TABOO

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Introduction

Ahmad R. Washington & Malik S. Henfield

This special issue of *Taboo* was occasioned by several widely publicized, gut-wrenching incidents of physical violence unleashed against Black K-12 students that were video recorded and circulated on social media. In Columbia, South Carolina, a young Black girl was physical assaulted by a brutish and overzealous police officer (aka school resource officer or SRO) in her high school classroom, ostensibly for not responding expeditiously to a directive to leave the classroom. This young girl was aggressively grabbed and yanked from her chair, and violently slammed to the floor in front of her classmates before being detained and arrested. On social media and various news outlets, onlookers shamelessly suggested that the police officer's malfeasant behavior was logical and justified. When physical aggression towards Black students is publicly condoned and encouraged, it should come as no surprise that schools across the country double-down on punitive practices such as investing considerable financial resources to employ more police officers, officers whose actions have been found to have a disproportionate and adverse impact on students of color (ACLU, 2017).

This doubling-down on punitive disciplinary action, which is particularly common in urban schools with predominantly Black and Brown students (ACLU, 2017; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Morris, 2016), engenders a school climate where antipathy and psychological, emotional, and physical disregard are com-

Ahmad R. Washington is an assistant professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Development in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky. Malik S. Henfield is a professor and associate dean in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, San Francisco, California. Their e-mail addresses are ahmad.washington@ louisville.edu & mshenfield@usfca.edu

monplace. Several educators and researchers contend these draconian zero-tolerance behavioral policies are anchored to an Anglonormative logic rooted in ideologies of White supremacy and anti-Blackness that criminalize the behaviors and cultural aesthetic (e.g., sagging pants) some students of color perform and embody (Ferguson, 2001; Heitzeg, 2009; Nocella, Parmar, & Stovall, 2014). Some of the constitutive elements of this Anglonormative logic are: the tendency to idealize and incentivize student competition; the reification of cultural definitions of academic success where academic failure becomes racially-coded shorthand for intellectual and/or moral inferiority (e.g., low character, grit and determination, poor work ethic); a dominant discourse of neutrality and objectivity that assumes academic success is an individual and merit-based accomplishment (e.g., meritocracy); a Eurocentric curriculum that romanticizes and valorizes conquest and domination that assigns oppressed groups to a role of perpetual subjugation; a persistent reliance on culturally-biased, standardized aptitude and psychological tests to inform academic decision-making; systematically relegating Black and Brown students to vocational or military academic tracks; and using the Anglonormative logic to coerce Black and Brown students into abandoning and dishonoring the cultural practices and cultural wealth inherent to their communities of origin (Chandler, 2009; Ford, Wright, Washington, & Henfield, 2016; King, 2006, 1991; Perry, 2003; Yosso, 2005).

In other words, the school-to-prison pipeline and the predominant banking concept of education (Freire, 1996) are predictable byproducts of a pervasive and dehumanizing racial ideology. This racial ideology seeks to subdue students' liberatory imaginations through a discourse of pathology (e.g., "at-riskness") that deems Black and Brown children ineducable and disposable because their presumed flaws are considered insurmountable and, thus, too costly to address (Dumas, 2016; Lewis, 2010; Ruglis, 2011; Sojoyner, 2013).

While the aforementioned stories of gross physical and discursive violence certainly inspired us to propose this special issue, they were not the sole precursors of this work. More than anything, the decision to assemble this group of critical-thinking, burgeoning scholars was impelled by the desire to construct a project of noncompliance; a project that aptly reflects the spirit of critical pedagogy for which Freire was world renowned; a project that was an unflinching compilation of writings that mirrors the courageous spirt that countless Black and Brown students are embodying, in this exact moment, as they engage in acts of resistance to combat the discursive 'othering' that foregrounds and informs school pushout. These manuscripts are diverse in scope. As editors, we were very intentional in articulating our interest in provocative writings that examined the intersections of education and society, and payed special attention to what acclaimed sociologist and Black feminist intellectual Collins (2002) describes as the matrix of domination.

We solicited contributions from scholar activists who were uninterested in composing pieces that contributed to the ""normalization" of the "established order…"" or that conveyed, even in the slightest way, an overly deterministic

belief that the school-to-prison pipeline is "something untouchable, a fate or destiny that offers only one choice: accommodation" (Freire, 1985, p. 39-40). We wholeheartedly believe this compilation of manuscripts accomplishes this objective. Whether it is incorporating literature from Critical Race Theory, Lat-Crit Theory, Afro-Pessimism, Black Studies, Higher Ed Leadership, or the utilization of quantitative (e.g., meta-analysis) or qualitative (e.g., counternarratives) methodologies, the pieces in this special issue possess breadth, depth, diversity, range, and intellectual curiosity. Most importantly, these manuscripts reflect our deep and abiding love for Black and Brown students and our very heartfelt aspiration to immediately halt the institutional practices that attempt to suffocate Black and Brown children's zeal for learning and circumscribe their social and political possibilities.

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Restorative Justice
as a Doubled-Edged Sword

Conflating Restoration of Black Youth
with Transformation of Schools

Arash Daneshzadeh & George Sirrakos

Abstract

The anchoring weight of slavery continues to ground schools by design and implementation, 151 years after the 13th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified. Empirical literature is rife with evidence that Black and Brown youth are penalized more frequently and with greater harshness than their white, suburban counterparts for the same offenses (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Welch & Payne, 2010), to the point where Triplett, Allen, and Lewis (2014) describe this phenomenon as a civil rights issue. The authors examine how a constellation of school-sanctioned discipline policies have connected the legacy of slavery with punishment. In order to curb burgeoning suspension rates that disproportionately target Black youth, schools and grassroots organizations have adopted various tiers of Restorative Justice (RJ). This article draws upon existing theoretical frameworks of Restorative Justice to discuss new approaches and directions, as well as the limitations of its hyper-individualized applications in K-12 schools. Finally, the authors assess two case studies that aim to transform schools and community engagement by refocusing restorative philosophy on the ecological conditions of student contexts, rather than the presumed intrapsychic symptoms habitually ascribed to youth behavior and Black culture.

Keywords: Restorative justice, anti-Blackness, draconian discipline, neoliberalism

Arash Daneshzadeh is a lecturer in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, San Francisco, California, and program director at BUILD. George Sirrakos is an associate professor and department chair of secondary education at Kutztown University, Kutztown, Pennsylvania. Their e-mail addresses are: arashdaneshzadeh@gmail.com & sirrakos@kutztown.edu

Introduction

> You are not a citizen of a democracy but the subject of a carceral state, just waiting to be cataloged.
>
> —Justice Sonia Sotomayor
> Dissenting opinion on racial profiling, dubious stop-and-frisk
> policies and the abridgment of 4th amendment rights,
> and the prison industrial complex in, *Utah v. Strieff*

Mason, a 17-year-old Black boy, sat quietly and alone at a table near the edge of the school cafeteria. By all accounts, Mason was a well-behaved student who earned good grades and was an active part of the school and the community. On this particular morning, he rested his head face down on the table with his arms wrapped around his torso, seemingly hugging himself. Several students and teachers walked by Mason, yet it seemed that no one noticed him. One teacher approached Mason; however, instead of asking if everything was alright or if he needed any help, the teacher authoritatively demanded that Mason remove the fitted baseball cap he was wearing on his head. After all, the school policy was clear; students were not allowed to wear fitted baseball caps in the school building. Mason's response of "Leave me alone" prompted the teacher to raise his voice and again demand removal of the cap. Mason sat quietly, unmoving until the teacher took it upon himself to remove the cap. In an instant, Mason sprang from his chair, grabbed the teacher's arms, gazed deep into his eyes, and repeated, "Just leave me the [expletive] alone!" As the teacher cried for help, Mason released his hold and apologized profusely, none of which mattered to the school-based police officers who shoved Mason to the ground and placed him in handcuffs. Later that afternoon, the school's assistant principal informed the teacher that the administration would be pursuing a long-term, out-of-school suspension at an alternative educational site because Mason violated the school's zero-tolerance policy on physical violence. About two months after the incident, the teacher inquired about Mason's return with the school's disciplinarian, who provided two updates. During the suspension process, Mason revealed the underlying cause for his uncharacteristic behavior that morning. Mason explained that he had been the victim of an armed robbery while on his way to school. With a gun pointed at his chest, Mason was forced to give up his jewelry, wallet, and mobile phone. The second, and perhaps more disheartening, update was that Mason spent a little over one month at the alternative school site before deciding to drop out.

The above scenario raises several key questions regarding the school administration's and police officers' responses to Mason's actions. Were Mason's actions enough of a threat to warrant the police officers shoving him to the ground and placing him in handcuffs? Was Mason, a tall, muscular Black boy, considered a threat because of his physical characteristics or because of an objective interpretation of his actions? Did Mason deserve a long-term, out-of-school suspension? And most importantly, did anyone, at any point, inquire about Mason's emotional

welfare, specifically with regard to his traumatic experience earlier that morning? The above scenario also sheds light on some of the overarching problems associated with zero-tolerance policies. Such policies have been disproportionately applied to students of color attending urban schools (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis, 2014), even though they were originally designed in response to a number of widely-publicized school shootings carried out during the 1990s primarily by White students in rural and suburban schools (Howell, 2009). Further, such policies are often enforced on urban students of color for behaviors that do not pose a threat to safety, are highly subjective, and based on perceptions of those in power within the school structure (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Welch & Payne, 2010). Additionally, when such exclusionary and draconian discipline procedures are applied repeatedly to the same student, the chances that the student will drop out of school significantly increase (Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015). Research also suggests that students of color who leave high school prior to earning a diploma are at greater risk of being imprisoned at some point in their life (Harlow, 2003; Kearney, Harris, Jacome, & Parker, 2014). Given this evidence, a direct link can be made between punitive discipline policies and the perpetuation of the school-to-prison pipeline.

The literature is rife with evidence that Black and Brown youth are penalized more frequently and with greater harshness than their white, suburban counterparts for the same offenses (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Welch & Payne, 2010), to the point where Triplett et al. (2014) describe this phenomenon as a civil rights issue. An investigation into why this occurs is beyond the scope of this article; however, it is important to acknowledge these disparities if we intend to engage in a critical discussion regarding the reparation and restoration of youth who have experienced such trauma in schools as an approach to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. Given all we know about the mistreatment of urban students of color in educational settings and society at large, one cannot help but wonder if the zero-tolerance discipline doled out to Mason would have been applied in the same manner to a White student in a suburban school. Regardless, what we know for sure is that Mason's history of never having been in trouble did not seem to matter. His service to the surrounding community did not seem to matter. His participation in several school activities did not seem to matter. Instead, Mason was labeled as a threat requiring swift removal for the perceived safety of all in the school.

As the number of Black and Brown youth entering the school-to-prison pipeline increases, researchers from various fields have put forth a call for action to identify and explore alternatives to zero-tolerance and other harsh discipline policies. For example, Triplett et al. (2014) identified Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), teacher professional development explicitly focused on broadening cultural competency, and an increase in quality clinical experiences in urban settings for preservice teachers. This article follows along the strand and tradition of PBIS and explores Restorative Justice as a viable alternative to zero-tolerance policies. Here Restorative Justice is put forth as a strategy to transform schools and

restore Black youth from the trauma suffered in schools for the ultimate purpose of preventing their entry into the prison system.

The Impact of White Supremacy on Communities of Color

In the United States, there are ample cases where individuals received starkly contrasting punishments for committing nearly the same offenses, conceivably because of the color of their skin, which plays into whether or not they are perceived as a threat. Most recently, our attention was turned to the judicial cases of Brock Turner and Cory Batey. Turner was a young, White, male standout swimmer at Stanford University. Batey was a young, Black, male standout football player at Vanderbilt University. Turner was tried for sexually assaulting an unconscious woman behind a garbage dumpster. Batey was tried for sexually assaulting an unconscious woman in a dormitory room. After their respective trials, both men were found guilty of multiple felony charges, yet Turner's 6-month jail sentence was strikingly shorter than Batey's 15 to 25-year prison sentence.

An array of scholars of color including Amos Wilson, bell hooks, Asa Hilliard III, Uma Jayakumar, and John Henrik Clarke have provided deep insights into how ubiquitous European norms are in America and how these norms have fostered the permanence of White supremacist ideologies in our society. In her 2009 TedTalk, *The Danger of a Single Story*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explained how people with power all too often get to write the narrative for those who lack power. The cases of Brock Turner and Cory Batey and countless others reinforce Adichie's assertion and demonstrate how communities of color have been impacted by Eurocentric norms and how Black bodies, in particular, have been existentially weaponized through the legal system, seeing them as threats first and humans second. Hence, in this section we contend that the school-to-prison pipeline exists because of White Supremacist norms and wish to highlight the impact that non-conformity to White racial frames of achievement has had on Black youth.

The anchoring weight of slavery continues to ground schools by design and implementation, 151 years after the 13th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified. Tracing the evolution of this post-industrial and "emancipated" America, we find more legislative attention paid to material production than social liberation, which gave rise to federally-sanctioned projects aimed at upholding and securing kyriarchal power structures imbued by White colonial settlers (Butchart, 1980). For example, Freedman Schools in the south, specifically appropriated by Congress as pedagogical sites for those recently emancipated from slavery, were not engendered with the same level of sociopolitical respect as schools reserved for their predominantly white counterparts. In 1870, Congress created the Freedman Bureau, charged with subsidizing and stocking the rudimentary provisions for teaching and learning such as schoolrooms, transportation, and books for Black teachers and youth in the south. However, despite comprising over half of Georgia's

school-going population at the time, and the obligation to pay taxes towards state education coffers, Freedman School families and students were still excluded from enjoying many of the amenities offered by de facto public institutions originally created for White students (Anderson, 1988).

While educational sites and their operations have undergone dramatic reconstruction paved by legislation and collective practice over decades, the iterations of schooling converge on one seminal point: to maintain the dominant paradigm of capitalism as transmitted through the cultural tenets of Imperialist White Supremacist Heteropatriarchy (hooks, 1994). The mission to protect the majoritarian narrative of power is riddled within school textbooks (Ravitch, 2013), funding algorithms (Rose & Weston, 2013), and leadership structures (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012) that herald a racial apartheid through coded and duplicitous language. This language provides the culturally subtractive (Valenzuela, 1999) and White-systemic frameworks (Feagin, 2009) that objectify youth and, over time, balkanize students in lockstep with the dominant economic and racial hierarchy. What is most endemic to the historical organization of schools is the outright erasure, by homogenizing and gutting contributions of people of color through eugenic projects such as the Carlisle Indian Industrial Schools (Adams, 1997), and other boarding schools, specifically designed to cleave youth from their communities and culturally sterilize First Nation youth, to reify the European colonial vision of physical and psychological conquest. Scholars have emphasized the relationship between exhuming the intellectual ancestry and cultural literacy of youth and liberatory space-making in schools. King, Swartz, Campbell, Lemons-Smith, and Lopez (2014) highlight the process of "othering" or socially isolating youth from academic contexts, by denying access to what Tara Yosso (2005) coins as cultural wealth, particularly resistance capital. King et al. (2014) argue that White Supremacist infrastructure of schools maintains hegemony by seizing a child's knowledge of community and by hyper-individualizing the experience of learning. They write:

> Denials or restrictions of freedom to some are in sync with the cultural tenets (e.g., duality, a hierarchy of human worth, might makes right, social isolation and fragmentation) that underpin European/White traditions and practices (Durkheim, 1949; Hobbes, 1977/1651; Spencer, 1897). Due to these cultural tenets, individually oriented cultures were and are inclined to make exclusionary claims about maintaining culture, with the conservation of the dominant culture viewed as achievable only by separation from and subjugation and exploitation of other cultures. Standard social studies materials cloak the claims advanced by European/White colonists and Enlightenment philosophers by portraying land theft and enslavement—with all the cultural disruptions they entailed—as inevitabilities of colonial settlement, expansion, and economic development. They were outcomes of the European assertion that only they had the right to maintain culture. A "re-membered" text on freedom and democracy connects alterity and dominant themes, and in so doing, shifts the student of freedom and democracy from sole assertions of supremacist inevitability to examining sets of assertions. (pp. 68-69)

The quote above illustrates the duplicitous actions and practices employed by many institutions—including schools—as they relate to freedom and oppression. Today's schools, in relation to their colonial counterparts that predominantly served White aristocratic males, offer a tacit binary that demarcates the line between the subjugated pupil and the unsubjugated dominant group. That is, offering the illusion of participation without transmogrifying the colonial requisites that socially quarantine students historically left out of the academic edifice. Antonio Gramsci captured the contradiction of marginalization that occurs when the oppressed participate within systems built by their oppressors. Cited by Hoare and Smith (1971), Gramsci deftly explains that "the normal exercise of hegemony" on the educational terrain is "characterized by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally without force predominating excessively over consent" (p. 80). Scholars find that, over time, schools have doubled-down on their draconian and eugenic roots—which materialize as disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of Black youth. As Henry Giroux (cited by Nocella, Parmar, & Stovall, 2014) contends,

> …if youth were once viewed as the site where society deposited its dreams, that is no longer true. Punishment and fear have replaced compassion and social responsibility as modalities mediating the relationship of youth to the larger social order. (p. 73)

This is particularly true for Black youth, whose disproportionate rates of surveillance and hyper-criminalization signals a reprogrammed version of human sorted and coded in ambivalent language of school security, intrapsychic objectification, and individual responsibility. According to Nancy Heitzeg (cited by Nocella et al., 2014):

> Black students make up only 18% of students, but they account for 35% of those suspended once, 46% of those suspended more than once, and 39% of all expulsions. In addition, Black and Latino students represent more than 70% of the students arrested or referred to law enforcement at school (Eckholm, 2013). This racial over-representation then manifests itself in both higher drop-out rates for students of color (students from historically disadvantaged minority groups have little more than a fifty-fifty chance of finishing high school with a diploma) as well as the racialized dynamic of the legal system (Losen & Gillepsie, 2012; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). (p. 23)

Following the *Brown versus Board* decision of 1954 which sought to racially integrate schools, credentialed Black teachers across the nation were fired in droves, leading to a separation of youth from their cultural wealth. Toppo (2004), using National Education Association data, provided a staggering account of the deleterious consequence that the landmark decision had on Black neighborhood schools:

> In 1954, there were 82,000 Black teachers; however, during the 11 years after the court ruling, some 38,000 Black teachers and administrators lost their jobs. After desegregation, 90 percent of Black principals lost their jobs, mainly in southern states. Qualified Black teachers were often replaced with less qualified White teach-

ers according to researcher Carol Karpinski; indeed, 85 percent of Black teachers had college degrees compared to 75 percent of White teachers. (p. 2)

The *Brown* decision also served as a watershed moment creating an opportunity for Europeans and their White descendants to represent the academic constructs of all achievement while simultaneously denying Black teachers and administrators an opportunity to provide relevant possibilities for Black children. The *Brown* decision helped advance another negative effect: dispossession of the Black community from having political ownership over shared institutions. That is, obstacles like job security and harassment interfered with concerned parents and community members who wanted equitable stakeholdership in school leadership that would allow them to derive the pillars of student outcomes in America. Drawing upon the canonical and empirical library of organizational scholars, it becomes abundantly clear that children of the Black diaspora, in addition to other historically looted and dehumanized populations, continue to be subjected to racial segregation in schools. Assimilation is advanced through sleight-of-hand logic that physically orients Black youth in White Supremacist school structures, where dominant culture reigns over curriculum, classroom behavior management, and presumed ability of students; the deception of assimilation as a reparative strategy rests in how it is shrouded in superficial conceptions of post-*Brown* decision inclusion and neoliberal versions of multicultural diversity. Schools, though, are not the sole progenitors for human sorting and commodified existence through the codification of labor--a universalized and interlocked process of subjection referred to as the necropolitical apparatus of oppression (Mbeme, 2003).

A distinct constellation of segregation practices connects the culture of school organization with the ostentation of Black suffrage. Schools become action arms of subjugation. Sadiya Hartman (1997) asserts that the everyday privilege enjoyed by White people in America is inextricably linked to segregation evidenced by everyday practices in schools. Hartman (1997) describes the paradox of segregation after the *Brown* decision as the lingering badge of slavery, which was protected by a statute that insisted on providing "for the equivalent treatment of the races, as though the symmetry of [*Brown* decision] itself prevented injurious and degrading effects" (p. 194). According to Hartman and others, the *Brown* decision was intent on granting the social benefits of White privilege, to those students who could mimic and in essence, participate in upholding its capitalistic agenda; and, in accordance to youth from non-White communities, "culturally suicidal" (Tierney, 1999) zeitgeist.

The Birth of Microsegregated Schools

As we have discussed, the *Brown versus Board* (1954) decision has a profoundly complex meaning for Black youth and families in America. *Brown* underscores Bensimon's (2005) cognitive frame of diversity, which refers to the demographic of predominantly White schools toward a more ethnically diverse composition, while

continuing the advancement of a monocultural frame of political organization in curriculum and practice. Bensimon (2005) describes the pitfalls of diversity frames that lack critical approaches to multiculturalism as a result of "Positive attitudes towards increasing minority student participation… but they are inclined to attribute differences in educational outcomes… to cultural stereotypes, inadequate socialization, or lack of motivation and initiative on the part of the students" (p. 102).

The monocultural approach towards augmenting Black student populations, painted widely as boosting a singular notion of "diversity," absolves institutions from actually addressing racial and ethnic iniquities that stifle a foundational mission of justice and equity for all. As well, monoculturalism emboldened the usage of Whiteness as the default proxy for academic excellence, and the "master-key that unlock[ed] the golden door of opportunity" (Hartman, 1997, p. 194). To legislate Whiteness as political currency or "property" (Harris, 1993), was to create a false binary that reoriented Black youth as peripheral and passive observers from the center of dominant school culture. As a consequence of this sublimating position, children of color were portrayed as deprived and innately corrupt specimens, sorely in need of the paternalistic interventions germane to schools serving the White Supremacist agenda. These interventions compose a school "culture of cruelty" backed by the "politics of humiliation" (Giroux, 2015, p. 14). It is paramount to remember that schools were forged in a crucible of colonialism and underwritten by perceptions of racial, socioeconomic, and gender hierarchies. As a result of this legacy, schools are operationalized as an action arm for necropolitics, by inculcating a deficit view of subordinated students—namely Black and First Nation populations—since the inception of school integration. As a result of this transmogrified, academic caste system, Blackness is seen as asynchronous to Whiteness. This relative proximity to dominant culture, through school norming techniques, creates a deficit model that distorts perceptions of Black youth as untamed savages in need of formal training. By extension, entire swaths of Black youth, families, and neighborhoods are stereotyped as collectively needy, and otherwise, unruly subhumans. Richard Valencia (1986) unpacks the rise of this deficit perception that plagues images of Black youth:

> Also known in the literature as the "social pathology" model or the "cultural deprivation" model, the deficit approach explains disproportionate academic problems among low status students as largely being due to pathologies or deficits in their sociocultural background (e.g., cognitive and linguistic deficiencies, low self-esteem, poor motivation) … To impose the educability of such students, programs such as compensatory education and parent-child intervention have been proposed. (p. 3)

What exacerbates this conception of Black youth is the pretense that poverty is a crime, much like Blackness is an ontological threat. Rather than pivot away from archaic language and belief systems that enable the violent rhetoric and infrastructure of White Supremacy, Black youth, particularly those from economically blighted

communities, are held responsible and even criminalized for attempting to participate in schools once reserved exclusively for White people. Under ideal conditions, schools would examine the historical precursors that systematically propagandized a troubled image of "other" (non-White) races to justify the superiority and creation of Whiteness (Lopez, 2006), while similarly brokering socially isolated milieus starved by poverty to legitimize dependency on predatory capitalism (Duneier, 2016).

A recent report from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2016) showed that 1.6 million students attended schools with a School Law Enforcement Officer (SLEO) but not a counselor who was clinically trained to deescalate conflict. Most detrimental to the academic longevity of Black youth were findings from Losen, Hodson, Keith II, Morrison, Belway (2015) at the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at UCLA. They found that Black K-12 students reflect a staggering 23 percent of the 18 million days of lost instruction due to out-of-school suspensions during the 2011-2012 academic year. If the primary goal of discipline is to sustain learning opportunities for youth, the systemic confinement and rampant ostracizing of Black students represents the antithetical practice and ontological contradiction of school leadership; perpetuating the very system of inequity it purports to subvert.

While the juvenile incarceration rate has plummeted by 41 percent from 1995 to 2010, the rate of Black youth being jailed is still five times greater than their White peers (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011). Overall, the United States leads the globe in youth incarceration, with a confinement rate of more than 300 per 100,000 children (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011). Black youth, which still comprise the preponderance of children locked in youth detention facilities, are three times more likely than White counterparts to be suspended or expelled from school (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). And while this disparity grows, so too does the correlation between school discipline and youth incarceration. One study in Texas found that 23 percent of youth who were suspended at least once during middle school or high school made contact with the juvenile penal system—versus 2 percent for those youth who had never been disciplined in school (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2011). This model of school discipline, disproportionately targets Black youth as young as preschool age for minor offenses which are stationed primarily by subjective and racialized biases (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May & Tobin, 2011). Among the litany of subjective or minor issues that resulted in suspension or expulsion, were truancy, disrespect, and even violations of school dress code (Skiba et al., 2011). However, White students were more likely to be punished for provable, harsher, or documented transgressions such as smoking or vandalism. These studies suggest that Black youth—particularly males as they have been maligned through negative media images and rhetoric, which distort them as inherently violent—do not, in fact, misbehave at a rate higher than their non-Black counterparts. Yet Black youth are steeped in a ubiquitous school climate of draconian and targeted control.

