaxia	Asian	F	Pomona	BS	State funded	17
Sally	Mexican	F	San Diego	BA	Head Start	20
Ted	Asian	M	San Francisco	BA	State funded	15
Montera	Filipino	F	San Francisco	BS	State funded	20

This population was chosen because of the limited number of studies focusing on teacher beliefs about discipline in preschool. Most research on teacher beliefs or school discipline in early childhood education has been situated in kindergarten through third grade. Therefore, there is a need for more literature focusing on young children before they enter kindergarten.

Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, and because schools had suspended in-person classes and went online following guidelines from the Center for Disease Control, San Diego State University had very specific guidelines pertaining to face-to-face interactions for human subject research. Consequently, Zoom was used to remotely conduct interviews. Zoom is a cloud-based collaboration tool allowing people to communicate face-to-face in real time using a

variety of hardware, including computers, tablets, or mobile phones (Zoom Video Communications, 2016). This makes the Zoom platform an optimal method for conducting research interviews as it allows for both time and cost effectiveness and the ability to access participants in farther geographic locations (Archibald et al., 2019). Additionally, using the Zoom platform allowed the participants and I to remain safely distant during the time of a global health pandemic.

Participants and Recruitment

To qualify for this study, participants had to meet the following criteria: (a) be employed as a lead preschool teacher in a state-funded or Head Start preschool program, and (b) have at least 3 years' experience teaching in a racially diverse classroom of 3 to 5 years old children. Lead teachers were chosen for this study because their job description entitles them to make classroom decisions, supervise and train teacher aides, and report directly to the center director. Additionally, participants were required to have at least 3 years teaching experience to allow for recruitment of both novice and veteran teachers who have had some time teaching in person before the COVID-19 global pandemic forced many schools to move to distance learning in spring and fall of 2020.

I used purposeful sampling to identify participants for the study (Patton, 2015). This included using both criterion and snowball sampling procedures, conducting recruitment over social media. I recruited participants using Facebook and Twitter social media platforms, including identifying groups focused on early childhood education. I created a survey using Qualtrics so participants could determine their eligibility for the study and provide their consent to be interviewed. I also created an online calendar using Calendly so teachers could schedule their Zoom interview after they had completed the survey.

According to Patton (2015), criterion sampling involves choosing cases meeting a “predetermined criterion of importance” (p. 425) and snowball sampling consists of asking study participants to recommend other participants. Patton (2015) stated, “By asking a number of people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new information-rich cases” (p. 298). At the end of each interview, I asked participants to identify other preschool teachers they were familiar with who fit the criteria and may be willing to participate in the study. My goal was to interview 20 preschool teachers; however, as Patton (2015) suggested, the actual sample size may be “emergent and flexible” (p. 474) depending on the depth and breadth of information gleaned from the interviews, especially when using research strategies like snowball sampling and sampling to the point of saturation.

Recruitment began very slowly with a combination of no responses, no-shows, cancellations, and rescheduling. Three interviews were cancelled. Two of the three were cancelled in March 2021, including one who twice did not show for their interview because they “[were] working and did not have time to volunteer for an interview” and another who canceled in Calendly. The last of the three cancellations was a preschool teacher scheduled for an interview in early April, who first rescheduled, and then forgot about the interview. A second person did not show at the end of April. Calendly sent a reminder email to the interviewee 24 hours before and 1 hour before the interview. I sent an email 30 minutes before the interview and sent a text message at the time of the interview. I waited 15 minutes and then left the Zoom room. The interviewee sent a text saying she was sick. I asked to reschedule, and she said she would be available after May 10. She did not answer future efforts to interview her.

After 2 months of very slow recruitment progress, I had a discussion with my dissertation cochairs about the slow recruitment, leading to expansion of participant criteria. We decided to

expand our boundaries to include Head Start and increase the gift card incentive amount from \$10 to \$25. As a result of expanding participant criteria, I decided to repeat my recruitment efforts after the school year had ended, hoping participation would increase if teachers had more time for interviews during the summer months when school is not in session. My cochairs and I agreed we would continue recruiting until the end of July. During the month of July, only two more teachers agreed to be interviewed. At the end of July, with 12 interviews completed, we decided to end the recruitment process.

A discussion with my cochairs raised a few theories about why my recruitment process went so slowly. First, we were experiencing a global pandemic, which caused teachers to pivot very quickly from teaching preschool in classrooms to teaching virtually. This included turning areas of their home into classrooms, creating curriculum packets for parents, and navigating technical components of the online classroom. This left little time or energy to commit to a Zoom interview, as expressed by the teacher who said she was working and did not have time to participate. Second, we must consider the context of the Black Lives Matter movement and the heightened sensitivity to CRT and antiracism. This sensitivity may have been experienced especially when conversing with a Black educator about these topics.

Data Collection

I collected data using one-on-one semistructured interviews, analytical memos, and personal notetaking. I also made follow-up phone calls to participants whenever clarification or additional information was needed.

Interviews

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the instrument for collecting data (Mertens, 2019, allowing for research participants to have discourse, voice, and self-reflection (Creswell, 2013).

Additionally, interviews are often used as the main data source when conducting qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This “person-to-person encounter” allows the researcher to examine phenomena from different vantage points (Taylor et al., 2015, p. 108) and obtain information from participants the researcher cannot observe (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, the qualitative researcher brings meaning to their study by designing an adaptable research method, accomplished through in-depth interviews.

In-depth, semistructured interviews are used when the researcher’s goal is to learn about a specific topic through an extended conversation, yielding a deep understanding of participants’ lived experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2013). This semistructured approach to examining preschool teachers’ beliefs about discipline was particularly appropriate for qualitative inquiry. The conversation was guided by an interview protocol consisting of open-ended questions and I called participants with follow-up questions as needed.

Interview Procedure

To facilitate the interviews, I used a semistructured interview protocol based on the literature review on teacher beliefs and classroom discipline (see Appendix). This interview style not only allowed me to create a set of questions designed to access relevant information, but also allowed me to improvise according to participants’ responses (Merriam, 2009). The interview protocol was piloted with two preschool teachers who met the research criteria to evaluate the efficacy of the protocol. After the first 2 interviews, I reviewed the protocol and revised as needed. Interviews varied in length from approximately 45 minutes to over 2 hours.

Each interview was recorded via Zoom and backed up using Otter.ai. Zoom provided transcriptions of recordings, and, if an interview was not automatically backed up in Otter.ai, I

manually uploaded them to the platform. I used Otter.ai to carefully check for accuracy against the interview audio recording. Additionally, I took notes throughout each interview, followed by analytic memos within 24 hours. These notes and memos allowed me to make sense and keep track of the data obtained from the interviews (Saldaña, 2016).

I interviewed 12 preschool teachers using a semistructured, conversational-style interview technique to establish a rapport with each participant. Glesne (2016) argued the importance of participants being comfortable and willing to share information of interest to the researcher. Although this interviewing style was used to create casual conversations about preschool teachers' beliefs and experiences about preschool discipline, I explained to participants I was obtaining information for a dissertation study. I also asked participants to choose a pseudonym and reassured them they would remain completely anonymous. Further, I made sure to explain to the teachers there were no "right or wrong answers" to the interview questions and I only wanted to hear their personal beliefs about discipline in preschool classrooms. Audio records and transcripts have remained in a password-protected file on my home computer and hard copies of transcripts have remained in a secure drawer in my home. I thoroughly explained to each participant the interview could end at any point, they could withdraw any statements, and the compiled information would only be used for this research study.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis is the process in which researchers gain insights by comparing and synthesizing the data, in addition to identifying and classifying consistent themes to move toward deeper understanding of the data (Merriam, 2009). I reviewed each audio recording against the transcript generated automatically by Otter.ai to make corrections and fill in any gaps. In addition to the audio recording, I took notes throughout the interviews and wrote analytic memos

after to record my thoughts, ideas, or reflections during data analysis. After all transcripts were completed, I read through them and my notes to become familiar with the data. I then coded the interview transcripts, notes, and analytic memos in two phases.

Phase 1 – Descriptive Coding

The initial round of coding was descriptive coding, the process of “assigning labels to data to summarize a word or short phrase” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 292) to gather preliminary patterns from the text. This first round of coding “breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examines them, and compares them for similarities and differences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). According to Patton (2015), “Whether you do or do not use software, the real analytical work takes place in your head” (pp. 530–531); therefore, for this first round of coding I used colored pens to manually highlight distinct words and phrases on printed copies of interview transcripts to be sure to capture key concepts representing more than frequency of specific language in the data. My notes from the interviews were also coded. In addition, I wrote analytic memos (Saldaña, 2016) to aid in the development of my findings and coding choices, and to keep an ongoing record of any moments of serendipity as I collected data. Stake (1995) stated, “Good research is not about good methods as much as it is about good thinking” (p. 19).

Each transcript was then uploaded into Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis computer software program allowing for classifying, sorting, and arranging qualitative data to determine the frequency and establish initial codes. Next, I input the initial codes into the Dedoose software program to reduce the data and facilitate identification of subthemes.

Phase 2 – Thematic Coding

I conducted a second round of coding to establish themes. Theming is the process of identifying units of data as an extended phrase or sentence and clustering data according to their

meaning (Saldaña, 2016). CRT was used as a theoretical lens for analyzing preschool teachers' responses.

After completing coding Phases 1 and 2, I identified the most salient themes to interpret my findings by identifying participant quotes and perceptions, and reviewed existing literature on preschool teacher beliefs, preschool discipline, racism, and whiteness. I then searched for similarities among participants' responses to the interview questions.

