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To be a child without the protections of innocence: the repercussions of the adultification of black youth by school teachers in the United States education system

To Be a Child Without the Protections of Innocence: The Repercussions of the Adultification of Black Youth by School Teachers in the United States Education System

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by
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Black children in America's schools are the main targets of harsh disciplinary policies and actions that directly push students outside of the classroom and in contact with the criminal justice system. According to a study conducted at Yale University, beginning from pre-kindergarten, black children in state funded schools are twice as likely than white and Latino children to be expelled, and are over five times as likely than Asian-American students to be expelled.[1] This trend begins in the earliest stages of a black child's educational experience, and extends to the end, high school graduation, for those who make it to that milestone. This research examines how black school-aged children are disproportionately susceptible to the discrimination and exclusion of zero tolerance policies because they are revoked of the protections of innocence that accompany childhood. This work researches the extent to which teachers contribute to adultification. Using Boston area schools as a case study, I test the hypotheses that (1) teachers view black students as older and less innocent than their white peers (2) when teachers encounter black children, in terms of disciplinary action, they treat them differently than white children (3) teachers' attitudes about race correlate with their attitudes about zero tolerance policies and (4) the gender of the child as well as their race has significant effects on the above analyses. Building on previous literature that details the racial disparities in school suspension and expulsion rates, and studies that reveal that black children are seen as older, my research goes further and expects that within the school environment, teachers contribute to the adultification of black children. Hence when teachers encounter black children, they treat them more like adults, and this in turn feeds into their support and/or adoption of zero tolerance policies being used on black children as opposed to their white peers. Through this study I find evidence that black boys were viewed by most teachers as 4 years older than their black girl and white counterparts. Also significant to the study is the finding that teachers express an overall incompetent understanding of zero tolerance school discipline policies; nonetheless their attitudes on race do correlate with their views about zero tolerance policies. Lastly, when teachers encounter students of different races they perceive the children differently, although this does not necessarily lead to significant differences in their perceived support for teacher's enacting harsh punishment, it does influence assumptions of innocence or accountability for the student and hence alter the ways in which they perceive, interpret, and explain identical behaviors enacted by both black and white school children.

Keywords: adultification, criminalization, dehumanization, innocence, racism, school discipline, school to prison pipeline, teachers, zero tolerance

[1] Gilliam, W. S., & Shahar, G. (2006). Preschool and Child Care Expulsion and Suspension. *Infants & Young Children,19*(3), 228-245. doi:10.1097/00001163-200607000-00007

"[T]he laws of the schools were aimed at something distant and vague. What did it mean to, as our elders told us, "grow up and be somebody"? And what precisely did this have to do with an education rendered as rote discipline? To be educated in my Baltimore mostly meant always packing an extra number 2 pencil and working quietly. Educated children walked in a single file on the right side of the hallway, raised their hands to use the lavatory…Educated children never offered excuses—certainly not childhood itself. The world had no time for the childhoods of black boys and girls. How could the schools?

—Ta-Nehisi Coates[2]

INTRODUCTION

Across the country, school environments, spaces intended for education, are rapidly mimicking sites of militarization.[3] An emphasis on "law and order" and being "tough on crime" and their racialized intents have infiltrated classrooms and have left many students, particularly black students, highly vulnerable to the harms of zero tolerance policies.

Imagine an educational system where it is possible for Alexa Gonzalez, a 12-year-old girl, to be handcuffed, faced with suspension, and arrested by New York Police Department for doodling on her desk "I love my friends Abby and Faith. Lex was here 2/1/10 :)" on charges of vandalism,[4] for Rajuawn Thompkin's four-year-old son to be given out of school suspension in Washington DC for crying and kicking off his shoes,[5] for a fourteen year old boy in Massachusetts to be taken into police custody and charged with "disrupting a lawful assembly" for yelling and refusing to go to the office after getting his cell phone confiscated at school,[6] and for Shakara, a 16 year old girl in South Carolina, to be dragged by the neck from her desk and

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2 Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. Random House US, 2015.

3 Giroux, H. (2003). Zero Tolerance, Domestic Militarization, and the War Against Youth. *Social Justice, 30*(2 (92)), 59-65. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/29768187

4 Chen, S. (2010, February 18). Girl's arrest for doodling raises concerns about zero tolerance. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2010/CRIME/02/18/new.york.doodle.arrest/index.html

5 George, D. S. (2012, February 12). Suspended from school in early grades. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/suspended-from-school-in-early-grades/2012/02/02/gIQA3H0X9Q_story.html?utm_term=.8c10ec9b001a

6 Dahlberg, R. L. (2012). *ARRESTED FUTURES The Criminalization of School Discipline in Massachusetts' Three Largest School Districts*(Rep.). Retrieved https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/maarrest_reportweb.pdf

thrown across the floor by a school police officer after not leaving the classroom when asked to because her cell phone was out.[7] This is a reality for black students in America's schools.

It is alarming how intentionally schools are merging interactions between the educational and criminal justice systems, and how continually educators are funneling black students out of the classroom. These occurrences enable school personnel to criminalize common childhood behaviors such as emotional outbursts, defiance, candid forms of expression, and even complacency. Yet, teacher perceptions of black children are an overlooked aspect in both academic scholarship and public discourse.

Behaviors are evidently under more intense scrutiny when enacted by black bodies. According to a report released in 2018 by the United States Government Accountability Office, for the 2013-2014 school year "black students accounted for 15.5% of all public school students, but represented about 39% of students suspended from school… [And] although there were approximately 17.4 million more white students than black students attending K-12 public school in 2013-14, nearly 176,000 more black students than white students were suspended from school that school year."[8] The report accounts for six different types of disciplinary actions- out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension, and referral to law enforcement, expulsion, corporal punishment, and school-related arrests. Across all of the disciplinary actions, types of schools, and differing poverty levels of schools, black students are disproportionately overrepresented in receiving discipline.[9] Additionally, critical to the study is the finding that black girls are adversely affected by disciplinary sanctions as well. Among all racial groups, black is the only

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[7] Song, J., & Blume, H. (2015, October 29). Girl thrown from desk didn't obey because the punishment was unfair, attorney says. Retrieved from https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-girl-thrown-punishment-unfair-20151029-story.html

[8] *Discipline Disparities for Black Students, Boys, and Students with Disabilities*(Rep.). (2018, March). Retrieved https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/690828.pdf

[9] Ibid.,

racial group for which both sexes were disproportionately disciplined across all six disciplinary actions.[10] Although boys as a group were overrepresented in discipline, black girls were still suspended at rates higher than Latino boys, Asian boys, and white boys as well as at rates higher than girls of all other racial groups.[11] Black boys and girls are being treated and tried as adults. However the hyper-disciplining of black children is not solely a direct response to their behavior. Even in classroom scenarios where no "challenging behavior" was exhibited, black children remained surveilled most by teachers; according to an eye tracking study at the Yale Child Study Center, and black boys were explicitly referred to by the teachers as "needing the most watching."[12] Black children are disproportionately monitored and disciplined on the basis of their race by their very own educators.

