

**University of South Florida**

---

**From the Selected Works of Vonzell Agosto**

---

2018

# Conduct un/becoming: Discipline in the context of educational leadership research.

Vonzell Agosto



Available at: [https://works.bepress.com/vonzell\\_agosto/42/](https://works.bepress.com/vonzell_agosto/42/)

**APA Citation:** Agosto, V., & Karanxha, Z. (2018). Conduct un/becoming: Discipline in the context of educational leadership research. In Wilkinson, J., & Bristol, L. (Eds.). *Educational leadership as a culturally-constructed practice: New directions and possibilities* (pp. 243-267). Routledge.

### **Conduct Un/Becoming: Discipline in the Context of Educational Leadership Research**

In this chapter we engage in a critical, reflexive process focused on researching and leading assemblages of discipline. Our interest in discipline stems from concerns about disparities in the educational experiences of students related to social differences, which for girls of color is seldom to their benefit. We confront leading and researching on two interrelated fronts: 1) participants'/students' interactions with school-based leadership, and 2) research as authors/researchers who aimed to mentor graduate students as novice researchers while attempting to involve youth as co-participants. More specifically, we address methodological and theoretical issues that surfaced in the context of studying school discipline and educational leadership with girls and their mothers from a diverse range of racial and ethnic identities.

This critical and self-reflexive praxeological approach attends to the un/foldings of actions over time (Reckwitz, 2002). We focus on the actions and interactions involved in the research process and led to the findings in order to denaturalize them. Such accounts of research praxeology, the study of human action and conduct, are typically ignored and excluded from publications (Schmidt, 2010). Critical postmodern perspectives are engaged, including a critical qualitative approach as described by Norman Denzin and vital materialism as described by Jane Bennett. According to Heck and Hallinger (2005), in the field of leadership and management, holding alternative ways of situating leadership is advantageous when it addresses blind spots in the field's knowledge and disciplinary practices. We first present Reflexive Stage 1, which focuses on findings about school discipline, followed by Reflexive Stage 2 on un/becoming findings. In discussing each phase, we incorporate literature pertinent to educational leadership practice, theory, and research to illustrate the active forces we found resonating across assemblages of discipline. The theoretical framework supporting this inquiry is described next.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

We consider what Bennett's (2010) recommendation for the field of political theory might do for educational leadership. She argued that political theory would be better off if it paid attention to nonhuman forces in events, such as how the vitality or capacity of things can impede the will and designs of humans – acting as quasi agents with active forces that have their own trajectories, propensities, or tendencies. According to Bennett, in an interview with Gratton (2010), attending to the political ecology of things and developing a heightened sensitivity to the agency of assemblages could shift national politics away from a juridical model of moral responsibility, blame, and punishment. Similarly, attention and sensitivity to the capacity of non-human forces to discipline and conduct events in schools could undermine the limited focus on judging students' morality, blaming them along for behaving as they do, and punishing them through belittling, bullying, or exclusionary practices.

Bennett's hope is that the desire for scapegoats will lessen as public recognition of the distributed nature of agency increases, resulting in a less moralistic and a more pragmatic (a la Dewey) leaning in national politics. Our hope is that attention to the entanglements helps elucidate the complexity of how leading a discipline (i.e., educational leadership) study, or school culture (administrative disciplining) influences what becomes of girls and women. Along

that stream of reasoning, we mean to provoke discussion of the power, people, and ‘things’ (discipline policies, codes of conduct) that became possible to re-imagine when we explored discipline as contiguous and continually moving, active forces – an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004).

### **Assemblage**

Assemblages can be understood organizationally, as constellations constituting cultures (discipline, girls, and education), artistically (i.e., surrealism) as three-dimensional structures composed of various forms, objects, or artifacts, and philosophically as mosaics (i.e., Spinoza) (Bennett, 2010). Often assemblages are made of everyday objects – or what some might refer to as junk. Nevertheless “assemblages of such material come at the spectator as bits of life, bits of the environment” (Alloway, 1961, p. 122). From an aesthetic and material culture perspective, we are interested in the imagery of the experiences that come to us through listening, watching, and reflecting on how through the study we taught and learned about discipline, including what assemblages of discipline can do.

From a psychoanalytic and organizational culture perspective we are interested in the “incorporeal transformation of bodies” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 80), or the attributes of events that occur when desires make certain statements possible; some bodies possible (i.e., institutional, legal, student. machinic). According to Wise (2005), an assemblage is not a random collection of things but rather “the process of arranging, organizing, fitting together” (p. 77). We engage the concept of assemblage to “show how institutions, organizations, bodies” (p. 86), along with desiring and leading practices, intersect and transform. We argue that through combined energies and continual movement (i.e., gears turning, desiring) within entanglements of matter with varying vitality across contexts - there is flow between becoming~un/becoming. Such vitality, we acknowledge, is not solely the purview of Euro-western scholars but also has roots in Indigenous philosophies with onto-epistemological perspectives (i.e., Aztec culture) (Maffie, 2014).