Protection of Human Subjects

Several steps were taken to ensure protection of human subjects. First, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board at Claremont Graduate University, which ensured I had taken all steps so no one was harmed before, during, or after the study. Second, I provided a voluntary consent form to participants who met the criteria and expressed an interest in participating. The consent form explained the purpose of the research and expected duration of their participation. Third, I provided a description of the procedures to participants which discussed the role they would play in the study. Fourth, I informed all subjects their participation was voluntary and refusal to participate or discontinue would not result in any penalty. I informed participants they could rescind their consent to participate if they felt uncomfortable at any point. Next, I ensured confidentiality was maintained by having all participants choose a pseudonym to conceal their identity. Finally, I gave all participants my contact information so they could reach me if they had any questions or concerns.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included teachers' self-reported beliefs about discipline, limited access to participants, and researcher bias. Because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, I was unable to visit classrooms to conduct observations; therefore, I needed to depend on the

preschool teachers' self-reported beliefs about discipline. Also, the current racial sociopolitical context after the murder of George Floyd and due to the Black Lives Matter movement may have caused some teachers to be apprehensive about sharing their beliefs about disciplining children of color, especially Black boys. The pandemic also caused many preschool teachers to move to online teaching, which was shown to be more labor intensive than working in the classroom. This may have reduced the number of teachers who would have otherwise participated in the study. Also, as a Black researcher with more than 20 years' experience in early childhood education, my approach to this research has been situated at the intersection of race and gender as researcher practitioner. This intersectional lens informs how I interpret the data. An additional limitation was none of the preschool teachers who participated in this study were Black. It would have been beneficial to examine a Black teacher's beliefs about discipline in comparison to participants with other racial backgrounds.

Despite the limitations, this study was valuable because it critically addressed the issue of teachers' beliefs about discipline in preschools from the voices of teachers engaged in this phenomenon. Additionally, most of the research on exclusionary discipline has been situated in K-12 (Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Michail, 2011; Morrison & D'Incau, 1997; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Therefore, this study will contribute to the existing literature on teacher beliefs and CRT as an investigative lens on preschool discipline.

Researcher Positionality

As a PhD student, I have focused my research studies on issues of equity and Black children in PreK. My positionality as a Black woman aware of the racism and oppression plaguing society has influenced my research examining educational disparities as they relate to this population in early childhood. Additionally, I am an early childhood educator with a

bachelor of science degree in child development and a master's degree in human development with a specialization in early childhood education. I also have more than 20 years of experience as an owner and director of an early childhood program. This insight has impacted my research perspective as I have formed my own educational philosophy for fostering social, emotional, and academic success in young children.

Finally, I am committed to social justice for all people. My research has been a marriage of my passion for quality early childhood education and my advocacy for social justice. Young children of color, and Black children specifically, have been disproportionately denied access to quality education and/or viewed from a deficit lens very early in school.

Researcher Reflexivity

The emotional labor of open-ended interviews in qualitative research is often overlooked (Hoffman, 2007). Open-ended interviews enlist a flexible structure giving away some of the control of the interview and allowing for the participant to feel empowered to engage actively. Additionally, scholars have argued qualitative research is intrinsically an emotionally challenged endeavor (Arendell, 1997; Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998; Blee, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Constantly navigating how to manage feelings and staying aware of facial expressions and body language is emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) and should be included as data in qualitative research (Hoffman, 2007). It is important for the researcher to engage in self-monitoring and reflexivity while seeking participant narratives. Further, there is an added, racialized level of emotional labor for the Black researcher.

As a Black researcher using qualitative, open-ended interviews to explore how whiteness and white supremacy has been upheld in education, I went into each interview guarding my emotions and reactions as I had to put on my “armor” because I never knew what I was going to

experience. Sometimes I even had to withhold my temper or surprise at the responses I received from preschool teachers. This is not a new occurrence. Black people have experiences of managing microaggressions daily in interactions with people holding a race-neutral ideology. Additionally, these experiences are layered as work and education spaces intersect with navigating daily racial dynamics (Evans & Moore, 2015). This research journey was no exception. Further, there was a layer added by conducting a study about teachers and schooling, an institution rooted in white supremacy, with the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter movement on the heels of the public, intentional murder of a Black man by a uniformed police officer.

This was the job. I chose to earn a PhD, a degree requiring navigation of the white, male dominated institution of higher education. I also chose to become a critical researcher examining the racial experiences of young children in educational spaces. Because I sit at the intersection of these two spaces, my emotional responses have aligned with Evans and Moore's (2015) description as "constrained by an institutionalized ideological frame that minimizes and denies the relevance of race and racism, and both tacitly and explicitly asserts institutional neutrality at least and racial equality at most" (p. 440). This experience was evident in both my journeys as a doctoral student and researcher interviewing preschool teachers about their classroom discipline beliefs. My positionality provided a unique perspective on the labor entailed in monitoring my emotional reactions and reflections to this research carefully through memo writing (Charmaz, 2014).

Chapter 4: Findings

So, when it comes out, they aren't that surprised that it is there. (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004)

The purpose of this study was to explore preschool teachers' beliefs about discipline, using critical race theory (CRT) to understand how these beliefs may influence how teachers discipline preschool children in the classroom. I used a basic qualitative approach to investigate the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How does the construct of whiteness influence how preschool teachers implement disciplinary action?

Research Question 2: How does the construct of whiteness influence preschool teachers' beliefs about discipline?

Data were coded using a CRT framework to explore how preschool teacher beliefs perpetuated structural racism and upheld white dominant cultural norms. Scholars have not reached consensus on the specific causes of inequitable discipline (Brown & Steele, 2015) or why Black preschool boys have been at greatest risk for exclusionary discipline (Gilliam et al., 2016). Because studies in K–12 contexts have found teachers' beliefs and biases have been a possible factor (Gregory et al., 2010; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011), this research further developed the understanding about racial and gendered disparities in discipline. Analysis of participant interviews revealed several findings allowing us to understand the beliefs of teachers. Findings were organized into four major themes: (a) whiteness as property, (b) color evasiveness, (c) performative antiracism, and (d) reactive antiracism (see Table 2). Each section in this chapter is organized by these four essential themes identified from the interview data.

For the theme of whiteness as property, I connected three subthemes, including discipline as white property, teacher beliefs, and anti-Blackness. For the theme of color evasiveness, I

explored the two subthemes of avoidance of discussions about race and teachers misunderstanding the definition of implicit bias. Performative antiracism, the third theme, consisted of actions claiming commitment to antiracism, but failing to authentically honor that commitment. I examined the use of implicit bias trainings as a pathway to addressing racism and bias in school culture. The last theme, reactive antiracism, had three subthemes: addressing the subject of race after an event, antiracism discourse after the murder of George Floyd, and increased staff trainings after the murder of George Floyd.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
Whiteness as property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discipline as White Property <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Control ○ Rules & developmentally appropriate behavior (DAP) ● Teacher Beliefs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kindergarten Readiness ○ Discipline for School Readiness ● Anti-Blackness
Color evasiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avoiding Racial Discussions ● Misunderstanding the definition of implicit bias
Performative antiracism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Actions claim to be committed to anti-racism, but actually do not result in dismantling systemic racism and bias. Implicit Bias Training
Reactive antiracism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Addressing race after an event ● Antiracism discourse after the murder of George Floyd ● Increased staff trainings after the murder of George Floyd

Table 3 outlines the subthemes within each theme responding directly to the research questions, presenting a summary of the themes and subthemes discussed below. A detailed discussion of each theme follows.

Whiteness as Property

Public education has centered whiteness in institutional policies, practices, and pre-teacher training. Because this white normativity has been the foundation of teacher education, schooling should be understood through the lens of the CRT tenet, whiteness as property. Because whiteness is a social construct based on power and white dominance, disciplining children in a white dominant institution is a tool of white property. This ownership of power and control is an extension of whiteness and allows owners of whiteness to impose behavioral rules and disciplinary action for those who do not abide by those rules. This use of power and control was indicated by the following examples of teachers' enforcement of classroom rules by demanding children's obedience and centering their own needs above the needs of children. Examples of behavior children for which were disciplined included defiance, making noise, and not sitting still.

Ted, an Asian preschool teacher with 15 years of experience, stated he does not use "timeouts" as a method of discipline; however, he will tell a child to "go sit in that chair and when you're ready to talk to me, I'll talk to you." This is Ted's way of using exclusionary discipline but justifying it by saying he "empowers" them by giving them the ability to leave the chair "when they are ready to stop crying and talk." Despite his belief he empowers them, Ted still maintains control of the "when."

For Autumn, a white preschool teacher with 9 years of experience, maintaining control in the classroom includes strict adherence to a schedule. When the schedule has been broken, she felt she had a hard day. Autumn stated:

But when they're, I mean, when it is uncontrollable, and they refuse to go with things . . . it makes the entire day harder . . . I've had issues with children who refuse to go with the schedule, like we have. . . right now we sit down and do circle time, and we are quiet, and you raise your hand, and you can participate in the lesson.

Autumn has decided a preschool child who does not wish to follow the rules is an uncontrollable experience, in which she is the victim. In this statement, she centered her own needs above the needs of the child. In doing so, she reinforced the rules and did not allow any flexibility for students to express themselves.

Rose, who identified as Pacific Islander, shared in her 7 years of teaching, she has seen many teachers who do not have the skills to cope with children's needs. She stated, "Often there are only 2 teachers in a class of 24 preschoolers. A lot of times they'll just shuffle them off to the office just like, 'Oh, you're acting up, you're not listening.'" She explained "acting up" could be defined as anything the classroom teacher does not want to deal with, including moving around too much, using bad language, or being difficult to soothe.

Similarly, Kat, a white woman who had been teaching for 4 years, shared a scenario in which she punished a preschooler by making her sit in the back of the class because she came to school late:

She was late and she was disruptive. She tried to sit up front, but I got up and redirected her to a better place to sit and she was very verbal about that . . . I told her that if that goes on I do have the option to call the office and send her out of the class.

Kat was annoyed this preschooler arrived at school after story time had already started, which was clearly not the child's fault. The teacher took her frustration out on the child by not letting her sit where she wanted and threatened to send her out of the class when the child voiced her disappointment.

Nicole, a white preschool teacher of 8 years, seemed to agree many teachers want to maintain strict control of the classroom. She had a unique perspective about her fellow teachers. Nicole shared:

There'll be teachers where, you know, they are very authoritarian and [say things like], "I want my whole classroom silent. And if my whole classroom is not sitting silent, then we're gonna sit here until everyone's silent," and they would do that.