Over the years, a number of scholars have attempted to identify the structures that leverage and promulgate the retributive state of schools—as they pertain to Black youth experience. One example is African American Male Theory (AAMT), which resurrects a number of canonical subtexts as touchstones, to articulate the relationship between the "pre and post-enslavement experiences" and the "spiritual, psychological, social, and educational development" of Black boys and men (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 6). AAMT is underpinned by numerous other frameworks including Black Feminist and Womanist Theory (Cannon 1988; Collins, 2000), which illustrates the intersectional dynamic of ecological systems (e.g., poverty, racism and identity formation being precipitates of interconnected environments) captured by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1989). AAMT is also underpinned by Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) (Brayboy, 2005), which represents the veritable bridge between desecration of indigenous land, natural resources, and cultural literacy, and the false binaries (e.g., Black as proxy for criminal) common to the daily experiences of many non-White populations. A result of findings that magnify the urgent need to redress school conditions, unfairly and subjectively punishing Black youth, is an emergent movement towards alternative policies and positive behavior approaches to school discipline (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Victor Rios (2011) suggests that this Youth Control Complex rigidly targets Black, First Nation, and Latinx youth in order to reclassify the racial under-caste manufactured by generations of post-colonial persecution.One of Amos Wilson's (1978) most salient arguments is the notion that desegregated schools that fail to modify their colonial, or White Supremacist, norms of academic decorum will be unable to meet the needs of non-White students. In fact, as Wilson contends, anglonormative standards heightens the problem of Black youth isolation, because:

> Discontinuity between Black life and school life breeds resistance, hostility, disinterest, etc., in the Black child. Much of what is taught in school meets his needs. It would be expecting too much however, of the schools, White schools in particular, to bridge the gap between black life and school life and to provide the Black child with the achievement drives which are essentially the products of the child's cultural-familial background. (p. 234)

This quote makes an important distinction between physical inclusion and epistemological inclusion. Harper and Hurtado (2007) explain that in order to create academic opportunities for historically marginalized populations like Black youth, educational institutions must create opportunity for students, themselves, to play an instrumental role in fostering pluralistic constructs of achievement and definitions for model behavior. Without an intentionally multicultural approach to leadership, school norms will continue to uphold a White Supremacist ethos and advance monocultural values. Transculturation (Ortiz, 1995) is a term used in place of assimilation, adaptation, and acculturation and describes a more fluid process of self-identification and belonging which favors organizational pluralism over cultural

homogenization. In transculturation, Black youth and institutional values are merged together in a dynamic system that allows the student to navigate between the two. Without the active and ongoing co-ownership of school governance, Black youth will remain suspended in a double-edged context of superficial integration while organizationally isolated by myopic carceral outcomes. Wilson (1978) articulates the pitfalls of schools that fail to alter their historically White pillars of control, and the corollary psychosocial gymnastics that Black youth are tacitly coerced to perform in order to meet these standards:

> Attending school for the Black child is often a schizoid process. He is called upon to alienate himself abruptly from his culture and he must maintain a precarious psychic balance between a Black and White world, belonging to neither. It is little wonder that the Black student rebels against this neurotic process which demands that he become not-self and shed his identity in order to succeed. (p. 234)

While we agree unequivocally that there is no singular or monolithic Black experience, the mere acceptance and affirming of Black youth contexts can play a vital role towards harvesting critical dialogue. Restorative Justice[1] is one model of community-centered discipline, which excavates the cultural mistrust (Terrell & Terrell, 1981) and dispossession (Fine & Ruglis, 2009) that Black youth have experienced within myriad (historically) eugenic institutions, including schools.

Conceptual Frameworks Informing Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice (RJ) is one philosophical approach to organizational leadership within educational spaces that embodies a conjunction between the aforementioned theories. RJ attempts to ameliorate the caustic political dynamic between Black youth in urban communities and predominantly White educators in K-12 schools. This model of school discipline aims at flattening the hierarchical power dynamic between pupil and practitioner through a three-tiered approach to discipline and youth engagement: Tier One—community building and shared ownership of decision making; Tier Two—restorative discipline and mediation between victim and offender; Tier Three—reentry support for individual students who have been held culpable for violating school policy (Zehr, 2002). Today, "over 500 restorative justice programs operate in the United States alone" (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005, p. 61), primarily situated in the juvenile justice and youth education spheres. The holistic and village-informed modality of Tier One RJ is grounded within a First Nation framework, originated by the Maori community, native to New Zealand (Zehr, 2005). In an ideal setting, RJ would move towards equitable stakeholdership between youth, families, and institutions. In order to cultivate this mutualistic understanding, it is important to demystify the historical presumptions, values, and norms that relegate Black youth to the academic periphery. Tier One RJ programs shifts the focus of discipline to address school and community contexts rather than student pathology. Despite the intentional effort to redefine misbehavior

from an intrapsychic to ecological perspective, there is still a lacuna that exists in the narrative surrounding RJ. This lens focuses heavily on rehabilitating individual students, akin to Tier Two (Reentry Agreements Between Pupil and School) and Tier Three (Individual Interventions) incarnations of RJ, whilst neglecting the community-based engagement that requisites Tier-One practices. Judy Tsui (2014) distills the manifold interpretations of RJ to its most nuclear mission:

> Restorative justice is a broad label that encompasses a plethora of different models, roughly bound together by the belief that the traditional American criminal justice system ignores a key step in "rebuild[ing] a sense of justice" because of its somewhat myopic focus on punishing offenders. In contrast, restorative justice techniques generally aim to focus on relationships and to relocate the sphere of power to "their rightful owners"—"offenders, victims, and their respective communities." Although punishment may play a part in restorative justice techniques, the central focus remains on relationships between the affected parties, and healing reached through a deliberative process guided by those affected parties. (p. 634)

As described earlier, school-based RJ programs have attempted to meet the needs and rights of the victim while simultaneously preventing the offender's entry into the juvenile court system by curtailing suspensions and expulsions as the primary mode of discipline (Tsui, 2014). While this approach is worthwhile, we believe RJ programs need to move beyond the individual and instead, aid in the holistic transformation of the school. For example, Tier 2 of RJ involves a non-punitive response to a specific conflict. Thus, the outcome of Tier 2 processes usurp culture and transmogrify it as something limited to individuals rather than structures, ideologies, values, and norms of the larger institution. Through these processes, students (victims and offenders, alike) are situated to successfully navigate school, yet remain unable to influence the tapestry in which dominant culture adjusts itself to student context. According to Yosso (2005, p. 75), "Educators most often assume that schools work and that students, parents and community need to change to conform to this already effective and equitable system." Thus, RJ as a multifaceted approach to student and school restoration must involve an acknowledgement and understanding of what Yosso (2005) describes as community cultural wealth. Community cultural wealth is a set of six frameworks (aspirational, linguistic, resistance, navigational, familial, social), called capital, that typify the relationship between institutionally-sanctioned knowledge and student behavior or academic outcomes. Community cultural wealth opposes a deficit model of thinking that perpetuates the notion that there is a true deficiency between the oppressor and the oppressed, or in American society, an individual who is unable to access resources typically reserved for the White, privileged classes (Valenzuela, 1999). However, these students are not in fact deficient, but rather possess a different set of experiences that are habitually pathologized and criminalized.

Moving Forward with Restorative Justice

In this section, we describe new approaches and possibilities for RJ. Fronius, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, and Petrosino (2016) find that despite the nascent stage of implementation, RJ is growing in popularity among school administrators but lags behind in schools that still subscribe to draconian, zero-tolerance policies. Their literature review found that Tier Two and Tier Three models of Restorative Justice were widely utilized (Fronius et al., 2016), adding:

> Bazemore and Schiff (2005) conducted a census of RJ practices in the U.S. justice system and developed strategies to evaluate the quality and consistency of the various approaches to RJ. Their census identified a total of 773 programs across the nation. Relatively informal practices, such as restorative dialogue and offender mediation, were most common. (p. 7)

Therefore, we begin with a call upon university-based teacher preparation programs as sites for intervention, particularly, because it is the graduates of these programs who will serve as future teachers and leaders in primary and secondary schools. Teacher preparation programs must be cognizant of this charge and actively combat the cultural imperialism that pervades many classroom and student behavior management approaches. The purpose of classroom management is to create a safe and nurturing learning environment, provide access to learning for all children, make effective use of time allocated for learning, and teach students how to self-manage (Woolfolk, 2016). However, classroom and student behavior management, particularly for urban students of color, is often accomplished through compliance to protocol and subservience to teachers, both of which are rooted in a narrow, monocultural understanding of students' ways of knowing, being, learning, and communicating. For example, teacher candidates are often taught that it is their responsibility to create and present specific classroom procedures and expectations aligned to the larger school-wide rules. If a student is unable to abide by those procedures or fulfill those expectations, the teacher is required to trigger a hierarchical, often punitive, set of consequences ranging from a teacher's expression of disappointment and disapproval to a visit to the school principal to after-school detention. However, as any successful and effective teacher of students of color can likely attest, a meaningful approach to classroom and student behavior management is much more nuanced. Conversations with teacher candidates need to be extended to include other approaches, namely RJ. When those conversations center on the amalgamation of culturally responsive management (Gay, 2006) with RJ, teacher candidates are in a better position to meet the needs of their students, particularly when the culture of the students is different than that of the teacher.

Further, beyond immediate classroom spaces, stakeholders must be willing and ready to examine the principles of RJ through a lens of community activism. In the participatory ethos of RJ, counter-narratives and equitable stakeholdership between youth and adults create spaces unsanctioned by common Western systems

of financial incentives or carceral punishment. Neoliberal appropriations of RJ in schools have flattened the community-centered texture and critical lens in which conflict is framed. If Black and First Nation youth are seen solely as restoration projects, then RJ will ascribe to a deficit-lens that hyper-individualizes activism as an issue of Black "respectability", while simultaneously absolving subtle and pervasive violence wrought within historically-blighted communities by the legacy of settler colonialism. RJ is a zeitgeist that migrates activism towards ecological concerns that condition violence espoused and perpetuated by a necropolitical state. Activism undergirded by a restorative lens creates bilateral communication between various stakeholders within a community (including youth), unhinged from the veiled threat of retribution and reinforced by a Fanonian theory of safety (Leonardo & Porter, 2010), which—in the context of schools—has also been described as a pedagogy of love or critical communication pedagogy (Cummins & Griffin, 2012). There are radical groups which have attempted to utilize the restorative lens of activism. One such grassroots organization is Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ) of East Oakland, California. This organization seeks to promote ecological and pedagogical healing to populations impacted by systemic injustices that range from land desecration to gang injunctions. There are several pillars to restorative activism, ascribed by CURYJ leaders, according to their 2016 Mission Statement:

> 1. Training and Technical Assistance: To other grassroots agencies to support the expansion and implementation of indigenous methodologies of addressing violence.

> 2. Youth Participatory Action Research: Engaging young people in the generation of new knowledge about their own communities is critical to building grassroots movements that are rooted in the experiences of those who are oppressed. Developing data that addresses the needs of the community and speaks the language of government institutions is a powerful tool for the next generation to build.

> 3. Restorative Justice Circles: Engaging communities to address violence through indigenous healing practices. With the acknowledgement of our internalized oppression individuals begin to restore their perspective and begin to un-learn the harmful behavior that mainstream society perpetuates.

> 4. Community Applied Research and Action (CARA): On the ground, documentation of police harassment and gentrification can generate important information in building movements for self-determination in our communities. Documentation of the positive impact of alternatives to incarceration such as restorative justice can be used as evidence to fight for successful solutions to violence. CARA is at the foundation of our policy work, and is essential to building our community's leadership and skills to sustain our movements. This effort has brought propositions, such as Proposition 57 in 2016, to light that seek to eradicate the common practice of direct liberty filed by District Attorneys who aim to try youth as adults; instead shifting the responsibility to juvenile court judges to make that demarcation of adult defendants.

Finally, we offer texture to the possibilities of RJ through a description of the transformation at John O'Connell, a three-storied urban high school located at the southeast corner of San Francisco's famous Mission District. The Mission neighborhood is popularized and renowned for its lineage of poets and musicians (including local artist Carlos Santana) who championed cultural sovereignty and political liberation, its mélange of revolutionary murals, and as a sociopolitical hub for the Chicano Civil Rights Movement (also known as El Movimiento) during the 1960s. O'Connell is heavily populated by what is left of the rapidly displaced modest-to-low income Black, Latinx, and Southeast Asian community. In contrast to the neighborhood's rich history of activism, John O'Connell, which ascribed to a rigid zero-tolerance policy, was marred by a growing rate of suspensions for infractions such as truancy and "disrespect." While Black youth comprised roughly nine percent of O'Connell's students in 2010, they represented a whopping 77 percent of its suspensions (SFUSD Progress Report, 2012). This stark contrast accents a larger crisis across the school district. According to archival data from the San Francisco Unified School District, in the Academic Year 2011-2012, there were 2,311 suspensions across K-12 schools (SFUSD Progress Report, 2012). Black youth represented a subset of 1,063 suspensions, despite accounting for merely ten percent of the overall student demographic. Under the leadership of a new district superintendent, three new school site principals, and a community school coordinator, John O'Connell made a dramatic shift in its disciplinary model, in order to circumvent the troubling numbers that had tarnished its image and advanced a reputation among the general public as an unsafe school where youth prepare for a future life behind bars.

If school is an expression of social inclusion, then youth punishment represents the symbiotic underside of systemic exclusion. Partially subsidized by federal School Improvement Grants (SIG) coffers, a rare model of inclusive and preventative Restorative Justice was resurrected. O'Connell employed an all-hands-on-deck approach to discipline. This Tier One model of school-based interventions, harnessed an epistemologically pluralistic and ecologically macrosystemic bevy of stakeholders. Students were no longer susceptible to suspension or expulsion for subjective and minor infractions, unless they were found in violation of more documentable and provable violations that involved drugs, weapons, or physical assault. The goal of this model was to cultivate a Third Space (Gutierrez, 2008) of school leadership, unsanctioned by the veiled threat of retribution, where students and practitioners work in concert to find mutually beneficial solutions to systemic issues, like poverty and truancy, rather than in top-down opposition. By employing a larger consortium of community-school partners, that included student ambassadors of RJ training, parent liaisons, and local community-based agencies from a variety of specializations (i.e., college and career counselors from TRIO and GEAR UP Programs, transcendental meditation experts, Hip Hop/spoken word artists, urban gardeners, chess masters, mural artists, mental health clinicians,

case managers for formerly incarcerated youth, etc), O'Connell was able to create classrooms that fostered long-term and active participation by students and families. Counselors also played a central role in moving this restorative mission forward. A different counselor was allocated to each grade level and responsible for facilitating an RJ class that was beholden to restorative ideals of equity and community building. Counselors led group discussions on a student-led Community Practicum Project (CPP). The CPP was meant to synthesize curriculum garnered in the students' other foundational classes while allowing students the space to forge blended learning from their personal and academic experiences. The RJ class required teachers, counselors, and community-based organizations to work in small learning teams with assigned student ambassadors to ensure that curriculum was informed by the consciousness of its students. As a result, O'Connell's emerging Restorative Justice CPP's have made strides in redressing systemic issues around The Mission and San Francisco, including but not limited to: Subsidized transportation for youth displaced by gentrification, eye glasses for families and youth who cannot afford federal health care, and free soil lead testing and soil for families whose gardens were found to be high in toxins. This approach to restorative curriculum not only shifted the locus of control from schools to community, but also engaged students as partners, pivoting away from the hyper-individualized focus on youth (mis)behavior and, instead, transforming the conditions of the students' immediate environments.

The successes of John O'Connell should serve as an example of the possibilities of an RJ program. However, many Tier Two and Three RJ programs, if/when left unchallenged, may potentially paint Black children with wide brushstrokes that converge them into one entry point of identity. Separating race, gender, and class from one another provides a shortsighted portrait of how these intersecting identities "mutually construct" a matrix of domination (Collins, 2000, p. 218) that is upheld by RJ for-deficit programs. As George Lipsitz highlights (2007), the possession of Whiteness provides an aggregate of landmines that hinder the access of Black youth to equitable learning opportunities. Thus, a critical RJ program that incorporates elements of community as a tool for subversion, "acknowledges the need for multiple counterstories and counteractions that challenge the dominant narrative within and across different spheres of influence" (Jayakumar & Adamanian, 2015, p. 36). A mutual engagement of students, families, and community partners towards critical RJ begins with the fundamental understanding that students must negotiate aspects of their identities in order to meet Eurocentric and necropolitical metrics of academic and interpersonal success.

Limitations of Restorative Justice Applications

Restorative Justice has been utilized as a distinct way of responding to "offenders" (Johnstone, 2002). Proponents of restorative justice argue that typical solutions to crime or school-based violations tend to center the offender (Burnside

& Baker, 1994; Van Ness, 1993; Zehr, 2002). As a result, responses to transgressions have been stratified towards punishing the offender, rather than reconciling and repairing the damage done to any potential victims or community members, at large (Zehr, 2005).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars argue that we must look beyond academic conventions that dismiss the pre-existing knowledge of Black children as too "urban", or lacking credibility within educational spaces (Bell, 1980; Delgado, 1990). There is a growing corpus of evidence that underscores the epistemological disconnect between school leadership and student knowledge; a distinction which Shirin Vossoughi and Kris Gutierrez (2010) bifurcate as the difference between vertical and horizontal expertise, respectively. Additionally, by fixing a CRT lens over restorative justice programs, practitioners maintain a focus on issues that plague Black youth in economically blighted communities, that cannot be encapsulated or reported by color blind, post-racial, liberal or White paternalistic notions of need.

Whiteness is not limited to hue, but rather a political currency that is ratified and bolstered by the norms, artifacts, values, and assumptions (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012) of academic institutions. Whether schools intentionally segregate students by sorting academic privileges, pales in comparison for the need to organize restorative justice programs "to counter inferiority myths" (Delpit, 2008, p. 122). The anglonormativity of schools has demarcated Eurocentric values as the aspiration of all students, in an attempt to homogenize mentoring programs and, by extension, create a deficit quotient among Black youth. Gutierrez and Vossoughi (2010), Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) as well as Noguera (2008) maintain that the literacy framework of culture expedites the knowledge that communities possess into the classroom in an attempt to synchronize funds of knowledge between mentoring programs and pupils towards political calibration. The lack of critical nuance that considers the macrosystemic (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) and necropolitical (Mbembe, 2003) obstacles for Black youth, hyper-individualize RJ programs. As a result, Black youth are held solely responsible for ecological challenges and as a result, issues such as poverty, gentrification, incarceration, and violence are seen as constructs of Blackness rather than an omnipresent oppression.

Critical approaches to restorative justice must imbue an understanding of both critical Whiteness (Cabrera, Watson, & Franklin, 2016) and Afropessimism (Weier, 2014). That is, a "fungability of the Black experience according" (Weier, 2014, p. 428) to what is self-defined by students, community, and family members as success. In other words, students are able to manipulate the goals of restorative justice and take stakeholder positions within the confines of leadership structures. Additionally, what is registered as "inclusive" literacy of RJ must not operate in lockstep with the silence of students whose quotient of achievement is measured in their ability to mimic the characteristics and values of the oppressor. Nocella et al. (2014) explain that the "new eugenics" (p. 178) of RJ, by fabricating illusory deficits in Black youth, is a primary obstacle to transforming the constructs of men-

toring and educating, all together. Drawing from Nocella et al.'s (2014) principles of transformative justice, a critical approach to RJ argues that we are "all involved in complex relationships of oppressors and oppressed, dominators and dominated" (p. 216). Therefore, it is incumbent upon educational practitioners to take an intersectional approach to RJ that "recognizes the significance of identities for political consciousness and behavior" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 119). Restorative justice, as a transformative expression and continuum of Black liberatory political movements, offers a counter narrative to dominant ideologies of academic success, by creating an inherent connection between cultural literacy and critical subversion of power (Nocella et al., 2014, p. 180). Patricia Hill Collins (2006) extends the realm of possibility by outlining the linkage between community-centered pedagogy, like RJ, and Black feminist consciousness:

> The line between altruism and exploitation can be a fine one, indeed. For example, Pauline Terrelonge contends that a common view within African American communities is that African American women can handle abuse mainly because of their 'fortitude, inner wisdom, and sheer ability to survive.' Connected to this emphasis on Black women's strength is the related argument that African American women play such critical roles in keeping Black families together and in supporting Black men that a responsibility for the status of the race rests more heavily on Black women's shoulders than on those of Black men. These activities have been important in offsetting the potential annihilation of African Americans as a 'race.' (p. 143)

Revisiting Mason's Story

According to Irvine (1990, p. 27), "The language, style of walking, glances, and dress of Black children, particularly males, have engendered fear, apprehension, and overreaction among many teachers and school administrators." Throughout this article, we have argued that unfounded sentiments similar to those described by Irvine coupled with unjust school policies have resulted in the disproportionate punishment of Black youth. Further, we have offered and explicated RJ as a double-edged sword to restore Black youth and simultaneously transform the very schools that have caused trauma for these students. The integration of RJ as part of the larger school culture and curriculum provide schools with a viable alternative to traditional approaches for managing student behavior.

Given this, we end by revisiting Mason's story and thinking about how different the outcome could have been had the school ascribed to an organizational framework and discipline philosophy informed by restorative justice. What if, after the incident, Mason knew to whom he could go for support? How might have the school better supported the rebuilding of the teacher's and Mason's relationship? What if Mason was given an opportunity to directly address the teacher who he grabbed? What if there were fewer school-based police officers and more counseling staff in the school? How could have Mason's family and friends been more actively involved

during the disciplinary process? What if Mason's history of academic achievement and community service were taken into account? Could a Tier One intervention have prevented Mason from dropping out of school? How could the school and surrounding community have come together to address issues of violence and weapons? These questions, and a plethora of others, remind us of at least some of the wickedness of zero-tolerance policies and the critical lens through which they must be examined, particularly as they are applied to students of color. Further, these questions provide us with a glimmer of love and hope as scholars, educators, and activists work diligently to dismantle the legacy of slavery that is levied against students of color and instead offer alternative frameworks such as restorative justice.

Note

[1] We use the term "Restorative Justice" (RJ) generally to encapsulate an assortment of terms such as "restorative approaches," "restorative practices," and other related iterations as conveyed by the literature.

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Using Double Consciousness as an Analytic Tool to Discuss the Decision Making of Black School Leaders in Disrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Ramon B. Goings, Sheree N. Alexander,
Julius Davis, & Nicole McZeal Walters

Abstract

Given that Black students are more likely to be suspended from school than their White counterparts, researchers, educators, policymakers, activists, and parents have forced national attention onto the need to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). A perspective that needs to be further explored is that of district and school leaders who have the challenge of making leadership decisions that influence the STPP. In this article, we take the position that district and school leaders must be provided tangible solutions to dismantle the STPP for Black students. Thus, we use Du Bois' (1903) notion of double consciousness as a conceptual lens to examine the STPP and the dilemma Black school leaders face in dealing with disciplinary infractions. We then present a case from the second author's experience as a

Ramon B. Goings is an assistant professor of educational leadership in the School of Education at Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland. Sheree N. Alexander is a P-12 school administrator and adjunct professor of Afriana Studies at Rowan University, Glassboro, New Jersey. Julius Davis is an associate professor of mathematics education in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Professional Development of the College of Education at Bowie State University, Bowie, Maryland. Nicole McZeal Walters is an assistant professor and associate dean of graduate programs in the School of Education and Human Services at the University of St. Thomas-Houston, Houston, Texas. Their e-mail addresses are: rbgoings@loyola.edu, s.alexander2004@verizon.net, jldavis@bowiestate.edu, & waltern@stthom.edu

practicing school leader to explore how school leaders are often presented with complicated choices when it comes to making decisions that potentially send a student into the STPP trajectory. Due to the fact school leaders are rarely provided tangible solutions for disrupting the STPP, we provide recommendations for school leaders on how to disrupt the STPP.

Introduction

According to the U.S. Department of Education's (DOE; 2014) Office of Civil Rights (OCR) two-year investigation of the Minneapolis school district (MSD), Black students were "considerably overrepresented in all of the district's disciplinary actions, including out-of-school suspensions, in-school suspensions, administrative transfers to other schools, referrals to law enforcement as well as detentions, Saturday school, and community service or restitution" (para. 4). In response to DOE mandates, Superintendent Dr. Bernadia Johnson, a Black woman, has led the MSD in making considerable efforts to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). These efforts have addressed the unfair disciplinary, suspension, and expulsion practices imposed on Black students (Post, 2014) and have brought increased attention from the media, policymakers, school districts, and scholars.

During the 2010–2011 and 2011–2012 academic years, the OCR reported that while Black students comprised 40% of enrolled students, they received 74% of the district's disciplinary actions. Specifically, they received 60% of in-school suspensions, 78% of the out-of-school suspensions, and 69% of law enforcement referrals (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Moreover, Black students were disproportionately disciplined for "disruptive, disorderly or insubordinate" behavior and subjected to 73% of the administrative transfers to different schools for disciplinary reasons (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

The investigation results led to an agreement between the OCR and MSD to address the unfair disciplinary actions. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), "the agreement requires the district to comprehensively assess the racial disparities in its administration of discipline and take steps to ensure that discipline is appropriately and equitably applied to all students" (para. 8). As a part of the agreement, the superintendent's office now oversees the suspension and expulsion of Black students for non-violent offenses. Because "the district's exclusionary discipline practices (including out-of-school suspensions) began as early as kindergarten," the superintendent has called a moratorium on school suspension for kindergarten and first graders (para. 7). Johnson has also reduced and redefined the role of school resource officers in schools (Matos, 2014).

The unfair disciplinary practices in Minneapolis represent a mere snapshot of what is happening nationally, but the investigation raises a number of important

questions about the STPP and the roles of policymakers, and district and school leaders. Namely, how do policymakers, and district and school leaders contribute to the STPP, and what are their roles in dismantling it? The decision making process of defining and enforcing disciplinary infractions is very complex for district and school leaders who have obligations to multiple stakeholders with different roles, responsibilities, motives, and interests. This reality begs the question: who are the stakeholders that district and school leaders have to consider in the decision making process? Further, how do they impact district and school leaders' decisions? How do school leaders determine appropriate disciplinary action when they are rarely, if ever, present during the situations that result in disciplinary action? Should school leaders automatically take the word of the teacher over the student? What type of professional development should district and school leaders participate in to assist them in their decision making for disciplinary infractions? What is happening at the school level that requires district administrators to take an active role in disciplinary practices? Lastly, how does being a Black school leader complicate these decisions, given that their decisions could send Black children into the STPP?

With these questions in mind, from our experiences as current and former schoolteachers and leaders, we posit that district and school leaders can serve as key stakeholders in dismantling the STPP. However, in scholarly conversations about the STPP, researchers often present large amounts of data without providing any direction or resources for preparing district and school leaders to dismantle the pipeline. Scholars have focused on local, state, and federal policies (Flannery, 2015, Heitzeg, 2009, NEA, 2016); Black students' experiences (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Grace, 2016; Morris, 2012; Polly, 2013); and examinations of teacher education programs and teachers' role in unfair disciplinary practices (Raible & Irizarry, 2010). Unfortunately, Black district and school leaders (superintendents, principals, vice principals, and/or disciplinarian designees) are often not given much attention in the literature related to the STPP. Furthermore, district and school leaders are not provided tangible solutions they can implement in their own practice to address this problem.