To explore un/becoming through the lens of research and leading practices associated with discipline in schools we engage the following terms, most of which have multiple meanings.

- Conducting: Directing who one is (or is becoming), what one does (or is doing), or how one is (or is becoming).
- Leading: Influencing, for instance through provocation or inspiration. Additionally, leading in inquiry contexts (i.e., questioning; guiding the witness) can also mean that the inquirer is influencing a predetermined answer to question or response. While these meanings of leading can overlap, leading in inquiry contexts such as research studies and courtrooms is often unwelcome.
- Becoming: The development of plans, products, or people.
- By un/becoming we mean the devolvement (going to a less advanced state) of plans, products, or people and/or unappealing or unattractive acts, events, or qualities.

These working definitions are applied in subsequent sections.

### **Reflexive Stage 1: The Findings**

We approach research studies and schools as sites of tension for researchers and students attempting to negotiate discipline. Guiding the overall multi-year, multi-site study was the question: How are girls of color entangled in the dynamics of discipline in schools? Our inquiry into educational leadership and discipline has led us to ponder questions such as what/whose

knowledge about girls of color is elicited and disseminated, and what is the role of research and researchers in shaping the knowledge base that informs leadership theory, practice and preparation.

### **Leading discipline in schools**

The majority of research on discipline in schools focuses on relational dynamics between teachers and students. While those relationships were predominant for the girls in our study, we were also interested in what they had to say about school administrators, how they came in contact with them and what they observed about their leadership with regard to discipline for racial or ethnic groups. While it is not uncommon for youth to be concerned with their social lives, it came as a surprise to us that much of their description of administrators also concerned sociality. In other words, the girls considered the social and behavioral conduct of administrators in their relationships with teachers, students, groups, activities, and objects.

Boundaries between teachers and administrators

Gorgeous described the line she saw between teachers and administrators, whereby teachers were not privy to information held by administrators on the topic of discipline. She speculated that administrators might have been making up the (unwritten) rules. Following are her responses to the question of whether or not she believed the high school had unwritten rules.

It's either that or the administrators are just making things up. But I feel like there is a line between teachers and administrators who just patrol and have their office and stuff. I feel like some teachers don't know what's going on. I feel like there's a boundary between certain administrators and teachers. They don't always tell them everything. It's not necessarily their fault or our fault. (Gorgeous, Interview 1, District 1)

We sensed her empathy for teachers who were not informed by administrators, yet recognized that this communication divide could be problematic for her, such as when some rules were being enforced by administrators while teachers remained unaware due to them being outside the circle of communication. She further described how students might be affected by the boundary between administrators and substitute teachers in particular.

We don't know what we're learning and the (substitute) teacher doesn't know. So that means students are more lost. And when you go and ask administrators, they know all about everything. But they're not the ones in the classroom. They are just walking around trying to find people to bust or whatever they're looking for. (Gorgeous, Interview 1, District 1).

In addition to administrators who “walk around” and “patrol”, the question on her understanding of power prompted her to say more about administrators and other “people that work in that office” (who may be administrators but not principals or assistant principals). Nevertheless those other “people” figured into the assemblage she was describing. To the question of how does power function in your school and what is its makeup – she responded as such:

Well there is an assistant principal and a principal. I don't know their names. I don't necessarily know what they look like. I don't see them a lot. I just see there are people in the office (not teachers); people that work in the office. They always have walkie-talkies and patrol. They walk around at lunch making sure students don't leave the area because you can sit outside or inside the area and make sure that they don't do certain things (Gorgeous, Interview 1, District 1).

Implicated in Gorgeous' account of power was “that office” or as described by other girls, the “administrative office” (Madonna, Interview 1, District 1) and the “front office” (Elvira,

Interview 1, District 1). They described the office as a nebulous space from which discipline emerged. In addition to “their office” there was “stuff” – like walkie-talkies - that “people that work in that office” used to patrol areas. From these accounts the objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories are vital and the assemblage of desire provides a way of understanding how the girls are making sense of the question of power and leading practices.

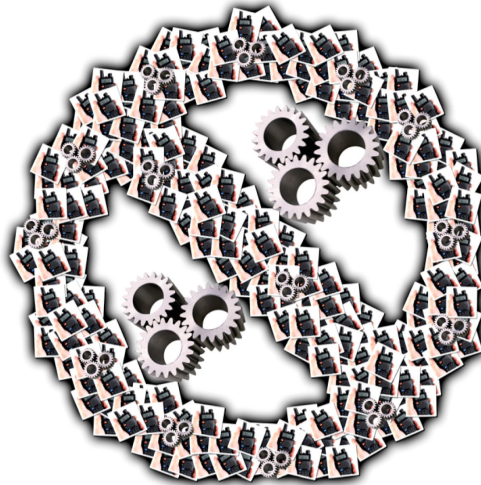


Image 1. Walk, Talk, Patrol

Walkie-talkies support the incorporeal transformation of bodies into gears of the machine of discipline. The static that emanates from them is a reminder to communicate (as one patrols), with another gear in the machine. The walkie-talkies are part of the operation. They allow people (“that work in that office”) to walk and talk to one another until the office draws them back in. As one researcher wrote about her impression of (three) students’ descriptions of school administration, “The principal’s office was viewed as a place to avoid and [was] associated with fear” (Researcher B, District 1, Journal Entry).