Extensive amounts of literature posit that black youth are viewed as older and less innocent than white youth, which directly impacts their experiences within criminal justice contexts. In present research, Goff et al link the effect of dehumanization on the perceptions and treatment of black children.[13] They find that black boys are viewed as older and less innocent than their white peers, which lends for justification for black children to be less deserving of the protections and assumptions of innocence that accompany childhood.[14] From two of their studies on undergraduate respondents they find that beginning at age 10, black children are perceived to

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[10] Ibid.,

[11] Ibid.,

[12] Gilliam, W. S., Maupin, A. N., Reyes, C. R., Accavitti, M., & Shic, F. (2016, September 28). *Do Early Educators' Implicit Biases Regarding Sex and Race Relate to Behavior Expectations and Recommendations of Preschool Expulsions and Suspensions?*(Rep.). Retrieved https://medicine.yale.edu/childstudy/zigler/publications/Preschool Implicit Bias Policy Brief_final_9_26_276766_5379_v1.pdf

[13] Goff, P. A., Jackson, M. C., Di Leone, B. A. L., Culotta, C. M., & DiTomasso, N. A. (2014). The essence of innocence: Consequences of dehumanizing Black children. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 106*(4), 526-545.http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0035663

[14] Ibid.,

have the innocence of non-black children up to four years older than they are.[15] Additionally, in the criminal justice context, black boys overall are rated most culpable among their counterparts. More specifically, black felony suspects are perceived to be 4.5 years older than they actually are and black misdemeanor suspects are perceived to be 2 years older than they actually are, whereas white and Latino felony and misdemeanor suspects had no difference in age errors.[16] Black felony suspects are estimated to be older than white and Latino felony suspects.[17] In terms of culpability, black felony suspects are perceived to be more culpable than black misdemeanor suspects.[18] However interestingly, white felony suspects were perceived to be even less culpable than white misdemeanor suspects.[19] This study also found that the more readily participants associated black children with apes on the dehumanization test, the higher their age overestimations were for black children and for black felony and misdemeanor suspects as well, the more readily associated with apes, the higher their culpability ratings.[20] This study clearly demonstrates that black children are barred from the protections of childhood in occurrences when they are dehumanized.

There is growing research in the field of political science linking members of certain racial groups being viewed and treated as older than they are to dehumanization. There is also growing research that attempts to link the implications of adultification to racial disparities in educational experiences. Yet much of the work on the school to prison pipeline heavily analyzes the "prison" end of the pipeline by looking at the criminal justice system, and looks at schools mainly as an institution that funnels black children into contact with the criminal justice system

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15 Ibid.,
16 Ibid.,
17 Ibid.,
18 Ibid.,
19 Ibid.,
20 Ibid.,

to then be criminalized and adultified. My research seeks to address this shortcoming. This study inspects the ways in which the school grounds itself contributes to the criminalization and adultification of black children even before they are pushed out and put into contact with the criminal justice system. The American public views black children as older. Teachers monitor black children more frequently. Are teachers exempt from adultification? My research looks to connect these facts and ground these phenomena, to directly seek a correlation between schoolteachers, adultification, and zero tolerance policies. This paper focuses on teacher's perceptions of black school aged children. Through this work I research the extent to which teachers contribute to the adultification of black children. Researching teachers, those who have direct and daily contact with children, and how they view their students is fundamental for understanding why our classrooms are yet another site where black children are misunderstood, criminalized, and essentially robbed of their youth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Childhood and Adultification

In more recent understandings of childhood, childhood is thought to be a time where children are generally beginning to be prepared for, yet protected from, the realities of the adult years.[21] Childhood is a unique period, and one's experiences during this period lay the framework for the years to come.[22] Throughout childhood there is an emphasis on protection. Children are protected "from the stresses and responsibilities of adult work through strict child labor laws. We handle their crimes in a special system of juvenile justice…we now value childhood as a special time for growth and change, and we invest great resources in caring for

[21] Santrock, J. W. (1997). *Children / John Santrock*.
[22] Ibid.,

and educating children."[23] Historically however childhood was not perceived to be a time for protective care, and legacies of this disservice may be linked to adultified treatment of children today. In medieval Europe, offenses committed by both children and adults were subjected to the same laws.[24] In the United States, generations of black children were born into and subjected to chattel slavery and labored almost identically to black enslaved adults.

To extend on this historical context of childhood, according to research and interviews with formerly enslaved individuals, childhood in slavery was a unique aspect of an enslaved person's life. Children born into United States chattel slavery were born into an "African American slave subculture" that held a fundamental value of community.[25] After a "lying-in period" which allowed mothers to stay with their newborns for only a few days to a few weeks, newly born children were handed off to older enslaved women, then by age two were then handed off to be taken care of by children ages 8 to 12.[26] Therefore, it was custom for children from 8 to 12 years of age to be in charge of taking care of young children. Once they reached age 13 young enslaved children were expected to work full time on the plantations.[27] The authors note that this dynamic was instilled purely for economic reasons to incentive the slave owning families.[28] Also throughout the age range of 8 to 12 years old, while taking care of younger children, enslaved children were expected to complete chores such as "hauling water, fetching wood, tending gardens, cleaning the yards, and feeding livestock."[29] It is evident that when captured from Africa and brought to American soil, black children were assigned adult like

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[23] Ibid.,
[24] Ibid.,
[25] Corsaro, W. A. (2015). *The sociology of childhood*. Retrieved April 8, 2019.
[26] Ibid.,
[27] Ibid.,
[28] Ibid.,
[29] Ibid., pg. 79

responsibilities essential to maintaining functionality of their communities, and robbed from protections of childhood as enslaved individuals. Similar evidences of this form of adultification follow suit today.

There are several theories on adultification that exist throughout the literature. According to Linda Burton, in her article *Childhood Adultification in Economically Disadvantaged Families*, childhood adultification is not solely the process of seeing children as adults or preparing children for adulthood, but also it is treating them as so and assigning them to complete adult responsibilities, assume adult culpabilities, and obtain awareness of adult subjects.[30] According to Burton childhood adultification occurs when children are rid from childhood protections and are prematurely exposed to adulthood.[31] Burton coins childhood adultification as a necessity for the functionality of a family, often catalyzed by poverty, that forces children to adopt responsibilities and "perform extensive labor in their families" outside of the realms of what is socially and institutionally relegated as the expectations of childhood.[32]

Burton distinctly distinguishes adultification from "hurried children." Hurried children can best be understood as overscheduled children.[33] Adultified children and hurried children differ by the behaviors they perform and what compels such behaviors.[34] Hurried children are children, situated in middle class contexts, who take on extra responsibilities and higher expectations as a motivator for "important preparation for adulthood that focuses on building human and social capital as early and quickly as possible."[35] She notes for example, taking on