In this article, we take the position that knowing data trends is not enough; district and school leaders must be provided tangible solutions to dismantle the STPP for Black students. To unpack this complex issue, we first explore the literature on the STPP with a focus on its development. We then examine zero tolerance policies, factors that contribute to Black students entering the STPP, and how the STPP adversely impacts Black students. Then, we use Du Bois' (1903) notion of double consciousness as a conceptual lens to examine the STPP and the dilemma district and school leaders face in dealing with disciplinary infractions. We present a case from the second author's experience, as a practicing school leader, to explore how policymakers, and district and school leaders are often provided limited options when it comes to making decisions that could potentially send a student into the STPP trajectory. Last, we provide recommendations for district and school leaders on how to disrupt the STPP.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

The term *school-to-prison pipeline* (STPP) "refers to the collection of policies, practices, conditions, and prevailing consciousness that facilitate both the criminalization within educational environments and the processes by which this criminalization results in the incarceration of youth and young adults" (Morris, 2012, p. 2). In other words, it is the process of tracking traditionally racialized and minoritized student populations (e.g., Black, Latino, and students with disabilities) out of educational institutions, directly and/or indirectly, into the juvenile justice system and subsequently into the adult criminal justice systems. It adversely impacts Black students and has had a significant impact on their academic and social trajectory in society, school, and classrooms throughout the United States.

For instance, although Black students only represent 16% of the national student population, they comprise 27% of students referred to law enforcement and 31% of students who have experienced a school-related arrest (OCR, 2014). According to the same OCR report, 20% of Black males were suspended from school during the 2011–2012 school year. This percentage was higher than that of any other racial/gender group. While Black males have been given much attention, Black girls have also been impacted by disproportionate disciplining in schools. Moreover, as noted by Morris (2012) and Crenshaw, Ocen, and Nanda (2015), Black girls have been given limited attention in scholarly and popular conversations about the STPP, which is concerning given they are the fastest growing population represented in the juvenile justice system.

As previously stated, the ramifications of this phenomenon extend far beyond the classroom and can derail young Black students' lives, putting them on a path to incarceration. Therefore, concerned stakeholders must ask the question, how and why are Black students disproportionately removed from school? While other articles have covered many of the reasons in great detail (e.g., Fenning & Rose, 2007; Morris, 2012; Noguera, 2003), for the purposes of this article, we focus on the impact of zero-tolerance policies. These types of policies create an environment where Black students are at greater risk for being placed into the STPP trajectory.

Zero Tolerance Policies in Schools

Scholars have asserted that one of the mechanisms through which the STPP operates is the concept of zero tolerance, which started in the legal system in response to anti-drug enforcement initiatives (Cerrone, 1999). For the purposes of this article, zero tolerance is defined as the "philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context" (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Taskforce, 2008, p. 852). Starting in the early 1990s, many school

districts transitioned from a gradual application of disciplinary sanctions to zero tolerance approaches to address students' wrongdoings. In particular, the *Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994* served as the foundational policy from which zero tolerance policies were developed. Along with its subsequent reenactment in 2002, the Gun-Free Schools Act mandates states that receive federal funding must require local school districts expel students who are found in the possession of a gun on school property for at least one year (Polly, 2013). Federal policies and state laws such as the *Gun-Free Schools Act* were established to reduce school violence particularly in suburban and White schools to ensure a safe environment where students can learn and prosper. However, in practice, these policies are far more prevalent in urban school settings where Black and Brown students are more likely to attend. Cerrone (1999) argued in her analysis of the *Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994*:

> These laws have the potential of imposing strict and harsh punishment upon school children who are not dangerous and who will only suffer detrimental results from a full year expulsion. In addition, and perhaps more irksome, is that these laws do not prevent school violence. (p. 133)

While zero tolerance policies were originally implemented to cease gun violence in schools, many school districts have adopted a zero tolerance philosophy toward all disciplinary actions, even those that do not involve guns or violence.

One particular issue with the adaptation of zero tolerance policies is the premise that they are race neutral. As several scholars have argued, race plays a central role in the development and implementation of zero tolerance policies (Cregor & Hewitt, 2011). For instance, Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, Mary, and Tobin (2011) found in their analysis of 364 elementary and middle schools that Black students were two to three times more likely than their White peers to be referred to the office for behavioral issues and, therefore, more likely to serve an out-of-school suspension. This study and others (e.g., Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Grace, 2016) found that Black students are often punished more harshly for minor infractions. We contend that there are several dynamics that contribute to this issue. In the section below, we focus on Black students' referral into special education and the cultural clashes that occur due to the lack of diversity in the schoolteacher workforce.

Entry Points of the STPP and the Dilemma for School Leaders

When examining how the STPP operates, it becomes apparent that there are several entry points that disproportionately impact Black students. The first is the frequency with which teachers refer Black students to special education classrooms. Many parents have made this observation anecdotally, but it has also been documented empirically. Ford (2012), for example, found that Black students are overrepresented in special education classes and underrepresented in gifted education programs. Moreover, Black students are two to three times more likely than White students to be given an *emotionally disturbed* label (Sullivan & Bal, 2013).

While special education classrooms should be a place of understanding, empathy, and specialized instruction, Black students who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities are highly likely to be suspended from school. For instance, OCR data shows that more than 25% of boys of color and nearly 20% of girls of color with learning disabilities receive out-of-school suspension (OCR, 2014). These realities negatively impact students by stigmatizing them and limiting their access to specialized instruction. Consequently, frequent suspension primes students for the STPP as they become more and more disengaged from school. This connection raises two important questions: Why are so many Black students being referred to special education classrooms, and why are these students not receiving the care and specialized instruction their diagnoses require by law? These questions cannot be answered without examining the contributions of teachers.

In U.S. public schools, a stark reality is that the teaching workforce is predominantly White and female (Davis, Frank, & Clark, 2013; Goings, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Given that students of color collectively make up a majority of the student population in U.S. schools, scholars and policymakers have urged school districts to diversify the teaching workforce (Goings & Bianco, 2016; Bristol, 2015; Lewis & Toldson, 2013; US Department of Education, 2016). Researchers support a diversified workforce because White teachers tend to approach Black students from a deficit lens (Ford, 2012), which leads to cultural clashes and misunderstanding between White teachers and Black students. In the end, many Black students develop reputations for being disruptive and end up on the STPP trajectory.

In Grace's (2016) qualitative study, which explored the experiences of Black males who were expelled from New Orleans schools, she found that a majority of the participants believed their teachers held negative expectations about them as Black students. As one participant, Malcolm, stated, "A lot of teachers feel like [black males] won't be anything" (p. 79). These types of deficit perspectives affected the way teachers viewed and interacted with students. In a more general sense, the deficit perspectives many White teachers carry into classrooms prime them to perceive Black students' minor behaviors, such as talking during instruction, as a sign of disrespect, which often results in their being removed from class. Inversely, Black teachers are less likely to remove Black students from class for minor behaviors and more likely to refer them to gifted programs (Nicholson-Crotty, Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty, & Redding, 2016). It is clear that a diverse teaching work force is beneficial to Black students' ability to thrive in the classroom, thereby avoiding the STPP.

In discussions about the STPP, scholars often explore the student experience or the teacher perspective. What is missing from the literature, and what we find to be critical, is an exploration of the role of school leaders. Though they are typically absent from the classroom, school leaders are directly involved in the complex and often unclear decision making process that can enter Black students into the STPP. School leaders have the important task of considering school culture, district policies and politics, and student history when making decisions that could potentially

remove students from school. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, school leaders should make efforts to start relationships with students before they come in contact with law enforcement and/or enter the juvenile justice system. Without a constructive preexisting relationship, it is hard for school leaders, who typically are not present in the classroom, to accurately judge the student's character and intent. They are left with nothing more than the teacher's report, which may come from a deficit perspective.

School leaders are in a challenging position when it comes to meting out discipline because they are forced to make decisions that all parties may not agree with. They may feel stuck between the parents and the teachers, working to strike a delicate and fair balance between the two. Moreover, as Black school leaders, these decisions become more complex as they must work within an education system that is inherently designed against the interests of people of African descent (Shockley, 2008). Thus, in the section below, we describe this dilemma in decision making using Du Bois' (1903) notion of double consciousness as a metaphor to explain the complexity of school leaders' decision making process. Then we present a case from the second author's experience as a current practicing school administrator.

Double Consciousness:
A Metaphor and Conceptual Lens for Examining District and School Leaders Decision Making

In his seminal book *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois (1903) coined the term *double consciousness* to describe how Blacks have had to navigate both their African and American identities and the psychological implications of this potentially irreconcilable process. He describes Blacks' struggle to view themselves from their own unique perspective while also thinking about how Whites intentionally misrepresent and misperceive Blackness. Du Bois explained that:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others . . . One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 3)

Similar to Banks and Hughes' (2013) study of how Black males with learning disabilities navigate their double consciousness in the college environment, we utilize Du Bois' notion of double consciousness as a metaphor and conceptual lens to explore how Black district and school leaders are often met with conflicting ideals when making decisions that potentially position Black students to enter the STPP.

Double consciousness describes how a Black person can have multiple competing and contradictory identities that make it difficult or nearly impossible to have a collective and integrated identity. Du Bois (1903) describes double consciousness

in the context of how racial and class identities functioned in the United States. If we expand this concept, in an academic context, consciousness could refer to and encompass social identities such as race, class, gender, family (e.g., mother, father, sister, brother, etc.) and professional identities (e.g., former teachers, administrators, etc.). Together, these identities and the contexts in which they evolve impact how Black school administrators see themselves, make decisions, and think about how others perceive them.

Moreover, within the school context it is critical to understand that the philosophical foundation of compensatory schooling and American schools is steeped in teaching Eurocentric norms while viscerally attacking any ideals that challenge those norms. Consequently, schools become spaces where Black children are expected to acquiesce to and assimilate Eurocentric norms. Thus, when Black students behave in ways that do not align with Eurocentric norms, the schooling system now dictates that Black administrators have to impose consequences (e.g., school suspension) on Black children. However, an important question to consider is:

> Will teachers, principals, education researchers, parents, and other stakeholders ever understand that the complex ways in which Black children perform in schools (and in society to some degree) are part and parcel of a necessary defiance against educational content that is woefully inconsiderate of their cultural ontology? (Shockley, 2008, p. 6)

For Black administrators, their decision making around student discipline becomes complex as they too have to contemplate the question posed by Shockley (2008) while also knowing they are expected to impose consequences given their position. In essence, this tension captures Du Bois' (1903) notion of double consciousness where Black individuals have an awareness of a potentially irreconcilable twoness: African and American. Black district and school leaders' twoness revolves around their antithetical positions as faithful and compliant *agents of the system* and *agents for racially oppressed students*. Du Bois discusses the conflict Blacks experience in the United States as they struggle to reconcile their identities as Blacks and as American citizens who experience racial oppression because of their Blackness. The conflict district and school leaders face becomes even more complex for Black administrators who not only have to contend with their positions as agents for the system (e.g., school system and STPP) and agents for racially oppressed students, but also with their Blackness and the racism (both overt and covert) that persists in schools. For instance, school leaders have to contend with teachers who continue to espouse their belief that all students can achieve academically, but continue to engage in the "criminalization of Blackness" (Chandler, 2017, p. 207), where Black children are treated more as criminals that are in need of reforming than academicians.

In many ways Black school administrators are situated in schooling spaces that are anti-Black and as a result, Black children predictably become casualties. Ultimately, Black administrators are faced with the dilemma of positioning Black

students to enter or evade the STPP. To complicate matters, Black school leaders are products of the same anti-Black education system that systemically marginalizes and polices Black bodies. This raises the concern as to how Black school leaders can subject Black students to the same marginalization and oppression they experienced themselves as a student and professional especially knowing, Black students receive more frequent and severe disciplinary infractions than all other racial groups for similar offenses.

Black district and school leaders also have to figure out how do they continue to exist in a system that seeks to alienate and marginalize Black students. This also can be complicated as not all Black district and school leaders politicize their work or view their work through a race-conscious lens. Thus, when situations arise with Black children, they may potentially see and punish the behaviors of the child rather than examine the ways in which the students' mere Blackness positions them as hypervisible and susceptible to targeting from teachers. They face an irreconcilable dilemma in that as long as they serve as school administrators (e.g., agents of the system) then they will either be an agent for the student or position them to enter or become further entrenched into the STPP. As a result, Black children become casualties of the system that was designed for them to fail.

Using Du Bois' notion of double consciousness, we contend that race-conscious Black district and school leaders never aspire to or attempt to fully reconcile their identities as Black individuals and as administrators who contribute to Black students' entrance and further integration into the STPP. We feel these leaders' behaviors are often influenced by negative stereotypes, fear of judgment from both their Black and White peers, and the likelihood that their unfavorable actions can impact their job security. Wilson (2013) explains the unique opportunity district and school leaders have when it comes to interrupting the STPP:

> School leaders have the power to influence and mitigate the effects of the pipeline by engaging in critical use of exclusionary policies as well as focus on collaborating with teachers on prevention and intervention to meet the academic and behavioral needs of students, particularly those who are marginalized and at risk. (p. 68)

Despite the power that district and school leaders possess, they are still constrained by the nature of their position, the school system, and the hierarchies therein. These circumstances can be difficult to navigate when district and school leaders' decisions counter or appear to usurp the school system's policies or recommendations. They can also lead to unsavory political ramifications for the decision maker. For instance, Dr. Bernadia Johnson, who we mentioned in our opening example for addressing school suspensions in MPS, has received backlash for her attempt to eliminate the disproportionality in school discipline. Peter Kirsanow, Commissioner of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, wrote a five-page letter to Dr. Johnson which cited her policy as "legally and constitutionally suspect" (Kirsanow, 2014, p. 1) and argued that her attempts to review all suspensions would "result in racial quotas

for disciplinary actions, with negative consequences for the learning experience of students" (Kirsanow, p. 1). These antagonisms can leave district and school leaders contemplating the following question: Should I make a decision that is in alignment with the school district's recommendations and/or policy guidelines even if it is not in the best interest of the most marginalized and oppressed students?

In the section that follows, we present a scenario from the practice of the second author (a practicing school administrator) that highlights the dilemma school leaders face when making decisions that could potentially have adverse effects on a student's life and/or educational opportunities.

The Context:
Being a School Administrator at Wilson Middle School

Wilson Middle School (WMS, pseudonym) is a Title I (i.e., 93% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch) school whose population is 90% African American and 10% Latinx. As the assistant principal of WMS, I (the second author) hold the primary responsibility of managing discipline. It is a role that consumes a majority of my work day, but it also affords me the opportunity to engage with students and assist them in making better decisions.

WMS's school district employs zero tolerance policies to address and reduce disciplinary code infractions such as fighting and high absenteeism. However, without addressing the climate and cultural issues—such as transiency among the student population, lack of diversity among the teaching staff, the constant turnover of building administrators and lack of parental outreach and involvement—these policies have not proven to be enough to make the school (and other schools in the district) safer nor have they increased attendance rates. Overall, the problems in the school have gone unaddressed as evidenced by the lack of a reduction in discipline referrals and stagnant student achievement.

Administrators at WMS are required to enforce the school district code of conduct when imposing consequences for misconduct or behavioral infractions. These infractions can range from minor disruption, such as calling out answers during class, to gross disrespect and continued willful disobedience such as using profanity, talking back and leaving class without permission. Additionally, the district code of conduct requires increased consequences for each subsequent offense. All serious infractions, such as weapon or drug possession and assault, result in automatic suspensions and/or referral for expulsion. As a school leader, a major conundrum I face is keeping safety first and adhering to policy while also providing a positive and nurturing learning environment that keeps students in school, where they belong.

While the principal is responsible for the building and entire student body and staff, as assistant principal, I am charged with maintaining the vision and mission of the school in accordance with the philosophy of the principal. When the leadership team shares the same disciplinary and education philosophy, it becomes possible to

craft alternative solutions that keep children out of contact with the juvenile justice system. However, as was the case with my first-year principal Mr. Scott (pseudonym), our disciplinary philosophies differed drastically. For example, Mr. Scott believed that zero-tolerance allowed for a safer school and was paramount in ensuring the school was a safe space for those who wanted to learn; however, my philosophy was more aligned with a holistic approach that emphasizes educating the entire child. In some cases this required equipping my students with strategies to navigate both their home and schooling environments, or in other cases, providing and/or connecting them to community or outside agencies with resources to assist them with their immediate needs. As a result of our philosophical differences keeping children in the building and out of contact with law enforcement was difficult. As a school leader with experience in various social and educational contexts (urban and suburban) it was apparent that suspensions and expulsions were disproportionately imposed upon Black students at WMS. However, because of the principal's insistence on following our district's zero tolerance policy, I, a Black woman who is passionate about supporting Black children, was often at a crossroads. In essence, do I do what is in the best interest of my principal and school system, or institutionally marginalized student? An encounter in the section below with my former student, Dan, highlights the complexities of a school leaders' decision making process, which could potentially disrupt or reinforce the STPP.

The Incident of Dan:
How Policy Can Fail Students

Dan, an eighth grade Black male, had a disciplinary record for minor infractions such as being disruptive, talkative, and not remaining on task. He was not a bad or violent child, but he had a reputation as a class clown and teachers often expressed their difficulty with keeping him on task. Additionally, Dan, like other children at WMS, came from a neighborhood where disputes in the neighborhood (e.g., quarrels between families during non-school hours) would often spill over into the school; thus, community issues often impacted students' interactions at school.

During one weekend, Dan was involved in altercation with another Black student, James, in their neighborhood. After the fight, James threatened to bring his older cousins to the school to fight Dan. Throughout the day on Monday, students discussed the fight between Dan and James, but teachers asked them not to. Concerned that he might be "jumped" by James and his family, Dan attempted to express his concerns to his math teacher, Mr. Gee (pseudonym). However, when Dan brought up the incident in class, Mr. Gee demanded Dan either be quiet and sit down, or get out of class. Embarrassed and frustrated, Dan walked out of the classroom. As a result, Mr. Gee wrote Dan up for the infraction of leaving class without permission. Dan went to see another teacher, who then sent him to see me in the assistant principal's office.

With Dan gone, other students in the class informed Mr. Gee that they had overheard Dan talking about a knife. They reported that it was probably in his locker because he had shown it to another classmate on the way to school. Hence, another referral was made, reporting that Dan was in possession of a weapon on school grounds.

Because of the allegation, an investigation involving security and Mr. Scott was required. Dan's locker, book bag, and person were searched in the presence of a building administrator. The halls were cleared and students were not allowed to leave the classrooms during the search. Dan admitted that he had the knife in one of his book bag pockets, but expressed that he did not intend to bring it to school. He explained that it belonged to his father, who had given it to him for protection around the neighborhood. Regardless of his reason for having it, Dan was held to the school district's code of conduct, which required the following consequence for such an infraction:

> Confiscation, forfeiture to Police Liaison, Immediate parent Notification; suspension (home instruction) pending mandatory Administrative or Board of Education Hearing; subject to mandatory security/ police search; Violence/Vandalism Report; Notice to Chief of Security, possible Expulsion.

As a result of the district's policy, Mr. Scott contacted the school resource officers, who are actual police officers, to confiscate the weapon. They handcuffed Dan and escorted him to the police car waiting in the front of the school.

The Decision Making Dilemmas

In this case, Mr. Scott made the decision to implement the school district's zero tolerance policy and ordered that Dan be immediately handcuffed and escorted to the police patrol car. However, because of my previous interactions with Dan and understanding of the context, I felt things should have been handled differently. I saw no need for Dan to be immediately handcuffed and walked through the hallways while his peers were present. Dan was not a violent person; they could have transported him after the halls had cleared and cuffed him immediately prior to placing him in the car. These are small differences that could have made a big impact on him mentally.

The desire for all school leaders should be to provide a safe, nurturing, inclusive, and engaging learning environment for all students and staff. When police become involved, it is obvious that safety is a main concern, but the other elements must also still be considered, especially when a student's academic future and record are concerned. Decisions should not be made blindly, without thought and consideration. For this particular situation, I contemplated the following questions:

1. How does Dan's arrest impact the climate and culture of the school?

2. How does Dan's arrest affect Dan, Mr. G., the rest of the 8th grade class, and the entire student body?

3. Do we have all of the details as to why Dan felt he needed to bring a weapon to school?

4. Why didn't Dan share his concerns with anyone? And if he did, why didn't they bring it to the attention of the guidance department and building administration?

5. If we knew about the altercation over the weekend earlier and warned the teachers ahead of time, could this situation have been prevented? Also, would Mr. G. have given Dan such a strict ultimatum when he expressed his feelings about the rumors during class instruction?

6. Now that Dan is removed from school, will he now be more susceptible to violence or danger?

7. How can we assist the family?

8. Has Dan lost trust in those who are, ideally, in place to assist and protect him (e.g., teachers, principal)?

9. Will Dan feel the need to take matters into his own hands now that he is in trouble for trying to protect himself?

10. Did the school fail Dan?

These are only ten of the perspectives I considered in this particular situation. As an assistant principal who firmly believes in partnering with families and community members to address the social and emotional needs of students, it is difficult, at times painful, to merely follow zero-tolerance codes of conduct without taking into consideration the context and specific circumstances of the student(s) involved. The way I would have liked to handle Dan's situation would have also maintained safety, but it would not have been a mere regurgitation of school district policy. It is the rigidity of such policies that forces administrators, even those who are culturally aware, to feed the STPP.

Implications of the Dan Incident

Dan's case is not unique to WMS. I certainly understand and experience daily how school administrators are presented with scenarios where they have to take a side, which, in most cases exposes Black children to some type of suffering. On one hand, not adhering to school district policy could potentially cause teachers to lose trust in you as a leader as they may not feel supported, which can then affect the morale of the school environment and cause teachers and students to doubt administrators' authority. On the other hand, adhering to school policies sometimes places good students at greater risk for entering the STPP. In addition, as a Black woman, I understand the realities that await Black children who become involved

in the criminal justice system; thus, the decision to remove a Black boy from the building in handcuffs is complicated and troublesome. In addition, for Black girls, as Crenshaw, Ocen, and (2015) note, they are just as "vulnerable to many of the same factors faced by their male counterparts" (p. 14).

Moreover, as a school leader, I cannot afford to be one-sided in my responses. I must consider all sides, placing myself in the shoes of the offender, victim, parents, teachers, colleagues, and supervisors. I must ask myself: what would I want/need to have happen as a mother, teacher, classmate, and school district? Will the consequence be a deterrent or will it exacerbate the situation? What will happen to the students next? Will the issue be settled/reignited in the community or can/will someone intercede to create opportunities for constructive communication? District and school leaders should consider all of these perspectives before making a decision. Unfortunately, many school leaders do not. As a caring and concerned school leader, I must accept the sobering fact that there are times where decisions that adversely impact the lives of Black students will have to be made, but not based on deficit perspectives that mischaracterize and stigmatize Black children. An even more disheartening reality is that as a Black school leader, reconciling these warring ideals of being an agent for the system and agent for the student can never be fully reconciled. In many ways, given the education system is steeped in anti-Blackness (Wun, 2016) our decisions are based on rubrics of behavior that will always negatively impact Black children. While these ideals can never be reconciled, that does not stop our attempts as Black district and school leaders to dismantle and challenge practices such as zero tolerance policies for the betterment of Black children. In fact, because of this complexity it is more critical that as Black school leaders we continue to fight.

Recommendations to Disrupt the School-to-Prison Pipeline

We presented the case above to explore the complexities of being a school leader and how analyzing systems of power is essential in making decisions that do not ultimately position students to enter the STPP. We believe school administrators currently play a key role in feeding the STPP, which means school administrators can play a key role in disrupting this path if they receive tangible solutions for implementing changes within their schools. While our list is not exhaustive, below are recommendations we believe are critical for school leaders to ensure they have the structures in place to disrupt the STPP.

Forging Relationships with the Students and Community You Serve Right Away. Not only are students' academic needs important, but so are their emotional, psychological, and mental health needs. Stakeholders who work to create safe learning spaces for students must consider all of these needs in order to elicit the best academic inputs and outputs of our students. School leaders must be cognizant that students are connected to families, communities, and the cultures they exist

within. Do not simply view them as bodies in a school building, but as individuals with stories. Take the time to discover, for example, the important social, religious, and cultural events that occur in the community. How do neighborhoods differ? What are the dynamics? What are your students' living arrangements? Are they being raised by a grandmother, aunt, uncle or older brother? Have they experienced a recent tragedy, a loss within the family or community at large perhaps? See the school as a part of the community and the community as a part of the school. Addressing the needs of one without considering the other can be problematic for a school leader.

Identifying and Confronting Racism at All Costs. With the changing demographics in our schools and the influence of political and social constructs evident today, administrators must have a heightened sense of identifying and confronting any divisive language, practices, and actions that may be deemed racist. Students see violence manifested in their neighborhoods, televised news, and social media outlets, and this may spill onto our school campuses. School leaders must examine people, policies, and practices that may promote racist thinking in our classrooms, and be willing to confront and disavow such actions. Equally important school leaders must engage in the reflective work to ensure they are able to engage in the work needed to address racism in their school. As Horsford (2014) suggested, while discussing racism can be difficulty, not addressing it "inhibits an education leader's ability to shape and sustain a school culture that draws strength from diverse backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, and concerns" (p. 124). Along with this reflective work, school leaders must cultivate the development of their staff's cultural competence, promote cultural inclusion for all students, model respect for all, and engage in dialogue that challenges racism directly. The point is, the same zero tolerance that school leaders apply to students must be applied to racism in the school building.

Share and Be Upfront About Expectations For Instruction and Discipline. School leaders must ensure that instruction is guided by curriculum and state and federal content standards. This helps ensure that students are being equipped with the skills and competencies that will prepare them for college, their careers, and the global environment and culture we now live in. Instruction that is culturally relevant, rigorous, engaging, and exciting allows students to recognize a purpose for and their place in school. Moreover, work with teachers to understand that undesirable behavior is often the manifestation of poor classroom management techniques, mediocre teaching, and/or lack of effective lesson planning. Leaders should visit classrooms regularly to establish relationships with students and ensure quality instruction takes place. This also allows leaders to model the types of instruction teachers should strive for. Moreover, school leaders should consider teaching one course a year so that they not only have an understanding of instruction and discipline from an observational standpoint, but also having that knowledge from having direct experience as a classroom instructor.

