AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS’ NARRATIVES OF CRITICAL INTERACTIONS

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This study explores in one high school setting how students who identify as African American perceive the critical interactions that occur between them and educators that may result in exclusionary discipline or other forms of exclusion and how White educators respond to the narratives of the youth. Using Critical Race Theory, the design of the research study privileges the voices of the African American students and calls on the educators, those with the power and authority to exclude these students, to hear and respond to the counternarratives of the youth. Students who identify as African American were interviewed regarding their perceptions of interactions between them and educators that may result in the students’ exclusion from school. The student descriptions were developed into narratives which were presented to educators for their response. Findings include that the responsibility of addressing racism and injustice fell to the African American youth. The students were aware that their decision about whether or how to address injustice could result trouble for themselves, either through school discipline or other forms of exclusion. The educators demonstrated an unwillingness or inability to name racism and a reluctance to take risks to address it. Researchers and educational leaders can learn from the both the experiences of the youth and the response of the educators to move toward the larger goal of eliminating the disproportionate suspension of Students of Color and other forms of oppression in schools.

Keywords: School Discipline, Disproportionality, Critical Race Theory, African Americans, race, racism.