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30 Burton, L. (2007). Childhood Adultification in Economically Disadvantaged Families: A Conceptual Model. *Family Relations,56*(4), 329-345. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/4541675
31 Ibid.,
32 Ibid.,
33 Ibid.,
34 Ibid.,
35 Ibid.,

multiple extracurricular activities and leadership roles, or using summer vacations to shadow professionals in their career fields of interest.[36] According to Burton, childhood adultification serves the families dynamics not the child's success and warrants less guidance.[37] A variety of causes, often linked to economic disadvantage can lead to childhood adultification such as a family being unable to access paid childcare, smaller or more crowded home environments that expose children to adult conversations, and harsh and violent realities in the neighborhood.[38] These situations among many others cause many children living in low-income families to take on "household labor" that their wealthier peers do not have to experience.[39] Not all types of poverty create homogenous experiences, and not all children growing up with less financial means or in poverty experience childhood adultification. It also warranted to assume that adult family members in low-income families do not like to or do not prefer to assign adult like responsibilities on the children in their household, and nor do they do so intentionally.[40] For the purposes of this research, it is not the childhood adultification faced at home that is being examined. Rather, this work seeks to examine how adultification of black children translates, transforms, and manifests within schools.

One suggestion is that for children from low-income families there may be discord between what behaviors are accepted, valued, or praised at home versus what is expected and welcomed of children at school.[41] For example, assertive behaviors that children may naturally use at home to maintain their family dynamics and functionality may pose a detriment or be

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[36] Ibid.,
[37] Ibid.,
[38] Ibid.,
[39] Ibid.,
[40] Ibid.,
[41] Ibid.,

viewed as inappropriate in schools.[42] Said well, "herein lies a paradox in childhood adultification—variations in institutional and family definitions of childhood can situate children between "a rock and a hard place" as they navigate multiple worlds while simultaneously being considered a child by some and an "adult" by others."[43] Burton details that assertive behavior when a child for instance is "parenting" their sibling can be viewed positively at home and negatively at schools. Burton's example demonstrates how childhood adultification in the home can lead children, particularly children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, to face increased obstacles in school.

Ann Ferguson, author of *Bad Boys: Public schools in the making of black masculinity*, conducted an ethnographic study of black boys' experiences within the public school system. Ferguson analyzes their experiences at their public school through what she calls "categories of difference." The three socially constructed categories of difference she explores are race, class, and gender.[44] She finds that their intersectional identities as black boys cause them to both not be viewed as childlike and to be revoked from the mentality of "boys will be boys" and instead adultified and viewed as possessing behaviors that have inherently ill intent.[45] Ferguson coins adultification as the process by which, in this case, specifically black boy's "transgressions are made to take on a sinister, intentional, fully conscious tone that is stripped of any element of childish naïveté." [46] Critically, she notes that definitions of childhood have changed over time, and for black children specifically, economic practices, the law, policy, and visual imagery in the

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[42] Ibid.,
[43] Ibid.,
[44] Ferguson, A. A. (2003). *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of black masculinity*. Retrieved April 9, 2019.
[45] Ibid.,
[46] Ibid., pg 82.

media have uniquely molded their definition of childhood.[47] From historical representations to the present day black children have been depicted as not childlike in popular imagery. Ferguson provides the example of pickaninnies, which represented black children as "animal-like savages" and popular images that depicted black children as "alligator bait" in postcards and souvenirs, and hence as both predators and natural victims.[48] To the present day, black children in the media are shown differently than children of other races. She states that black children suspects are demonized, "there is rarely the collective soul-searching for answers to the question of how "kids like this" could have committed these acts that occurs when white kids are involved. Rather…it is their own maladaptive and inappropriate behavior that causes African Americans to self disrupt." [49] This belief, which has been ingrained in the messages our society omits continuously throughout centuries, allows for and propels the adultification of black youth.

From her findings, Ferguson states that "the exemption of black males from the dispensations granted the "child" and the "boy" through the process of adultification justifies harsher, more punitive responses to rule break behavior. As "not-children," their behavior is understood not as something to be molded and shaped over time, but as the intentional, fully cognizant actions of an adult."[50] She argues that in her study, teachers' adultification of black boys was enabled by the lack of knowledge that teachers at the school had about the black students that they served.[51] These teachers were disconnected from the community that they taught in. None of the teachers lived in the community or visited children's families and homes

[47] Ibid.,
[48] Ibid.,
[49] Ibid., pg. 82-83
[50] Ibid., pg. 90
[51] Ibid.,

often.[52] Instead, they depended on narratives of these children as "at-risk" to create their flawed understanding of their black students and their families, which allowed the images of black children to shape their beliefs about and behaviors towards their black students.[53]

The Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality released a report in 2017 entitled *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood*. Building on the aforementioned Goff et al study which demonstrates that by the age of 10, black boys are more likely to be misperceived as older and be viewed as more culpable of crimes, this report hones in on the affect of adultification on black girls. This report, for the first time, provides data demonstrating that adults misperceive black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers, especially black girls among the 5-14 age range.[54] Using the findings of this study, the authors take an in depth look at the adultification of blacks girls and discuss how it creates negative implications for black girls within the criminal justice, educational, and child welfare contexts.

The authors of this report define adultification as "the perception of black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than white girls of the same age."[55] They account for two forms of adultification, which have been explored by aforementioned authors as well. The two essential forms of adultification include both "a process of socialization, in which children function at a more mature developmental stage because of situational context and necessity, especially in low-resource community environments and a social or cultural stereotype that is based on how adults perceive children in the absence of knowledge of children's behavior and verbalization"[56] This report specifically focuses on the latter form of adultification. Rooting their study in historical

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[52] Ibid.,

[53] Ibid.,

[54] Epstein, R., Blake, J. J., & González, T. (2017). *Girlhood interrupted: The erasure of black girls childhood*. Retrieved April 9, 2019.

[55] Ibid.,

[56] Ibid.,

context as well, one of the authors, Professor Priscilla Ocen, in affirming the notion of childhood adultification states that "as the notion of the innocent, developmental child emerged, white children began to enjoy greater legal protections, while black children's position remained relatively unchanged."[57] The report, in alignment with other literature, goes further to recount slavery in the United States as a time period when black children were regarded as property and were worked very young and punished for exhibiting normal child-like behaviors.[58]

In this study the authors surveyed United States adults about their perception of either black girls or white girls, not both, and this was randomly assigned. They asked the participants questions regarding their perceived belief of the innocence, aging, responsibilities, protections, and characteristics of black or white girls through a rating scale. They found that across all age ranges, participants viewed black girls as more adult than white girls.[59] More specifically, beginning at age 5, black girls were found to be thought of as needing less protecting and nurturing than white girls and were perceived to know more about adult topics and know more about sex than white girls.[60] Throughout all stages of childhood, and peaking from ages 10-14, black girls are misperceived by adults to be adult-like and more adult-like than their white girl peers. The authors conclude that these findings have implications for the disproportionate harsh treatment that black girls face in school discipline, by law enforcement, and in discretionary calls throughout the juvenile justice system.[61] The report also discusses how the way in which adults, including teachers, view black girls can be connected to the legacies of historical stereotypes.[62] Commonplace historical stereotypes of black women as angry and emasculating; the sapphire,