However, Nicole disagreed with handling children in her own class this way, and instead she conceded complete control was unattainable. She went on to say, "Well, again, you're asking a room of 24 4-year-olds to be completely silent. It's just not going to happen." In this way, she released some control, because she felt that kind of control was not developmentally appropriate for young children. However, her release of some control ultimately maintained her position of power because she simply shifted "controlling" the children within developmentally appropriate expectations. Naturally, many teachers expressed developmental appropriateness as a guide for the parameters of power and control they may hold in their classrooms.

Rules and Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Teachers in this study expressed a desire for preschool children to follow developmentally or culturally inappropriate classroom rules. Many of these rules had no influence on a child's academic success but were based on homogeneous societal culture. Obedience, manners, and disrespect were recurring themes emerging during the interviews.

Autumn, a white preschool teacher with 9 years of experience, described her expectations from the children in her class when she gave them instruction:

When they told me “No”, they won't do something, or they don't want to do something. There are times when everybody is coming to sit on the carpet. It is story time and you need to come to sit down. That's not a question. . . . Come sit down. They all have their assigned spots. But every once in a while, there's those kids that are, “no, no, I'm not gonna do that.” And I tell them you can't tell your teachers no. . . . And so we have to teach them, the teacher's in charge, you respect what I'm asking you to do.

Autumn had an authoritarian-type of teaching style and believed children need to do what they have been told immediately. This behavior has been met often with behavior plans or even exclusion from the program as Sally, a Mexican preschool teacher with 20 years of experience, described:

In the program where I worked previously, if children had any kind of behavioral difficulties, we would, if it was just a behavior, something when they were mean to other kids, they were biting or hitting or disrespectful, saying no, and refusing to do what we were asking them to do, we would put them on a behavior contract. And that would be set up with the parents, you know, three strikes you're out kind of thing. And that was all there was to it.

Disrespect is a very subjective term and is based on conforming to white normative values of what is respectful and punishing the child who does not comply. Additionally, language about “three strikes you're out” is analogous to California laws where a person is incarcerated for their third offense, no matter how minimal. Repeated exclusionary school discipline, often beginning in preschool, can start Black children on the path to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Another example of punishable developmentally appropriate behavior was the policy against imaginative play. Amber, a white preschool teacher with 15 years of experience, shared how active imaginative play has been deterred at all Head Start programs. In particular, she discussed understanding cultural differences, and yet considered the play inappropriate. She explained:

We definitely have both the African American children and the Latino children, the boys you know who are about all the superhero movies that they're watching at home. Sometimes it's, you know, stuff that's way too advanced for them. . . . And they're encouraged to, you know, act out that play fighting is acceptable.

Not only does Amber have a deficit view of the children engaging in developmentally appropriate play, but this statement also implied only children of color pretended to be superheroes and white children did not. Additionally, she has criticized the parents of color she believed should not have allowed their children to engage in this type of play. She further described parents watching their children playing on the playground at pickup time and blamed the parents for what she perceived as negative behavior:

And the boys are roughhousing and wrestling and pretending to, you know, be superheroes and beat each other up. And the moms are just sitting there watching this. And, you know, for them, it's acceptable. Is this an acceptable form of play?

Amber's statements demonstrated she has seen this roughhousing and imaginative superhero play as both masculine and racialized. Furthermore, she has understood these types of play as potentially developmentally inappropriate and; therefore, has felt parents should prevent their children from participating in this type of play.

Similarly, Elizabeth, a Latina woman working at a Head Start program with 19 years of preschool teaching experience, described how physical play has been addressed at her school:

In a preschool classroom, on a preschool playground, we don't let them wrestle, or any of that or play fight, you know, at the most, we let them chase each other. So, you know, running around the yard as many times as you can, as fast as you can, is fine. You know, while you're playing Spider-Man, Batman or whatever it may be. Also, the same thing is true for gun play. The rule for the preschool is no guns at school, period, you know, we're not pretending to shoot guns at people, are not talking about I have my gun.

Amber and Elizabeth's statements have shown how imaginative play has been discouraged at Head Start. However, Amber also understood there is a difference between what children have been taught at home and what they have been taught at school. Though these two different discipline standards might be challenging for a young child to understand or negotiate, the child has been punished for not complying with school policy:

Some of these kids do have toy guns at home, you know, and so they're having to, they're having to put this sort of self-restraint, this code switching basically of their play, "I can play like, I'm pretending to shoot you, when we're just me and my cousins playing around, but when I go to school, my teachers get me in trouble for that. So, I have to remember no guns at school."

Although Amber recognized the potential dissonance experienced by children, she also placed the job of "code switching" onto the child, instead of contemplating how the early childhood environment might better connect with children and their families. Given she taught at a Head Start with children ages 3 to 5 years old, this seemed to be a direct contradiction with her discussion of age-appropriate learning for young children.

Sally continued to describe how gunplay has been addressed with the children in the Head Start program where she has worked for the past 8 years:

If I keep seeing you pretending to shoot guns while you're playing. And I've been reminding you, we don't do that at school. Now I'm gonna have to ask you to come and do something else. And you might have to actually, to it's, it says sort of a gray version of a timeout . . . I'm removing you from this group of friends right now.

This teacher's description of "sit down here and think about what you did" and "I'm removing you from this group of friends right now" was an example of how whiteness in the form of power and control has manifested as exclusionary discipline. This practice of separating a child from his educational environment still happens even though state preschools and Head Start programs have policies against suspension and expulsion. Punishment of this kind has been justified by preschool teachers as they believed this was a productive way of preparing preschoolers for entering kindergarten.

Teacher Beliefs

Gaining a thorough understanding of preschool teacher beliefs provided insight about how their actions have been informed. The following section provides insight about what preschool teachers believed about preparing children for kindergarten and what influenced these beliefs.

Kindergarten Readiness

Each preschool teacher interviewed in this study was asked what skills they believed children needed to be successful in kindergarten. Answers revealed school policy and curriculum informed preschool teachers' discipline beliefs and practice. They found it necessary to implement certain standards because of the pressure to prepare preschool children for the

kindergarten classroom. Independence, academics, and social-emotional learning were recurring themes in responses to inquiries about kindergarten readiness.

Montera, a Filipino teacher who has taught at her current program for 20 years, shared she believed kindergarten readiness included self-help or independence and social development. She said:

Children who are ready for kindergarten need to be able to have self-help skills, you know, pulling and putting your backpack on, you know, just being able to use the bathroom. . . . To be able to just know how to interact and play with other kids, you know, communicate yourself and the social skills.

Montera was describing how young children needed encouragement to be self-sufficient, building confidence and self-esteem as part of social-emotional development.

Similarly, Rose, a Pacific Islander with 7 years' experience teaching preschool, believed children need social-emotional learning and to be able to follow directions. She also believed academics should take a back seat to these skills. She said:

In kindergarten, I think that they need to be able to focus, have an attention span, and follow at least three-step directions. Social emotional development needs to be the foundation for their learning. So, we focus a lot on social emotional development. And then academic stuff will come later.

However, Rose was keenly aware of both her students' needs and the pressure to have them "ready" for kindergarten. She articulated:

But I think that when my children come, they already have all these risk factors, or all these things against them that they need to start ahead. And I know kindergarten teachers,

and they would like them to know their alphabet, how to write their name when they come to kindergarten, because of the state standards.

However, she also pointed to deficiencies, or “risk factors” as she called them, she assumed her students had before arriving to her.

Ted, an Asian preschool teacher for 15 years, also referred to state curriculum expectations when explaining what he believed preschool children need to be successful in kindergarten:

The kindergarten curriculum. So like, they should know, 1 to 20, how to count 1 to 20 . . . all their A through Zs, right? How to identify most of them big and small, recognize their name, handwriting, you know, somewhat legible in kindergarten.

However, he then stated he personally felt the social-emotional needs were even more important, stating:

I really feel like focusing on how they [the children] are as people: building character, responsibility, discipline, character integrity, you know, thinking about, “is this right or wrong”, figuring that out is way more important than knowing what’s the difference between big R and little r, or the sounds.

Ted was conflicted, like other participants, about age-appropriate social emotional learning for his preschoolers and preparing them for what lies ahead in their educational journey.

Participants recounted their conflicted feelings about the need to support the current developmental needs of their preschool students and preparing them for what is be expected of them in kindergarten.

Amber, a white preschool teacher with 15 years of experience, discussed her belief about the preschool to kindergarten journey: “We’re preparing them for, you know, school for the rest

of their life.” She described the variety of skills they would need from “language development, or cognitive skills” to “social and emotional skills.” Amber pointed out also more clearly the role behavioral skills might play for her students, describing a student without these skills as a “quote unquote, problem child or the challenging child, who is really a strain and stress on the teacher and ends up getting maybe overly punished or just not given as much attention.” Amber concluded her answer about kindergarten readiness by articulating her frustration about the tension between feeling pressured to pursue academics in her pedagogy and believing her students should focus instead on social-emotional and behavioral skills. She told me:

Most public kindergartens, schools have a ratio of one teacher to 25 children. . . . And so, knowing that, what I know about them pushing a lot more for academic skills and instruction in kindergarten, you know, we want you to read and write, you know, starting from day one. It’s a personal goal to make sure that children are able to cope with what’s expected of them in kindergarten . . . you know, it’s pretty much we’re gonna sit down and write in our workbooks and practice our phonics.

Amber’s personal goal of “making sure children are able to cope” with what’s ahead allowed a look into why many young children have been disciplined in early childhood classrooms.

Disciplining children so that they do not become the “problem child” in kindergarten has been part of the groundwork laid in preschool. Similarly, Nicole, who has taught 3- to 5-year-olds for 8 years, shared Amber’s sentiment about the tension between what happens in preschool and the responsibility of preparing children for kindergarten:

Realistically, they're probably going to go into a kindergarten and end up with a kindergarten teacher who is the sit down, listen, be quiet, color in the lines kind of

person. So, I'm always torn as a teacher to like, do I set them up with what I think is best for them? Or do I set them up for what they're going to actually encounter?