Students and administrators: deference or defiance?

The following descriptions of contact between the girls, or other students, and administrators speak to the subjective nature of discerning social behavior and the importance of communicating deference to as opposed to defiance toward figures of authority.

So I was one day in school I was really tired and there was this administrator and she was like asking me something and I was just like okay. I just kind of waved her off. And she just like, ‘What?’ – I was like NO, I didn't I didn't really mean it! So she just talked to me about it. ‘If you have a bad attitude don't take it on anybody else, OK’. Then I was like sorry and she was like ‘it's okay’. So she let me go. So you can't really, you can't disrespect them - and cursing is not allowed. (Elvira, Interview 1, District 1)

The tension in her contact with the administrator pivoted on the extent to which the administrator understood Elvira’s wave of dismissal to be an indicator of defiance or an indicator of reluctant conformity. As Elvira, added: “So you can’t really, disrespect them . . .”. Her comment depicted sensitivity to the importance of subjectivity (i.e., what the administrators view as disrespect), which is a constant theme in the literature on the disproportional punishment directed at girls of color in comparison to White students who are punished for more objective infractions (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).

Unlike the descriptions of Black girls in particular being loud (e.g., Evans, 1988; Koonce, 2012), or among those who are academically high-achieving, being silent (e.g., Fordham, 1993; Morris, 2007), this scenario involved motion (a wave) perceived by sight more so than by sound. However, the following account she provided concerned sound (waves) and the question of what conduct is appropriate for students and administrators (in what context).

I mean it, Mr. X, nobody likes him [the assistant principal]. He can be way too much sometimes. I don't know. At a pep rally we were screaming and stuff and he was, 'Guys quiet down or there's not going to be another pep rally'. And we were like what do you mean, it's a pep rally we're supposed to be all pepped up. Yeah. I feel like that was just too much. I mean if you have a headache walk outside, but you can't tell us to calm down - it's a pep rally! (Elvira, Interview 1, District 1)

In her comment on how the assistant principal should behave echoed the sentiment of the principal: if you are having a bad day (or a headache), do not take it out on us (or walk outside).

Elvira's comments about her interactions with two administrators helped to illuminate for us an understanding of how vitality [life force] mattered. For instance, the wave of the hand and the sound waves at the "pep rally" allowed us to consider how one's life force - whether feeling tired or feeling "pepped up" is subjected to the desires in the discipline assemblage: desires for calm; desires for (school) spirit. In both scenarios how a wave mattered was not automatically defined by the context. As such, a wave (of the hand; of cheers and chants at a pep rally) was a gear, a conjoining of body/spirit in the discipline assemblage Elvira described. These "gears" involved disciplining by school administrators, correcting her perceived "bad attitude" and threatening punishment (the pep rally could be their last one).

#### Inconsistency in rules and rulings

As the topic of fairness arose during interviews, the girls spoke of how it varied among teachers and administrators by race (students') and administrators'/teachers' desire to exercise their brand of leadership. Gorgeous expressed her sense that administrators and teachers can be unfair: "I just feel like there's a couple of those teachers and administrators that just aren't fair-or they don't give it [punishment] out fairly" (Gorgeous, Interview 1, District 1).

A common view of the administrators held by the girls was that they were all-powerful when it came to disciplining students, leaving no room for deliberation. Elvira, thought teachers were inconsistent in how they ruled. She characterized the administrators as unwavering in their enforcement of discipline. Elvira (Interview 1, District 1) wrote: "I would say that the punishment from the front office and the administrators, their ruling, is their ruling – and that's it. But for the teachers it definitely varies."

In addition to commenting on the inconsistency in their rules and ruling, the girls talked about unfairness among students from different racial groups. "Colored students [Ashlee's terminology] get more suspensions" (Ashlee, Interview 1, District 2). More specifically, they spoke of unfairness in how administrators dealt with infractions.

It depends on how much a kid does. Some of Black kids I know do get in trouble and it's like they know the administrators at this point. I think those kids get in trouble a lot more. The White kids they don't - they get in trouble, they just don't get as many referrals or many things don't happen to them as often. (Elvira, Interview 1, District 1)

While the girls described few experiences of direct contact with administrators, those which they did describe pointed to leadership enacted discipline across various aspects of the schooling experience, including the most personal such as determining how often students were allowed to

use the bathroom and what they could put in and on their bodies. Here are a few of the quotes that support this interpretation.