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[57] Ibid.,
[58] Ibid.,
[59] Ibid.,
[60] Ibid.,
[61] Ibid.,
[62] Ibid.,

hyper sexualized; the jezebel, and both as self-sufficient and the caretaker; the mammy, feed into the lens through which people view black today. All of these stereotypical caricatures of black women originated during slavery yet continue to lead to the adultification of black girls today, because many in society fall victim to these images and messages and are unable to view black girls outside of this scope, meaning that they interpret their behaviors through this context and the behaviors of their peers of different racial groups do not get interpreted the same way.[63]

This report did not extend to find an exact causal relationship between adultification and criminalization. However the authors are confident that the implications of adultification present themselves within the education system and the juvenile justice system. In terms of schools specifically, this report discusses the disproportionate administering of school discipline on black girls. According to the report, black girls are more likely to "experience exclusionary discipline outcomes for subjective reasons, such as disobedience/defiance…and some research indicates that black girls may also be punished more harshly than their white peers for the same behaviors when referred to the disciplinary office."[64] The authors posit that such arbitrary punishment can be a result of adults in school building adultifying black girls. The research on the racial disparities of school discipline is plentiful. Yet the why behind these disparities have largely been left untouched. Adultification may serve as reasoning behind why black children, and in the case of this report, black girls, are subjected to disparate treatment by school officials and law enforcement.[65] This report pushes for its readers to think about how educators and school-based police officers may also view black children as less childlike and intentionally defiant. It also looks beyond the realms of school discipline and employs studies to argue that the adultification

[63] Ibid.,
[64] Ibid.,
[65] Ibid.,

of black girls harms black girls in other ways in the classroom as well, by disregarding them as potential leaders and robbing them of mentorship opportunities.[66]

Dehumanization

A lot of the existing research links dehumanization to the mistreatment of certain racial groups, including the adultification of black children. Dehumanization is a concept that relies on stereotypes to deny that which is thought to make one human and hence justify the mistreatment of people of that social group. In 2016 Jardina and Piston presented a study, which concludes that "old fashioned racism," that is, explicit and overt racism, is not gone from the minds of the American public, as popular thought seems to suggest.[67] In fact, the authors argue that although overt sentiments that black people are inferior to whites are not as commonly expressed, a majority of white people still both routinely and instinctually dehumanize black people.[68] In this study Jardina and Piston show the degree to which white Americans explicitly dehumanize black people and demonstrate how this informs and effects white people's stances towards punitive criminal justice policies. In order to analyze the degree and impact of white people's dehumanization of black people and its implications for criminal justice policy and public opinion, they look at the results of the 2016 GfK Survey. To measure dehumanization the authors employed the "Ascent of Man Scale" which prompts respondents to determine how evolved they perceive each of the races to be on a scale that indicates the evolutionary trend from ape to fully evolved human. For the category of most evolved indicated on the Ascent of Man Scale, Jardina and Piston find that the average rating of whites is 93.1 whereas the mean rating of

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66 Ibid.,

67 Jardina, Ashley, and Spencer Piston. 2016. "Dehumanization of Black People Motivates White Support for Criminal Justice Policies." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Annual Political Science Association.

68 Ibid.,

black people is 89.1.[69] Therefore on average, the respondents of this study rate white people as being more evolved that black people.[70] Using the Dehumanizing Characteristics Index, the authors asked respondents to indicate how well certain dehumanizing terms describe black people. Some of the terms included "savage," "barbaric" and "lacking self-restraint, like animals," which are words and messages which they prove are common in widespread in describing black people in the American media.[71] Aside from the 44% of whites who responded at the lowest value, "Not at all well," when indicating how well all of these terms describe black people, the rest of the respondents demonstrated great variation.[72] The authors conclude that tellingly, these results show that although a great number of white respondents hold back from stating dehumanizing attitudes towards black, in the same vein a great number of the white respondents in fact do express dehumanizing attitudes.[73] To extend these findings beyond demonstrated white dehumanization against blacks, the authors employ the results of the 2016 GfK Survey to show how they correlate with white option about the death penalty and three strike criminal justice policies. The authors find that white people who indicate black people as less evolved through the Ascent of Man Scale are substantially more likely to support the death penalty.[74] Additionally, white people who indicated that dehumanizing terms like "savage," "barbaric," and "lacking self-restraint" are well suited to describe black people were substantially more likely to support the death penalty. White support for three strikes laws were also substantially correlated to whites who believe blacks are less evolved and embody the given

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[69] Ibid.,
[70] Ibid.,
[71] Ibid.,
[72] Ibid.,
[73] Ibid.,
[74] Ibid.,

dehumanizing characteristics.[75] According to these authors, dehumanization contributes to our carceral state. Evidently, as whites accept and rely on stereotypes about black people and express dehumanizing sentiments, they are more likely to favor harsh policies that factually cause disproportionate harm and detriment to black people. These are patterns almost identical to the ones explored in this research analyzing adultification and support for zero tolerance policies in schools.

Referring back to the 2014 Goff et al. study, a third study that the authors conducted used police officer respondents rather than undergraduate students to analyze whether the impacts of the dehumanization of black children extend to the real world policing context and affect how police officers perceive children suspects. The authors hypothesized that racial dehumanization against black children would predict the disproportionate use of physical force against black children throughout a police officer's career.[76] The police officer participants were asked to complete The Attitudes Towards Blacks Scale which is a 20 point questionnaire that assesses anti-black prejudice through statements such as "it is likely that Blacks will bring violence to neighborhoods when they move in," The Personalized Implicit Association Test, and The Dehumanization Implicit Association Test. Thereafter the police officers were given twelve scenarios showing male targets of a given race; either white, black, or Latino and were tasked to complete age and culpability assessments for each target. The authors found that participants overestimated the ages of black felony suspects more than they overestimated the ages of black misdemeanor suspects, whereas there were no differences in age overestimations for felony and

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[75] Ibid.,

[76] Goff, P. A., Jackson, M. C., Di Leone, B. A. L., Culotta, C. M., & DiTomasso, N. A. (2014). The essence of innocence: Consequences of dehumanizing Black children. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 106*(4), 526-545.http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0035663

misdemeanor suspects who were white or Latino.[77] Following suit, black felony suspects were rated as significantly older than both white and Latino felony suspects, and black misdemeanor suspects were rated as significantly older than white misdemeanor suspects.[78] Next the researchers looked at the records for the police officers involved with the study to find a relationship between dehumanization of black people and police behavior. Connecting the police officer's answers on the multiple survey questions with the available police records, they found that those officers with more implicit association between black people and apes had used force more frequently on black children in their career.[79] The multiple studies conducted by these authors demonstrate that the dehumanization of black children is a driving force in determining the maltreatment that black children receive, specifically in the policing context. Racial dehumanization of black children is dangerous in that it allows attitudes to extend to behaviors and it distorts how police officers, those who are sworn to protect, view and physically treat black children; leading to disproportionate monitoring, sentencing, and physical force.