The previous statements demonstrated an ongoing disconnect between the preschool and K–12 systems and how the children have suffered the consequences of this disconnect. Nicole, a white preschool teacher of 8 years, has experienced an internal dilemma between knowing what is developmentally appropriate for children in her class and knowing what expectations lie ahead for children entering K–12 schooling.

Preschoolers have been disciplined for exhibiting developmentally appropriate behavior because preschool teachers have bared responsibility for preparing them for kindergarten. Autumn, who was white and has been teaching for 9 years, gave an example of parents' academic expectations:

I have parents who bring their children and they say, "What academics are they going to learn by the end of the year?" We try to teach them academics, but my biggest focus is social. They need to leave preschool knowing how to follow a teacher's directions and be respectful of themselves, their classmates, and the adults in the room.

When asked to explain her definition of disrespect further, she replied:

Not having manners and demanding things. So, we get a lot of kids also, it's a cultural thing that they're, I don't know if it's more language barrier, or just cultural that we get students who demand things like, "Give me this now" or "I want that." And so, we're trying to teach them to say please, and thank you, you know, if I offer them something, and they don't want it, they say no, I say, "tell me no, thank you."

This statement demonstrated subjective white cultural norms and measurements of disrespect.

Though she mentioned a possible cultural disconnect between the child and her expectations, she

pushed the child must assimilate to these white normative values for them to be successful in school.

Kat, a white teacher of 4 years, shared a different perspective about kindergarten expectations:

To me, a child in kindergarten at 5 and 6, shouldn't be expected to sit in a chair for 8 hours. Children aren't meant to be kept still. So, I think that school should be willing to offer a myriad of learning experiences. So, if they need to stand in the back, they can stand in the back if they need little bouncy things for their feet, to keep them busy if they need fidget things. Some are not able to handle sitting down.

Kat's comment focused more on the child's need to learn how to control their body, rather than the teacher's control of their body. This approach to inclusive learning styles allowed children to comprehend information in the way that worked best for them.

A common theme between the preschool teachers' beliefs about discipline was "challenging behavior" included the way children, especially Black and Latino children, "talked back" to their teachers. Teachers wanted children to do what they were told and conform to cultural norms rooted in white supremacy. Anything outside of conformity seemed to be considered a behavioral issue. Importantly, some teachers seemed to make their own deficit assumptions about children of color and their families when their behavioral expectations were not met.

Anti-Blackness

Using the lenses of CRT and BlackCrit, we understand racism and white supremacy are protected in historically white-dominated institutions. Anti-Blackness is a social construct extending the focus of racism to address specific lived experiences of Black people and the

history of Black bodies being despised, disdained, and disregarded in society and in schools. The following participant statements demonstrated deficit beliefs these teachers had against cultural norms of Black children and their families.

Montera, a Filipino preschool teacher for 20 years, seemed to understand cultural and racial representation in the teaching workforce could contribute to how children responded to their teachers. In our interview, she shared reflections she has had about classroom dynamics between teachers and the children:

None of the teachers look like her, like her family. So, she pushed us differently. There could have been that perspective of, there wasn't a teacher represented that looked like her that can maybe cause her to challenge us differently, because if there was a Black teacher in the classroom, she maybe had not acted the same way that she did . . . I always tried to find teachers that were represented in the classroom of the children. So, if there was like, a different approach that they would feel comfortable in the classroom, so, I don't know, if it's necessarily they felt like a behavior issue, because that they behave differently. But because at the same time, kids are being kids. I try to, to always think about and try to understand the Black child perspective.

Montera appeared to be the only preschool teacher I interviewed who understood there was a cultural disconnect between the school's expectations and the children's behavior. This was influenced perhaps by her own background as a Filipina school teacher.

However, all teachers did not share this perspective. Autumn, a white preschool teacher in southern California, described beliefs and attitudes of participants who expected all preschoolers to speak and behave in a way conforming to what they believed was "appropriate."

These beliefs and practices maintain white supremacy and contribute to deficit thinking about children and families of color. Autumn shared:

Most of my Black students didn't really have big behavior issues. It was mostly just in the way that they talked or talked to other kids. I had students who I felt were usually the low-income families. I've had several Black students, but a particular student, his vocabulary wasn't where it should have been for a 4-year-old, but he talked just like his dad. And I would constantly correct the little boy on that's not how you say that word. You know, I try to not tell them, "That's not how you say something," I would model it for him, like, "Oh do you mean, this way?" And the little boy would say, "No, that's not how my dad says it." And so, I think he just didn't know and not that he didn't have any behavior issues. But he just didn't understand the right way to say things.

Autumn believed there was a "correct" way to speak the English language and Black students were not taught the right way to speak. This was an example of a lack of consideration of the cultural and linguistic variety represented in diverse families and the way they speak.

Additionally, Autumn made a connection from the child's socioeconomic status to hers, and other "low-income families" language skills.

Believing there was a "proper" use of the English language was an example of whiteness as property. The marginalization of individuals speaking different dialects was a form of societal power. In the following example, Amber recounted a Black teacher and Black student using African American English:

I noticed this one teacher, every time she speaks to the Black children, she breaks into this sort of Ebonics, like don't be doing this and don't be 'bla bla bla' you know, but she only talks to the Black child in this way and I don't know, you know, I'm not sure how to

talk to her about that or let her know like, you can use the same proper English you've been using with all the other children.

Elizabeth, a Latina preschool teacher for 19 years, provided another example of anti-Blackness when I asked her to tell me some of the challenges she has encountered teaching preschool. She gave a one-word answer, "behavior." When I asked her to explain, she told me a story about a Black, 3-year-old boy:

I think he had like, no rules at home, basically. Because when we would tell him to come in and sit down, he would be like, "Nope, I want to play" and then I was like, "No, it's time to sit down" and he didn't want to sit down. He just wanted to do his own thing.

By assuming the child had no rules at home, Elizabeth made negative assumptions about the child and how he has been parented at home simply because he did not want to sit down. Rather than attempting to understand how this behavior could be a developmental issue, she resorted to deficit thinking, and anti-blackness in this case, toward his parents for not teaching the child rules.

Rose, who identified as Pacific Islander, has been a Head Start teacher for 7 years. She shared similar views as Elizabeth. When prompted, she shared her belief about where some negative beliefs about Black children may have originated:

I grew up in Mexico. It was hard for me to see people of color because I grew up around one race. In the movies in Mexico, Black people are portrayed as bad gang members and shooting. So, when I came here, that's what I thought, you know, that everyone is a gang member and they're gonna do something bad to you.

Rose's beliefs about the Black community were associated with negative portrayals in the media, where stereotypes are often illustrated. These stereotypes can be a catalyst for teachers to form negative beliefs and expectations for engaging with children in their classes. Amber, who was white, recounted a story of a young child who did not want to stop playing:

It seems like the African American children tend to be, from what I've seen, more likely to, quote unquote, talk back. And so yeah, so sometimes, you know, just to give an example, we had a little African American boy who, when he would get really mad at us teachers for basically saying, you can't play with the dinosaurs anymore, that time is over, it's time for this now. He crossed his arms over his chest and made a mad face, you know, but then after a minute or two, he'd say, "You're fired!" But that's just an example. But I think in general, they give me a little more that sort of, you know, the talking back is sort of like, "No, you can't tell me what to do. I'm not going to do what you say." Sometimes you get even a little head roll from the girls, you know.

When prompted if she observed similar behavior from other students, Amber said, "No, no, because they don't have you know, the 22-year-old Mama, who does the head roll just the same way, you know?" In this example Amber explicitly expressed her own racial bias toward the way Black children talk and move their bodies. Additionally, Amber spoke negatively and stereotypically about a Black mother who may have spoken in a more animated manner than this teacher was accustomed. This behavior was measured against white normative values and has often been one of the reasons Black children have been excluded from the classroom as educators have interpreted "back talk" and body movements as aggressive or insubordinate behavior in need of disciplinary action.

Many interview participants shared negative assumptions about Black children and families. Kat, also a white teacher, described how she experienced Black children:

I seem to be getting more and more attitudes, children where they give you that lip service, the head bob, and talking under their breath, which is very interesting for a 4-year-old to even have. It very much tries your patience, and you have to take a lot of deep breaths.

Kat viewed the Black child's verbal competency as challenging her authority as a teacher.

Alternately, all participants did not agree this verbal assertiveness was negative. Autumn, though white, had a different perspective about Black preschoolers and "talking back". She shared: "I have preschoolers and yeah, they talk back. But it's cute. And they can still be taught, and I can tell myself, they've only been on this earth for 4 years. They're learning. They don't know any better."

Unlike Amber and Kate, Autumn did not have a negative perception of her preschoolers' conversational skills, nor did she generalize "talking back" as a behavior only seen with Black children. Further, Autumn was aware young children were learning social-emotional skills and learning to assert their power and independence. These are all developmental stages of a young child's development and should be met with guidance and direction instead of negative bias.

Color Evasiveness

You can't fix what you don't look at. (Carter et al., 2017)

Avoiding Racial Discussions

When questions emerged addressing issues of color-evasiveness, a mixture of responses were evoked from teachers regarding their beliefs about the ideology of colorblindness. As discussed in Chapter 2, I used the term color-evasiveness instead of colorblind because the term

colorblindness has been rooted in ableism and deficit-based thinking (Annamma et al., 2017). A few participants believed individual race and culture should be embraced. Other participants expressed beliefs aligning with a color-evasive ideology of avoiding racism and discrimination by disregarding individual race and skin color and “treating everyone the same.” Finally, some participants shared they were taught to avoid the topic of race but have since learned the importance of acknowledging race and culture. Kat and Nicole, white teachers with 4 and 8 years of teaching experience, respectively, both believed acknowledging race and culture was important. Kat voiced people need to be recognized for their differences and for their culture:

And I don't believe in having America be a melting pot of everybody becoming one thing and being assimilated. I think that our greatest strength lies in our individuals, our individual self and what we bring to the table and our strengths. And your ethnicity and your race plays a huge role in what you bring to the table.