I think it's our principal who mostly kind of restricts our bathroom usage; (Elvira, Interview 2, District 1)

We got a new principal and she kind of thinks she can change anything and everything because she is a new principal. She said we could no longer take food onto the campus even if it is in a lunch box. She wants everyone to eat school lunches; I don't know why. The dress code has changed a lot. Pants used to go from mid-thigh, now they are all the way - they went to the knee for this year because people were disobeying the mid-thigh one. Now she is completely getting rid of shorts and capris. There are a lot of things she has changed just because she is now in power - being principal. (Ashlee, Interview 2, District 2)

The girls apparently viewed the conduct of school administrators as weak in relational, as well as rational, leading practice and therefore as conduct un/becoming. It is one thing to look at nationwide or even school-wide data and see the problems associated with inconsistency in how discipline is practiced and polic(i)ed, and another to look (into the mirror) at one's own involvement in the disciplining of youth.

### **Reflexivity Stage 2: Un/Becoming Findings**

The unit of inquiry in this reflexive stage shifts from leading practices in schools to leading practices in researching about discipline in school. Herein we highlight events and, through reflection and critique of theoretical and methodological issues, consider these subsequent questions: What conduct is un/becoming? What conducts un/becoming? This critical reflexive inquiry takes seriously the idea that "there can never be a final, accurate, complete representation of a thing, an utterance or an action. There are only different representations of different representations" (Denzin, 2013, p. 354).

In addition to the multiplicity of representations that come from this study and reflection upon it, there are "certain things we can build our new practices around" (Denzin, 2013, p. 355).

1. We have an ample supply of methodological rules and interpretive guidelines.
2. They are open to change and to differing interpretation, and this is how it should be.
3. There is no longer a single gold standard for qualitative work.
4. We value open-peer reviews in our journals.
5. Our empirical materials are performative. They are not commodities to be bought, sold, and consumed.
6. Our feminist, communitarian ethics are not governed by IRBs.
7. Our science is open-ended, unruly, disruptive (MacLure, 2006; Stronach, Garratt, Pearce, & Piper, 2007, p. 197).
8. Inquiry is always political and moral.
9. Objectivity and evidence are political and ethical terms. (Denzin, 2013, p. 355)

Although most of these "things" apply across all phases of our study, number six (bolded font) is most relevant to the planning phase of the study. We intend to highlight ways in which the study was pregnant with moments in which disciplining, conducting, and leading were entangled with power, people, and things. In continuing with the support of vital matter in assemblages, we continue into this reflexive stage to further elucidate the pragmatics (or schizoanalysis) of

leading and researching discipline as a machine with alternatives, jumps, and mutations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 146-147).

### **Planning the study: framing girls of color**

In designing the study we initially reviewed literature on discipline and gender (girls of color) that characterized them as being aggressive (Bright, 2005), and/or fighting (Brown & Tappan, 2008). Our search of literature (2003-2013), using key terms such as *discipline* and *girls of color*, resulted in an abundance of literature that helped to frame the initial proposal we submitted for IRB approval. The headings we submitted in the research proposal were bullies, beauties, and resistance. As such, the emphasis was on relational aggression, sexuality, and abuse – mainly on how girls' of color behavior was tantamount to subjecting themselves to disciplinary procedures.

Overall, the literature suggested to us that girls of color were being disciplined for misbehavior even if it was because they were responding to abuse or resisting cultural insensitivity. However, after initial interviews, it became apparent to us that the girls in our study were not living out the stereotypes about girls of color being (hyper) aggressive or sexual. They did not describe experiences of fighting, feelings of hostility toward students or educators, or infractions related to sexual expression. Although one out of the six girls had been expelled from school (though later reinstated), it was an unusual circumstance that did not involve aggression, harm, abuse, or sex.

Instead we were learning from the girls how discipline in the school carried into their homes, such as how the dress code policy informed their morning preparation and weekend shopping excursions. Both activities involved deliberation about what clothing to select, and whether or not it would meet the school criteria related to coverage once on their bodies. The absence of infractions involving aggression, coupled with the daily incursion of the student code of conduct into their lives outside of school, urged us to re-search the literature – as is typically done in case study research (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In re-searching the literature we found work on identity types (Gee, 2000), which seemed more aligned with the girls' ways of negotiating how discipline was enacted in their schools and a point to which we return shortly on the topic of social group identifiers.

### **IRB meets Y-PAR: disciplining desire in research design**

Some scholars claim that Youth Participatory Action Research (Y-PAR) affords students an opportunity to become youth researchers and to position them as participants in inquiry about institutions that shape their lives (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Cook-Sather, 2002; Oakes & Rogers, 2006). In addition, youth participation in research provides an outlet for their expression of agency or agentic potential – or voice. With regard to studies of discipline among students, we were also familiar with the idea that student self-reports of school discipline may be more valid than the data reported by individual schools, districts, and perhaps even states given that schools may underreport the level of violence and discipline statistics to avoid the loss of funding or being labeled a dangerous place (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008).