District and school leaders should study the code of conduct for students, disci-

plinary policies, disciplinary consequences, and suspension and expulsion policies. It is important for district and school leaders to have a thorough understanding of the policies governing discipline and disciplinary sanctions. Discipline policies and sanctions must be clearly defined for district and school leaders, teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders. Additionally, it is important for district and school leaders to engage all stakeholders (e.g., community, parents, students, etc.) in policy development. The whole community should be on the same page about the policies governing discipline and disciplinary sanctions. There should be transparency and open dialogue between stakeholders, and district and school leaders about how to best address disciplinary infractions.

Create a School-Wide Advising and Disciplinary Plan for Teachers and Staff. In one of our former schools, the motto was, "School achievement is everyone's business." This motto set the expectation that all stakeholders (including teachers, office and custodial staff, and parents) had a shared responsibility in the success of the school as a whole and students were assured that they had access to caring adults in the building. This idea of increasing the level of involvement creates a more nurturing environment that both students and teachers can benefit from. In this same vein, it may be useful to create an advising program where teachers and staff are given small groups of 10–20 students (e.g., 10–20 students per adult) they can advise. This gives students the reassurance that they have a specific, caring person that they can consult about any issues they may have. Advisors can host daily check-ins that can help diffuse situations before they get a chance to explode. In addition, morning meetings may be useful to ensure expectations are established with students. This is the time where any outstanding issues can be addressed and resolved, setting the stage for teaching and learning to occur. In addition, putting programs in place to support student's academic and social development sends the message that school leaders want to create an environment, which supports their academic and social strengths. Teaching social/emotional skills to handle various situations is imperative. New school leaders can address this by creating interventions such as restorative school discipline, peer mediation, and mentoring programs. Making these resources a part of the school culture will provide students with alternatives to undesirable behaviors.

Integrate Students' Frames of Reference in All Policies and School Procedures. All students bring to the classroom their own experiences and ways of relating to the world through their unique lens. Oftentimes, schools omit the experiences students bring because they feel that they, the school leadership, know what is in the best interest of students. While a part of this may be true, students have their own thoughts and feelings on how they can contribute in an authentic manner based on what they know and have experienced. Leaders can tap into this resource and fully develop student potential, even creating leaders, by allowing students to bring their skills and talents into the classroom. For example, what better way to

examine the effectiveness of particular policies than to ask students about them? Moreover, school leaders can create a student conduct advisory board panel, which is a student body that hears discipline infraction cases in the school and provides a recommendation to the principal when students violate policies. Using this approach ensures students have a voice in shaping discipline outcomes in the school.

We strongly believe that districts and schools leaders need to create a culture of academic and social excellence by enthusiastically rewarding students consistently throughout the year. We have found that while Positive Behavior Interventions Supports (PBIS) is integrated as a school-wide support, there may not be complete buy-in from school stakeholders. From our experiences, if there is no support of this initiative from the district personnel, principals and teachers, this can lead to poorly developed programs and initiatives that are supposed to celebrate students' academic and social achievements. In reality, they have very little value if a solid plan of implementation is not in place. Students are perceptive; they can tell if their school really cares or not. This is why district and school leaders must enthusiastically and consistently celebrate students' academic and social accomplishments, especially the students who have regular academic challenges and behavioral infractions. They must learn that they can gain attention in better ways, so struggling students should be encouraged to reach for academic and social excellence. However, this encouragement will only be received if it comes from enthusiastic leaders and teachers who have shown they really care. This all starts with district and school-level leadership because the administration sets the tone for the teachers and staff.

Suggestions for Collaborations
Among Researchers and School Districts

As researchers and practitioners concerned about Black students in the STPP, we have spent considerable time thinking about how to dismantle the STPP and what recommendations to offer district and school leaders. A major problem is that district and school leaders are not often formally trained on how to navigate the nuances of handling disciplinary problems that arise. For instance, most educational leadership programs do not offer courses on how to manage discipline. This means teachers and administrators come into schools and classrooms without the knowledge of how to defuse incidents, especially incidents between students and teachers. In this regard, we call for universities, school districts, and private schools to form partnerships to address the STPP by developing conflict resolution courses to better prepare leaders to effectively address discipline in the classroom (Raible & Irizarry, 2010).

In recent years, there has been a big push to improve the cultural competence of teachers (Keengwe, 2010), but very little focus has been placed on improving the cultural competence of district and school leaders. In most cases, district and school leaders are primarily in charge of improving teachers' cultural competence,

despite the fact that they lack the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to do so. We call for an increased focus on building district and school leaders' cultural competence because lasting changes starts from the top down.

For district and school leaders and teachers, professional learning opportunities must deeply explore their beliefs about and biases toward Black students and their responses to disciplinary infractions. Districts and school leaders and teachers must move away from the behaviorist model of discipline toward culturally responsive classroom management (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004) and restorative justice approaches (NEA, 2016; Schiff, 2013).

Concluding Thoughts

As concerned researchers, practitioners, and parents of Black children, we are deeply troubled by the current trends of Black students being sent out of classrooms, often for minor infractions. School leaders have the power to change this trend. While the opening example with the superintendent of MSD is an exemplary, positive case of how districts can stop the STPP, it highlights how school leaders must be given the autonomy and support to change these staggering statistics. Moreover, as Black district school leaders, the notion of having warring ideals (agents of the system vs. agents of the student) places added pressure when making decisions. However, if we want the discipline practices against Black children to dissipate, it will require a concerted effort. This piece is our attempt to engage in conversation with school leaders and schools of education that prepare school leaders to ensure that the disruption of the STPP becomes a priority.

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Seen But Not Heard

Personal Narratives of Systemic Failure Within the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Kalinda R. Jones, Anthony Ferguson,
Christian Ramirez, & Michael Owens

Abstract

The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) involves harsh discipline practices and exclusionary processes that disproportionally effect students of color by excluding them from K-12 education and increasing the likelihood of their involvement with the criminal justice system. To curtail these unjust practices and end the negative effects of the STPP, much of the academic literature provides insight into the causes of the STPP and proposes solutions to this problem. However, the voices of those who have experienced the STPP are largely missing from the literature. Specifically, the perspective of academically capable but historically unsuccessful incarcerated adults is largely unknown. This paper uses first-hand narratives developed using evocative autoethnographic methodology to describe the K-12 experiences of currently incarcerated college students. The STPP literature and two developmental theories (Bronfenbrenner (1979); Maslow (1971)) frame the narratives that explore A) interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences within the STPP; B) the complex interplay of the systems the authors interacted with; C) unmet needs that prevented educational attainment; and D) unanswered questions such as: "Who could I have been if someone had intervened?" This article concludes with questions that challenge readers to become engaged in social justice actions that can prevent current and future K-12 students from becoming oppressed and controlled by the STPP.

Kalinda R. Jones is an assistant professor and department chair of Human Services/Social Work at Folsom Lake College of the Los Rios Commuity College District, Folsom, California. Anthony Ferguson and Michael Owens have earned certificates in Social Work/Human Services and Christian Ramirez is a college student, all at Folsom Lake College. E-mail address is: JonesK@flc.losrios,edu

Keywords: School-to-prison pipeline; educational inequity; incarcerated college students; autoethnography; and personal narratives.

Introduction

The more completely they [the oppressed] accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. (Freire,1970, p. 73)

It [humanization] is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity. (Freire, 1970, p. 43–44)

In theory, education offers the promise that all people can develop into critically reflective, self–actualized, empowered contributors to society (Bell, 2007; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970). However, in the United States, inequities in school funding and discipline mar this promise (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Ladson–Billings, 2006). These inequities unjustly affect students from historically marginalized groups, such as students of color, children of immigrants, and families of low socioeconomic status (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). The school–to–prison pipeline (STPP) is, perhaps, the most egregious example of these injustices. The STPP is a metaphor used to describe the harsh discipline policies and exclusionary practices that disproportionally funnel African American and Latino students away from academic success and toward the criminal justice system (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Scully, 2015; Wald & Losen, 2003). Students who experience suspension and expulsion because of harsh disciplinary policies are three times more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011). Frequently, these students spend their adult lives as incarcerated individuals striving to survive instead of free individuals contributing to society (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014).

In recent years, the STPP has garnered the attention of scholars (e.g., Skiba et al., 2014; Scully, 2015), governmental agencies (e.g., U.S. Department of Education, 2014), and professional organizations (e.g., American Psychological Association, 2008; National Education Association, 2016). These valuable contributions have provided awareness, understanding, and promising solutions to the STPP. However, with the exception of a few articles (Annamma, 2014; Winn, 2010), the voices of those individuals within the STPP remain silent, especially the voices of incarcerated college students. According to Freire (1970) "One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people" (p. 95). Through dialogue with those impacted by the STPP, community members and professionals, such as professors, policy makers, educators, and mental health practitioners, can collaboratively challenge cultural myths and develop critical consciousness in order to "transform

an unjust reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 174) of educational exclusion into a just reality of educational empowerment.

The purpose of this article is to enter into the STPP dialogue through the presentation of our narratives developed using autoethnographic research methodology. As three college students, who are currently incarcerated, and a professor who teaches prison education, we "converse with the literature" (Wall, 2008, p. 40) through a vulnerable exploration of our interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). In response to simplistic and deficit perspectives of students within the STPP (Pyscher & Lozenski, 2014) we examine how unmet needs and complex systemic interactions influenced our identity development (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Consistent with autoethnography we discuss "tensions between connectedness and otherness" (Jensen–Hart & Williams, 2010, p. 464) and grapple with difficult questions (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) such as: "Who could I have been if someone had intervened?" By raising awareness of the ways power marginalizes students from oppressed and vulnerable communities, our goal is to deepen readers' empathetic understanding of individuals within the STPP (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Ultimately, we hope readers find themselves impelled with "more urgency to work for justice" (Bell, 2010, p. 6–7).

Kalinda Jones' Narrative: The Context

I was leaving prison. While standing inside the 12 foot, electrified, barbed–wired, fenced sally port at Ivory State Prison (ISP), I looked up at the guard tower and wondered again, "How did we lose them? These intelligent, articulate, and grateful college students are great writers and diligent scholars. If they are flourishing in the prison education program, why were they not successful in K–12?"

The questions I was asking were not new to me. They began in the winter of 2016 when I taught two sections of undergraduate Human Service classes at ISP, a maximum–security prison. Previously, my work as a high school teacher, therapist, school counselor, and professor had intersected with the STPP, but when I began teaching Human Service classes at ISP, I became deeply immersed.

Students enrolled in my Introduction to Psychology of Human Relations course completed reflective papers that focused on the application of psychological concepts to their lived experiences. As I read their stories, I was shocked, saddened, disappointed, outraged, and inspired. Their courageous self-reflections and hard fought transformations energized my commitment to work for social justice. I sensed that other educators would benefit from reading their stories; I tentatively invited one class to "think about" forming a writing group to communicate their experiences within the STPP. Some students nodded their heads and some opened their eyes in interest, but no one inquired further until the last day of the semester when Anthony Ferguson (one of my co–authors) asked, "Remember that writing project you mentioned? Is there a way we can still work on that?" Two weeks later, our meetings began.

Methodology

The Writing Team

The four authors of this paper comprised the writing team. Kalinda Jones is a 46-year-old White female who holds degrees in biology education, school counseling, and counseling psychology. Currently, she is a professor of Human Services at Folsom Lake College where she strives to facilitate students' development of self-awareness, cross-cultural helping skills, and critical consciousness. Christian Ramirez, a 28-year-old Chicano man, hopes to complete his Associate's degree in Human Services before he paroles. Eventually, he expects to complete graduate studies in the social and behavioral sciences. Anthony Ferguson is a 34-year-old African American man, who has completed Associate's degrees in social and behavioral sciences, Arts and Humanities, and American Studies. Upon his release from prison, he plans to earn a Master's degree in social work and obtain employment as an Addiction Therapist. Mike Owens is a 45-year-old African American man, published poet, and student currently working toward a degree in Human Services. While serving his life sentence, Mike looks for opportunities to collaborate with community-based organizations with whom he can help create new models for restorative justice.

Evocative Autoethnography

We utilized evocative autoethnography to guide the development and writing of this paper. Autoethnography is "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Evocative autoethnography, a specific type of autoethnography, uses description and emotion to create stories that promote empathy and compassion (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Jensen–Hart & Williams, 2010). Consistent with our goals in writing this paper, autoethnography has been used in educational research and is recommended to increase educational equity by raising "emancipatory narratives to a place of prominence, where they can challenge the fragmented and pervasive messaging of the mainstream accounts" (Allen, Hancock, & Lewis, 2015, p. 180). Autoethnography empowered us to voice our experiences within the STPP (Allen et al., 2015) and connect those experiences to the larger educational context in the U.S. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Ethics and trustworthiness are key aspects of evocative autoethnography (Bochner & Ellis 2016). In alignment with relational ethics, we used pseudonyms for people and places (Ellis et al., 2011). When this was not possible, we either discussed the content of the paper with those mentioned or attempted to mask their identities. Drawing on Ellis, Bochner, and James' (2000, 2006, 2011, & 2016) writings on autoethnography, we viewed language as socially constructed and subjective; therefore, we trust the readers to create their own meaning from our stories.

Keeping in mind that readers determine the trustworthiness of autoethnographies when they connect to the stories by experiencing them as credible and useful (Ellis, James, & Bochner, 2011), we strove to express our memories in an authentic, emotional, and meaningful manner.

Theoretical Framework

Our research team met to talk through each person's STPP story, read one another's written work, discuss the direction of the paper, and review literature and theoretical frameworks. As the stories evolved through cycles of discussion, writing, and revising, our writing team examined ways in which our (Christian, Anthony, and Michael) stories illustrated and reflected key concepts from the STPP literature and the psychological theories of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Maslow (1971).

Our narratives demonstrate the antecedents and negative effects of the STPP. Specifically, these include: 1) zero tolerance policies that lead to suspension and expulsion (Kim et al., 2010; Losen & Gillespie, 2012); 2) hostile school climates marked by bullying, neglect, and exclusion (Sussman, 2012); 3) educational trauma contributing to low self–esteem and a lack of academic success (National Education Association, 2016; Scully, 2015; Sullivan, 2004); and 4) involvement in the criminal justice system at school and/or in early adolescence (Skiba et al, 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of ecological development explains our complex personal development across time. As students in K-12 settings, we interacted with the microsystems of school, family, neighborhood, mental health, church, and criminal justice. When these systems intersected, they created mesosystems that influenced our development, such as the mesosystem of family–school interaction. To a lesser degree, our stories demonstrate a lack of direct involvement with exosystems, such as the lack of mental health treatment systems to assist in meeting our family members' mental health needs. Overall, our narratives reflect the influences exerted by the larger ideologies and macrosystems of racism, classism, sexism, and nationalism.

As we moved within numerous systems, our needs were largely unmet. Maslow's (1971) theory of motivation provides insight into our relationships with school and eventual involvement in the criminal justice system. According to Maslow, people concentrate their behavioral efforts on getting their needs met in the following order: physiological, safety, love/belongingness, esteem/achievement, and self–actualization. We did not experience school as a place of psychological or physical safety, belongingness, or academic achievement. We sought safety, belongingness, and achievement through violence and gang activity. However, we had the potential to be accomplished scholars, as indicated by our current college successes and our involvement in the writing of this paper. Using Maslow (1971) as a guide, we wondered, "How our lives would have been different if schools had

facilitated our development by 'see(ing) that the child's basic psychological needs were satisfied'?" (p. 190).

The Narratives

In the next portion of this article, Christian, Anthony, and Michael present their STPP narratives, which are organized chronologically with the youngest author's story presented first. Consistent with evocative autoethnography, instead of relying on explaining and interpreting, we employ storytelling to convey information, trusting our readers to draw their own meaning from our stories. This is also the reason for the interrogative structure of the conclusion that follows the narratives. When reading the narratives and the conclusion, we invite readers to extract whatever inspiration they may find to become better-equipped interrupters of the STPP.

Christian Ramirez's Narrative

"Excuse me ma'am, we're expelling your son. Could someone translate to Mrs. Ramirez that Christian is being expelled for stealing?" The school, Adams Elementary, expelled me in the middle of fourth grade.

Because this expulsion occurred at so early an age, it established me as a "troublemaker" in all schools I attended, but worse than the label was the zero tolerance policies I was subjected to for the smallest infractions. These policies created inconsistency in school settings and caused me to feel excluded from school. I never attended one school for more than two years. I was kicked out of three elementary schools and two middle schools. After attending two high schools, for one day each, I dropped out of high school. At 15, I was arrested; at 16, I learned to read.

"Why you act like that?" As a result of my family interactions, I developed an inability to communicate about serious topics, a low self-esteem, and a tolerance for violence. All of these negatively affected my school environment. Both of my parents were from Mexico. They were uneducated immigrants, who moved to the U.S. in "pursuit of the American Dream." They only spoke Spanish and lacked healthy communication skills, but they believed their children would have better life opportunities as a direct result of the education given here. Unfortunately, they were unsure of how to interact with me about school.

Mother's tolerance. After my expulsion in the fourth grade, my mother treated me to Burger King. There she asked me if I wanted to go to another elementary school. Scared and confused, I nodded my head "okay." Because my mother did not discipline me for my school misbehavior, I formulated the belief that I did not do anything wrong and that school was not fair. Also, my mother seemed disappointed at herself and showed it by not mentioning my expulsion to my father.

Father's contribution. While on my many "paid vacations" provided by school

suspensions in elementary school, I worked with my dad. While working with him, I had a great time. He was a different person sober: we joked around, he bought me fast food, and we never talked about my school troubles. My father believed his only duty was to put food on the table, so he never got involved in my education.

Brother's rejection. My parents were boxing fanatics. They encouraged boxing amongst siblings, friends, and family. As the youngest of three brothers, I had the most to prove. I wanted to hang with my older brother, which required that I become his "puppet." Anywhere we saw kids my age he made me fight them. When kids were his age, he compelled me to fight them by threatening me physically.

At about 10 years of age, I involuntarily became my brothers' verbal and physical punching bag. I did not mind it at home, but it bothered me mentally when, for the sole purpose of humiliating me, it took place in front of my friends, family, and classmates. His treatment became unbearable. I feared being around him and tried to avoid him in public. I began to resent him because I developed a low–opinion of myself.

Manifestation. Humiliation is something I try to avoid because it was the part of my childhood that caused me to detach from my family. Because of my brother's abusive rejection, I started elementary school with the core belief: "I am unlovable." I went through elementary school without learning how to read. I was too scared to ask my teachers for help and believed I was not worthy or deserving of someone else's attention. School became a blur. I passed along one grade to another without any teacher mentioning my inconsistent attendance, lack of class participation, or nonexistent homework. This perpetuated my violent personality in middle school, as I tried to hide the fact that I could not read.

Round trip airfare. In middle school, I received my first–class ticket into the STPP. My inability to read and numerous suspensions solidified my alienation from school. I became a short–tempered, class clown who compensated for academic deficiencies before they were exposed. In classes where teachers asked me to read, I wandered in the halls, started fights, or irritated the teachers. I did not want anyone to find out that I could not read, so I faked the persona that I was a violent class clown. This behavior worked. I gained confidence from the attention I was receiving– so I continued.

Having a "disruptive" reputation meant that school employees were quick to remove me from school. I acknowledged this and countered with being violent. The middle school suspensions, also known as "the only option to handle Christian," were the most damaging. They kept me out of school at the time when I needed to catch–up academically. Since I was not in school, I began to be curious about my neighborhood where there was a heavy gang presence.

My new big brother. Up until seventh grade, I was searching for someone to look up to, to connect with, and to show me a way–essentially a role model.

By eighth grade, I became a full participant in the criminal lifestyle. Within this lifestyle, I felt welcomed, included, and valued.

My introduction came via a gang member, Matt, who was 10 years older than me. Matt earned my full attention after he bullied my brother for trying to bully me. As a kid, I imagined someone magically appearing to make my brother feel the same pain he made me feel, so when Matt threatened my brother, he instantly became my new big brother. I emulated his attitude, beliefs, and behavior. To fit in and socialize with my new family, I smoked and sold drugs, carried guns, and committed robberies. School meant nothing to me. I only attended a few times a month so my parents would not get arrested for my truancy.

My "high school prom." During the past ten years of my incarceration, I have wondered what it would have felt like to attend a high school prom. What would it have been like to ride in a limousine? What would I talk to my date about when I arrived at her house? How would it feel to be dressed up and have the attention of my friends and family? The closest resemblance to my prom came in ninth grade, when several police officers graciously chauffeured me to school on a truancy sweep.

It began when my sister, also truant, allowed the police officers into our home. She ran to my room and said, "The cops are here!"

Half asleep, I immediately tried to escape out of my window, but was stopped when one cop asked, "Where do you think you are going?"

I did not have any shoes on, so I knew if I ran, the police would catch me. I replied, "Nowhere, what's up?"

Another cop commanded "Get dressed, we're going to school." When we arrived at school, the cops escorted me to the front of a class. To make sure I stayed in class they sat behind me. Sadly, what the police officers did not know was that negative attention boosted my confidence. I, at the time, held the "trouble–maker" label as a badge of honor.

The truth. Another interaction with the police on March 10, 2006 resulted in my arrest for carrying a concealed weapon. When in juvenile hall, I received an additional charge of attempted murder for a crime I committed before March 10, 2006. At 17, I was sentenced to 27 years. It was here that the seeds of my one positive middle school experience grew.

An act of kindness. My sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Neil, was the first teacher to give me a second of her time. Every Friday, in her class, we had a spelling bee. I remember leaving my first spelling test blank. She noticed and asked me to stay after class. The other students left, and she tested me again. I still did not write anything. She seemed to realize that I could not read or spell, so she sounded out each word. As she sounded out each letter, I wrote it down. By nodding her head "yes" or "no" she gave me the information I needed to finish the test. Finally, someone taught me that a word is exactly how it sounds.

An act of inspiration. Mrs. Neil's act of kindness was reproduced when Ms. Adams, my teacher in juvenile hall, inspired me to begin reading. Ms. Adams, one of my maximum–security unit teachers, looked for what each student was lacking and attended to his needs. She engaged me in conversation and assessed that I did not have a mental disability, but she still could not pinpoint why I did not do any work in her class.

After fighting another student in her class, I was in solitary confinement. This meant I was on room confinement and would not get privileges for at least two months. Ms. Adams came to my cell. She said "Ramirez- that wasn't very nice of you to punch Mr. Smith." Then, she motivated me by asking, "You want some candy?" Being without privileges, of course I replied, "Yeah."

She handed me a book and stated, "you have to read this book, get 70% of the questions correct, and then I will give you a Jolly Rancher." That night I sounded out every word of that very thin book. In my mind, I was either going to boost my spirit or break it. In the morning, I took the test on her computer and passed. Finally, when I was 16–years–old, I tried to and successfully read my first book. My success got me a Jolly Rancher.

Acts of success. After two years in prison, I heard that the education department was offering the tests for the General Education Diploma (G.E.D.). I thought of taking the tests, but I still had doubts that I could pass. My doubts were really a fear of failing because I did not want to confirm what others said about me growing up. I signed up saying to myself "If I fail, I just won't tell anyone." I studied a G.E.D. book for six months, about eight hours a day. When I took it, I passed.

Getting my G.E.D. was vindication for past labels such as, "Troublemaker," "Fuck up," or "Dumb ass" that came from school officials, friends, and family. The confidence I received after passing the G.E.D. was and still is enormous. The knowledge I got from preparing for the G.E.D. helped me understand my past, including how I became the person I was before incarceration. I attribute my G.E.D. to changing my violent personality as well as my perspective of what really matters.

Beautiful struggle. As a 4th grader, I could never have foreseen the struggle I would endure because of low self-esteem. I attended the public school system, but I was blatantly excluded from education. My behavior in fourth grade was a cry for help that the school answered with expulsion, not help. I believe a school counselor, a teacher, or some other professional could have addressed and rectified my "disruptive behavior" and "academic deficiencies." Instead, I was suppressed by zero tolerance policies, kicked out of school, landed in the streets, and eventually earned a place in prison.

I essentially grew up in jail. I am now 25-years-old and serving a 27-year sentence for a shooting I committed at 14-years-old, simply to justify my acceptance into a gang. However, with the passing of Senate Bill 260, The Youth Offender Parole law, I have the opportunity for early release. Currently, I am pursuing my

college education. I hope to earn an Associate's degree, a Bachelor's degree, and eventually a Master's degree. The STTP is very much in business, and I am struggling to overcome it.

Anthony Ferguson's Narrative

I entered school with the necessary ingredients for a typical STPP experience. My father was not around, my mother struggled with alcoholism and depression, and my stepfather was addicted to drugs and alcohol. By age 4, I had witnessed and endured emotional and physical abuse from my parents.

My mother loved me a lot, and I loved her. She read to me regularly, engaged me in thoughtful conversation, and gave me a moral foundation that included the value of education. However, depression and alcoholism often got the best of her. When she drank, she was an entirely different person. I often felt afraid, embarrassed, and confused by her dramatically unstable behavior, which frequently vacillated from attentive, motherly love to rabid, angry outbursts. Unfortunately, my mother was unprepared to participate fully in my schooling. At an early age, I had developed a behavioral pattern that cried out for attention and some sense of tender understanding from the adults in my life.

This is the child who entered Pre–K in 1988.

The beginning: Pre–K through 2nd grade. From Pre–K through the second grade, I was very hyper in the classroom. Starting in preschool, my teacher reprimanded me for pouring milk over my classmate's pizza. I forgot why I decided to do it, but I did. The teacher told my mother, who told my stepfather. As I was bathing that night, my stepdad stormed into the bathroom and beat me severely. I did not even know why I was being beaten–until after it was over. This was the beginning of a long and contentious scholastic disciplinary history that joined me, my family, and the school system in an antagonistic triangular matrimony wherein each party's reactions did not serve my best interests. That incident was my entry point into the pipeline.

In kindergarten and first grade I was very energetic and social. I loved to talk during class and found it difficult to sit still and listen while teachers spoke. As a result, my teachers often became irritated, which led to many phone calls home, parent teacher conferences, and being singled out in class. This ritual became so common that I began to think that it was just a natural part of being in school. My mother quickly became overwhelmed and reacted with increasing emotionality and hostility, which triggered my stepdad's wrath. Their reactions felt unfair and made me angry and resentful. I sought refuge and freedom in socializing and clowning around at school, which again prompted my teachers to call home, thus perpetuating the cycle.