Kat shared she had knowledge of her students’ different cultural backgrounds and spoke positively about the value of acknowledging children’s differences. Nicole shared a similar belief:

Equality is not the same as equity. So to treat everybody equally, well, you're not taking into account really people's uniqueness and what makes them and you're not taking into account, you know, their family dynamic, and what's going on behind closed doors and their economic situation, stuff like that. And to be colorblind, I feel essentially, is that you're taking away someone's identity and not seeing that person for who they are.

Both Kat and Nicole understood the importance of seeing the “whole child”, including their race. They recognized and embraced the racial and cultural capital their students and their families brought to the preschool program.

Conversely, Martha, a Mexican teacher for 13 years, believed race should not be considered when teaching young children and they would receive equal treatment if teachers ignored a child's race. She explained:

We are the same. And we teach the children, we are the same . . . there's not like this and this black, black do this and white are different, they're not different, they're the same students, they need the same attention.

Martha's belief of avoiding race when considering children's educational experience aligned with the dominant perspective of neutrality and objectivity in education. Likewise, Elizabeth, a Latina woman who has taught for 19 years, shared acknowledging a child's race should be avoided "because we're all human beings." She continued, "Well, we almost have everything the same. We have, you know, our bodies always the same. I mean, different sizes, different colors, but we're all the same."

Despite being a Latina, Elizabeth believed everyone "almost" has everything equal. Non-white teachers also believed color-evasiveness due to their beliefs everyone was the same, despite their racial background, as Elizabeth discussed.

Xi Xia, an Asian teacher for 17 years, had beliefs paralleling Elizabeth. She stated, "I think [that's] correct. We should treat everybody the same. I don't look at race." Xi Xia described her stance of treating everyone the same as a method of reducing issues of racism.

Despite their different backgrounds, Martha, Elizabeth, and Xi Xia all ascribed to the ideology of color-evasiveness and did not think students were treated differently based on race, nor did they believe students should be viewed differently because of their race. All three of these teachers felt their neutral approach to educating children helped provide an equitable class environment.

Ted, the only male participant, seemed to have a very intentional method of avoiding discussing the topic race, even when a child in his class brought up the topic of skin color. Though he was obviously aware children noticed racial and ethnic differences in the people around them, he worked hard to maintain a mindset everyone was the same. This became evident when he shared his beliefs about discussing race with the children in his class:

I'm aware of everybody's color, like but it's not a big deal. We talk about race in the fact of where you're from and genetics. . . . We got the same blood, our blood's the same color, right? Red? But you got your mom's blood and I have different blood than you. So, I explain in very scientific terms. . . . When it comes up, we're pretty mixed. I mean, like I come from a science standpoint, like, if we're talking about skin color, I just like, Hey, your darker skin, that means you don't get sunburned as fast. Like we get sunburned faster, the paler kids, right? I explain the differences on that. I prefer to look at things in a scientific way.

Ted, an Asian man with 15 years of experience teaching in a state-funded preschool program, believed everyone was the same and telling his students skin color “[was] no big deal” to teach everyone they were equal.

Finally, some participants believed in the color-evasive ideology at one time and have evolved. Montera explained:

Yeah. I don't believe that because you're not acknowledging the people that need to be seen. So, I just don't agree with that statement that we should all be colorblind. And I had to learn that because I think early on, I was like, we all should be treated the same, but we're not. So, we have to acknowledge that not everybody's treated the same. They're not. So, I don't agree with the statement anymore.

Montera reflection indicated how her thinking evolved from her previous beliefs because of her learning in her teacher training. Although she believed everyone should be treated equal, she recognized this was not the case.

Rose, a preschool teacher of 7 years, shared her parents taught her she should ignore someone's race and just be nice to everyone. However, her perspective has changed, and she no longer believed race should be ignored, which she has applied to her teaching. She shared:

I know I was taught that like, treat everyone the same and don't see skin color but I do see skin color. I see how they're different, but we talk about the differences between us and how we're unique that way we don't all want to look the same.

Rose explained she believed racial differences and skin color should be acknowledged; however, she seemed to want to willfully ignore actions when it came to her coworkers and possibilities of biased classroom practices:

I try to think about these teachers and how they grew up. Did they grow up in a community of just white? Did they grow up in a community of just Hispanic? And so, I try to give them the benefit of the doubt and not go negative and not think, are they doing this because of the color of the child's skin? And I try to think positive about it.

Like many other people, Rose grew up being taught by well-meaning adults being a "nice" person means treating everyone equally and ignoring a person's racial background. Further, when Rose observed other teachers treating children differently because of their race, she wanted to give them the benefit of the doubt, rather than confront them about the possible biased behavior she observed.

Performative Antiracism

Implicit Bias Training

In addition to articulated classroom practice, color-evasiveness appeared throughout the preschool programs' cultures where participants worked, as evidenced by lack of training and understanding of the definition of implicit bias. The objective of implicit bias and antiracist training is to expose unconscious bias and encourage teachers to reflect on pedagogical and disciplinary practices resulting from personal bias and racism. However, data revealed workshops these teachers had attended did not accomplish that goal. Additionally, this popular way of educating teachers about racism and bias has been disengaged from any critical theories about race and racism, therefore diminishing social constructs to individual acts (Jackson, 2018). Antiracism work must be addressed at a systemic level rather than individually. Though most schools have claimed to support diversity and inclusion in their school culture, the following quotes demonstrated many schools have not put action behind those words.

When the issue of implicit bias emerged, the question elicited varied responses. Most participants seemed unaware of their own biases or that implicit bias was unconscious and should be addressed proactively. Participants who understood the value in implicit bias training were in the minority. Nicole shared:

I think at [Cal Coast Preschool], it's one of the values as to, you know, encourage diversity and to encourage inclusivity. So, we focus really strongly on pointing out our implicit bias and looking at situations, but as you know, why might we think that way? And what, you know, what can we do to maybe change our thinking?

Nicole stated her school valued and embraced diversity and inclusivity as part of its culture. Trainings often included reflecting on their own biases and working through them. Similarly,

Rose described how implicit bias was addressed in the Head Start program where she worked: “I would say they talk about it all the time. We have training. I would say everyone’s trying, everyone’s improving on their bias.” Rose had an optimistic outlook on how teachers used staff training to reflect on their personal bias at her Head Start location.

Montera, a Filipino teacher who has taught preschoolers for 20 years, explained antibias training has been implemented at her program for about 5 years, but only for faculty on hiring committees, as was her reason for participating in implicit bias training:

We must attend in order for us to be on hiring committees, and I do it because I want to be on a hiring committee. I think it’s every 2 years. I know, I have to take it every couple of years.

Montera further explained implicit bias training was not given to the teachers in preschool classrooms: “We’ve [faculty] been trying to talk about it. So, um, so, for coursework, we’re talking about how to implement antibias practices in our coursework.” Montera referred to a lack of implicit bias training for the preschool teachers in this state-funded program on a California college campus. Further, the faculty discussed how to incorporate antibias practice into the syllabi for future preschool teachers.

Kat, a white woman who has taught preschool for 4 years, said the state-funded program where she has worked also did not address preschool teachers’ implicit bias and she is “attempting to fix” this issue:

Because I think that it does need to be addressed. Antibias training needs to be in place. And not with just us, but the children need to be exposed to, um, equity, as well. And there’s like my room specifically, we have all ability, all gender, all race books that are within eyesight of the children that I went out, and I specifically purchased. So, I went

through a list of women history stuff, I went through lists of Black history stuff. And I bought those personally. I brought those into my classroom. Prior to that it was all just like the typical preschool stuff, the fluffy bunny and the, you know, that *I think I can* train motivational books.

Without program-level training and practice on bias where Kat works, she took initiative to purchase classroom materials to create a more antibias environment. She understood an inclusive classroom environment was necessary for antibias pedagogy and for children and families to feel a sense of belonging. However, she did not receive training on how teachers must identify and interrogate their own subconscious biases and assumptions about people of different races and cultures.

Although Kat was aware of implicit bias, most participants were not aware of what it was. Participants were unaware of implicit bias regarding their own behavior and their school did not address it. Autumn's response indicated a lack of comprehension of the term:

Um, I think if it comes up, it would be. I haven't experienced it where I'm at now. I do know that the staff I work with all are pretty good about—I feel like all the staff where I'm at now is in it for the right reasons. I think all the staff members are pretty good about being fair and, and giving everyone the same opportunities and working with kids who need it, some kids do get more attention because they need it.

Autumn's response described explicit expressions of bias, evidenced by how the children were treated in the classroom. She indicated she had not been trained to reflect on implicit biases all teachers bring to the classroom. She believed further all staff members were there for the right reasons but could not elaborate beyond thinking everyone was fair toward students.

Amber, a white female teacher with 15 years of classroom experience, shared the administrator in her program inspected the environment for examples of bias:

We do get regular training throughout the year that I think are, you know, trying to help us open our eyes to what having bias, you know, can mean, and can look like, and also just more generally trying to make sure that we're including sort of cultural diversity in our curriculum and in our classroom. You know, there is a big emphasis on making sure we have pictures around the classroom of diverse families and children's books for the children, you know, that reflect other cultures and, you know, there's, there's a lot of sort of constant push and review of that from the supervisors and the managers.

Amber described a surface-level approach to "diversity" in the classroom environment in terms of images and literacy. Like other participants, she had no knowledge of implicit bias as a subconscious attitude or associating stereotypes toward people. She believed including cultural diversity in the curriculum and having a few pictures up was sufficient.

When prompted about how implicit bias was addressed at her school, Martha repeated language aligning more with color evasive ideology than implicit bias: "We are the same. And we teach the children, we are the same. Your skin . . . maybe I'm darker than you, but I have my brain like you. And I have my heart just like you."