The assumptions we held about the effects of Y-PAR on students (rather than researchers), such as the validity of data and the influence of the IRB, were not automatically evident to us in the planning phase. Instead, they were un/becoming evident through writing, critical questioning, and self-assessing. Initially, when designing this study, we envisioned the research design would be youth participatory action research (Y-PAR). However, we recognized early on that the IRB process posed limitations for designing a strong version of Y-PAR. For

instance, consent forms were needed in order to engage students – or that was how we interpreted the IRB process, as primarily about the internal ethical concerns associated with obtaining informed consent (from parents of students and students under age 18). Furthermore, two of the three co-principal investigators (authors), professors in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program (ELPS), were leading the research team that included two doctoral students in their program. Thus, there was a layer of teaching/mentoring that heightened our sense of responsibility to lead a study that was ethical, internally (IRB guidelines) and externally (researchers' axiology concerning engagement with participants and co-principal investigators). Instead of the original version of Y-PAR we envisioned, with girls co-designing the study, we settled on their participation using an alternative form of the focus group. The focus group approach, and how student participants revised it, is described in detail below in the section on conducting and leading the study.

### **Conducting interviews: eliciting social group identifiers**

Others have inquired into youth identity development in secondary education, such as racial identity formation (Flory, Edwards, & Christerson, 2010; Staiger, 2004) and gender identity (Erarslan & Rankin, 2013). More recently, arts-based approaches such as assemblage have been incorporated into research on youth identity formation (Drouin, 2015). However, the following observations by Rodino-Colocino (2010) about research with youth concern both Y-PAR and youth identity. According to Rodino-Colocino (2011), there are tendencies among researchers when conducting research with or about youth. Researchers tend to

- reduce youth to broad categories of identity (i.e., girls of color);
- present stereotypical portrayals of youth (i.e., agents or victims);
- present coherent and linear narratives about youth.

While we use broad categories of identity to characterize the girls as girls of color and as either African American (4 participants), Black/Latina (bi-ethnic) (1 participant), or White/Latina (bi-ethnic) (1 participant), the girls did not automatically use these labels in their process of self-definition. Additionally, the notes (i.e., outtakes) and journal reflection entries researchers recorded after each interview session included questions about what it means to self-identify. As researchers we were working within a pre-established set of identity markers (i.e., IRB demographic table) and academic language we often use. Some of the girls' responses to questions to describe themselves are captured in the journal reflections of five of the seven researchers, indicating that at times they were "leading" the girls to describe themselves using social group identifiers instead of, for instance, personality characteristics.

For instance, Researcher D (District 1) wrote, "In terms of her identity she began with characteristics that had nothing to do with race, gender, religion or sexual orientation. She began by [describing herself as] being nice and not fitting into any one particular group". Additionally, Researcher B (District 1) wrote, "It was only through prodding that they gave their answers". Last, Researcher A (District 2) questioned: Why did we push them to define themselves by the categories we work under/with? Left to their own devices the girls seemed quite confident describing themselves according to their personality traits, although we pressed them to redefine themselves using broad categories of race and gender. Additionally, socioeconomic status was another group identity marker that was eventful, at least for us.

Interviewer: How would you describe your social class?

Elvira (District 1, Interview 1): what do you mean like my social status?

Interviewer: . . . well I said social class, but you can tell us about that.

Elvira (District 1, Interview 1): Hmm, I am kind of miscellaneous - sort of. I hang out with all different types of people, like, there is no general, like, classification.

As researchers we were unfamiliar with this self-characterization, “miscellaneous”, and uncertain as to whether she was using it as an adjective, a noun, or both. She initially defied being classified as a member of a group given that she hangs “out with all different types of people”. This claim is supported by an entry in Researcher B’s (District 1) journal describing how Elvira responded when asked to describe herself during the second interview: “I conducted the second interview with Elvira. She continues to identify as a nice person etc. (very similar to last time). This time she also described herself and her academic standing”. Eventually, when asked to imagine the researchers conducting the interview were aliens, and unfamiliar with her and her name, Elvira described herself as Black and Mexican, Puerto Rican, Haitian, Native American and African American.

Here we came to understand how the interview process was a site of leading as researchers “prodded” (Researcher B, District 1) and “probed” girls to state their identity (Researcher C, District 1). As Researcher C wrote in her journal, “it was as if she were reluctant to identify herself in terms of race, ethnicity, social class, etc”. Our desire to have the girls identify as particular types of girls, namely as girls of color (by race and/or ethnicity) became salient during interviewing; an event through which becoming moved in an eternal and productive return to difference (Stagall, 2010). Simultaneously, our desire to have the girls verify that they fit the sampling criteria, as “girls of color”, illustrated a tendency among some researchers conducting research as Y-PAR: reducing youth to broad categories of identity (Rodino-Colocino, 2011).