The "diagnosis." Eventually, the school's vexation with me inspired a referral

to a psychiatrist. I attended a few sessions with my mother and grandmother. The psychiatrist asked some questions and prescribed Ritalin to "calm me down." I felt like something was wrong with me. Why else did they say I needed pills? Why did teachers persistently call my mother and tell her that I was too disruptive? Why else would my teachers regularly send me to the principal's office or require me to stay after class? I began to believe that this was what school was about. No longer did I see school as a welcoming experience for educational development. It simply became a place where, for whatever reason, I was required to be.

The teasing. I was a chubby kid, and other kids teased me because of it. Many of my classmates regularly called me demeaning names like "fatty," "fat hamburger," or "titty boy." Rarely did the most enthusiastic bullies miss an opportunity to call me names in front of other students or play pranks on me. I often wondered why they hassled me so much. I got depressed and angry because, no matter how hard I tried, I could not make it stop. Unless I was amusing them by cracking jokes or being combative with teachers, I was the butt of the other kids' jokes that made me doubt my social worth. Thus, schoolwork, academic achievement, and long–term success became background noise in the face of the immediate pain, shame, and embarrassment. Fitting in became my focus, and if being a "problem child" was the way to be accepted, then that was what I would do. I often felt guilty for the embarrassment and shame my behavior caused my mother and grandmother, but the intensity of the isolation I felt overrode my guilt.

A new start?: Third grade. In third grade, my mother decided to enroll me in Webb Elementary, in upscale Malibu. I believe my mother hoped I would fare better there because of the better education and relational atmosphere, where different teachers and a new environment offered new possibilities. I guess she figured, why not seize the opportunity to give her son, a poor black kid, the same educational experience as the privileged white rich folks whose racial and economic advantages made their children's attendance at such a school a reflection of who they were.

Socioeconomic exclusion. Children from very affluent families attended Webb. The school held field trips to interesting places, such as the J. Paul Getty Museum or the beautiful beaches of Malibu. My class was planning for a weeklong trip to Yosemite National Park, and I was very excited to visit a place that I had only heard about. When I learned that the trip cost something like $500, I knew I likely would not be going. I asked my parents anyway and the answer was "no." I was upset but never mentioned it. I just went to school like nothing was wrong and listened to the other kids talk about how much fun they were going to have in Yosemite. Even though I sat with those kids in the same class every day, and I was good friends with many of them, I remained acutely aware of how different our experiences were. Our worlds were very far apart.

Stranded and alone. In 1993, a major fire in Malibu shut down large portions

of the Pacific Coast Highway, which was the only road between my house and Webb. The fire got close enough to the school that the city forced us to evacuate. We took shelter and stayed overnight in a makeshift Red Cross outpost until the highway reopened for travel. Once the officials cleared us to leave, parents came in droves to pick up their kids. They arrived terrified with uncertainty over their children's wellbeing and left with their loved ones in elated relief. One by one, two by two, I saw my classmates reunited with their parents, but mine never came because they did not have a car. A few of my friends' parents offered to drive me home, but school officials refused. Finally, I was the only child left. My principal, to his credit, drove me to the Board of Education building where my mother and grandmother picked me up. It stuck out in my mind that my parents were concerned, yet unable to arrive when I needed them. At the time, I could not comprehend the larger socioeconomic narrative that this experience represented. All I knew was that, once again, I was reminded of how different I was—par for the course.

A caring teacher: Fourth and fifth grade. In the same month of the fire, my family moved into the Los Angeles Unified School District. My mom enrolled me into Lowe Elementary. Of course, my behavioral problems continued. I still found it difficult to pay attention to the teacher's agenda at the expense of my own. By the fifth grade, schoolwork had become a nuisance. I did not have problems learning the material; it simply bored me. My intentions were set on impressing my peers by showing them how well I could entertain them and disregard authority.

Mrs. Potter, my fifth grade teacher, saw through my façade and into the hurt little boy behind the antics. An energetic, 50–something white lady with a grayish blonde Afro–like hairdo, she truly cared for her students. Although I did not spare her any of the stress and grief that I gave my previous teachers, her reactions to my shenanigans were different. When she scolded me for disrupting the class or being off task, I got mad, but I did not view her responses as antagonistic. In her eyes I saw the same concern and love that I received from my mother or grandmother when they became fed up with my behavior. Something about those looks made me feel guilty for not "acting right" when I "knew better." Mrs. Potter talked to me about being considerate of others and never missed an opportunity to tell my mother or me that I was smart. Never did I feel that I was simply being "handled" or merely "tolerated" as was so often the case for me in school.

School becomes irrelevant: Middle school and high school. In middle school, my relationship with my parents became very tumultuous. My stepdad and I clashed constantly, partially because of his anger, drinking, and drug use, and partially because of my defiance and desire to escape the chaos at home by running the streets. His physical abuse was one–sided before, but at age 13, I started fighting back. We were unable to live together. Frequently, my parents kicked me out, which forced me to live with my grandmother and other family members.

Because of my relationship with my stepfather and my mother's seeming

indifference, I was so angry and resentful toward authority that school ceased to have relevance to me. I began ditching school, something that I never considered in elementary school.

Attention and relief through crime. Whether or not school was in session, I ventured into different parts of the city and started learning new behaviors. To gain approval, I followed my "friends" into the world of gangs, drugs, and crime. I joined a gang at 14 and started getting high and drinking daily. Soon, I was selling crack and marijuana. I began burglarizing businesses and schools to steal appliances and money. My crimes progressed from petty to felonious. I became what some people call "incorrigible"—unable to be reasoned with.

Criminality dominated my life. Before I turned 17, I was arrested 11 times (six times for felony offenses) for everything from Grand Theft Auto to drug sales and battery. My intense pain, anger, resentment, and feelings of emptiness temporarily subsided in the thrills I derived from stealing a car and joyriding with friends, vandalizing other people's hard–earned property, or getting drunk and high until I blacked out. The only time I felt validated or important was when I got arrested or into some other kind of trouble. I remember one instance when the Los Angeles Police detained me for truancy and drove me onto school grounds in the middle of third period as the entire Physical Education class looked on. Back then, that was my idea of positive recognition, and I reveled in every minute of it.

Variable school involvement. Schools either expelled me or forced me to transfer because of enemy gang concerns. None of my teachers made an impression on me, nor did any of them take an interest in me, probably because I changed schools nearly every semester. I was only going through the motions of going to school. For some reason I never dropped out, but I abandoned any "delusion" that my attendance meant anything other than keeping my mother or myself out of legal trouble.

My only positive relationship was with Mrs. Cole, my eleventh grade civics teacher at Grove City High School. Everything about Mrs. Cole exuded dignity, and her aura commanded respect. A short, dark black woman with a stern but gentle demeanor, she tolerated ignorance but detested foolishness. She spoke with an authority that, ironically, I did not resent or try to rebel against. As I mentioned earlier, I understood class material but did not feel a need to work. When Mrs. Cole lectured on the mechanics of the Constitution or on the significance of the Bush vs. Gore election, and I engaged her intellectually, she immediately noticed. She took a liking to me, not unlike how Mrs. Potter had. She told me how much "potential" I had and, like Mrs. Potter, even her reprimands expressed a genuine regard for my wellbeing. Even though I was emotionally walled off and committed to being antisocial, Mrs. Cole's belief in me did not go unnoticed. It was unheeded because I did not believe in myself.

End of the pipeline: Prison at 17. I succumbed to the STPP. By age 16, I

was a boy emotionally ruined. I saw no future for myself beyond my day– to–day routines of getting high and doing whatever I could to get money. Occasionally, I went through the motions of attending school. My final two years of school were a whirlwind of home school, multiple continuation (alternative) schools, and a short stint in adult school before the pipeline finally spat me out into prison.

On January 25, 2002, I committed assault with a firearm on three Santa Monica police officers, and was subsequently sentenced to 34 years in prison. I was 17. I was too immature to understand fully the magnitude of my crime or the true impact that my actions would have on the victims, their families, my family, and my life.

Coming of (intellectual) age. Being locked up provides ample time, much of which I decided early on to spend educating myself. My first five years were an autodidactic odyssey. I immersed myself in great works of literature, history, philosophy, science, and politics. Plato, Aristotle, and the American Founding Fathers taught me critical thinking and abstract reasoning; Swift, Milton, and Shakespeare revealed the immense beauty of the language I had taken for granted my entire life; Galileo and Darwin expanded my view of the cosmos and nature; while W.E.B. Dubois, Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Alex Haley, Malcolm X, and Harriet Beecher Stowe awakened me to my racial and cultural heritage. My chance encounters with those authors laid the foundation for an intellectual birth that impelled me on a journey toward self–awareness and a greater appreciation of the world around me that continues to this day. With my self–awareness has come a deeper understanding of my past and why I actively resisted education. I am proud of the person I have become and am continually becoming. The decision to educate myself is definitely one of the most important decisions I have made in my life.

Mike Owens' Narrative

Hobo, age 12
Momma used to say:
"boy, you must got hobo in your blood—
all you ever want to do is eat, sleep, and run the streets."

Maybe momma was right.
Maybe I did have hobo blood.

Or maybe it was just that I preferred
the uncertainties of street life
over what I already knew
was waiting for me
at home.

As I contemplated my journey along the STPP, I found myself thinking about the pre–existing conditions that made me especially susceptible to the flush. I am

convinced that each was an essential, indispensable element of my slide. I do not believe the STPP can be examined apart from home and social conditions.

The roots of my dysfunction. My family's dysfunction was violence in all its forms. My parents were sometimes physically violent but regularly emotionally violent. They used the threat of violence, intimidation, and berating as their main tools of parental guidance. Having to work long hours, they left me in the care of my eldest sister. I am the youngest of three older sisters and one other brother. Several of these older siblings abused me sexually and emotionally. The effects of my traumatic home life severely handicapped my ability to recognize school as important.

Developing authority issues. Aside from the distrust I felt toward authority at home, I learned very early that I was somehow innately displeasing to most people of authority I encountered. I can best illustrate this point with two examples.

When I was seven or eight years old, a deacon at my mother's church was openly hostile to me. I do not know if it was because my father did not attend like most other dads, or if the deacon just thought I was a "bad seed," but he was always the first and most vocal person to criticize my every move. When I asked his grandson, one of my Sunday School playmates, why his grandfather did not like me, he answered, "I don't know, he just doesn't" and then skipped away.

Another instance occurred around the same time. Some friends and I were playing catch in a residential area down the street from my house. A police cruiser pulled up beside us and waved us over. I was excited because at the time, I wanted to be a cop, and I thought this might be a chance to get a peek at all the cool gear inside the patrol car. I pushed to the front of the group. The cop gave us an indifferent once over with his ice blue eyes and said, "You little niggers stay out of the street." As he pulled off, I remember thinking "Well, I don't want to be a cop anymore." These types of interactions reinforced my resentments toward authority that were born in my home.

Sub–culture and environment. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, my community was a hyper–masculine, violent, and racist environment. Violence was an acceptable form of communication, and fair fights were routinely encouraged to settle disputes. This is of course before Crack and the ensuing gun violence epidemic. Older kids taught younger ones, often through beatings, how to fight. Learning to fight effectively was seen as a responsibility in our community where people of color were outnumbered by poor whites, who were angry at their own economic misfortune. Any show of emotional sensitivity by boys was shamed or beaten out of those naïve enough to reveal it. At the time, talking to anyone about what I was going through or feeling was just not an available option. I had to be a man and in my world, men were hard.

Elementary school (K–5). School for me during the kindergarten through fifth grade years was an experience of strange duality.

School as refuge. School served as a refuge away from the chaos of home and the peer pressures of neighborhood politics. I felt safe at school because my sibling abusers were not there. At school, nobody knew my secret shames. Not wanting to reveal the truth of what was happening to me at home, I would feign excitement over approaching holiday school breaks. The other kids could not wait for Christmas or summer vacation, but I dreaded them. I never wanted to be home.

School as reinforcement. On the other hand, my K–5th grade school years reinforced every conclusion I made about distrusting people in authority. My school principal and all my teachers seemed interested in one thing: my obedience. The yoke of their expectations felt like oppression. It felt like an insult to my injury. I did not feel like anyone cared about whether I was happy or safe. I felt like I was just something to be managed; as if it was not me that mattered, but just whether my behavior made their jobs easier or more difficult.

The school held me back in the third grade. I seem to remember being told the reason was that I was "less mature" than the other kids. Coincidentally, that was also about the same time of my most traumatic sexual abuse. I do not claim to be an authority, but my misbehavior– lighting fires, fascination with weapons, and aggressiveness toward perceived bullies– should have prompted deeper investigation. Given the chance, I may have revealed hidden issues I was also suffering – night terrors, bedwetting, and suicidal ideation. I can acknowledge now that most of my teachers probably cared on some level; but I am not ready to forgive them for missing the signs that any competent adult should have been able to pick up. I wonder who I could have been had someone intervened.

Junior high school (6th–8th grade). By the time I entered middle school, I had already accepted that my place in this world was among the gangsters of the criminal subculture. The adults in my life—my mother, a few teachers, a principal—began telling me that I would be dead or in jail by 21. I believe they meant it as a kind of tough love warning. They had no way of knowing that I already felt my future would inevitably lead me to prison or an early grave. I felt safest when my peers feared me and most valued while participating in organized criminal activity. I accepted incarceration and danger as simply part of my fate. Whenever I tried to think about the future, I just felt an enormous black hole looming before me. At 12–years–old, I experienced but could not articulate this intense level of hopelessness.

Feigned participation. School became nothing more than a camouflage, a thin veneer of obedience I complied with because it lessened the scrutiny of my parents and probation officer. Even my older homeboys, as negative an influence as they were, encouraged me to go to school. The funny thing about it, no one—not my parents or probation officer– seemed too concerned with my performance at school. My grades were terrible. I was barely passing my classes, due mostly to the

fact I refused to do homework. I did classwork if I was interested in the topic, and I participated in testing. I never turned in homework, and my grades reflected it. My parents rarely asked for my school progress records. I guess they were satisfied that I was even showing up.

Do I feel that my school failed me? Yes, that is true, but it is not totally fair. What I suffered as a child, the secrets coiled around my heart, led me to fail myself as well. For every betrayal I suffered, I betrayed myself in even worse ways. I could never see for myself a bright, shining future attainable through school and education. I did not believe that was possible for me. I just wanted to not be who I was—an emotionally terrorized, sexual abuse victim. And if that meant crafting a tough guy persona, living life as a criminal, or even becoming a murderer—so be it; the sooner, the better. That remains the most catastrophic decision of my life, and the thing of which I am most ashamed. In response to my own pain, I was perfectly willing to become a source of pain to others.

The school system marginalized and excluded me, and in response, I rejected the system right back. By twelve I decided all the folks who had prematurely written me off were right, I was not ever going to amount to anything. However, I could revel in the power I did have. If I was destined to go down, I wanted to go down on my own terms. I take full responsibility for the way I chose to live. As a teenager and young man, I was an urban terrorist, a true believer radicalized by my own rage, fear, and shame.

A people's education leads to liberation. Stokely Carmichael (1966) said, "We must begin like the philosopher Camus to come alive by saying 'No!'" My rejection of any meaningful school participation, my every act of defiance felt at that time like a defense of my personhood. Admittedly, the self I was defending was a shadow self, but that was who I believed was keeping me alive.

The school system failed me, but education was still a major factor in my evolution. I earned my G.E.D. while in Folsom State Prison at the age of 22. Soon after, I discovered the true power of education through the writings of Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Stokely Carmichael, and Amiri Baraka. These black men spoke directly to my experience as a young black man in America. They were putting words to the inexpressible despair I was feeling. For the first time in my life, I did not feel alone in my pain. Every chance I had, I read the works of authors like these. I clung to them, not only because they shared my pain, but also because they spoke of reasons to hope.

They taught me that I could, and should, struggle to create a better world than the one into which I was born. They taught me that it was my responsibility to search out the truth of who and why I was. The monster I had allowed myself to become was not an inevitability– just a tragedy. These men taught me I would have to fight for my humanity, and then fight again to have it recognized. They taught me that even a man convicted of murder and sentenced to life without the possibility of

parole can redeem himself if he is willing to do the work of self-cultivated justice. Twenty years later, I remain strengthened by that message.

Conclusion

Today we sit in prison much older and wiser than the people we were when we entered prison so many years ago. As we contemplate the lost possibilities, inevitable questions arise: Just who could we have become if none of the risk factors that converged to characterize our STPP experiences had been at play in our lives? What if our home lives had been different? What if our acting out behaviors were understood as cries for help? What if we were motivated by, instead of excluded from, the school system? What if our teachers took more interest in understanding and potentially meeting our needs for safety and belongingness? What if our families' language and culture were seen as strengths as opposed to detriments to creating a positive relationship with the school system? What if school employees collaborated with our parents and connected them to community resources? What if counselors, social workers, or psychologists intersected in our lives and in the lives of our families? What if our interactions with the school and criminal justice systems had been focused on restorative justice? What if we had not reacted to our traumatic experiences by seeking acceptance through acting out? What if we decided to take school seriously? The answers to these questions are not readily available and lead to more questions. One of the saddest ironies of the STPP phenomenon is that it defies simplistic answers and is bigger than any one person, intention, mindset, philosophy, or policy (Scully, 2015; Wald & Losen, 2003). However, who we have become provides a glimpse of what we could have accomplished had our experiences been different.

The question, "Who could I have become?,",can be best addressed by diverting the current generation of STPP victims from the pipeline. What will happen for them if we, both individually and collectively, find the will to move beyond theoretical cycles of thinking, talking, and writing into implementing what the literature recommends? What will happen if we "address complex problems and glaring racial disparities with compassion, care, knowledge, and determination" (Wald & Losen, 2003, p. 14)? What will happen if schools create nurturing environments that embrace a "whole child approach" (National Education Association, 2016, p. 16), emphasize prevention (American Psychological Association, 2008), and enhance protective factors (Wald & Losen, 2003)? What will happen if educators are empowered to meet the academic, as well as the social and emotional needs of students by implementing early prevention strategies (National Association of School Psychologists, 2008), culturally responsive pedagogy (American Psychological Association, 2008), and restorative justice practices (National Education Association, 2016; Scully, 2015)? What will happen if schools use "emotional support to remedy" the causes of disruptive behavior by empowering school counselors, school psychologists, and social workers to address students' mental health needs (National

Association of School Psychologists, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2014)? What will happen if stakeholders "fight for the kinds of supports" (National Education Association, 2016, p. 13) needed by students and educators by collaborating with schools, families, human service agencies, the criminal justice system, and other community organizations (U.S. Department of Education, 2014)?

We hope that our stories motivate readers to engage in dismantling the STTP by struggling for justice and "the right to quality education that builds human dignity for all" (Scully, 2015, p. 1009)— particularly for students of color. Instead of asking, "Who could those currently incarcerated have become?" We challenge readers to ask, "Who can current and future students become if we move beyond merely seeing their behavior to hearing and understanding them? Who might they become if we utilize this understanding to adequately meet their educational, emotional, and social needs?"

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Latinx Youth Counterstories in a Court Diversion Program

Gerardo Mancilla

Abstract

The study explores the counterstories of Latinx[1] youth participants in a court diversion program. The Esperanza program works to re-integrate Latinx youth back into the educational system as a way to divert them from the juvenile justice system. This narrative qualitative research study included 33 interviews with youth participants, parents, program staff, and other stakeholders using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) as theoretical frameworks. The youth were referred to the Esperanza program, engaged with the program, changed their thinking, and transformed their lived experiences. In particular, they created their own counterstories about immigration and identity. The findings of this study are significant because they provide examples of Latinx youth needs that are not being offered in their current educational system.

Keywords: Counterstories, Latinx, School-to-Prison pipeline, Critical Race Theory, LatCrit

Introduction

Many scholars have focused on the educational attainment for Latinx students. Yosso and Solórzano (2006) highlighted "the serious and persistent leaks in the Chicana/o educational pipeline" (p. 1) and addressed the conditions that affect youth in this pipeline. Students are dropping out or being pushed out at various stages throughout their educational pipeline trajectory. In 2006, only 46% of Chicana/o

Gerardo Mancilla is an assistant professor and director of educational administration and leadership in the School of Education at Edgewood College, Madison, Wisconsin. His e-mail address is gmancilla@edgewood.edu

students graduated from high school (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Recent data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014) suggests that the graduation rates for Latinxs have improved, yet they remain below the national average. In 2009-10, the national graduation rate was 78% for all students and 71% for Latinxs. Then, the White House released a report stating that national graduation rates reached an all-time high at 83.2%. For Latinxs, however, the graduation rate was 77.8% (White House, 2016).

In Wisconsin, the graduation rates for the state have remained between 86% and 88% from 2010-2013 (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2014), the 4-year graduation rate for White students increased from 85.7% (2009-10) to 88% (2012-13). During that same time period, the 4-year graduation rate for Latinxs increased from 69% (2009-10), to 72% (2010-11), 74.3% (2011-12) and 74.3 (2012-13). Although high school completion rates continue to improve, there are many Latinx students who are not graduating from high school. It is important to understand the barriers to educational success that students face.

In addition to the leaky educational pipeline, many policies criminalize youth of color including Latinx students. United States schools began adopting zero tolerance policies modeled after the "tough on crime" or "get tough" policies to address school discipline between 1980 and 1993 (Wrightsman, Greene, Nietzel, & Fortune, 2002). According to Heitzeg (2014), "the school to prison pipeline refers to this growing pattern of tracking students out of the educational institutions, primarily via 'zero tolerance' policies, and tracking them directly and/or indirectly into the juvenile and adult criminal justice system" (p. 12). The zero tolerance policies affect youth of color disproportionally and criminalize youth. U.S. news coverage and educational researchers have documented stories of the effects of zero tolerance policies on students. Ayers, Dohrn, and Ayers (2001) list four clichés that demonstrate a disturbing pattern of the impact zero tolerance policies have on students. They list the following examples:

> • A high-school boy pulls out a steak knife in the cafeteria to peel an apple, and is expelled for weapon possession.
>
> • A fifteen-year-old Chicago youth is assigned to bring an object from home in order to write a report for his English class; when he enters the school with a large, elaborate carved cane, he is expelled for bringing a weapon to school.
>
> • A fourth grader forgets his belt at home and is suspended for violating a school dress code.
>
> • Another Chicago boy, in a disagreement with a teacher over writing "I will not misbehave" on the board several hundred times, says, "I'm going to take this to the limit," and is expelled for threatening a teacher's life. (Ayers et al., 2001, p. xii)

School discipline policies are supposed to be implemented and enforced equally for all students; however disciplinary policies are often disproportionately applied

and enforced against African American and Latinx students. Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) have explored the disparities in disciplinary consequences for students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. They found that students of color are often disciplined for subjective reasons (e.g. wearing a cap, speaking loudly, or tone of voice), while white students are disciplined for observable behavioral reasons (e.g. smoking marijuana). Dignity in Schools (2014) further explains the disparities in school discipline, "70% of students arrested or referred to police at school are Black and Latino. While Black students represent 16% of enrollment, they represent 31% of school-related arrests." Students of color are criminalized through the unequal application of school disciplinary policies. Scholars have begun to discuss this criminalization as the "school-to-prison" pipeline. According to Heitzeg (2014), "In part, the school to prison pipeline is a consequence of schools that criminalize minor disciplinary infractions via zero tolerance policies, have a police presence at the school and rely on suspensions and expulsions for minor infractions" (p. 12).

Scholars such as Wald and Losen (2003), Gregory et al. (2010) and Heitzer (2014) have addressed the concern of inequalities in a system with high-stakes testing where minorities disproportionately experience lower high school graduation rates, reduced levels of academic achievement, and higher rates of attrition. The authors note that schools mimic the "get-tough approach" of the criminal justice system. Alexander (2012) explained how the War on Drugs and the "three-strike" policy under the Clinton Administration increased sentencing for drug violations. The policies were based on the idea that the police had to be tough on crime in order to get rid of it. The policies disproportionally affected people of color. Similarly, the school system began to introduce zero tolerance policies based on fear sensationalized by the media. Heitzeg (2014) explained the media construction of crime and criminals, "TV-driven notions of black and Hispanics as 'predators' provide whites and others with justification for pre-judgment and negative responses. Media-based preconceptions may play a role in the school to prison pipeline" (p.15). The policies in the school system and the juvenile justice system are driven by a rhetoric of fear that affects people of color disproportionally.

Latinxs and other ethnic and racial minorities are also overrepresented in the juvenile justice system. The concept of Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) (Short & Sharp, 2005) has been used to discuss this overrepresentation of minorities in the justice system. Villaruel and Walker (2001) reported that, compared to their white counterparts, Latinxs were arrested 2.3 times more often, prosecuted as adults 2.4 times more often, and imprisoned 7.3 times more often between 1996 and 1998. They also found that Latinxs were 2 to 3 times more likely to be incarcerated than their white counterparts. According to Heitzeg (2014), "nationally, 1 in 3 black and 1 in 6 Latino boys born in 2001 are at risk of imprisonment during their lifetime" (p. 18).

Court diversion programs were established by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the court systems to divert youth from entering the juvenile justice system. Municipal courts referred students court diver-

sion program for many reasons including aggression, alcohol and other drugs, and gang prevention. Hamilton, Sullivan, Veysey, and Grillo (2007) stated that diversion programs worked to decrease cost for juvenile justice involvement and reduced the stigma associated with juvenile delinquency. In addition, the programs promoted students' wellbeing and family functioning. The diversion programs varied from recreation, advocacy, resource brokering, to vocational or educational training as well as group or individual counseling (Palmer, 1994). In the United States, there were 52 different juvenile justice systems plus tribal juvenile justice systems (Porter, 2011). However, there was no uniformity in court diversion programs because most were handled at municipal levels offering different programs and different implementations. There are also critics of court diversion programs. Strategies for youth (n.d.) addressed "scared straight" strategies that use consequence of illegal behavior as forms of deterrent for youth. The programs focused on punishment and fear, similar to tough on crime, in an attempt to reduce juvenile crime.

The Current Study

This study explored the Esperanza program as a court diversion program. Many Latinx students in the municipal courts were referred to this program in this county. The program served to interrupt the school to prison pipeline. This research attempts to understand the impact the program had on youth and families. Two of the research questions that guided this study were:

• How is "success" defined in the Esperanza program?

• What stories (and counterstories) do Esperanza participants have?