Similar to Ted, Martha believed the way to teach young children no one's skin color was better than another was to teach them the color of their skin is the only difference they have and that difference is insignificant. When the same question was posed to Elizabeth, she gave me a blank stare. When asked, "Do you know what implicit bias is?" Her response was "No."

Martha and Elizabeth were examples of how two non-white teachers can uphold white normative values because they have been taught treating all children equally and ignoring their race would create an equitable learning environment.

Ted shared implicit bias has been discussed in his program in response to something happening:

Sometimes it comes up where [preschool] students get to bring up topics and we address them. Like how do you deal with these situations as it happens and reflecting on what happened and how could you have dealt with it differently?

Ted's statement was an example of not only the lack of proactive implicit bias training at the state-funded program where he taught, but an example of performative and reactive antiracism, which are discussed in the next sections.

Reactive Antiracism

In statements above, Autumn and Ted explained conversations about bias have been addressed after an event or the topic was elicited by a preschooler. In addition to being performative, these were examples of what I have called reactive antiracism, rather than proactive approach to antiracism. Further, though antibias or implicit bias trainings have been implemented in teachers' professional development for many years, trainings focused specifically on antiracism have appeared in abundance as schools and other institutions respond to the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020.

Kat described the complacency of her preschool program in addressing bias and racism before May 2020:

I don't think it was ever anything that was brought up before. It was never a concern. It was never something that was on everybody's forefront in mind. So, I personally was like, let's, let's do the training. Like I think everybody needs it.

Kat, a white teacher of 4 years, explained issues of race were not discussed in her program or in the classroom before the murder of George Floyd. Similarly, the program where Sofia, a Latina teacher of 25 years, worked had a reactive response to social justice practices during the Summer of 2020:

We have been virtual from March until September [2020] and this happened during the Black Lives Matter, whatever, and they started incorporating social justice in our curriculum. So we have been working on social justice, not only for the staff, [but] for the children.

Sofia has taught preschool for over 2 decades and has not experienced any attention to social justice pedagogy during that time. This was new instruction for teachers and the preschool children.

Nicole, who has been a preschool teacher for 8 years, recounted the following when asked if she had these types of training before the pandemic:

Not a lot of them. I was with [Cal Coast Preschool] for about seven months before we went virtual and I was able to attend a couple in person but they are more geared towards things that we use in the classroom. There wasn't a lot on bias and racial diversity and things like that. I think especially just in the last year because of George Floyd events and stuff like that, that's the big reason why a lot more of these trainings are being offered. Because I definitely have noticed an uptick in the ones that are being offered. And I'm like, oh, wow, like, I've never seen something like that before. So like, let's take it, let's

see what they have to say. You know, the news . . . I think the turn of the world in the last year has really caused a shift, essentially, in the ECE community. . . . Because like, this is not okay.

Nicole described another example of how schools were focused on the appearance of classroom diversity and inclusivity more, but no substantive antibias or antiracist work was done in terms of reflective teaching. Her statement described a recent shift in how much training has been offered and the training content since the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020.

From an early childhood faculty perspective, Montera also recounted how things have changed since May of 2020:

We've been talking about antiracism, you know, how do we make changes to our coursework and our policy at the college to implement antiracist policies and really think about how our course design, our interactions, you know, really look at our policies. So, I feel like, you know, it's forced us to look at, you know, our whole college and to see whether our policies are really supporting all students, particularly of color. So, it's just been a lot of conversations we're having to have with our colleagues to really look at our pedagogy and to think about our own self-reflection. So, we've been doing a lot of work with antibias, antiracist practices, antibias curriculum, oh, antibias has been there, but now being more antiracist . . . trying to put that into practice and the courses since probably like last year. It's not just antibias, it's antiracist now . . . I think that the conversation definitely needed to happen just with George Floyd and all the news about things that were happening locally and more, like nationally, that it had to change. We cannot ignore this anymore.

Montera has worked at her current state-funded preschool program on a college campus for 15 years and has just now seen university-wide policy changes discussed about antiracism policy, coursework, and pedagogical practices for early childhood education students working at the on-campus preschool. Her statement, “we cannot ignore this anymore,” speaks to a much larger conversation about systemic avoidance of addressing race and racism in public education, despite vast research on disproportionate educational outcomes for Black and Latino children, especially in early childhood education.

Summary

Through the process of data collection and analysis, this qualitative study explored how whiteness influences both teacher beliefs about discipline and how discipline is implemented in preschool. The purpose of this study was to explore preschool teachers’ beliefs about discipline and understand how these beliefs may influence how they decide to discipline preschool children in the classroom. Data obtained from the interviews of 12 preschool teachers from California Head Start and state-funded programs revealed the critical role preschool teacher beliefs have on the disciplining of young children. Initially, the intent of this study was to critically examine preschool teacher beliefs about discipline related to specific causes of inequitable discipline or why Black preschool boys are at greatest risk for exclusionary discipline. However, data analysis revealed more broad and systemic racist behavior. Themes included whiteness as property, color-evasiveness, and performative and reactive antiracism. In Chapter 5, I summarize and interpret findings of the study, describe limitations of the study, and provide recommendations for research and practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. This principle has precedence over all others in this Code. (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2011, p. 3)

The purpose of this study was to conduct qualitative research to explore preschool teachers' beliefs about discipline and further understand how these beliefs may influence how discipline is administered in preschool classrooms through the lens of critical race theory (CRT). As demonstrated in the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct (2011), early educators are committed to do no harm to children, yet institutionalized racism and unconscious bias—the tools of whiteness—can cause the kinds of harm the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct precisely seeks to avoid. Indeed, extensive literature has detailed racially disproportionate discipline in schools (Brown & Steele, 2015; Carter et al., 2017; Darensbourg et al., 2010; George, 2019; Gilliam, 2005; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Wesley & Ellis, 2017; Wood et al., 2018). Scholars have continued to look; however, for reasons for inequitable discipline (Brown & Steele, 2015), in particular, determining why Black preschool boys have been at greater risk for exclusionary discipline (Gilliam et al., 2016). As research conducted in K–12 contexts has found teachers' beliefs and biases have been a possible factor (Gregory et al., 2010; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011), my data further has supported this theory and extended this premise from K–12 to preschool.

Alexander (2020) called mass incarceration in the United States a system of racial and social control. The author argued the growth in incarceration rates was not a result of increased

violent crime, but a systematic practice created by design to maintain oppression of people of color in this country. Similarly, Black children have been overly criminalized in school classrooms as early as early childhood education. CRT examines constructs of race, racism, and policy in education and is an appropriate lens through which to view educational discipline policies and how they relate to historical racism and oppression of Black people (Dutil, 2020). School discipline policies can be understood as similar oppressive methods of controlling people in Black bodies through punitive action for “misbehavior,” working in connection with the school-to-prison pipeline. These are tools of white supremacy.

I started my dissertation research thinking about how teachers view discipline in the context of disparate rates of suspension and expulsion experienced by Black children in preschool programs. Black preschool children are more than 3 times as likely to be suspended or expelled from school compared to white children (Gilliam et al., 2016). Disproportionate discipline practices have been researched significantly (Allen & Steed, 2016; Brown & Steele, 2015; Bryan, 2018; Carter et al., 2017; Edwards, 2016; Ferguson, 2010; George, 2015; Gilliam et al, 2016; Monroe, 2005; Skiba et al, 2011; Wood et al., 2018). However, there has been a dearth of research about how daily classroom discipline practice and preschool teacher beliefs and biases contribute to this phenomenon. Beginning to explore issues of school discipline and expulsion at this early stage may provide an understanding of the attitudes and behaviors students, specifically Black boys, will adopt regarding their future education prospects.

Interviews conducted for this study allowed preschool teachers to provide insightful responses to questions regarding their beliefs about classroom discipline focused on both the problem statement and the purpose of the study. The four major themes identified during data analysis were (a) whiteness as property, (b) color evasiveness, (c) performative antiracism, and

(d) reactive antiracism. The following section includes a discussion, organizing reflections by theme, and recommendations based on findings from this study.

Whiteness as Property

Every day, U.S. public schools operate in this undercurrent of whiteness, upholding white supremacy and leading to disparate consequences for Black students. For example, even though policies for California state-funded and Head Start programs prohibit exclusionary discipline through suspending or expelling preschool children, data revealed many of them do exclude children from the learning environment. Participants in this study described how minor issues would result in disciplinary action, such as coming to school late, being “disruptive,” talking in a “disrespectful” manner, saying “no” to a teacher, or even moving or playing too much rather than paying attention to the teacher. Such exclusionary discipline was described as making children sit down away from their peers, sending them to the director’s office, or asking a parent to pick them up for the day.

Because teachers felt their authority was tested, whiteness was weaponized through these various means of discipline to maintain power and control over children in preschool classrooms. Additionally, when a teacher felt as if their authority was challenged, they disproportionately viewed Black children as exhibiting “challenging behavior,” such as “talking back” or participating in more physical play than their white peers.

Punishing preschool children based on a notion of disrespect and disruptive behavior is questionable because the perception of negativity in these behaviors is subjective and defined differently depending on the teacher. Using the lens of CRT and its tenet, Critique of Liberalism, including neutrality of the law (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004), judgment of these behaviors is clearly based on a white dominant cultural viewpoint (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Behaviors of Black

children are measured against white normalized perspectives. Therefore, whiteness is weaponized to maintain power and control by using discipline as a tool to exclude children who do not comply with the standards of white dominant culture. This is discipline as white property.

When participants were asked what training or professional development prepared them to manage “challenging behavior” in the classroom, they explained they took college classes including behavior management and they had mandatory professional development days. However, training was based on school norms and has not changed in many years. Teachers were left feeling unprepared for what happens in the classroom and led to subjective preschool discipline. Public schools set classroom rules aligned with school practices and white dominant cultural norms and based on zero-tolerance policies which became widespread in the 1990s (Richart et al., 2003). The policy objectives and resulting norms were to reduce gun violence in high school. This policy has no evidence of effectiveness even in higher grades and has shown evidence of disproportionately effecting Black students negatively (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Bryan, 2018; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Importantly, zero-tolerance policies now allow for disciplining young children for developmentally and culturally appropriate imaginative play and are not congruent with NAEYC’s standard of developmentally appropriate practice. Garrity et al. (2017) examined discipline policies in 282 NAEYC-accredited early childhood programs, revealing only 40.1% of behavioral expectations stated by programs were developmentally appropriate for young children. This study revealed examples of these inappropriate behavioral expectations.