As professors and educators concerned with racial disparities in education, whether based in the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, policies, or practices or across several of these areas (i.e., discipline), researchers recorded journal reflections that spoke to the perpetuation of racial stereotypes of inferiority by some of the girls and their limited awareness of racial disparities related to discipline. Regarding racial stereotypes Researcher E (District 2) wrote, “I was shocked that she associated being Black with having little or no intelligence and speaking Ebonics”. Additionally, Researcher C (District 1) wrote, “I too am curious about the identity questions, their response, our response, and their lack of making a racial/ethnic designation, even when they were able to articulate some of the racial/ethnic differences related to discipline in school. It’s curious to me that the girls were aware of difference in terms of treatment by gender and race but did not ‘see’ (my interpretation) their race/ethnicity as a salient factor.”

The girls’ constancy in describing their individual qualities rather than social group positionalities was similar to that of the clerk in Melville’s *Bartleby the Scrivener* who responded to all requests with the phrase, “I would prefer not to”. This phrase has often been cited as an act of resistance to that which attempts to domesticate someone (Taubman, 2009). We read these engagements (between researchers and participants, women and girls) regarding identity, positionality, and self-identification as socialization events involving claims about being and involvement in one another’s becoming as researchers, participants, and members of broader social groups.

### **Post-interview debriefing sessions: researchers, mothers, and mentors**

After being interviewed and starting to exit the room, Gorgeous commented that as a form of punishment her mother had removed her bedroom door from its hinges. Researcher B (District 1) shared this comment as part of the debriefing session with other members of the

research team who had conducted interviews in other rooms. This comment prompted three of us researchers (professors) to reflect on the disciplining practices we used with our children, which included withholding affection and giving children the “silent treatment” as well as spanking them *and* removing doorknobs. There were tensions over which disciplinary measures were abusive or not in the discussion, which bordered on naming what we viewed as un/becoming of a mother. Through the reflective dialogue we considered what cultural norms were operating in how we, as researchers from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, disciplined our children and how varied our practices can be depending on whether they are done in private or public.

Later, Researcher B, District 1, entered a reflection into her journal about how she was reminded of the news that the door had been removed when she and a student/co-researcher entered the home of Gorgeous to conduct an interview with her mother.

Gorgeous said her mother took the door of the hinges! I did not know what to do with that bit of information. I considered questioning her mother about it, but I was afraid to ask after she said she was raised on a military base. I did not want to provoke a ‘drill sergeant episode’ response to my [perceived] questioning of her ‘single-parent child raising skills’. (Researcher B, District 1)

We understand this journal entry as including the researcher’s desire to avoid backlash that she imagined could erupt if the mother had sensed she was being judged. Also intertwined in this desire was the fear of the military, a fear based on images of controlled training being used to discipline soldiers.

Gorgeous’ statement served as a starting point – a thing involving relationships between people (her and her mother), objects (hinges, a door), and action (removal of the door). What was at the time a statement Gorgeous made in passing it was a statement that had repercussions for us. It prompted us to reflect on their experiences with discipline as an aspect of parenting and entered the assemblage of desire as a creative force to dislocate our thinking about leading/following. We shifted in our roles from being personally detached to personally invested leaders (influential figures) to leaders~followers, and saw the girls become similarly personally invested followers~leaders. By taking her statement as a point of reflection and re-engaging with it self-reflexively we have come to understand it as a shaping force that led us to reflect differently. In addition to reflecting on the study we have been helped to re-imagine ways of becoming mother(s)~researcher(s) who also discipline children and youth in ways we and others may find unattractive or unbecoming.

Gorgeous’ comment helped us to raise a mirror to our practice as researchers, a mirror that distorted our sense of what we knew about conducting research, including how we were becoming knowledgeable about the research participants. Ironically, we did not capture the comment by Gorgeous with the digital recorder since the interview ended and the recorder was stopped. Neither did we capture the interview with Gorgeous’ mother since a researcher (professor) did not press the record button with sufficient force. Even this reflection is a reminder of the importance of the middle as the most interesting area between beginnings and endings (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987) or (in research terms) what happens between data generation and data analysis. While we knew better (i.e., how and when to start and stop the recorder), we did not practice what we knew (perhaps for the better). We contend that discipline practice in schools can suffer from the same lapses in judgment and might also benefit from the mirrors students would hold up if invited to openly participate in dialogues as leaders~followers.

**Focus group**

The focus group was developed as a role-play activity that asked the girls to imagine themselves in our roles, as researchers, and collaboratively design a similar study. To inform their design, we provided them with statistical data on discipline across districts in the U.S. More specifically we provided the data on disproportionality across race and gender (e.g, Blake, Butler, Lewis & Darensbourg, 2011). The purpose was to inform the girls about the significance of the current study and therefore the significance of the one they were to design, from the research question they would ask to the participants/informants they would invite to participate. In the first instance (District 1), only two of four girls showed up so that our group was instead a dyad/pair. They proceeded to brainstorm and deliberate over the study they would design. Then, just when we thought we were “leading from a shared vision” (a popular phrase depicting leading practices in K-12 school literature), our plan to conduct a focus group in another district (District 2) was revised by two siblings participating in the study.