Theoretical Framework

Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) were utilized as analytical lenses to explore how the court diversion program in this study interacts with multiples systems and offers a voice to Latinx youth and their parents. Both Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged from Critical Legal Studies, which challenges the notion of "hegemony" by drawing attention to how the dominant culture perpetuates ideas and uses language to maintain power and control, and to keep certain populations marginalized (Gramsci, 1971). Bell (1992), widely considered the primary architect of CRT, addresses issues of race and the persistence of racism in the United States. He states, "Indeed, the very absence of visible signs of discrimination creates an atmosphere of racial neutrality and encourages whites to believe that racism is a thing of the past" (Bell, 1992, p. 6). He linked racial disparities in poverty, unemployment, and income to the Rules of Racial Standing. The rules address the legitimacy of Black people, the validity of their experience, objectivity of their arguments, and perceptions when they take

actions. Bell suggests that people need to understand these rules to understand policies, laws and everyday interactions. His fifth rule states,

> True awareness requires an understanding of the Rules of Racial Standing. As an individual's understanding of these rules increases, there will be more and more instances where one can discern their working. Using this knowledge, one gains the gift of prophecy about racism, its essence, its goals, even its remedies. The price of this knowledge is the frustration that follows recognition that no amount of public prophecy, no matter its accuracy, can either repeal the Rules of Racial Standing or prevent their operation. (Bell, 1992, p. 125)

With a central focus on race, CRT challenges race-neutral, color-blind, meritocratic and apolitical policies and structures (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 2002). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explain:

> But examination of class and gender, taken alone or together, does no account for the extraordinarily high rates of school dropout, suspension, expulsion, and failure among African-American and Latino males. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 51)

CRT also acknowledges the historical and contemporary realities of race, racism, and white privilege (Yosso, 2006) and serves as a tool to deconstruct whiteness, privilege, and oppression. Using a CRT lens, scholars can explore the oppressive aspects of society and individual transformations (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). CRT's commitment to social justice is demonstrated through the individual and societal transformation it seeks to accomplish.

Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) emerged from Critical Race Theory (CRT) to further understand the multidimensional impact of dominant constructions and narratives surrounding race in relation to Latinx people and culture including language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype and sexuality (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2006). Similar to CRT, LatCrit calls for both social and legal transformation with a specific focus on Latinx issues. Social Justice is a part of LatCrit and uses the theoretical framework to call for action. Valdes et al. (1997) introduced the concept of LatCrit as part of a symposium between the *California Law Review* and the *La Raza Law Journal* in an attempt to bring together critical legal scholars focusing on issues affecting the Latinx community. He stated that LatCrit incorporates four main functions including:

> (1) the production of knowledge; (2) the advancement of transformation; (3) the expansion and connection of struggles; and (4) the cultivation of community and coalition. LatCrit also can be expanded to examine concerns that impact Latinx communities beyond the U.S. borders (Yosso, 2006). Perez-Huber (2009) further explains that LatCrit is an extension of the efforts of CRT that allows researchers to better understand the lived experiences specific to Latinxs. CRT and LatCrit both "acknowledge that educational structures, processes, and discourses operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize and the potential to emancipate and empower" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 109).

One particular aspect of LatCrit and CRT that applies to the Esperanza participants is the importance of counterstories. Delgado (1989) uses the term counterstorytelling to describe a technique of telling the stories and experiences that are usually marginalized, ignored or simply not told. Yosso (2006) would add that counterstories recount the experiences of racism and resistance from the perspective of marginalized populations. Counterstories demonstrate hope and possibilities for success. Yosso also (2006) identifies four ways in which counterstories may be helpful: (1) counterstories can build community among those at the margins; (2) counterstories can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center; (3) counterstories can nurture community cultural wealth, memory, and resistance; and (4) counterstories can facilitate transformations in education. Gonzalez, Plata, Garcia, Torres, and Urrieta (2003) also add *testimonios* [testimonies] as a pedagogical tool and as a way to capture the counterstories. *Testimonios* also acknowledge the political context and lived experience of people. Lastly, testimonios and counterstorytelling are critical because they challenge prevailing narratives about oppressed groups that are constantly being legitimized by those in power. Tate (1994) emphasizes this point when he states, "The dominant group of society justifies its power with stock stories. These stories construct reality in ways to legitimize privilege. Stories by people of color can counter the stories of the oppressor" (p. 249).

Methodology

LatCrit (Yosso, 2006; Perez-Huber, 2009) and CRT (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 2002) were the theoretical frameworks used in this study. In alignment with these frameworks, a Critical Race Methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) was implemented to explore the intersection of race, class, gender and the multidimensional aspects of Latinx people. In this study, CRT was used to (1) challenge deficit-thinking models, (2) highlight race and racism, and (3) apply the multidisciplinary aspects of the research. I drew from LatCrit to (1) challenge disproportionate minority contact, (2) focus on experiential knowledge, and (3) emphasize counterstories. This type of theory, methodology, and analysis forces the researcher to constantly evaluate and reevaluate the context and participants, and to unpack the complexities of the data. This approach also helps maintain "theoretical sensitivity" throughout the process (Glaser, 1978, p. 3).

The Esperanza Program

Esperanza was the court diversion program that was used for this study. The program was established in 2007 through a collaboration between the municipal courts and a community-based organization. The program was located in a small Midwest city where the Latinx community is growing. According to a recent report, the Latinx population in 2014 in the county was 30,662 people representing 6.1%

of the population. The population was previously around 26,000 people in 2010. Esperanza was designed to allow participants to talk and discuss issues affecting their lives. Esperanza used a workshop model to provide youth with communication and interpersonal skills, community resources, and a safe space to reflect on personal experiences and to challenge the barriers students face. Municipal courts referred students to this program for a variety of citations including truancy, use of alcohol and other drugs (AODA), or violation of municipal ordinances (e.g. retail theft). Students attended twice a week and completed 40 hours in the program. The students would attend workshops and presentations facilitated by the program coordinators. The program was funded as a way to reduce youth recidivism . The program coordinator created quarterly service reports as a part of their process to maintain their funding. The reports included the number of sessions provided, the number of unduplicated youth serviced, the average number of youth, the number of youth graduating, and the number of youth continuing on to another youth program. The report also had two open-ended sections to capture the narratives of the program as well as how the program was meeting the program goals. The municipal judge stated that "success" in the program occurred when he did not see youth returning to his courtroom. Between 2007 and 2012, the program served over 130 youth.

Participants

This study used interviews as part of a narrative research project. According to Creswell (2007), narrative research explores the lived and told stories of individuals. In order to capture these narratives, a total of 33 people were interviewed: twelve youth participants, nine parents, five program staff, and seven other stakeholders (i.e., county staff, social workers, judges, etc.). Twelve youth were interviewed for this research project (11 males and one female). Ten participants were from Mexico and two of them were from Honduras. At the time of participation, one of the youth was 12 years old, two were 14 years old, one was 15 years old, five were 16 years old, and three were 17 years old. The youth participated in the Esperanza program between the Summer of 2007 and the Fall of 2011. Six of the students were referred for truancy, two were referred for trespassing, two of them related to alcohol, and two of them for disorderly conduct.

There were also nine parents who were interviewed for this study. Two of them conducted their interviews together. Four of the parents also had their children interviewed for the study. Five of the parents elected to participate in the study even though their children were not interviewed but had participated in the program. The interviews also included five Esperanza Program staff who identified as Latinx. Three of them had served as program coordinators and two of them were Esperanza facilitators. Most of them had worked with several cohorts of students. There were seven other staff members who were important stakeholders. The interviews included

two staff members worked in the court diversion unit, one youth service coordina-
tor, one social worker, one judge, one police officer, and one detective. The staff
included one Latinx, two Black/African American, and four White participants.

Procedures

Each participant agreed to take part in a semi-structured interview for approxi-
mately 45-60 minutes in the language of their choice. I developed an interview protocol
to obtain information about the participants, their referrals, and their feelings about
the program, and notions of success. The semi-structured interview protocol was
developed to allow participants to discuss their experiences with the program. The
interviews provided important data about the concept of "success" and what it meant
to each participant and stakeholder. As part of this study, participants also completed
a basic demographic sheet that asked about their age, sex, school, and employment
status. This demographic information was used to update the program's database.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred throughout the data collection process. As the researcher,
theoretical sensitivity and critical consciousness were important in addressing the
intersections of race, class, gender, and the multidimensional Latinx identities. The
data analysis was conducted in alignment with a critical race-grounded theory. The
strategy uses a CRT lens to situate lived experiences within a broader sociopolitical
frame. According to Malagon, Pérez Huber, and Velez (2009),

> A critical race-grounded methodology draws from multiple disciplines to challenge
> white supremacy, which shapes the way research specifically, and society gener-
> ally, understands the experiences, conditions, and outcomes of People of Color.
> It allows CRT scholars to move toward a form of data collection and analysis that
> builds from the knowledge of Communities of Color to reveal the ways race, class,
> and other forms of oppression interact to mediate the experiences and realities of
> those affected by oppression. (p. 264)

The first phase of the data analysis occurred after the pilot study. For the pilot study,
8 youth participants and parents were interviewed. The interviews were transcribed
and I looked for emerging themes using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967).
The framing allowed me to identify and develop themes that emerged from the lived
experiences of the participants. The critical race aspect of the analysis comes through
the "critical frameworks with explicit anti-racist and social justice agendas, to reveal
oppressive experiences dominant ideologies mask" (Perez Huber, 2010, p. 84).

As the researcher, I focused on Saldaña's (2009) work to guide the data analy-
sis process using NVivo software. According to Saldaña (2009), the data analysis
process includes various stages of constantly questioning the data. He goes on to
explain different cycles of coding. During the first cycle of coding, I created descrip-

tive codes (p. 70). These are codes that described something specific, for example AODA, depression, and mental health. In addition, I used "In Vivo" coding (p. 74) to address concepts in Spanish where the words used had a stronger impact, for example "*buen ejemplo*" or "*buen camino*." After doing these codes, I wanted to compare and contrast how similar codes might be different for each participant. For this exploration, I used "versus coding" (p. 40). While these codes were very informative, they were not providing a deeper understanding of the process that was occurring for participants.

The results from the pilot study were then presented to coordinators of the Esperanza program as a form of member-checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The program coordinators provided feedback and discussed the ongoing data analysis. The second phase of the study included 25 additional interviews. The program coordinators and other key stakeholders were interviewed for the second part of the study.

The rest of the interviews were transcribed and coded with the themes from the pilot study. I then moved into what Saldaña (2009) describes as a second cycle of coding. This step was important to deconstruct the themes and concepts that had been previously identified. For example, previously I had coded many data points as "success." I then used axial coding (Saldaña, 2009, p. 77) to search for consequences of actions and interactions between my codes. Additionally, I began to use gerunds ("-ing" words) to capture a process, interaction, or activity. With this process, I began to understand what causes success, what are the stages of success, and what supports success for the participants in the study. In this way, the data analysis was a constant process of interrogation, reflection, and application.

Results

Creating Counterstories

The Esperanza participants often had to challenge or overcome the perception that they had deficits. Rather than looking at their strengths, school staff perceived them as flawed and labeled them negatively as troublemakers. The youth in the Esperanza program pushed back against these perceptions by offering narratives that highlighted meaningful occurrences from their own lived experiences. The participants in the Esperanza program created their counterstories of success.

Students in the program felt that they had been labeled as troublemakers and that people often expected them to be deficient. Eder, one program participant, talked about teachers labeling him as a bad kid and treating him with disrespect. He stated, "When I came to class. They would make a big deal about it. They would say, oh, look who decided to show up. You actually want to work and things like that." Lorenzo, another program participant, shared similar experiences, "On the first year, I never really cared about school. But they didn't care about me either. Like they thought that I was a delinquent." The students' stories were echoed by Domingo and Fernando, the program facilitators:

I think it would be things like that. The teacher saying to them things that might have been racist or talking down to them. I would say that it was situations like that. (Domingo)

We start from the assumption that schools are a hostile environment for a lot of the youth. And this is when we would ask youth, Latino youth, about their experience with the school. I mean the vast majority of those responses are not positive. So, we really draw from that experience and the schools and we really, we honor those experiences that the youth want to share. (Fernando)

Youth must overcome many obstacles in order to be successful. This section of the results focuses on how participants overcame barriers to success and created their own counterstories. Two of the challenges that participants mentioned in their interviews were (1) immigration and (2) identity. The following counterstories demonstrate how youth and their families challenged these deficit-focused ideas associated with immigration and identity.

Immigration

For immigrants, one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome is arriving in a new country and having to deal with all the challenges that come with it. Lucas and Jasmine[2] were both immigrant youths who attended the Esperanza program. They are both undocumented youth working towards degrees in higher education. They had attended the Esperanza program when they were in high school and the program changed their trajectories. After attending the Esperanza program, they joined other support communities, became leaders, and contributed back to the community.

Lucas immigrated to the United States from Honduras and lived with his older sister and mother while his two younger siblings and father were still in Honduras. Jasmine immigrated to the United States from Mexico and lived with her mother and two older siblings while her father remained in Mexico. Both Lucas and Jasmine come from transnational families, in which some members of the family live in the United States, and other members live in another country (Dreby, 2007). Lucas attended high school in Great Lakes while Jasmine attended both middle school and high school in Great Lakes. At the time of the interview, Lucas had completed one semester at Great Lakes College, and Jasmine was in her third year of study at another college. Both were first-generation college students.

Lucas and Jasmine each faced the challenge of being undocumented in the United States, which affected their perspectives and their self-esteem. "Undocumented" means that they do not have the proper paperwork to be in the United States. Passel (2006) uses the term "unauthorized migrants" to refer to people who are not U.S. citizens, not permanent residents, and do not have authorization for temporary or long-term residence. The term unauthorized or undocumented describes a person who entered the U.S. without inspection or a person who has overstayed their visa or permission to be in the U.S. There are an estimated 11.1 million undocumented

people in the U.S. (Passel, 2006). The U.S. Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) established free and equal public education for unauthorized immigrant children for K-12 education. As undocumented youth consider higher education, Drachman (2006) explains that Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 prohibits them from receiving federal aid. However, neither federal nor state law forbids undocumented students from attending college.

Lucas

As youth grow up and realize that they are undocumented, they see many doors close and become discouraged. Before Lucas realized that he was undocumented, he was very successful in school. He noted,

Mi sueño era ser futbolista. En los dos años que estabas en la escuela llegue a estar en el Varsity. Estuve dos o tres años y obtuve medallas por, en los dos años que estuve con el Varsity recibí reconociendo de la ciudad. Estuve entre los 8 mejores de la ciudad. Estaba positivo durante ese tiempo, eso fue en el 2007.

[Translation: My dream was to become a soccer player. During the two years that I was in school, I made it to Varsity. I was there two or three years. I had medals, and in the two years that I was in Varsity I received recognition from the city. I was among the top 8 players in the city. I was very positive during that time, which was in 2007].

Lucas then went on to explain that his motivation changed after he found out that he was undocumented.

His soccer coach was leaving to coach at a university and wanted Lucas to come with him to play soccer. Lucas remembered sadly,

Pero ya que cuando me dijo que necesitaba seguro. No sé pero las personas del ESL le dijeron que yo no tenía seguro. Y que no podía. Entonces, cuando me dijeron las personas de ESL, como que eso me dio para abajo, ya que el futbol siempre ha sido lo mío. Y cuando me dijeron eso, me decepcione mucho. Ya mi último año, ya no lo hice bien, porque ya no tenía las mismas metas, ya que no tenía las mismas ganas de seguir estudiando porque decía, pues si sigo estudiando y no voy a cumplir mi sueño, entonces fue un año de rebeldía.

[Translation: But when they told me that it required a social security number. I don't know, the people from the ESL program told him that I didn't have a social security number. And that I couldn't. Then, when the people from the ESL program told me, it brought me down because soccer has been my thing. And when they told me that, it disappointed me a lot. Then my last year, I didn't do it well because I didn't have the same goals. I didn't have the same desire to continue studying. I thought to myself, if I continue studying, I won't be able to reach my goals. So, it became a year of rebellion.]

Lucas lost his hope of playing soccer and of continuing studying. He felt that he did not have anything to work for.

Jasmine

Jasmine had a similar story. She understood that she was undocumented, and noted, "*Y ahorita no tengo papeles.*" [And right now, I don't have papers/documentation]. Reflecting on her experience as an undocumented immigrant, Jasmine is now more knowledgeable about immigrant rights and options for undocumented students. Earlier in her life, she had to learn how to navigate the educational system. Her knowledge about resources was something that she began to learn about as a participant in the Esperanza program. She noted,

> *Cuando uno sabe de los recurso por ahí, y sabe de sus derechos, sea inmigrante, ósea, uno va a decir, no yo sí puedo. Siempre se puede con la mente. Cuando uno quiere, uno puede.*

> [Translation: When one knows about what resources are there, and knows about their rights, whether they are immigrant or, one may say, no, I'm able to do it. One can always do it with the right mindset. When one wants it, one can achieve it.]

Jasmine became an advocate for immigrant rights after she learned more about the resources and opportunities available to undocumented youth. When Lucas and Jasmine first went to Esperanza, both seemed discouraged and felt hopeless because of their undocumented status.

Going to Esperanza

Lucas and Jasmine's immigration status was contributing to their feeling of alienation in school. Instead of supporting them when they faced challenges, the school policies required punitive consequences. One day, Lucas was skipping classes and went to a local grocery store to buy snacks. When he returned to school, he was given a ticket for skipping classes. He had to do community service and decided to fulfill his community service requirement at Centro Cultural, which housed the Esperanza program. Jasmine received a warning ticket for getting into a fight on a bus and was also required to complete community service. Both Lucas and Jasmine did their community service in 2007 and met their requirements by cleaning around the center, sweeping the floors, and clearing tables. The Esperanza program started that same year. Lucas and Jasmine were asked if they wanted to participate in the program as a way to complete their community service hours, and they both agreed. Neither knew what to expect from the program, but they wanted to make sure they did not get in trouble again.

The Esperanza program provided information, hope, and a sense of community for Lucas and Jasmine. The program included workshops, field trips, and presentations. The program was new, but it left a lasting impression on both Lucas and Jasmine. Although "scared straight" diversion strategies are seen as generally ineffective in the literature (*Strategies for Youth*, n.d.), a field trip to jail changed Lucas' thinking. He decided that he did not want to end up in prison and committed himself to changing his behavior. Lucas explained the experience,

Entonces, vivimos una experiencia los pocos que fuimos, los pocos que éramos. Vivimos una experiencia que nos cambió ya que convivimos con ellos por un buen rato, unas dos horas. Vivimos, vivimos como ellos vivían en la cárcel, como dormían en las celdas y como la comida que ellos comían. Y no me comí la comida porque no me gusto. También, ellos hablaron con nosotros, los reclusos, hablaron con nosotros. Nos dijeron porque ellos estaban ahí. También nos dieron consejos y de esa forma, cambio mi perspectiva. Y creo que eso fue.

[Translation: Then, we experienced something for those few of us who went; there were few of us there. We lived an experience that changed us because we hung out with them for a long time, I think two hours. We lived; we lived like they live in jail. We experienced how they sleep in the cells and how they ate food. I didn't eat the food there because I didn't like it. Also, they talked to us, the inmates, they talked to us. They told us why there were there. They also gave us advice and, in that way, my perspective changed. I think that was it].

As a result of that field trip, Lucas realized that if he did only negative things, he would only attract negative energy. He did not want that for himself. He wanted to be different.

Changing Their Thinking

Lucas observed that the Esperanza program changed his way of thinking and provided knowledge of resources. He had felt hopeless and believed that he could not overcome his legal status, but his attitude changed. Lucas did not feel connected to other Latinxs in Great Lakes because he was from Honduras, and most Latinxs in Great Lakes are from Mexico. He had believed that all Mexicans were bad, a belief that stemmed from his experience of crossing the borders from Honduras to Guatemala to Mexico to the United States. People from Honduras have to cross the Mexican border and then the U.S. border. Immigrants face many harmful risks including exposure to crime (i.e., being robbed) or actually dying. In the Esperanza program, Lucas realized everyone is a human regardless of nationality. He learned,

Que yo no era diferente a ellos. Que yo soy un humano y eso es nada mas falta de educación… Aprendí que cada quien tiene una historia por cual ellos están aquí en los Estados Unidos. Y que solo por haber estado en Honduras, se me hace difícil, y que para algunos mexicanos solo cruzar la frontera de aquí para ya, pero algunos se les hacen difíciles también.
[Translation: That I was not different from them. That I am a human and that is nothing more than a lack of education…I learned that each person has a history of why they are here in the United States. And that just by having been in Honduras, it becomes difficult for me and that for some Mexicans just crossing the border is from here to there, but for some of them it becomes difficult, too.]

Lucas looked for a community to belong to and prior to the Esperanza program; he did not feel that he was part of the Latinx community. He did not feel

accepted because he was from Honduras. The program allowed him to challenge the stereotypes that he had about Mexicans, about people in general, and about people willing to help him. This realization occurred as he interacted and developed caring relationships with other participants of different nationalities, including Mexicans, and with the staff. Surrounded by people who cared about him, Lucas realized that people can be good.

Jasmine also changed her thinking about her situation as an undocumented student through the Esperanza program. As an undocumented student, she felt that she did not know much about resources available to undocumented youth. In the program, Jasmine used theater as a way to address issues of immigration. She explained,

> *Hicimos una dramatización, un skit, era uno de los talleres que hicimos. También hicimos una demonstración de lo que pasan las familias inmigrante cuando cruzan: buscando una vida mejor. Y porque muchas veces no pasan. Arriesgar la vida ahí para que sus hijos tengan una vida mejor una mejor educación y que vivan bien. Porque allá hay mucho crimen y se trabaja muchísimo.*

> [Translation: We did a dramatization, a skit that was one of the workshops that we did. Also, we had a demonstration of what happens to immigrant families when they cross. They are looking for a better life. And why a lot of the time they don't make it. They risk their lives so that their children can have a better life, a better education, and better way of living. Over there, there is a lot of crime and people have to work a lot].

The ability to discuss immigration issues was key to Jasmine in becoming an advocate for immigrants. The theater dramatization provided an opportunity for Jasmine to explore other possibilities in the community.

Giving Back

After participating in Esperanza's program, Jasmine became politically active at another grassroots community organization. She stated, "*Y de ahí me empecé a meterme más a la política de aquí, de los derechos civiles, derechos de los inmigrantes, y todo eso*." [Translation: And from there I began to get into politics, civil rights, immigrant rights, and all that]. By creating the space to discuss issues affecting the immigrant population, Jasmine became aware of the resources and opportunities available to immigrant youth, which gave her a sense of purpose to do further work to support the community. Jasmine actively sought out more information on scholarships, community resources, and resources for undocumented youth. "[The Esperanza program] *ayudo a los estudiantes a enfocarse en cosas positivas y hacer algo por su comunidad*." [Translation: [The Esperanza program] helped students to focus on positive things and to do good things in the community]. Like Lucas, Jasmine was determined to be positive about her life and the lives of others. She searched for ways to stay involved in non-profit organizations committed to immigrant rights.

Both Lucas and Jasmine finished the 40-hour program to complete their community service. However, after experiencing a positive program, they were challenged with returning to the same school environment. They processed their own stories and how the school and society impacted their experiences. They also developed a sense of community and wanted to be agents of change for that community. Both of them returned to Esperanza for a second time as volunteers. Lucas explained that he wanted to be around positive people and youths who wanted to change their lives. Jasmine said that she returned because learning in the program was better than being at home and not doing anything. The program allowed the youth to return, build community and surround themselves with supportive people to move forward. After Lucas and Jasmine had returned, they began to reach out to other youth programs to continue building a community.

Sin Nombre

Four or five years after he attended the first Esperanza program, Lucas became involved with a program called *Sin Nombre*[3] [Without a Name].

> *Lo que me hizo regresar a Centro fue la necesidad de hacer lo que estaba haciendo. Ya que estaba involucrado con pandillas y algo en mi me hizo que cambiara la página. Regrese a Centro no sé, para salir de los problemas y de la falta de rechazo de las personas.*

> [Translation: What made me return to Centro was the need to do what I was doing before. I was involved with gangs and something made me want to turn the page. I returned to Centro, I don't know, to leave the problems and to leave the feeling of alienation.]

The Esperanza program had helped Lucas the first time around. Then, he recognized that he was experiencing problems again; he knew that he could go to the Centro. The Esperanza staff welcomed him back. He volunteered for a cohort of Esperanza program participants and joined another program, Sin Nombre. Some of the facilitators from Esperanza and youth who wanted to continue learning after they completed the Esperanza program founded Sin Nombre. The youth wanted to use art to express themselves, and they were very positive and proactive about using art to speak their minds. They created a mural representing the challenges of immigration, which they presented at a Great Lakes University conference and for which they received an award. Lucas was a prominent member of this group, and he had much to contribute. He helped other young people in the program and was an active participant in group discussions, events, and projects. He was motivated to make positive changes in the community and to create a community for youth. The group created a safe and welcoming space for youth to express themselves and discuss the issues that affected them.

Jóvenes Trabajadores

Jasmine also returned to Esperanza to continue learning. She returned the same year as her first program and participated in the next cohort. When she went back, she was more motivated to get involved with other non-profits and to be an activist for immigrants' rights. The Esperanza program helped make Jasmine more aware of resources for immigrants; Esperanza provided information about scholarships for undocumented students, had undocumented presenters and provided educational resources for undocumented youth. There, Jasmine found out about a group called *Jóvenes Trabajadores* [Young Workers], which worked with unions to address the rights of workers and immigrants. Jasmine noted that

> Mi compañera Claudia, una compañera me había comentado de Jóvenes Traba-jadores en la middle school, pero no empecé. Pero ya ahi fue donde me fui abriendo más y este unos compañeros de línea me invito.

> [My friend Claudia, a friend had mentioned the *Jóvenes Trabajadores* in middle school, but I didn't join. But then, I began opening my mind more and an online friend invited me].

In high school, she joined *Jóvenes Trabajadores* after participating in the Esperanza program. Working there, she learned to do presentations and became comfortable with public speaking. *Jóvenes Trabajadores* helped organize a walkout for immigrants' rights and the May 1st March for immigrants in Great Lakes, along with the workers' union. Members of the organization also volunteered at the Mexican Mobile Consulate. The youth from *Jóvenes Trabajadores* were active community participants and helped inform people about civil rights and immigrant rights. Jasmine's experience with Esperanza encouraged her to become more active in promoting immigrants' rights.

Lucas and Jasmine were both undocumented youth who created their own success stories. They attended the Esperanza program to complete community service hours that were required by the municipal courts. They had been feeling alienated due to their immigration status and instead of helping them, the school assigned them punitive consequences. Fortunately, the Esperanza program was beginning at the same time that Lucas and Jasmine were completing their service hours. The Esperanza program provided new positive perspectives about people and resources. The students used these perspectives to continue to grow, unlike before when they felt they had limited opportunities because of their immigration status. As a result, Lucas and Jasmine engaged with other youth programs to continue to support the community and other youth. They turned their hopelessness into positive hope for the future.