Zero Tolerance

It would be remiss to understand how the adultification and dehumanization of black children and their histories and legacies prompt American adults, teachers and law enforcement most specifically, to view black children as being at risk, needing less protection, having ill intent, lacking innocence, and being more deserving of harsh punishment without also accounting for the policies and practices that institutionally allow these mindsets and behaviors to manifest and persist in school buildings. Zero tolerance policies are largely defined as policies that "require school officials to give students a specific, consistent, and harsh punishment,

[77] Ibid.,
[78] Ibid.,
[79] Ibid.,

usually suspension or expulsion, when certain rules are broken. The punishment applies regardless of the circumstances, the reason for the behavior, or the student's history of disciplinary problems."[80] The United States Department of Education defines zero tolerance policies as "school or district policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specifics offenses."[81]

Zero tolerance policies entirely remove context from a situation when administering discipline. Zero tolerance policies devise three pathways- suspensions, expulsions, and criminal justice system contact, which have affects that manifest in the lives of America's students in very specific and harmful ways. Zero tolerance as a phrase took off in the 1980s in response to the war on drugs.[82] However, it emerged as a school-sanctioned policy in the early 1990s and quickly took on a "Broken Windows approach."[83] The ideology that zero tolerance policies lean on is one that promotes that the best way to deter severe behaviors is to crack down on all minor offenses and to remove these students from the learning environment.[84] Despite the heightened fear of crime pushed by politicians in this era, juvenile crime was on the decline as zero tolerance policies took off.[85] Zero tolerance policies in schools also emerged in part from the Gun-Free Schools Act in 1994.[86] Congress enacted The Gun-Free Schools Act, which mandated that all

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80 Thompson, K. (2018, January 18). Zero-Tolerance Policies and the School to Prison Pipeline. Retrieved March 4, 2019, from http://www.sharedjustice.org/domestic-justice/2017/12/21/zero-tolerance-policies-and-the-school-to-prison-pipeline

81 (1998, November). Retrieved April 12, 2019, from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/98030.pdf

82 Teske, S. C. (2011). A Study of Zero Tolerance Policies in Schools: A Multi-Integrated Systems Approach to Improve Outcomes for Adolescents. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing,24*(2), 88-97. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6171.2011.00273.x

83 Ibid.,

84 Ibid.,

85 Howard N. Snyder, Juvenile Arrests 2003, OJJDP JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN (August 2005), http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/209735/page2.html

86 S. David Mitchell, Zero Tolerance Policies: Criminalizing Childhood and Disenfranchising the Next Generation of Citizens, 92 Wash. U. L. Rev. 271 (2014).Available at: http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_lawreview/vol92/iss2/6

states receiving federal funds enforce a state law that requires all schools to expel any student, for no less than a year, who brings a firearm to school.[87] To continue receiving federal funding schools all over the country instated a zero tolerance policy for weapons in schools, but consequently due to a lack of provisions, schools began to deviate from the original intent of the act as well, and created variants of their own zero tolerance policies.[88] Zero tolerance policies were then created to address fighting, threats, drug use, and nonviolent and minor offenses.[89] The rapid spread, increased harshness, and less narrow use of zero tolerance policies are seen to have occurred also in response to the Columbine school shooting. Schools across the country became more militarized following this incident and stricter zero tolerance policies and an increased police presence were widely apparent in schools.[90] Hence, zero tolerance policies, which emerged through both real and perceived safety concerns, have proliferated around the country as subjectively punitive, non-discretionary, and racially discriminatory policies. Zero tolerance policies effectively criminalize many childhood behaviors through a stringent, non-situational approach.

According to the United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics 1998 and 2002 reports *Indicators of School Crime and Safety*, in 1996-1997 94% of public schools reported having zero tolerance policies for firearms and weapons, 88% had zero tolerance policies for drugs, and 79% reported having zero tolerance policies for violence and

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87 Miller, & George. (1993, March 04). H.R.987 - 103rd Congress (1993-1994): Gun-Free Schools Act of 1993. Retrieved from https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/house-bill/987

88 S. David Mitchell, Zero Tolerance Policies: Criminalizing Childhood and Disenfranchising the Next Generation of Citizens, 92 Wash. U. L. Rev. 271 (2014).Available at: http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_lawreview/vol92/iss2/6

89 Ibid.,

90 Nelson, L., & Lind, D. (2015, October 27). The school-to-prison pipeline, explained. Retrieved from https://www.vox.com/2015/2/24/8101289/school-discipline-race

tobacco.[91] Most public schools during this time period had zero tolerance policies, and as minority enrollment increased, so did the likelihood that a school had zero tolerance policies implemented.[92] Of public schools with a minority enrollment of less than 5%, 71% had zero tolerance policies for violence and 83% for drugs, whereas 85% and 92% of public schools with a minority enrollment of more than 50% had zero tolerance policies for violence and drugs, respectively.[93]

From 1996-1997 10% of all public schools had a police officer or other form of law enforcement stationed at their schools anywhere from 1-30+ hours a week.[94] During this same time frame, 15% of all public schools with less that 5% minority enrollment had police officers stationed at their schools.[95] 33% of public high schools with over 50% minority enrollment did have police officers stationed at their schools.[96] However, the report found that the greater the police presence, the more likely the school was to report incidents of serious crime.[97]

According to the United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* 2012 report, by the 2007-2008 academic year, just a decade later, 30% of all public schools had one or more full time law enforcement officer, and 34% with law enforcement carrying a firearm.[98] By the 2009-2010 academic year the number of full time law enforcement officers in all public schools decreased to 30% and 28% for law enforcement stationed with a firearm.[99] However, by the 2009-2010 school year the

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91 (2002, November). Retrieved April 12, 2019, from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003009.pdf
92 Ibid.,
93 Ibid.,
94 (1998, November). Retrieved April 12, 2019, from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/98030.pdf
95 Ibid.,
96 Ibid.,
97 Ibid.,
98 Ibid.,
99 Ibid.,

disparities across schools with different racial makeups grew. 13.6% of public schools with less than 5% minority students had full time officers whereas 41.3% of public schools with 50% or more minority students had full time officers in the school building.[100] The racial disparities among the expansion and criminalization of zero tolerance policies in United States public schools are evident.