After reviewing the nationwide report on discipline related disparities by race and gender that we provided to the siblings, instead of following the research outline we offered they proceeded to communicate using arts-based modalities by drawing on whiteboards as they narrated their observations and interpretations of how girls are entangled in discipline at schools. The focus group we imagined was revised as the participants’ and researchers’ desires commingled and became entangled with the agency of objects, like whiteboards and cellphones, that hail users by often simply being present and performing as they were designed to do. The focus groups served as events that dislocated our sense of control as researchers who were “leading a study” and “conducting focus groups”. In planning we thought about what they are and would be rather than what they could become in the context of students’ lives.

### **Conclusion**

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1983), “desiring-machines work only when they break down, and by continually breaking down” (p. 8). In this concluding reflection we note that what broke down in the desiring machine of researching discipline was the design of the study: envisioning it as Y-PAR, re-viewing of relevant literature; imposing labels for students; restructuring the focus groups. Also, what broke down in the desiring machine of leading discipline in schools was consistency: the gap between teachers and administrators, the logic of the demand for noise reduction at a pep rally, and the inconsistency in the degree of punishment enforced for students of color when compared to White students. Assemblages operate through desire and a wide range of flows (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986). What might be perceived as a desire for power is only one’s fascination with the gears of the overall machine. It is either a desire to make sure the gears operate, a desire to be a gear, and/or a desire to be treated as material used by a gear (the finger that presses the button on the walkie-talkie button; the finger that presses too softly or fails to press the button on the audio recorder).

Machines that break down can provide opportunities for problem-solving, re-imagining problems of practice and inquiry, and leading practice that is responsive to what girls of color experience. The continual breaking down of research about discipline and the implementation of discipline in schools allowed us to probe events and take notice of multiple, transitional, and divergent meanings of conducting and leading. To the question of *what conduct is un/becoming*, we found that entanglements of power, people, and things exposed how unsteady the relationship between discipline and education was playing out for girls of color. Instruction emphasizing adherence to rules rather than growth in learning seemed to be in constant competition for primacy in the cultures of the schools. Thus it seems a great task before those in educational

leadership roles, especially those directly or indirectly influencing students' lives on a daily basis (i.e., teachers, school administrators), is to recognize the inharmonious chord that can be struck when leading to discipline *and* leading to educate.

There is growing attention to the adoption of restorative justice in schools to reduce race related disparities and exclusionary practices associated with discipline (as punishment). Attempts to take up a restorative justice approach to discipline in school offers those in educational leadership positions an opportunity to dialogue with students on the Indigenous philosophical roots undergirding restorative justice practices (Zehr, 2008), including how power, people, and things are in constant flux yet fueled by desires for consistency – among others. However, as Lustik (2015) noted, researchers and educators (i.e., school administrators) should have as their goal to understand when opportunities for student voice are technologies of pastoral power that reproduce the racially disproportionate outcomes educators seek to mitigate. Restorative justice practices can offer opportunities for students to make decisions and then provide rationales for those decisions (Gregory, Clawson, Davis & Gerewitz, 2014; Wachtel, 2012). Y-PAR might then be a precursor to restorative justice for it is guided by the ethic of justice and an emancipatory relationship between members of society regardless of age, gender, rank, or race. Though as we have illustrated, equity and parity in research or leadership are not automatically produced through the adoption a practice.

This critical and self-reflexive praxeological approach challenged our comfort with qualitative research that generates data and analyzes it as if disconnected from the processes of conducting and reflecting upon it. It also poses a challenge to traditional constructions of leadership in schools as it repositions leading practices within an entanglement of power exchanges between people, objects (walkie-talkies, whiteboards) *and* places (offices, pep rallies). Through our entanglement with people, power, and objects in the research process we were afforded mirrors through which to consider how research is disciplined and how we as researchers responded to the various desires associated with planning, leading, and conducting research related to discipline.

By exploring some unexamined assumptions that underpinned research methodology and theoretical frameworks used to examine educational leadership practices (leading in schools, leading research with students), we are perhaps be/coming more skeptical of research on the experience of girls of color with discipline, even when conducted with emancipatory interests and guided by frameworks informed by critical and postmodern perspectives. At least we are more sympathetic to administrators who are enmeshed in the desiring machine without plentiful opportunities for critical self-reflection yet with abundant opportunities to be observed and critiqued for how they conduct themselves and others. After all, we are also enmeshed in a desiring machine of wanting to know through research that is weighted with assumptions and imaginations about the ideal conditions under which it will be conducted and consumed – and by whom.