Participants in this study described several behaviors for which children were disciplined, including imaginative superhero play, fighting, wrestling or roughhousing, or wanting to play instead of sitting down. Further, teachers singled out Black and Latino boys as the primary

individuals reprimanded for this developmentally appropriate type of play for preschool age children. However, because of teachers' implicit biases, this childlike behavior was often judged as aggressive, which may have led to disproportionately higher rates of suspension and expulsion for Black children, especially boys (NAEYC, 2019). Additionally, Bryan (2018) pointed to using the CRT framework with young children of color, usually focused on adult experiences of race, racism, and whiteness. According to Bryan, race and racism play a significant role in the perception of how Black children play. The author argued Black boys are policed and surveilled in society and schools in a manner other children do not experience because when Black boys play innocently, they are racialized, gendered, and mischaracterized as violent and dangerous. Therefore, the school playground has been white property historically (Bryan, 2018; Davis, 2017; Harris, 1993; Howard, 2014; Rosen, 2017; Ulen, 2016; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

Color Evasiveness and Implicit Bias

A color-evasive ideology invokes the idea matters are approached fairly such as classroom discipline without considering race as a factor. However, CRT argues race must be considered because institutions were created to oppress minoritized groups to uphold white supremacy (Dutil, 2020). In this study, I avoided the ableist and deficit-based term of colorblindness intentionally to describe the belief all people are treated equally in society and therefore there is no need to address uses of race and racism. Ignoring salience of race should not be compared to blindness (Annamma et al., 2017). Color evasiveness was used as a more appropriate term to describe the absence of policies and practices addressing race, and it was seen through participants' talk about how they worked with children and parents.

Recalling Kat's experience described in Chapter 4, the state-funded program where she worked did not address implicit bias and she was "attempting to fix" that. She shared her belief

ongoing authentic anti bias and anti-racist training was needed for teachers and children needed to be exposed to equity. She purchased items for her classroom personally, including inclusive literature for her class library. The only classroom literature provided by the program were books on animals and the motivational book, *I Think I Can*.

Kat's classroom is an example of many early childhood classrooms with a race-neutral environment. This subtle form of discrimination and absence of ethnicity and culture in classrooms is pervasive and a covert display of upholding white supremacy. This is an example of what scholars argue to be objective processes concealing biases and reifying inequities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Tyson, 2011). Additionally, these classroom environments center white children and marginalize children of color. When race and culture are erased from the classroom in media, text, and discussions, the classroom context defaults to whiteness. Therefore, white children are privileged in ways Black and other non-white children are not (Blaisdell, 2016; Bryan, 2018).

In addition to color evasiveness, implicit bias emerged as a theme throughout the culture of the preschool programs where participants worked. Though there was a great amount of cultural and racial diversity within the preschool teacher workforce and the children attending the programs, most participants in this research study did not understand the definition of implicit bias, even though they have participated in implicit bias training during their years as teachers. This is troubling because it shows teachers receive the training but do not glean the information the training intends to teach. Additionally, a lack of understanding implicit bias or how it manifests in teaching and discipline practice could be a contributing factor when examining the cause of disproportionate discipline Black children receive. Gregory and Roberts

(2017) stated raising awareness about teachers' negative beliefs and implicit racial bias could lead to a reduction in overrepresentation of Black student discipline.

Reflecting on personal bias allows teachers to participate in reflective practice so they can meet the needs of children and families in their program. When bias is unaddressed, personal beliefs are considered normal and used to measure others' behaviors. Normalizing personal bias interferes with teachers' ability to understand and embrace cultural values and behavioral norms different from their own. Research has found teachers who do not think it is important to address race and culture and have a "we are all the same" approach to teaching create a deficit-framed environment by trying to assimilate their culturally diverse students into a white-dominant educational model (Ladson-Billings, 1995; McKenzie & Philips, 2016; Russell & Russell, 2014).

This common practice of color evasiveness in early childhood classrooms is insufficient and educators have an academic and ethical obligation to address race and racism with young children (Boutte et al., 2011; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Children reach their own opinions about race in the absence of intentional antibias and antiracist early childhood pedagogy. Further, Jupp et al. (2019) argued the need for race-visible teaching and learning, referring to a critical need for teachers to incorporate identity in their classroom pedagogy, including race, class, culture, language, and ethnicity, to move the discourse from appropriate ways of "thinking" to achieving systemic changes in preservice and in-service teacher practice. Although well intentioned, the belief of avoiding racial discussions and not "seeing" race denies systemic racism in our country and the lived experiences of Black and other people of color. This denial of structural racism in schooling also leaves educators surprised and unprepared when a racist event happens, and a quick reaction is needed.

Performative Antiracism

The dictionary defines performative as relating to ways of behavior exhibiting a socially acceptable belief, trait, or quality, often making a superficial impression: Performative wokeness enables privileged people to reap the social benefits of wokeness without undertaking the necessary legwork to combat inequality.

The data analysis revealed many programs conduct implicit bias training, claiming to support diversity and inclusion in staff meetings and classroom environments and making commitments to antibias and antiracist work without the actual manifestation of that work. These acts and statements are hollow at worst and shallow at best. Performative acts of antiracism uphold whiteness and white supremacy by adopting a race-evasive ideology, removing racism from its historical context, and addressing it with contemporary research. Small gestures of racism (microaggressions) are connected to historical acts of racism and marginalization of Black perspectives (Jackson, 2018).

Interestingly, Ahmed (2012) argued what I describe as nonperformative. They argued nonperformative speech acts appear as if they are performative. The name of the act stands in for its effect. In this case, the act of implicit bias training stands in for the actual work of transforming policies and practice. In this way, the training does not perform antiracism and simultaneously supports racism. In other words, according to Ahmed (2012), schools and preschool programs claim to be committed to antiracism but have not performed the work. Therefore, their training and commitment statements are nonperformative antiracism. Ahmed's analysis provides a more in-depth description of how schools nonperform their stated goals. Educational institutions' nonperformativity was exposed after the brutal public murder of George Floyd made it necessary to examine current policies and practices in the educational

environment. Though I have found this perspective profound and a relevant perspective for describing my data, I have chosen to continue using the term performative to describe the preschool programs' superficial attempts to demonstrate their commitments to antiracism and social justice.

Examples of performative antiracism addressed Research Question 2: How does the construct of whiteness influence preschool teachers' beliefs about discipline? Diversity and racism trainings must educate teachers authentically about how Black people have been historically marginalized in society and schooling and provide on-going training and support on anti-racist pedagogy and discipline practice. Not doing so allows the construct of whiteness to influence teachers' personal beliefs built on stereotypes and systemic racism to influence discipline practice.

Reactive Antiracism

A few participants in this study shared their experiences addressing racism at their preschool program. Most shared issues of race or bias were discussed usually after an event needing their attention occurred in school. This is a reactive, rather than proactive, approach to equitable early childhood education and is an indication of the historic lack of support for racial justice, equity, and commitment to dismantle structural racism in education. The structural conditions of whiteness influence what teachers believe about children and families in their programs, establishing behavioral expectations based on white normative values and overly disciplining children who do not conform to those expectations.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) brought CRT from the legal field to the field of education and created frameworks disputing the white-dominant narrative stating students of color were the sole reason for disparate educational outcomes. Yet, disproportionate educational

outcomes experienced by Black students have changed very little over the last several decades (Howard & Navarro, 2016). This lack of improvement will not change until educators are aware of how whiteness permeates schooling and work to disrupt it intentionally (Milner, 2008, 2010). The importance of addressing race and culture in schools is not a novel concept. However, when systems grounded in whiteness work to keep the status quo, issues focused on equitable educational outcomes become sidelined. Teachers are not trained to handle topics such as race and racism in early childhood classrooms and have no knowledge of how they uphold whiteness and white supremacy in their pedagogical and discipline practices.

Summary

Based on interview transcription, extensive coding, and thorough analysis as described in Chapter 3, the findings revealed preschool teachers participating in this study held beliefs about discipline and racialized identities possibly resulting in Black children experiencing disproportionate school punishment. To dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, awareness is needed of the path from school discipline and educational outcomes to the criminal justice system for Black children (Dutil, 2020). This path begins in preschool. When children begin their educational journey, they are entitled to teachers who understand systemic racism in society, how it is mirrored in education, and the part educators must play in dismantling the system. Research shows teachers' beliefs and biases are a possible factor in disproportionate discipline Black children experience in school (Gregory et al., 2010; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). None of the participants in this study spoke to the need for self-reflection and pedagogical adjustments necessary to put children's needs before their own and understand children behave as children.

Implicit bias training is presented as an effective strategy for guiding people to reflect on their personal biases to reduce racism and prejudice. However, increasing awareness of how individuals view and treat others is an insufficient and incomplete approach to dismantling structural racism. Personal beliefs and biases must be situated as part of a larger conversation about systemic racism in schooling to create substantial change in how Black children experience the school system and to close the racial discipline gap (Boutte et al., 2011; Jackson, 2018). Further, Gregory and Fergus (2017) argued color evasiveness fails to consider racial and cultural differences and measures students' behavioral expectations by a white cultural normative perspective. CRT calls for interrupting the status quo by challenging the prevailing dominant oppressive structures and argues punitive discipline is a fundamental injustice in the educational system (DeMatthews, 2016).

Findings in this research study point to how whiteness is upheld in schooling policies and implementation of discipline, specifically. These examples show pervasiveness of the dominant ideology and why it must be challenged consistently. Whiteness works to avoid acknowledging how the lived experiences of Black people are marginalized and white people's experiences are centered and normalized. When whiteness is endemic in our socialization, it is very difficult to step away and see people who are not white may not have the same "normal" perspective. It is much easier to avoid the topic of race altogether and view society (and schooling) as neutral and colorblind, so therefore everyone is equal. These seemingly neutral or colorblind institutional policies and procedures conceal biases and reproduce inequalities.