Those in favor of zero tolerance policies advocate for its ability to standardized discipline.[101] Proponents argue that zero tolerance policies make punishments clear and consistent and deter students from misbehaving in fear of suspensions and expulsions.[102] School personnel who implement zero tolerance policies often view them as a good option for maintaining school safety and elevating a "no nonsense" approach.[103] However, the grounds for this support for zero tolerance policy are not backed by empirical evidence. Whereas, opponents of zero tolerance policies commonly cite the racially discriminatory outcomes of suspensions and expulsions and referral to law enforcement, the incompatibility of these policies with the child and adolescent brain, and its ineffectiveness at reducing school infractions as the pitfalls of zero tolerance policies.[104] Opponents also argue that zero tolerance policies infringe on the rights of students, and create dismay among students towards the system.[105]

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[100](2012, November). Retrieved April 12, 2019, from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013036.pdf

[101] S. David Mitchell, Zero Tolerance Policies: Criminalizing Childhood and Disenfranchising the Next Generation of Citizens, 92 Wash. U. L. Rev. 271 (2014).Available at: http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_lawreview/vol92/iss2/6

[102] Ibid.,

[103] Teske, S. C. (2011). A Study of Zero Tolerance Policies in Schools: A Multi-Integrated Systems Approach to Improve Outcomes for Adolescents. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing,24*(2), 88-97. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6171.2011.00273.x

[104] Ibid.,

[105] S. David Mitchell, Zero Tolerance Policies: Criminalizing Childhood and Disenfranchising the Next Generation of Citizens, 92 Wash. U. L. Rev. 271 (2014).Available at: http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_lawreview/vol92/iss2/6

In the Journal of Law and Education, authors Kim Fries and Todd. A DeMitchell conducted a study to better understand teachers' perceptions of zero tolerance policies and how these policies align or do not align with the concept of fairness. These authors, similar to my own motives in researching the perceptions of teachers, chose to highlight teachers because they are the "front line of identifying, intervening, and deciding whether or not to refer rule breakers to an administrator for "sentencing.""[106] When searching three databases for their literature review, the *Academic Search Premier, Books in Print, and ERIC*, only two studies brought up results regarding the opinions of teachers on zero tolerance policies.[107] These two studies only peripherally dealt with teacher's responses on zero tolerance policies. The main concerns of the research papers were a plethora of educational topics, and zero tolerance was one of many that were addressed. The authors concluded that it was evident that teacher opinions on zero tolerance policies were not being sought out by researchers and teachers themselves were not publishing pieces on the topic of zero tolerance policies.[108] As I do through my honors thesis, these authors Fries and DeMitchell, hoped to contribute to this lacking yet crucial area of study.

In this study the authors conducted two focus groups of K-8 teachers in the northeast of the United States. Their two focus groups were guided by two overall research questions (1) what are teachers' perceptions regarding zero tolerance policies? And (2) how do educators perceive notions of fairness relative to zero tolerance policies?[109] The teachers in the focus group went over scenarios involving zero tolerance policies and throughout the discussions the

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106 Fries, K., & DeMitchell, T. A. (2007). Zero Tolerance and the Paradox of Fairness: Viewpoints from the Classroom. *Journal of Law and Education,36*, 221-229. doi:10.1080/0953996890010305

107 Ibid.,

108 Ibid.,

109 Ibid.,

researchers quickly found that the teacher's felt that they were doing a disservice by disregarding context and intentions when abiding by zero tolerance policies.[110]

School to Prison Pipeline

Zero tolerance policies are frequently criticized when specifically discussing the school to prison pipeline. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, the school to prison pipeline is "a disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems"[111] The emergence and proliferation of zero tolerance policies contribute directly to the school to prison pipeline due to its incessant use of suspensions and expulsions in public schools. With the introduction of zero tolerance policies in America's schools, suspensions have risen from 1.7 million in 1974 to 3.1 million by 2000.[112] Suspensions and expulsions are not administered equitably. There are stark racial disparities among discipline. According to a report conducted by the Government Account Office, black K-12 students are more likely than students of all other racial groups to be disciplined across all punishment types, regardless of the type of school they attend, and no matter the poverty level of the school.[113] According to the United States Education Department's Office for Civil Rights, black children are 3x more likely to be suspended or expelled than white children.[114] This disparity begins in preschool. In preschool, black children make up 48% of preschool children that receive more than one out of school suspension although they only comprise of 18% of

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110 Ibid.,

111 American Civil Liberties Union. (2016). *What is the school-to-prison pipeline?*

112 Advancement Project, Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track (Mar. 2005)

113 GAO analysis of Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection and Common Core Data. Lopez. (2018, April 05). Black kids are way more likely to be punished in school than white kids, study finds. Retrieved from https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/4/5/17199810/school-discipline-race-racism-gao

114 United States, Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2014, March). Retrieved April 12, 2019, from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-discipline-snapshot.pdf

preschool enrollment.[115] To compare, white children make up 43% of preschool enrollment and only 26% of all preschool children receiving more than one out of school suspension.[116]

More generally, black students account for 16% the overall student population, but account for 32% of students receiving in school suspensions, 33% receiving one out of school suspensions, 42% of students receiving multiple out of school suspensions, and 34% of students receiving expulsions. Whereas white students who comprise of 51% of student enrollment, receive 40% of in school suspensions, 36% of those who have received one out of school suspensions, 31% of students who have received multiple out of school suspensions, and 36% of those who have been expelled.[117] Both black boys and black girls have higher suspension rates than any of their peers in any racial group.[118] 20% of black boys and more than 12% of black girls receive out of school suspensions. [119]

Additionally, in terms of referral to law enforcement, by race, white students represent 51% of the student population, 41% of arrests referred to law enforcement, and 39% of students subjected to school related arrests.[120] Despite making up 16% of the student population, black students comprise of 27% of the students referred to law enforcement and 31% of students subjected to school related arrests.[121]

With 20% of black boys being the national trend for the out of school suspension for black boys, black boys in Massachusetts make up 16% of out of school suspensions.[122] As for black girls in Massachusetts they make up 8% of out of school suspensions compared to the

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115 Ibid.,
116 Ibid.,
117 Ibid.,
118 Ibid.,
119 Ibid.,
120 Ibid.,
121 Ibid.,
122 Ibid.,

national rate of 12% of students given out of school suspensions.[123] White boys make up 6% of those students nationwide receiving out of school suspension, and 5% of students in Massachusetts specifically.[124] Similarly, white girls make up 2% of out of school suspensions in the United States, and 2% of out of school suspensions in Massachusetts.[125] Across disciplinary types, from preschool to high school age, black children disproportionately comprise of the main victims of exclusionary school practices. Critical to mention, this racial disparity exists regardless of socioeconomic status of the students and there is no empirical evidence to support that black students misbehave more than students of other racial groups.[126]

Effects of Suspension/Expulsion/ Policing on School Children

Direct referral to law enforcement by schools is not the only way schools are intersecting with the criminal justice system. Suspensions and expulsions alone funnel students into contact with criminal justice systems, as well as the presence of school police/resource officers. According to what is currently considered the most comprehensive study on the intersection of school discipline and the criminal justice system, a Texas study which used data on every seventh grader in the state in 2000, 2001, 2002 and followed their academic and disciplinary tract for six years, found that 31% of the students who were suspended or expelled had to repeat a grade, and only 5% who were not suspended or expelled did.[127] Additionally, 23% of the students disciplined or expelled in middle school or high school ended up in contact with the juvenile justice system.[128] This is compared to the finding that of students who did not get