## References

- Alloway, L. (1961). Junk culture, *Architectural Design*, 31(3), 122.
- Blake, J. J., Butler, B. R., Lewis, C. W., & Darensbourg, A. (2011). Unmasking the inequitable discipline experiences of urban Black girls: Implications for urban educational stakeholders. *The Urban Review*, 43(1), 90-106.
- Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bright, R.M. (2005): It's just a Grade 8 girl thing: Aggression in teenage girls, *Gender and Education*, 17(1), 93-101.
- Brown, L. M., & Tappan, M. B. (2008). Fighting like a girl fighting like a guy: Gender identity, ideology, and girls at early adolescence. *New Adolescent Development*, 120, 47-59.
- Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion*. New York: Routledge.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing students' perspectives: Toward trust, dialogue, and change in education. *Educational Researcher*, 31(4), 3-14.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1983). *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H. R. Lane. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1986). *Kafka: Toward a minor literature*, trans. Dana Polan, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2004). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. London: Continuum.
- Deleuze, G., & Parnet, C. (1987) *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlison and Barbara Habberjam, London: Continuum.
- Denzin, N. K. (2013). "The death of data"? *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 13(4), 353-356.
- Drouin, S. D. (2015). Assemblage: Raising awareness of student identity formation through art. *Multicultural Education*, 22(3-4), 59-61.
- Erarslan, A. B., & Rankin, B. (2013). Gender role attitudes of female students in single-sex and coeducational high schools in Istanbul. *Sex Roles*, 69(7-8), 455-468.
- Evans, G. (1988). Those loud Black girls. In D. Spender and E. Sarah, *Learning to lose: Sexism and education* (pp. 183-190). London: The Women's Press.
- Flory, R., Edwards, K., & Christerson, B. (2010). *Growing up in America: The power of race in the lives of teens*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219-245.
- Fordham, S. (1993). "Those loud Black girls": (Black) women, silence, and gender "passing" in the academy. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 24(1), 3-32.
- Gee, J. P. (2000). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education*, 5, 99-125.

- Gratton, P. (2010, July 26). Bennett, vibrant matter. [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://philosophyinatimeoferror.com/2010/04/22/vibrant-matters-an-interview-with-jane-bennett/>
- Gregory, A., Clawson, K., Davis, A. & Gerewitz, J. (2014). The promise of restorative practices to transform teacher-student relationships and achieve equity in school discipline, *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 25(1), 1-29. DOI: 10.1080/10474412.2014.929950
- Heck, R. H., & Hallinger, P. (2005). The study of educational leadership and management: Where does the field stand today? *Educational Management Administration Leadership*, 33(2), 229-244.
- Koonce, J. B. (2012). "Oh, Those Loud Black Girls!": A phenomenological study of Black Girls talking with an attitude. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* [Online], 8(2), 26-46.
- Lustik, H. (2015). Administering discipline differently: A Foucauldian lens on restorative school discipline, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 15(1), 1-15. DOI: 10.1080/13603124.2015.1100755
- Maffie, J. (2014). *Aztec philosophy: Understanding a world in motion*. Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press.
- Morris, E. W. (2007). "Ladies" or "Loudies"? Perceptions and experiences of Black girls in classrooms. *Youth & Society*, 38(4), 490-515.
- Oakes, J., & Rogers, J. (2006). *Learning power: Organizing for education and justice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Reckwitz, A. (2002). Toward a theory of social practices. A development in culturalist theorizing. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2, 245-265.
- Rodino-Colocino, M. (2011). Getting to "not especially strange": Embracing participatory-advocacy communication research for social justice. *International Journal of Communication* 5, 1699-1711.
- Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R. L. (2002). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *Urban Review*, 34(4), 317-342.
- Schmidt, R. (2010). Re-describing social Practices: Comparison as analytical and explorative tool. In Jörg Niewöhner & Thomas Scheffer (Eds.). *Thick comparison: Reviving the ethnographic aspiration* (pp. 79-102). Boston, MA: Brill.
- Stagall, C. (2010). Event. In A. Parr (Ed.). *The Deleuze dictionary* (pp. 89-91). Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.
- Taubman, P. M. (2009). *Teaching by numbers: Deconstructing the discourse of standards and accountability in education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Wachtel, T. (2012). Defining restorative. Retrieved from <http://iirpds.pointinspace.com/pdf/Defining-Restorative.pdf>
- Wallace, J. M., Goodkind, S., Wallace, C. M., & Bachman, J. G. (2008). Racial, Ethnic, and

Gender Differences in school discipline among U.S. high school students: 1991-2005. *Negro Educational Review*, 59(1-2), 47-62.

Wise, J. M. (2005). Assemblage. In C. Stivale (Ed.), *Gilles Deleuze: Key concepts* (pp. 77-87). Trowbridge, CA: Cromwell Press.

Zehr, H. (2008). Doing justice, healing trauma: The role of restorative justice in peacebuilding. *South Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, 1(1), 1-16.