In this study, teachers' beliefs about discipline apply to all children but have a disproportionately negative effect on Black children as many other social issues affect Black communities, such as health care inequities like the COVID-19 pandemic (Brown et al., 2020;

Millett et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2020), police violence (Desmond et al., 2016; Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019), incarceration (Pettit et al., 2009; Western & Travis 2014), and unemployment (Laird, 2017; Miller, 2018).

Recommendations

Findings from this research support past studies indicating discipline disparities in K–12 may be the potential result of implicit bias in implementation of discipline policies and/or discriminatory discipline practices (American Psychological Association, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010; Lamont et al., 2013; Skiba et al., 2011). This research suggests several opportunities for early education administrators and teachers in their efforts for equitable early education. As such, recommendations for practice, policy, and future research should be considered in conversations about success of Black children in their early years of education.

First, antibias and antiracist trainings should be provided for all pre-teacher training programs. Inequitable educational outcomes will continue until there is a top-down (society, schooling, teachers) understanding of the absolute need to discuss race. Understanding racism in U.S. society and in the school system should be a mandatory component of pre-teacher training for every teacher, regardless of grade. Specifically, this training should include the socioemotional impacts of racism on students from different backgrounds. Teachers must understand young children become aware of differences in skin color, hair texture, language, gender, and physical ability at a very early age. Children are also sensitive to spoken and unspoken messages (i.e., hidden curriculum) received through implicit bias and stereotypes. Therefore, there is need for additional support for early childhood educators regarding culturally responsible pedagogy and behavioral support so they can become critically reflective antiracist practitioners.

Second, although implicit racial bias training is a starting place, this research suggests training workshops should be followed by in-class observations and mentoring practices to allow teachers to learn how bias appears in everyday classrooms. Alternatively, in-depth case studies could provide a way to observe bias in action. In this process, self-reflection should be taught as a tool to help teachers recognize their own bias and replace it with equitable practices and attitudes. Weinstein et al. (2004) suggested asking teachers to self-reflect on their biases and collect data about classroom practices and teachers' referrals. These data would allow administration to monitor for additional culturally responsive training needs (Allen & Steed, 2016). Behavior guidance policies should communicate using data collection to evaluate efficacy of policies (Washburn et al., 2001) and to interrupt implicit bias (Garrity et al., 2017). Effective use of data collection is an important method to ensure programs' behavior guidance practices are equitable for all children (Garrity et al., 2017).

Last, regarding policy, this research suggests administrators must monitor classroom behaviors actively and keep transparent records about disciplinary practices and demographics. Record-keeping is an essential policy to set norms, establish goals, and implement changes. For example, Gilliam et al. (2016) identified how early childhood teachers showed implicit racial bias by responding to young children's behavior when watching videos of expected challenging behaviors. Although there were no challenging behaviors present, and typical preschool behavior was balanced between children of different race and gender, teachers expected challenging behavior and stared longer at Black children, especially Black boys. To disrupt implicit bias, Fallon et al. (2012) recommended regular monitoring of disciplinary data and disaggregating those data by race and gender with a focus on disproportionate disciplinary patterns. This

monitoring is effective to uncover inconsistencies and implement goals to establish equitable practices (Skiba et al., 2004).

California has a very ambitious master plan for early learning and care, which includes goals for “equitable treatment of children (Alcala et al., 2020, p. 9).” This is defined through use of data to identify and support dual language learners and children with disabilities; preparing the workforce to address needs; eliminating suspension and expulsions; and incentivizing inclusion. However, authentically equitable treatment of children cannot happen until the system of whiteness and white supremacy is dismantled and color-evasive racism is interrupted. Only then will discipline as a value of white property cease to exist.

Future Research

Recent early childhood scholars (Henneman, 2014; Powell, 2020) have conducted research studies using counterstorytelling as a methodological approach to examine exclusionary discipline of Black boys in preschool. The authors interviewed families of the young children suspended from preschool. Voices of the preschoolers themselves appeared to be missing from the literature. It would be informative to examine how young children describe their early childhood experiences and their feeling of sense of belonging as they begin their K–12 education.

There has been considerable research documenting racial discipline disparities (Aratani et al., 2011; Dancy, 2014; Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam et al., 2016; Morris & Perry, 2016; Wright & Ford, 2016). Further research is necessary to consider daily microlevel teacher–student interactions coming before the final act of suspensions and expulsions and what interventions could prevent that outcome. For example, a research study examining how color-evasive beliefs

and deficit beliefs about Black children and families impact how preschool teachers perceive students' behavior would be helpful.

This study is situated in California state-funded and Head Start preschool programs. Future research may consider varying discipline beliefs and practices of preschool teachers from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and teachers working in early childhood programs in other parts of the country. For example, this study could be duplicated using the same interview protocol with Black preschool teachers to see if responses may indicate whether Black teachers have internalized preconceived ideas of Blackness and disciplining Black preschool children. Additionally, researchers may consider examining teacher beliefs and practices from privately-owned early childhood contexts, such as family childcare, and private and faith-based preschools.

Lastly, because this study was specific to the preschool learning environment in five counties in California, future research may consider required needs for training anti-racist early childhood educators in other parts of the state considering the upcoming master plan for early learning and care promises "equitable treatment of children." For example, research may consider what anti-racist education pre-service teacher educators receive across all content areas and who would train these pre-service teachers.

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Appendix
Interview Protocol

Part One

Demographic Information

Name: _____

Name of school/program: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Email: _____

What is the best way to contact you? _____

1. With race or ethnicity do you identify? (check all that apply)

- a. Black or African American _____
- b. Asian _____
- c. White _____
- d. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander _____
- e. Native American/Alaska Native _____
- f. Hispanic or Latino (of any race) _____
- g. Not listed _____ Please describe: _____

2. How many years have you been teaching? _____

3. How many years have you been teaching preschool? _____

4. How long have you been teaching at your current school/program? _____

7. What is your highest level of education. Please include information on your major or area of focus.

8. Please list any additional certifications.

Part Two

Background Information

Choose a pseudonym

1. Can you tell me where you were born (country/state) and where you were raised (country/state)?
 1. What was it like to grow up in your neighborhood?
 2. Who were your friends growing up?
 3. Did you interact with people from different backgrounds?
2. What advice did your parents give you about friendship groups? Did they suggest or warn against any individuals?
 1. Were you allowed to have friends come over to your house? Were you allowed to go to your friend's house?
3. Can you tell me about some of the traditions that you were raised with in your family?
4. Did you get in trouble often when you were growing up?
 1. Can you tell me a bit about how disciplined was handled in your family of origin?

Educational Experiences

5. Can you tell me about your K–12 experiences? What was it like to attend the schools you attended?
 1. Was the high school that you attended diverse? How often did you interact with students of different backgrounds than you?
 2. Do you remember who was part of your circle of friends?
 3. Did you have any teachers of color? Any black teachers?
6. Where did you attend college? Why did you choose to enroll at this college? How diverse was your college?
 1. What was your major? What kind of courses did you take?
 2. What kind of activities were you involved with?
 3. How much did you engage with students from different backgrounds?
7. What courses prepared you to work with preschoolers?
 1. Were there any specific courses that you enrolled in that helped prepare you to work with diverse students?

Teaching Information

8. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
 1. Did you have any previous experiences related to education? If so, how did these experiences influence your decision to go into teaching?
9. How did you decide to teach preschool specifically?
10. Were there any specific certifications that you were recommended to get before you began teaching?

Teaching Experience

11. Can you tell me a little about your experiences teaching preschool?

12. What would you say is your teaching philosophy? Who influenced the development of your philosophy?
 1. Tell me about any mentors you had while teaching? What was that like? What advice did they give you?
13. What are some things that you enjoy about teaching preschool?
14. What are some challenges that you encounter teaching this age group?
15. Describe your role in the program. What are your responsibilities?
 1. Do you mentor any new teachers?
16. What skills do you believe children need to be successful in kindergarten?
17. What has been the racial demographic of the children in your classes?

Program Information

18. Tell me about the program where you work.
 1. How did you end up working at this particular site? Was there anything in specific that you were looking for in a job site?
19. What are the racial and SES demographics?
20. Can you tell me about the community surrounding the school?
21. Do you live in that community?

Discipline Information

22. What do you consider challenging behavior?
23. What are your biggest pet peeves in terms of children's behavior?
24. Can you share a scenario with me about an incident involving challenging behavior?
25. When challenging behavior arises, how do you handle it?
26. When you need help managing a situation, who do you ask for support?
27. Describe your beliefs about classroom discipline in preschool?
28. What factors or experience contributed to your perspective on classroom discipline?
29. Can you describe behavior that causes students to be disciplined?
 1. Is there a process/procedure that teachers have to follow before disciplining students?
30. Who is responsible for discipline at your school? Do you as a teacher get a say in what happens?
31. What types of training/professional development do you think has best prepared you to manage challenging behavior in your preschool classrooms?
32. Have you ever asked for a child to be permanently removed from your classroom due to behavior problems? If yes, can you walk me through the most recent incident?
33. In your opinion, who are the students who are frequently disciplined?
 1. Why do you think this happens?
34. Do you feel that all students are treated equally by teachers?
35. How do teachers (or the school) address implicit bias?
36. Do you believe that we should all be colorblind and treat everyone the same?

Engagement with Black Boys

37. Can you tell me what your experiences have been like with black students? Is there a difference between how black boys and black girls behave?

1. Are black boys receptive to you?
38. Do black boys behave differently than other boys? If so, how? Why do you think this is the case?
39. Are you teaching in person now or virtually? If virtually, Is child behavior any different than when you taught in person? Can you explain what challenging behaviors occur in online learning? Is discipline handled any differently via online learning? If so, how?

Is there anything else you would like to include, in this interview, that I did not ask?