Identity

Esperanza emphasized culture and identity, which students often did not receive in school. Ernesto was an Esperanza participant who learned and grew culturally in

the program. His counterstory demonstrates how he developed cultural conscious-
ness by spending more time with Latinx people. He also developed a stronger
relationship with his family.

Ernesto

Ernesto lived in Great Lakes and was a junior in high school at a neighboring
town. His school had a small population of Latinxs, and as a result, he felt that he
did not have many opportunities to be around Latinxs. His plan was to work for two
years after high school, and then enroll at Great Lakes College before transferring
into Great Lakes University. Ernesto hoped to open his own business someday.

Ernesto faced obstacles of cultural identity growing up. He observed, "I don't
spend much time with my culture, it was different being in a whole room of people
who are of the same race as me, because I don't know how to communicate with
them. I don't know what their interests are. What they are interested in, I basically
grew up knowing what Americans like to do." Although Ernesto identified as His-
panic, he did not feel part of the Latinx community. He said that even when he was
invited to family events, he did not want to participate in them. He felt alienated
from his culture and did not feel part of it.

Going to Esperanza

Ernesto attended the Esperanza program because of truancy. The municipal
judge required Ernesto to complete community service hours. Ernesto went to
Centro Cultural to complete his hours. Similar to Lucas and Jasmine, Ernesto was
asked to attend the Esperanza program as a way of completing his hours. Ernesto
said that he did not attend school much at all during his freshman year. "I didn't
use to go to school, ever. Not until I finished the [Esperanza] program," he said.
However, the school policies and monitoring procedures did not recognize Ernesto's
attendance situation until the end of his freshman year. By that time, Ernesto felt
that he had lost a whole year and did not receive any academic credits towards
graduation. Like Lucas and Jasmine, Ernesto was feeling alienated from school
and instead of helping him, the school policies offered punitive consequences.

Ernesto suffered from depression as the result of an incident that occurred
when he was young and he used marijuana as a way to cope with it. He pointed
out, "Yeah, I started way back and freshman year is when it got worse, that's why
I skipped school pretty much the whole year. Finding a different life, I didn't even
realize that people actually do that. I thought that I was one of the only people that
got really into that. And then I got into a group of people." Ernesto was searching
for coping mechanisms to address his depression and substance use. He felt that this
was something that was only occurring to him. He found a group of other students
that also used marijuana and skipped school. The school policies criminalized both

the use of substances and truancy. Instead of proactively supporting students who experienced substances use and truancy issues through therapeutic interventions, school policies were usually reactive in nature. Rather than trying to understand what students need, schools resorted to punitive consequences.

Normalizing the Experience

The Esperanza program helped normalize and validate Ernesto's experience. He said, "I thought that the program was just great; I loved it. It was fun." Through the program, Ernesto could address two of his challenges: cultural identity and family relationships. Ernesto appreciated the workshops that the program offered. He remembered a workshop on Capoeira. He said,

> That was the first time I learned how to do it. And getting into the rhythm, that's when I learned that every human has a rhythm to their heart and that they can follow it.

Ernesto experienced the program with other young people, which helped normalize his experience. He realized that he was not alone, and that other youth also faced obstacles in their schools, communities, and families. Instead of focusing on the obstacles, the program focused on their humanity and helped them understand their lived experiences.

Through the Esperanza program, Ernesto also learned more about his culture. He said,

> I thought it was going to be a boring program, but it actually turned to be something I enjoyed doing. I learned a lot from the Hispanic community because I go to an all American school, so I'm not a really part of the Hispanic community in my actual life outside of here, so it's fun coming here, learning about the Hispanic community and how they work and how we can try to help each other survive here.

Ernesto shared a room with other Latinxs, which exposed him to some of the diversity witnessed within the vast Latinx community. Through workshops, the students discussed how different issues were affecting them. They listened to each other and supported each other. The workshops also focused on learning more about Latinx heritage, past and present. The group dynamics and cultural curriculum were important to fostering an understanding of what it can mean to be a Latinx person. He acknowledged that there were many nationalities present in the room and not everyone was from Mexico, which encouraged him to begin talking to others, and became part of the group.

The Esperanza program also taught Ernesto a second important lesson, which was that it was okay to ask for help. As he says,

> I always had someone to rely on when I needed support. If I were having a stressful day, I would talk to Fernando.

Fernando was a program coordinator who wanted to make sure students felt com-

fortable and heard in the program. Ernesto developed a close relationship with Fernando, which created a sense of support. As Ernesto noted,

> That is something I learned through Centro. Fernando actually taught me, he said, "don't close yourself in. Always ask for help." They just tell us; you are never alone. You always have someone to help you.

Ernesto heard that it was normal to ask for help. Most importantly, the staff stated that they were there to support him. Knowing that people were available to help him was a new concept for Ernesto. Previously, he had not known where to go to seek help, but then he found Centro. Knowing that the doors were open at Centro was important because it allowed students to return anytime they needed help. Like Lucas and Jasmine, Ernesto also returned to Centro after he had completed his program. He reached out to Centro to ask for support in dealing with his depression and to continue being part of a supportive group.

After the Program

After the program, Ernesto felt that he focused more on his education. He was absent fewer days during his sophomore year. He noted that he attended all his academic classes, and only skipped his study skills class:

> I take seriously my education now. I realized that it's basically what I have as a job right now. It's my duty. I'm trying to better myself for the future. I want to make a lot of money when I grow up. The way to do it is through an education.

Ernesto now volunteered at the local fire station and noted that community service was a good thing,

> At first, I thought to myself, I could party, I can do this, but I never thought of the long term consequences of my actions.

After the program, Ernesto not only knew to seek help when he needed it, but he could also think through his actions and their impact.

Ernesto also received professional help for his depression. He met with a psychologist and actively worked on addressing his depression. He wanted to stop using drugs and change his life for the better: "You know because I realized that I needed to change and that drugs are not a way to escape reality. If anything, they keep you trapped in reality." Ernesto wanted positive change in his life and the Esperanza program had provided that for him. The staff and the program created a welcoming environment in which he felt comfortable asking for help. Furthermore, the program was more interested in the root cause of Ernesto's behavior rather than on giving him consequences for his actions. The school can be positioned in a way to support students; however, they focused on the consequences for students' behaviors instead of helping them.

Family Relationships

As a result of the Esperanza program, Ernesto also became more comfortable with his Latinx heritage and with his family. The Esperanza program emphasized family dynamics as they work with youth by also inviting parents to have their own workshop. The program works on developing communication and understanding between parents and youth. In his freshman year, Ernesto did not feel connected to his family and he stated that he did not want to participate in their events. Through the parent workshops, Ernesto's parents explored his experiences in school and in the community. Ernesto and other youth were also encouraged to understand their parents' sacrifice and commitment to them. The Esperanza program allowed them to see their lived experienced through their family member's perspectives. Ernesto did not say that it was directly connected to Esperanza, but the family became closer together. Ernesto also changed his behavior and wanted to attend family gatherings where other Latinx people were present. He stated,

> Once I got to know Hispanics as people, they were not that bad to be around. And now I actually go out with my parents to like Hispanic gathering, because their friends go to parties and I would actually go now.

Ernesto began to feel more connected to his Latinx heritage and culture. He was also less shy talking to other Latinxs than he had been before. Prior to attending the program, Ernesto did not go to those events. This new connection was partially the results of the program's emphasis on language and culture. In the program, Ernesto was around people who spoke Spanish, and he became comfortable with them. He began to enjoy being around other Latinxs in the program, which also made him more willing to participate in family activities. He noted, "Yeah, I feel more, not a duty, but I feel more inclined. I can have a good time, talk to some people, and meet someone new." As a result of the process that began at the Esperanza program, Ernesto felt more connected to his family and his culture.

With the program's help, Ernesto's counterstory focused on cultural and family connectedness. The program helped normalize his experience, taught him that it was okay to ask for help, and how to further develop his cultural identity. It also allowed his family to work on their family dynamics and encouraged more family involvement through understanding of each other. Ernesto wanted a positive change for himself by addressing his depression and leaving drugs. He also aspired to one day own his own business.

Ernesto became involved with the Esperanza program because of truancy. School policies required punitive consequences instead of providing therapeutic support for his substance dependence and truancy. As a Latinx student growing up in a predominantly White community, he was alienated from the Latinx community. Ernesto's need caused him to lose his ninth grade; he did not receive any academic credits. CRT calls attention to the extraordinarily high rates of school dropout, suspensions, and expulsion. Furthermore, Ernesto's story counters the

master narrative that Latinx students do not care about their education. Ernesto was in the 9th grade when this occurred, which is a crucial grade for student retention. Fortunately, Ernesto was attending the Esperanza program, which focused on his humanity first and his lived experience.

Implications

Latinx youth need to be validated, supported, encouraged, and intentionally addressed to support their success. The counterstories presented here demonstrate how youth can be successful after attending the Esperanza Program. Prior to them attending, they felt alienated from school and were struggling socially and academically. Instead of focusing on how to help them, school policies focused on how to punish them for their behavior. Part of that punishment was to complete community service hours. The participants became connected with the Esperanza program to fulfill their service hours. Their counterstories demonstrate that youth need to be humanized, supported, and validated.

The two primary counterstories presented here focus on immigration and identity. The counterstories talk back to the master narrative, which is rooted in deficit-thinking and claims Latinx students cannot or do not aspire to achieve academically. The counterstories demonstrate that, with the right support and encouragement, youth can be resilient, overcome the obstacles they face, and create their own success stories. The counterstories highlight the work that the Esperanza program and staff did to support youth. This type of work can benefit both community-based organizations and schools.

Through my interviews, it was revealed that students and parents had strengths that the school staff did not acknowledge. In contrast, the staff at Esperanza built relationships with the youth and treated them with respect by humanizing their lived experiences. The staff used culture and language to help build on the ideas of strengths rather than deficits. Another example of the cultural deficit-thinking model claims that parents of color do not care when their children get into trouble. My interviews with parents countered this assumption. Parents participated in workshops, provided transportation for their children to the program, and sought further support for their sons and daughters. This was evidence that parents were invested in their children's education. Thus, the interviews contribute to a new counterstories of Latinx parents who are willing to exhaust all their resources when trying to support their children.

The Esperanza program was a court diversion program that attempts to interrupt the school to prison pipeline. In the spirit of the Esperanza program, school districts and administrators should focus on proactive youth supports instead of reactive punitive consequences. By implementing this approach, school districts and administrators can help normalize and validate students' stories and experiences. Students reported feeling alienated and disconnected from schools and

staff. Schools should focus on the root cause of students' behavior. Osher et al., (2012) discussed how schools can help interrupt the school to prison pipeline:

> . . . teachers and others need (a) to be culturally and linguistically component, (b) to be able to use positive behavioral approaches, (c) to apply their understanding of learning ad emotional/behavioral disorders, and (d) to identify students' strengths as oppose to employing a deficit approach. (p. 6)

Osher et al. (2012) explained that teachers and administrators needed to understand the school to prison pipeline and be intentional in discussing these matters in staff development and espousing the importance of strength-based approaches that do not criminalize students. Schools should also address the need for more mental health support for youth. In this study, youth brought up depression, alcohol and other drugs abuse, and understanding immigration as issues of concern that impacted their school processes. Instead of being reactive and punitive, schools should address these needs proactively to help youth become successful.

The Esperanza program allowed participants to understand their Latinx heritage, history, and lived experiences. The program coordinators developed the Esperanza program with four philosophies including *La Cultura Cura, In Lak'ech*, Restorative Justice, and Positive Youth Development. According to the U.S. Government website Youth.Gov. (n.d.), positive youth development is developed through positive experiences, positive relationships, and positive environments. The philosophy behind positive youth development is that youth will develop better when they are engaged through a strength-based approach, which include opportunities to build affirming relationships. Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) argue that while positive youth development is an improvement over punitive consequences, the framework has two shortcomings. Positive youth development has the possibility of dismissing how social, economic, and political ideologies and policies impact youth of color. Secondly, Ginwright and Cammarota argue that positive youth development is based on universalistic, white middle-class conceptions of youth that do not apply to youth of color. They promote social justice youth development (SJYD) as a different approach to focus on critical consciousness and social action. They believe "Critical consciousness can be described as an awareness of how institutional, historical, and systemic forces limit and promote the life opportunities for particular groups" (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 87). Ginwright and Cammarota identify self-awareness, social-awareness, and global-awareness as important concepts that should be addressed when working with youth to promote critical consciousness. Other scholars have focused on critical literacies to promote youth development. Morrell (2008) explains that youth need to understand dominant literacies and that youth must actively intervene to contest them. According to Morrell, youth "must speak back and act back against these constructions with counter-language and counter-texts" (p. 5). Morrell lists the following examples of critical literacies: critical reading, critical textual productions, cyberactivism, and critical media and cultural studies. In

a similar vein, Winn's (2011) book *Girl Time* focuses on a theater program, literacies, and experiences for formerly incarcerated girls. *Girl Time* was about building coalitions, improving the lives of girls and women, negotiating lives between incarceration and freedom, and developing critical literacies. Clark-Ibanez's (2015) also address using photo elicitation as a way to unpack the lived experiences and immigration knowledge of youth living in the border cities. These are all examples of building critical consciousness and metacognitive awareness for youth. It is also important to allow youth to create their own counterstories in the process.

Future Directions

Participants in the Esperanza program, a court diversion program, created their own counterstories about success. The program was developed as a collaboration between a community-based organization and the municipal courts. The program represents one point on a spectrum of the school to prison pipeline. As schools are being challenged to move away from zero tolerance policies into more restorative justice practices, it is important to explore how these new behavioral policies affect youth of color. In addition, future research can focus on the staffing decision between Education Resource Office and more counselors in the schools. Lastly, it is salient to investigate the population who is entering the youth detention center and how disparities may continue to occur.

Meiners (2011) has also identified other tensions in researching the school to prison pipeline. She has four questions that interrogate the intersection between the theory and movements around the school to prison pipeline that could inform a praxis of positive youth development for students of color:

> (1) How do we negotiate work that often centers youth or juveniles as "exceptional" within the larger mess of the criminal justice system? (2) How do we negotiate shifting state structures capable of appropriating our justice work? (3) Why is it important to focus labor on how to change and build practices and paradigms of public safety that are not reliant on punishment, isolation, and stigma? And finally, (4) How do we center an intersectional lens in our organizing and research? (Meiners, 2011, p. 554)

Conclusion

Latinx youth are not graduating at the same rates as their White counterparts. This can be attributed, in part, to the fact school policies routinely criminalize Latinx youth and push them away from school. The school-to-prison policies focus on consequences for youth's behavior rather than on focusing on what youth need. The Esperanza program worked with the youth who had to complete community service hours. Based on interview data, the program validated, supported, and helped the youth. The Esperanza program provided the space where youth could create counterstories about how they confront various issues including immigration

and identity construction. The program offered a space where youth could address their lived experiences. The youth felt supported by the staff and their experienced were normalized and humanized. They learned about family dynamics and were able to understand their parents' perspectives. Youth also found resources, learned about their rights, and became advocates for their communities. Most importantly, the youth learned to believe in themselves and create their own success stories. These stories push back on the dominant deficit-thinking model that Latinx youth are inherently incapable of learning or that they are socially enabled to behave as troublemakers. The existence of the Esperanza program buttress the idea that it is important to create safe spaces where Latinx youth can be free and safe to express themselves and have their lived experiences validated.

Note

[1] Latinx (latin-ex) is a gender neutral pronoun that is inclusive of all people of Latin American descent. It addressed the intersections of gender, race, and class (Scharrón-Del Río & Aja, 2015).

[2] These names are pseudonyms.

[3] The names of the programs are also pseudonyms.

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A Student Saved is NOT a Dollar Earned

A Meta-Analysis of School Disparities in Discipline Practice Toward Black Children

Jemimah L. Young, Jamaal R. Young, & Bettie Ray Butler

Abstract

Exclusionary school discipline practices continue to play a key explanatory role in racially disproportionate outcomes in the justice system. Three decades of research substantiate the disproportionality of discipline practices and the negative effects on Black students. However, a meta-analysis of this phenomenon and its moderators remains absent but is warranted based on its practical and empirical import. Thus, this meta-analysis synthesized the research on school discipline disproportionality between Black and White students by aggregating odds ratios across studies. An exhaustive search of the literature and rigorous screening process produced a final pool of 29 studies representing 51 independent effect sizes. Based on the test for homogeneity we concluded that their was significant heterogeneity, $Q(50) = 20115.40$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, a random effects analytic model was employed. After testing and adjusting for publication bias, the overall mean estimated odds ratio was 2.58, $p < .001$. Thus, the odds of being disciplined if Black are more than 2 and half times the odds of being disciplined if White. The subsequent moderator analysis results suggest that grade level and gender were not significant moderators of the disproportionality. Rather the results explicitly indicate that the ill-effects of school discipline are "equally" disproportionate toward Black male and female students across all K-12 grade levels. Results also indicate that statistically

Jemimah L. Young is an assistant professor and Jamaal R. Young is an associate professor, both with the Department of Teaching & Learning of the College of Education at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa. Bettie Ray Butler is an associate professor in the Department of Middle, Secondary, and K-12 Education in the Cato College of Education at the University of North Carolina Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina. E-mail addresses are jemimah-young@uiowa.edu, jamaal-young@uiowa.edu, & Bettie.Butler@uncc.edu

significant differences in effect size magnitude exist between disciplinary actions taken, and data collection methods. Implications of these results and suggestions for application and future research are provided.

Keywords: School-to-prison pipeline, Meta-analysis, Black students, school discipline

Introduction

Exclusionary school discipline practices continue to play a key explanatory role in racially disproportionate involvement in the justice system. Studies have connected increases in school suspensions and expulsions to increases in incarceration rates (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Losen, 2015; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009; Skiba, Arrendondo, & Williams, 2014) in a burgeoning body of research known as the "school-to-prison pipeline" literature (Wald & Losen, 2003). The relationship, particularly, between the school and juvenile justice system has been most pronounced among Black students (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2009; Skiba, 2015). All things considered, any policy that results in a negative correlation with academic achievement and a positive correlation with incarceration- for any ethnic group-is unjustifiable (Skiba et al., 2008). For this reason, school-based zero tolerance policies remain highly controversial; and have been met with much resistance and criticism- often being challenged as a violation of civil rights in federal courts (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

The past three decades of scientific and behavioral research on school discipline (e.g., Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Skiba, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheya, & Hughes, 2014) has chronicled the disproportionate representation of Black students for school discipline- specifically in the area of suspensions (McCarthy & Hodge, 1987), expulsions (KewelRamani, Gilbertson, Fox & Provasnik, 2007), and office referrals (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002); a phenomenon also known as the discipline gap (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Monroe, 2009). In analyzing this gap, several researchers (Browne, Losen, & Wald, 2002; Skiba & Knesting, 2001) have consistently found evidence showing that Black students are oftentimes disciplined more frequently and severely; despite the fact that studies reveal that they are generally no more likely to display greater levels of disruptive behavior in comparison to their peers from other ethnic groups (Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007; Rocque, 2010). The detrimental effects of school exclusion are numerous. At the most basic level when students are removed from their learning environment even for a simple office referral, they will inevitably miss valuable classroom instruction (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011). These effects are consistent, and prevalent across the current discipline literature (Marchbanks, et al., 2014).

Discipline scholars (Dupper, 2010; Marchbanks et al., 2015) know all too well the often subtle, unintended yet deleterious consequences that surface as a direct result of exclusionary discipline practices, especially for Black students. From lagging

achievement to dropping out of school; Black disproportionality in school discipline functions at the very heart of several negative outcomes (e.g., bad grades, retention, recidivism, incarceration, economic hardship, etc.). Despite the somewhat intuitive link between suspensions and expulsions and student performance, research in this area has remained relatively scattered. Only a handful have attempted to synthesize this growing body of literature beyond the descriptive identification of disparate patterns (Gregory, et al., 2010) and few have quantified disproportionality in such a way as to yield an understanding of its causes (Skiba, et al., 2014).

Given this, the purpose of the present study is twofold. Our first objective is to provide a quantitative summary of the magnitude of disproportionality in discipline practices toward Black students chronicled in the current literature. Second, we examine the possible moderating relationship between grade level, gender, discipline actions, and data collection methods. The findings of this study are important because they provide a meta-analytic lens that affords researchers and educators a summary of the cumulative magnitude of disproportionality effects for Black students that can be used to assess results of future studies as well as school-wide practices.

The Discipline Gap

Given the long-standing evidence of the persistent discipline gap and its relationship to the school to prison pipeline, it is imperative that researchers and educators are armed with a comprehensive and informative synthesis of the effects and moderators of school discipline disproportionality and Black students. Evidence of the discipline gap was first documented by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) (1975) in a seminal report revealing the disparities in discipline practices within American schools. The discipline gap, as it is referenced here, is much like the other gaps--the opportunity gap (Carter & Welner, 2013) and the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006)—in that disparities (i.e., in discipline, in education resources, in education experiences, etc.) between White and Black students have historically created advantages for some, and disadvantages for others.

Discipline in Black and White

Using a sample of over 2000 school districts from the federal Office of Civil Rights' national dataset; the CDF found that 1 in every 8 Black students—compared to 1 in every 16 White students—were suspended at least once during the 1972-1973 school year (1975). Disproportionality in discipline practices, like those referenced by CDF, persist even today (Losen, 2015). Losen and Skiba (2010) point out that the racial gap in school suspensions has at least doubled since the early 1970s- this being particularly true for African Americans. The suspension rate for these students went from 6% in 1973 to 15% in 2006 (Losen & Skiba, 2010). From this report, two major findings emerged. First, during the 1972-1973 academic school year, the use of suspensions in public schools accounted for the removal of over

one million students from their respective educational institutions, which was a total loss of over four million school days and 22,000 school years (CDF, 1975). Second, Black students were suspended twice the rate of any other ethnic group (CDF, 1975). These findings would, ultimately, provide a platform whereby racial discrimination in the use of school suspensions could be further explored.

Alternative Perspectives

Since the publication of the CDF report, some researchers (Kinsler, 2009) contend that racial bias plays a very minute role, if any, in the distribution of school sanctions. McCarthy and Hoge (1987) were among the first to challenge the salience of race as a determinant of school punishment. They found that students' past history of official punishment, teacher perceptions of student demeanor, and previous academic performance were stronger predictors of suspensions in comparison to race. When these three variables are controlled, McCarthy and Hoge (1987) find, in their study, that race, along with other demographic characteristics, such as, socioeconomic status and gender, has no effect on the type of school punishment a student receives. In his study of the Black-White school discipline gap, Kinsler (2009) reports findings closely related to those of McCarthy and Hoge using North Carolina school infraction data. In investigating gaps in punishment within and across schools, Kinsler found that Black and White students are equally likely to be suspended and receive similar suspension durations. While Kinsler certainly does not rule out the possibility that racial bias could explain racial gaps in discipline; he maintains that such was not the case in his study.

Despite these findings, the interest in the relationship between race and school suspensions continued to gain notoriety, perhaps as an immediate result of the publication of Opportunities Suspended. This report, developed by the Civil Rights Project (CRP) at Harvard University (2000), was the first comprehensive national report to scrutinize the disproportional impact of zero tolerance policies—school or district-wide policies that mandate pre-determined, typically harsh, consequences or punishments (such as suspension and expulsion) for a wide degree of rule violations (Solari & Balshaw, 2007)—on students of color (Civil Rights Project, 2000). Initially, the report showed that Black students make up roughly 17% of U.S. public school enrollment, yet they constitute approximately 32% of those suspended from school. White students, on the other hand, represent 63% of the total enrollment, and make up 50% of suspensions. When comparing these two statistics, suspensions for White students are seemingly more proportionally distributed.

The CRP report also showed that while several students were referred to the office for a variety of reasons, Africans Americans were frequently referred for non-dangerous, nonviolent offenses, such as, disobedience, defiance of authority, and disrespect of authority (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011). Infractions such as these are often subjectively defined. As a result, it is quite possible that the

determination of whether an infraction occurred could, very well, be tainted with bias and stereotypes (CRP, 2000). The many views and perspectives on this issue have produced a vast and rich body of research that warrants systematic review.

Problem Statement

While some skeptics of the discipline gap believe that Black students' behavior is simply more disruptive; there is little evidence in support of this theory, which in turn speaks to why it is rarely considered a plausible explanation for the overrepresentation of Black students for disciplinary action (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). With no explanation at hand, to explain this phenomenon, researchers have, therefore, felt the need to revisit the influence of race in the administration of school discipline; with the aim being to clearly articulate if, indeed, race—as it pertains to bias and discrimination, could be partly responsible for the disproportional patterns seen in discipline practices (Skiba, et al., 2002; Roch, Pitts, & Navarro, 2010; Welch & Payne, 2010). Notwithstanding the overwhelming interest in racial disproportionality in school discipline, just recently studies have begun to assess the magnitude of disproportionality through a gendered lens looking specifically at discipline practices meted out to Black students (King & Butler, 2015). Yet, and still, this vein of inquiry is deserving of much needed synthesis and meta-analysis due to the severe implications that function as a result of the relationship between exclusionary discipline practices and student achievement, as well as, the scarcity of viable alternatives to school suspension.

One of the most seminal studies within the corpus of discipline literature was conducted by Russell Skiba and colleagues (2002). Using the method of discriminant analysis, these researchers uncovered large, statistically significant differences between the rate of office referrals and race. Consistent with much of the prior scholarship in this area, they generally concluded that those students typically referred for sanctioning, which resulted in suspension, were namely Black students (Townsend, 2000). While discipline disparities impact both males (Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010) and females (Blake et al., 2015) within this subgroup; Black males are widely cited as having the greatest risk for school exclusion through disciplinary action (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). Aside from race, as seen above, other studies have identified additional variables that are likely to contribute to disparities in discipline. Among the most prominent of these indicators are gender, grade level, and type of disciplinary action.

Given the need to synthesize this growing body of literature this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the magnitude of disproportionality present in school discipline practices toward Black students compared to White students?