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123 Ibid.,

124 Ibid.,

125 Ibid.,

126 Advancement Project, Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track (Mar. 2005)

127 Nelson, L., & Lind, D. (2015, October 27). The school-to-prison pipeline, explained. Retrieved March 14, 2019, from https://www.vox.com/2015/2/24/8101289/school-discipline-race

128 Ibid.,

suspended or expelled only 2% ended up in contact with a juvenile probation officer.[129] And of the students who were suspended and expelled, they were 3 times more likely to come into contact with the juvenile justice system the following year than students who were not disciplined in that manner.[130] Additionally, according to a study conducted by the Civil Rights Project at UCLA, children who have faced suspension or expulsion even just once are twice as likely than their peers who have not faced such discipline to drop out of school.[131] Further, students who face arrest at school are 3 times as likely to drop out than students not arrested in schools.[132] Evidently so, being removed from the classroom is connected to the increase in a students' contact with the juvenile justice system, and repeated contact often follows suit.

In the United States Department of Education and United States Department of Justice *Dear Colleague Letter on Nondiscriminatory Administration of School Discipline* the federal departments concluded that

> The Civil Rights Data Collection data show that an increasing number of students are losing important instructional time due to exclusionary discipline. The increasing use of disciplinary sanctions such as in-school and out of school suspensions, expulsions, or referrals to law enforcement authorities creates the potential for significant educational and long-term outcomes, and can contribute to…the school to prison pipeline. Studies have suggested a correlation between exclusionary discipline policies and practices and an array of serious educational, economic, and social problems, including school avoidance and diminished educational engagement; decreased academic achievement;

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129 Ibid.,

130 Ibid.,

131 Losen, D. J., & Martines, T. E. (2013, April 8). *Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools*(Rep.). Retrieved April 16, 2019, from The Civil Rights Project UCLA website: https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/out-of-school-and-off-track-the-overuse-of-suspensions-in-american-middle-and-high-schools

132 Ibid.,

increased behavior problems, increased likelihood of dropping out; substance abuse; and involvement with juvenile justice systems.[133]

Suspensions and expulsions lead to increased chances of interaction with the criminal justice system and so does the infiltration of law enforcement personnel in the school environment. The presence of police officers in schools is not new; however, it is certainly increasing. According to a report done by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Courts, the number of arrestees in US schools nearly doubled from around 22,300 in the year 2000 to more than 43,2000 in 2004.[134] Police officers have been employed in schools to handle minor disputes that were once handled by school authority figures themselves.[135] Therefore, although the number of juvenile arrests are at an all time low, the number of arrests sourced from schools themselves comprise of a significantly high proportion of the overall arrests of children.[136]

A report conducted by the American Civil Liberties Union discusses how schools across America, especially those with larger demographics of black and Latino children, have become sites of increased criminalization of black youth.[137] This use of power is an overextension of what already occurs in all other aspects of black, and particularly, low-income communities. Yet the report states that "their power to legally use physical force, arrest and handcuff students, and bring the full weight of the criminal justice system to bear on misbehaving children is often obscured until an act of violence, captured by a student's cell phone, breaks though to the

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133 United States, Department of Education and Department of Justice, Office for Civil Rights and Civil Rights Division. (2014, January 8). Retrieved April 1, 2019, from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi.html

134 Villalobos, J. G., & Bohannan, T. L. (n.d.). *The Intersection of JUVENILE COURTS and EXCLUSIONARY SCHOOL DISCIPLINE*(Rep.). National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

135 Ibid.,

136 Ibid.,

137 *Bullies in Blue The Origins and Consequences of School Policing*(Rep.). (2017). ACLU.

public."[138] This report calls attention to the fact that the scope of the affect of police officers in schools goes beyond these isolated incidents caught on camera. It goes beyond faults of individual officers and allows the law to find its way into any aspect of a child's learning experience because "police in schools are first and foremost there to enforce criminal laws, and virtually every violation of a school rule can be considered a criminal act if viewed though a police-first lens."[139] The report provides historical context explaining that policing in schools in the United States was an additional attempt to maintain *de jure* segregation along with racial covenants, zoning laws, and scare tactics among other things.[140] As school desegregation was underway white communities claimed that bringing black students into their schools would increase misbehavior and disorder in their school communities and policing strategies were implemented to enact punitive control.[141]

In 1948, the inception of the Los Angeles School Police Department was devised as a security unit to patrol schools in increasingly integrated neighborhoods.[142] In 1957, a committee intended to study juvenile justice was formed and it suggested placing police officers in every city public school to do so, yet it turned out that police officers were only stationed in schools in black and Latino neighborhoods.[143] The school to prison pipeline is maintained by upholding and relying on vicious and detrimental stereotypes of black youth. As the report affirms, "suburban youth commit crimes; urban youth become delinquent."[144] The rhetoric that youth crime was a main problem facing the United States gained widespread momentum across the country and

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138 Ibid.,
139 Ibid.,
140 Ibid.,
141 Ibid.,
142 Ibid.,
143 Ibid.,
144 Ibid.,

black youth were framed as the root of this problem and increased policing was employed as the solution. The criminalization of black people had already existed in all aspects of their communities and neighborhoods, and schools were the next facet for the criminal justice system to invade. The school to prison pipeline expanded through the criminalization of black youth. The ACLU report notes how the creation of delinquency and of an aura of moral panic prompted the federal government to invest in the expansion of policing in communities. 1998 was when Congress first allocated funds for "Community Oriented Policing Services" in schools and referred to them as "school resource officers" or SROs.

The Role of Teachers

The fact that black students are overwhelmingly disproportionately disciplined within the United States education system is well studied, yet the causes for why this disparity exists are not. Researchers Skiba, Nardo, and Peterson conducted a yearlong study in an urban school district to add to this gap in the literature on the use of zero tolerance policies and the school to prison pipeline. Because racial bias or discrimination itself is difficult to directly collect empirical data on, the authors of this study chose to examine whether racial biases exist in the administration of discipline by ruling out other commonly hypothesized possibilities.[145] These authors analyzed the following common alternative explanations for the racial disparity in school discipline: (1) that socioeconomic status is the reason for the disparity, not racial discrimination (2) that black students have higher rates of misbehavior and (3) that the disparity in discipline between racial groups can just be a matter of statistical artifact, that is, statistical differences in data collection.[146] They conducted the study through data collection in the district of interest and

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145 Skiba, R. J., Shure, L. A., Middelberg, L. V., & Baker, T. L. (n.d.). Reforming School Discipline and Reducing Disproportionality in Suspension and Expulsion. *Handbook of School Violence and School Safety*. doi:10.4324/9780203841372.ch38

146 Ibid.,

closely analyzed the discipline referral forms sent to the office whenever any of the students were sent to the office.[147] The referral forms included information regarding why the student was referred to the office, the action that the administration took, who made the referral, whether action had previously been made on the student, and whether the parent was notified.[148] Through analyses of their data, the authors found that the "significant racial disparities in school discipline remain even after controlling for socioeconomic status…[and] no evidence that racial disparities in school punishment could be explained by higher rates of African American misbehavior."[149]

Distinctly, they found that the disproportionately in suspension for black students was a result of higher rates of office referral, meaning that the disparity in school discipline was rooted from the classroom level.[150] Black students were more likely to be referred to the office by their teachers and for more arbitrary reasons. For example, "white students were significantly more likely to be referred to the office for smoking, leaving without permission, obscene language, and vandalism. [Whereas,] black students were more likely to be referred to the office for disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering."[151] It took concrete violations for teachers to refer white students to the administration, and biased interpretations of the behavior of black children to get them pushed out of the classroom.