2. How do student characteristics moderate the amount of disproportionality?

3. How do school level factors moderate the amount of disproportionality?

Method

We conducted separate searches using the keywords "school discipline," "Black Students," "Students of Color," and "zero tolerance." Each search was conducted in the following databases: (a) Academic Search Complete (169 citations), (b) PsycINFO (70 citations), and (c) ERIC (77 Citations). Our search was exhaustive, thus publication date restrictions were not employed. The three searches resulted in 87 citations, which were entered into a master library using Zotero online software. We used Boolean operators to identify studies that incorporated a combination of pertinent search terms. For example, studies that investigated "zero tolerance" and "Students of Color" were located from within the master list. As a result, we organized and read a total of 87 articles. We used the following criteria for including studies:

1. Studies had to concern discipline practices for exclusively Black K-12 students compared to White K-12 students.

2. Studies had to directly assess students' discipline. Examples include survey results, transcript data, or observational methods.

3. Studies had to disaggregate student results for specific discipline outcomes. For instance, one study included expulsions and suspension, which represent two separate discipline outcomes.

4. Studies had to include sufficient quantitative information to calculate odds ratio effect sizes.

Grey literature was initially retrieved, but after cross-referencing data between published studies and dissertations, dissertations were removed due to substantial overlap between data presented. For example, published studies included samples and data from dissertation studies (Lewis et al., 2010; Butler, 2011). In an effort to ensure that the studies were more similar than different, only publish studies were retained. After applying the inclusion criteria, an initial pool of 33 studies were retrieved. However after removing the grey literature, a final pool of 29 studies representing 51 independent effect sizes was retained. A flowchart of the entire study retrieval and review process is presented in Figure 1.

Coding Studies

Each study was coded for information about the discipline and school characteristics, student sample, and research quality. School characteristics included location, SES, public/private, etc. Disciplinary action and duration of the consequence, if any, were also coded as part of the study. Although duration is a reasonable study characteristic it was not included in the final analysis because of the different varia-

tions of non-time contingent discipline outcomes. Disciplinary actions were coded into three categories: (1) Office Discipline Referral (ODR), (2) Suspension, and (3) Exclusion. ODRs represent minor infractions that did not lead to suspension or exclusionary action. Suspensions included in school and out of school suspensions that lasted less than one week. Exclusions included instances were the student was expelled or sent to alternative school.

Figure 1
Study Inclusion Flowchart

quantitative information to
calculate odds ratio effect sizes, k =
73

Met inclusion criteria
k =121

Did not report
effect size information
k = 95

Reported mean effect
size info
k = 26

Sufficient data provided
to calculate effect size
supplied
k = 3

Manuscripts coded
k = 29
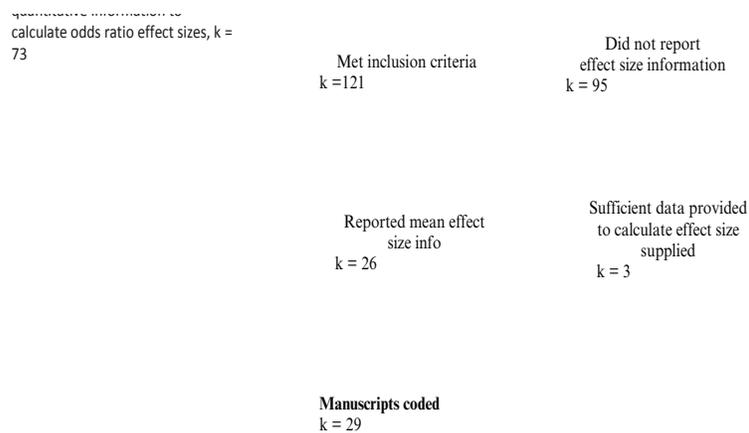
Student information included primarily study demographics such as gender representation and race (male, female, & Black), and grade level (K–6, 6–12, and K-12). When grade levels overlapped categories, we chose to categorize studies as K-12. Finally, each study's data collection procedure was coded as either national or state/local. Given the nature of discipline data, the authors hypothesized that differences exist between national data collections and state/local results. Each author met to develop the coding protocol, the coding form, and came to a consensus on the overall coding procedure. Following the initial meeting, each author separately coded a random sample of four studies using the coding form. Given their backgrounds and expertise, coding forms from authors 2 and 3 were used to assess inter-rater reliability. The resulting inter-rater agreement was 90.6% (Cohen's κ = .892, p < .001). We compared completed forms, identified and resolved discrepancies, and made appropriate revision to improve performance. The first author reviewed the studies independently of the author pairs and verified the accuracy of the study codes entered in the meta-analysis database.

Analysis

We conducted the meta-analysis in four steps. First we computed an odds ratio effect size for each study. Second we computed an overall effect size across the research studies. Then we performed the homogeneity analysis, followed by the final moderator analysis. We utilized Comprehensive Meta-analysis (CMA) version 2.0 for the data analysis and presentation of the results. For the purpose of this analysis, we report odds ratios as the measure of effect size, which was calculated and adjusted for small sample sizes within CMA 2.0 (Rosenthal, 1991). The majority of the included studies provided odds ratios as the measure of effect size, and utilized White students as the reference group. The odds ratio is a measurement of association which compares the odds of an event of those exposed to the odds of the event in those unexposed (Kalra, 2016). In the present study, the odds ratio is used to evaluate whether the odds of receiving disciplinary action is the same between Black and White students. Here we used White students as the reference group, thus if the odds ratio is 1 there is no difference. However, if the odds ratio is greater than 1, then the odds of receiving disciplinary action are greater if the student is Black, likewise if the odds ratio is less than 1, then the odds of receiving disciplinary action are greater if the student is White. There was variation in the design and presentation of study results. For example, some studies examined different discipline outcomes. Accordingly, for all studies we adjusted weights to account for the different standard errors and sample sizes (Hedges & Olkin, 2014). Finally, because some studies report outcomes for independent samples on separate interventions, these studies were analyzed as independent samples.

Data from independent samples were used to compute overall effect sizes for the proportional differences between Black and White student disciplinary action

occurrences. Based on the assumption that larger sample sizes produce more reliable estimates of effects, studies were weighted according to sample size. We conducted a homogeneity analysis to determine whether the effect sizes varied more than what are expected from sampling error. The value of the *Q* statistic was statistically significant; thus we concluded that the effect sizes were not homogeneous. This result is consistent with prior research that suggests that discipline is differentiated by student and school level characteristics, particularly race. Thus, the random effects model was employed and the final moderator analysis was conducted to identify factors that might account for variation in effect sizes across studies. According to Pigott (2012), a random effects moderator analysis is best suited for investigations of multiple sources of variation amongst studies that can be accounted for by study characteristics. Therefore, given the limited set of categorical moderator variable identified in this study and our focus on the study characteristics, the random effects model was used to calculate a *Q* statistic for each moderator.

Results

Figure 2 presents a forest plot, summarizing the quantitative characteristics of the 29 studies included in the synthesis. The publication years for the studies ranged from 2006–2015, and the median year of publication was 2011. The majority of the studies were conducted across all grades, initially 6-12, and then k-5. The majority of the studies included nationally representative samples of Black students compare to White students. Furthermore, the studies in this sample included mixed gender groups or exclusively male participants. The sample of studies was comprised of studies conducted in the United States, however this was not an inclusion criteria. Finally, the discipline practices varied from ODR to expulsion.

We calculated effect sizes for each of 51 independent samples extracted from 29 studies. Figure 2 presents information on each independent sample, effect size, and lower and upper limits of the 95% confidence interval. Based on the test for homogeneity we concluded that their was significant heterogeneity, $Q(50) = 20115.40$, $p <0.001$. The "one study removed" procedure was utilized to identify possible outliers (Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2009). This procedure did not yield any outliers. To assess the stability of the summary effect size we calculated the classic fail-safe *N*. According to Rosenthal (1979) the Fail Safe N, estimates the number of studies required to yield a non-statistically significant mean effect size at the $p <0.05$ level. Hence, this statistic "indicates the stability of meta-analytic results when additional findings are included, no matter the source" (Persuad, p. 125, 1996). For the present study the value of the Fail Safe *N* was 63, which suggest that we would need to retrieve an additional 63 studies to observe a statistically non-significant mean effect size at the $p <0.05$ level. Please see Table 1 for complete analysis details. Figure 3 presents the visual results of a trim-and-fill to examine the representation of effect sizes in the sample. The results of the trim-and-fill resulted in the imputation of 12

additional studies and the mean effect size was adjusted accordingly. After completing the trim-and-fill procedure the overall mean estimated odds ratio was 2.58, $p < .001$. This value was statistically significant and large based on effect size benchmarks.

Figure 2

*Forest Plot of Individual Study Effect Sizes and Confidence Intervals*
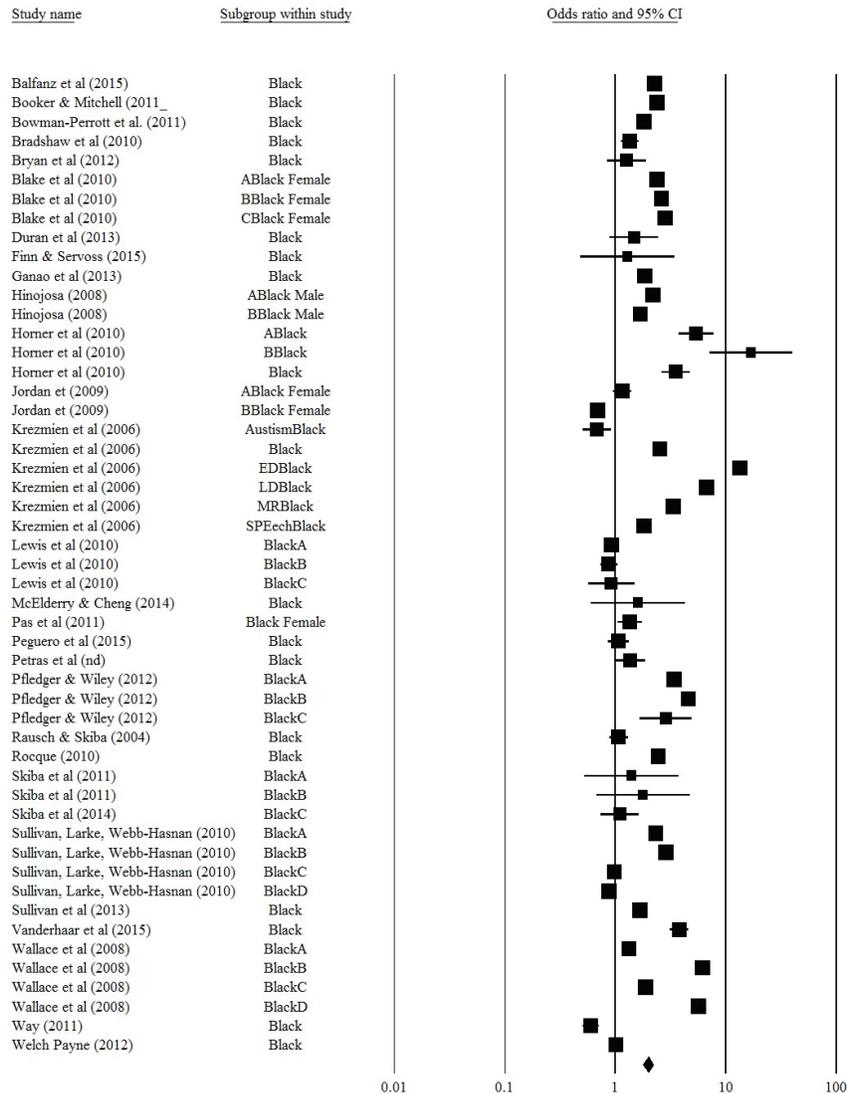
Table 2 presents the mean effect sizes for each level of the different moderators, including grade level, gender, disciplinary action, and data collection. In table 2, when the 95% confidence interval does not include zero, the effect of the moderator is significantly different from zero. We also included the *QB* values for the homogeneity analysis of the effect sizes for each moderator. A *QB* value that is statistically significant indicates that the moderator influences the variation among the effect sizes. As indicated in Table 2, the effect sizes for grade level (K-5, 6-12, and K-12) were all statistically significantly greater than zero. However, based on the *QB* statistic, grade level was not a statistically significant moderator of disciplinary actions towards Black students. For the analysis of gender 10 effects were disaggregated by race and gender. The effect sizes Black male and female students were statistically significantly different from zero; however, the *QB* value for gender was also not statistically significant different from zero.

The value of the *QB* statistic for disciplinary action was statistically significant,

Table 1

Summary Statistics for Mean Effect Size, Heterogeneity Analysis, and Publication Bias

	k	ES	CI	Heterogeneity		Publication Bias	
				Q	I2	Fail-Safe N	Trim and Fill
Overall Results	51	2.58*	[2.30, 2.90]	20115.40*	99.75	63	12

Figure 3

Funnel plot with imputed studies from trim-and-fill
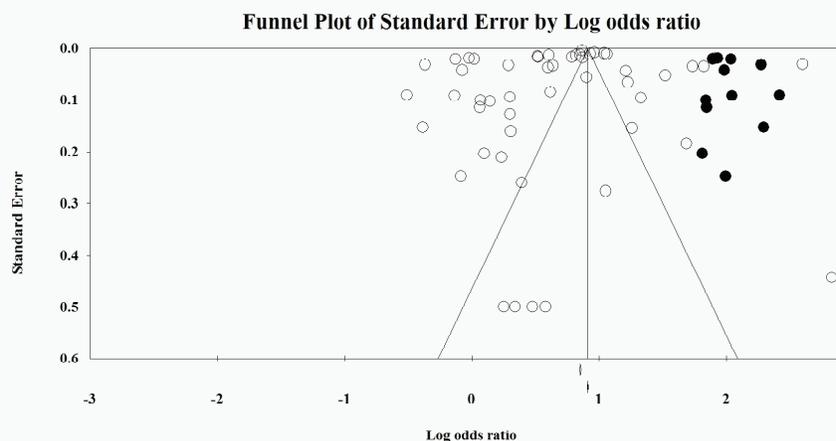
thus the level of disciplinary action accounts for some of the variability observed in the disproportionality. Furthermore, all effect sizes for were statistically significantly greater than zero, and a larger effect size was observed for more serve actions such as suspension and exclusion. Although much of the literature on student discipline is derived from large national datasets, thus we were interested in the effects of data collection on discipline effect size for Black students. Finally, the *QB* value for the data collection (national or state/local) was statistically significant, thus the magnitude of effect sizes were moderated by the research data collection source. Additionally, the largest effect sizes were observed for studies from state and local school data.

Discussion

The results of this study have substantial and profound implications for addressing the school to prison pipeline. First the results of this study indicate that Black students across all K-12 grade levels are more than twice as likely to incur school discipline actions. The cumulative effects observed in this study substantiate 30 years of research by aggregating ostensibly similar studies into one overall effect size estimate. The cumulative mean odds ratio effect sizes was large and statistically significantly different from zero, substantiating the empirical and practical relevance of these results. Although, a longstanding empirical history has chronicled the perpetual discipline gap, the quantification of the between study

Table 2
Analysis of Effect Size Moderators

Moderator	k	QB	Effect Size	95% Confidence Interval
Grade Level		2.65		
K-5	13		2.19	[1.74, 2.76]
6-12	15		1.63	[1.18, 2.25]
K-12	23		2.15	[1.88, 2.46]
Gender		.03		
Male	4		2.35	[1.47, 3.75]
Female	6		2.26	[1.88, 2.71]
Disciplinary Action		16.35*		
ODR	15		1.29	[.95, 1.75]
Suspension	21		2.58	[2.23, 2.99]
Exclusion	15		2.07	[1.50, 2.85]
Data Collection		13.09*		
National	39		2.20	[1.96, 2.48]
State/local	12		1.28	[.98, 1.68]

Note: *k* represents the number of effect sizes, *represents a statistically significant value of *QB*.

magnitude was elusive until now. Though many may question the causality of the discipline gap, the reality of its robust nature and magnitude cannot be ignored. Several moderators of the effects also provide practical and scientific import.

Black children should be affirmed early and often, thus examining the disproportionally across K-12 grade bands was a major consideration in this study. The results of this study suggest that the discipline gap between Black students and White students begins early and is consistent across grade levels. This finding parallels recent studies that highlight the early and persistent discipline gap (Gregory et al., 2016; Morris & Perry, 2016). The lack of statistically significant differences is a refection of the need for culturally responsive teaching as a means to avoid unnecessary disciplinary actions that stem from cultural discontinuity. Moreover, establishing good practices throughout the K-12 continuum is crucial to the sustaining positive effects across schools (Larke, Young, & Young, 2011; Young & Young, 2016).

The literature has illustrated, relatively consistently, that male students receive a disproportionate degree of disciplinary actions (Simmons-Reed, & Cartledge, 2014). Yet this is not the case for Black students when effect sizes are aggregated based on the results of this meta-analysis. The mean odds ratios for Black boys and girls were not statistically significantly different in magnitude, and thus indicate that disproportionality in disciplinary action does not discriminate between Black boys and girls. Rather the results explicitly indicate that the ill effects of school discipline are "equally" disproportionate toward Black boy and girl K-12 learners compared to their White counterparts. The level of disciplinary action was a statically significant moderator of the effect sizes in this study.

Based on this study Black students are more likely to receive suspensions and other exclusion practices than minor office referrals. The residual effects of school exclusion are numerous, but the results of this suggest that Black students are more prone to short and long-term school exclusion. Innovative practices and interventions are on the horizons; recent studies seek to critically examine administrator perspectives and zero tolerance policies to provide alternatives to current praxis (Day, 2016; Hoffman, 2014). Unfortunately, until these refined policies emerge, the absence of quality, culturally relevant instruction and the presence of seemingly biased disciplinary policies will continue to have drastic effects on the ability of Black students to matriculate through the K-12 educational system. Finally, effect sizes were differentiated by data collection. Nationally representative samples had smaller effect sizes than the observed effect sizes for local and state data sets. This does suggest that methods matter, and that results across studies should be examined to maintain the highest degree of empirical rigor.

Limitations

Because of the explanatory importance of experimental research, randomized

control trials are preferable in meta-analytic research. However, it is important to recognize that in most situations, educational researchers must submit to the will of the school district, which may prohibit the implementation of specific design protocols. These and other constraints placed on the primary researcher become the burden of the meta-analyst, which was a limitation of this study (Young, Ortiz, & Young, 2017). Additionally, a lack of grade spans specificity was present in the observed studies. This was most apparent in the middle grades. Because the middle grades represent a unique and important transition period for Black students, another limitation was the inability to draw explicit conclusion for the middle grades due to grade span overlap.

Finally, as researchers we chose to report the odds ratio instead of the risk ratio, given the larger representation of the odds ratio in the primary studies. This is a limitation given the distinctly different interpretations between the two effect size statistics. Specifically, the overall odds ratio for this study was 2.58, which is interpreted as "the odds of being disciplined if a student is Black are more than two and a half times the odds of being disciplined if a student is White." However, if risk ratios were utilized then the interpretation is somewhat more comprehendible, for example "Black students are more than 2 and a half times more likely to incur disciplinary action in schools" is an appropriate interpretation for a risk ratio. Despite this limitation we chose to use the odds ratio to support meta-analytic thinking. The American Psychological Association and the American Educational Research Association encourage meta-analytic thinking as an important data reporting practice (AERA, 2006; APA, 2010). Meta-analytic thinking is defined as the prospective formulation of study expectations and design by explicitly invoking prior effect sizes and the retrospective interpretation of new results by direct comparison with prior effects in the related literature (Thompson, 2002, p. 28). Using the odds ratio instead of the risk ratio supports meta-analytic thinking because the odds ratio is the more common metric in the related literature, thus using the odds ratios supports researcher comparison and interpretation across studies.

Conclusion

There are many school-level factors that must be considered in conjunction with the school-to-prison pipeline. However, the parallels between the correctional system and school discipline practices cannot be overlooked. First, Black youth are overrepresented in the correctional population, and likewise Black youth are disproportionally represented in school discipline profiles. The results of this study provide a quantification of the magnitude of the disproportional practices in discipline towards Black students across decades of research. Researchers and educators can use these results to inform interventions to dismantle the systemic educational policies and practices that often contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Our hope is that this study will further discussions that lead to the end of

the commodification of Black lives as a means to support the American correctional system. Based on the results of this study, Black students are severely and disproportionally disciplined in American schools. Causes, warrants, and justifications cannot qualify these results, because no matter the rationale, the outcomes are not only detrimental to Black students and parents, but to our nation as a whole.

In conclusion, Fredrick Douglas once said, "For it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." We, as educators, cannot disregard our complicit role as architects of the school-to-prison pipeline. Whether consciously or unconsciously, implicitly or explicitly, as members of the educational community we are accountable. Hence, we must redress this phenomenon by redrawing the blueprint of American schools or be prepared to rebuild a generation of young men and women with fractured knowledge, skills, and identities.

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Vision and Scope

Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education is an academic forum for the transdisciplinary study of the dynamic and complex relationship between the various competing and complementary aspects of education broadly defined. *Taboo* is grounded on the notion of radical contextualization. To investigate the notion of radical contextualization, we encourage scholars to draw from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives to contest current taken-for-granted approaches in education and in the academy. Some of these approaches include, Post-Structuralism, Feminist Studies, Actor-Network Theory, Queer Theory, New Materialism, Historical/Genealogical, Affect Theory, and Critical approaches to race, class, and gender studies. Beyond simply articulating critical perspectives we seek contributions willing to stake the unsaid and the previous and current unconsiderable and/or irreconcilable. We encourage work that seeks to wrap its lips around the complex, chaotic, and cutting edges of the sayable and knowable. We want to push readers and contributors to perform complex questioning of the very ideas that have become all too common-place within traditional academic journals. We specifically foster discussions across and through different disciplines including explorations into how intertextualities and intersectionalities operate throughout and within different educational times/spaces/places. The journal encourages papers from a wide range of contributors who work within these general areas. We also encourage research that pushes the methodological boundaries. *Taboo* seeks a dialogic series of interactions that push place, space, and time boundaries as well as invites a leaning in and pushing back approach. Not only do we seek content that engages these values, but we also favor unique, controversial, and continually complicated forms and modes of presentations. As its title suggests, *Taboo* seeks provocative and controversial submissions.

Reviewer Questions and Criteria

When submitting a piece for consideration, please know that reviewers will be asked the following questions about your manuscript:

How does the manuscript take up a transdisciplinary study of the dynamic and complex relationship between the various competing and complementary aspects of education broadly defined?

How and to what extent does the manuscript address the notion of radical contextualization?

How does the manuscript investigate the notion of radical contextualization?

How do scholars draw from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives to contest current taken-for-granted approaches in education and in the academy? (Some of these approaches include, Post-Structuralism, Feminist Studies, Actor-Network Theory, Queer Theory, New Materialism, Historical/Genealogical, Affect Theory, and Critical approaches to race, class, and gender studies).

Beyond simply articulating critical perspectives how does the manuscript stake the unsaid and the previous and current unconsiderable and/or irreconcilable?

How and to what extent does the work seeks to wrap its lips around the complex, chaotic, and cutting edges of the sayable and knowable?

How does the manuscript push readers and contributors to perform complex questioning of the very ideas that have become all too common-place within traditional academic journals?

How does the manuscript foster discussions across and through different disciplines including explorations into how intertextualities and intersectionalities operate throughout and within different educational times/spaces/places?

How does the manuscript foster research that pushes the methodological boundaries?

How and to what extent does the manuscript foster a dialogic series of interactions that push place, space, and time boundaries as well as invites a leaning in and pushing back approach?

To what extent is the content of the manuscript provocative and controversial?

Types of Manuscripts

Articles: Taboo accepts what might be called traditional academic articles. We also encourage scholars to write and produce research that exposes the limits of this form as well as compose research in modes that would not be considered in mainstream academic journals. We expect thoughtful, provocative, and well-researched articles, but we also encourage authors to play with form and content. There is no word limit. Articles will go through a double-blind peer-review process. Authors can expect to receive a decision in 3-4 months.

Rants: *Taboo* accepts opinion pieces on any topic. Rants are designed to be thoughtful and passionate pieces that utilize research in a provocative manner. Rants will go through a double-blind peer-review process. Although there are no word limits to Rants, we would expect that they would not exceed 1000 words. Authors can expect to receive a decision in 1-2 months.

Book Reviews: *Taboo* encourages authors to write critical book reviews and submit them to the book review editor. We would like authors to be creative in their book reviews. This creativity can occur in several different ways. Authors could review award winning books from their national organization; authors could review 2-3 current books in a given field or on a specific topic; authors could review books that are critical of one another. There are a variety of ways to conduct a critical book review. We want authors of book reviews to be provocative with opinions supported by relevant evidence. All book reviews go through a double-blind peer-review process. Authors can exepect to receive a decision in 1-2 months.

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Please adhere to the following criteria prior to submitting your manuscript:

1. Send a cover-letter with your manuscript and address the following items:
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  c. Manuscript Type (Article, Rant, Book Review, Guest Edited Special Issue).
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  f. Please indicate that the article is not under-review for another peer-review journal
     and will not be submitted for review during the peer-review process with *Taboo*.
  g. Please submit the names of three potential reviewers for your manuscript.
  h. Indicate the style of your article (i.e., APA, Chicago, Hybrid).

2. Word Count: *Taboo* has no word count requirement.

3. Style: Please know that *Taboo* publishes articles that adhere to the guidelines of the *American Psychological Association (sixth edition)*. We also remain open for author to play with academic style.

4. Please attach two copies of your article to the email in PDF format. One of these two copies must be prepared for the blind review process.

5. Contributors are asked to send manuscripts electronically to either Editors-in-Chief:
     Kenneth J. Fasching-Varner or David Lee Carlson at
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Review Process: Issues are published twice a year (winter and summer). The deadline for the Spring issue is March 15 and the deadline for the Fall issue is August 15. *Taboo* prides itself on timely and useful feedback on all manuscripts. Reviewers are strongly encouraged to provide timely and nuanced feedback that leans into and pushes back against articles and to be a part of the dialogue that occurs within the journal.

Acceptance: Once your article is accepted in the journal, the author(s) will be asked to transfer copyright of the article to *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*. The transfer will ensure the widest possible dissemination of information. We have an acceptance rate of 15%.

Taboo
The Journal of Culture and Education

Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education is an academic forum featuring the study of teaching and pedagogy that focuses on the relationship between education and its sociocultural context. Grounded on the notion of "radical contextualization," **Taboo** presents compelling and controversial pieces from a wide range of contributors.

Taboo began as a publication of Peter Lang Publishing, with two issues published each year in 1995, 1996, and 1997. **Taboo** has since been acquired by Caddo Gap Press, which renewed publication of the journal with the Spring-Summer 2000 issue.

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