This study found that the classroom management of black children relies heavily on negative and punitive discipline.[152] However, at the administrative level, although boys were suspended more than girls, white and black students had almost identical punishments from the office, specifically in the average number of days suspended and the probability of suspension

147 Ibid.,
148 Ibid.,
149 Ibid.,
150 Ibid.,
151 Ibid.,
152 Ibid.,

once they were referred.[153] This significant contribution to the research on racial disparities in school discipline truly calls the American public to critically look at the role and impact of the classroom teacher. The authors note that their findings suggest that cultural discontinuity or misunderstanding, fear and an acceptance of stereotypes of black males, and a lack of teacher training in cultural competency may enable this drastic disparity in office referrals to exist.[154] Referring to the existing literature on this issue, the authors contend that a lack of knowledge and understanding among teachers, especially white teachers, of their black students can leave them unaware and uncomfortable with some cultural and social characteristics demonstrated by their black students.[155] The authors also found that teachers shared to feel least equipped in the area of classroom management, which can lead them to overly rely on authoritarian leadership styles.[156] All of these results cumulate and create an environment that allows teachers to misinterpret and even villainize many of their behaviors. When teachers see their black students through the lens of societal stereotypes that deem them as a threatening they are more likely to be apprehensive, more vigilant of their behaviors, and more forceful than they are towards their students of other races.

A Closer Look- Massachusetts

Nationally, knowledge of and resistance to the school to prison pipeline is increasing. Boston Massachusetts, which historically created its own full-time, police force for schools and employed police solely to bar black students from entering South Boston High School during

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153 Ibid.,

154 Ibid.,

155 Townsend, B. (2000). Disproportionate discipline of African American children and youth: Culturally-responsive strategies for reducing school suspensions and expulsions. *Exceptional Children* 66: 381–391.

156 Calhoun, S. E. (1987). Are our future teachers prepared for the stress that lies ahead? *Clearing House* 6: 178–179.

mandatory desegregation has since in 2010 altered its code of discipline to call for restorative justice practices in schools rather than reliance on suspensions and expulsions.[157] The Obama Administration led efforts to directly tackle the school to prison pipeline such as creating the Supportive School Discipline Initiative that provided schools with alternatives to exclusionary school discipline tactics and directly called out the racial disproportionately of school discipline.[158] This change within the federal government from divisive and discriminatory rhetoric about broken windows policies and the supposed inherent and imposing threat of criminality and predatory nature of black youth in America to a stance to call for equity, protection of students' civil rights, and healing has created a shift in how some districts within Massachusetts particularly, are approaching the issue of school discipline; yet racial disparities remain glaring.

The report *Suspended Education in Massachusetts* by The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at The Civil Rights Project indicates that for the 2015-2016 school year Massachusetts school children missed approximately 16 days per every 100 enrolled student all due to suspensions.[159] When broken down by race, white students lost on average 10 days per 100 students enrolled and black students lost 34 days per students enrolled.[160] Furthermore, of the 1,853 schools in the Massachusetts state database 21.5% of schools, or 398 schools in Massachusetts had over the average of 16 days lost per every 100 enrolled students, varying

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157 *Bullies in Blue The Origins and Consequences of School Policing*(Rep.). (2017). ACLU.
Kang-Brown, J., Trone, J., Fratello, J., & Daftary-Kapur, T. (n.d.). *A Generation Later: What We've Learned about Zero Tolerance in Schools*(Rep.). The Vera Institute of Justice.

158 U.S. Department of Education, "Supportive School Discipline Initiative Overview," n.d., http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/appendix-3-overview.pdf.

159 Losen, D. J., & Martines, T. E. (2013, April 8). *Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools*(Rep.). Retrieved April 16, 2019, from The Civil Rights Project UCLA website: https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/summary-reports/suspended-education-in-massachusetts-using-days-of-lost-instruction-due-to-suspension-to-evaluate-our-schools/suspended-education-web-corrected-032317.pdf

160 Ibid.,

anywhere from 17 days lost to 200 or more days of educational time lost.[161] The report also finds that the majority, being over 50 percent, of suspensions in Massachusetts was for minor behaviors which rule out all violent, drug or criminal related behaviors.[162] This report, which is the first of its kind to analyze missed instructional time for school children in Massachusetts, serves to demonstrate that the discipline gap is a precursor to the achievement gap and that the overreliance on suspensions and expulsions is lowering the standard of academic achievement in Massachusetts school districts and evidently more so for the state's black students.

The American Civil Liberties Union released a report in Spring 2012 entitled *Arrested Futures: The Criminalization of School Discipline in Massachusetts' Three Largest School Districts*. In this report they studied the school based policing and arrest rates in Boston, Springfield, and Worcester schools. Using data from the 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010 academic years they found that all three of the school districts had many school based arrests for behaviors that did not have to be criminalized and were most often classified legally with "catch-all public order offenses such as "disturbing a lawful assembly.""[163] Of the three districts, Springfield had a significantly higher arrest rate.[164] The authors conclude that this may be due to the fact that Springfield is the only district with armed uniformed police officers posted in some of the schools for the entire day and whom report to the Springfield Police Department.[165] Whereas Boston has unarmed officers in schools employed by Boston Public Schools and permanent officers in Worcester public schools do not have the authority to arrest.[166] Overall, in

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161 Ibid.,

162 Ibid.,

163 Dahlberg, R. L. (2012). *Arrested Futures: The Criminalization of School Discipline in Massachusetts' Three Largest School Districts*(Rep.). New York: American Civil Liberties Union.

164 Ibid.,

165 Ibid.,

166 Ibid.,

all three districts students of color were disproportionately arrested.[167] The disparity was found greatest in the Boston Public Schools district, where black students made up 70% of those arrested for public order offenses and two thirds of all arrests despite only accounting for one third of the Boston district throughout the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years.[168]

In the report by The Civil Rights Project analyzing data from the Worcester school district for the 2009-2010 school year, it was found that black elementary school students had a 10% risk of suspension and black secondary school students had a 46% risk of suspension in the district; white elementary school students had an 8% percent risk and white secondary school students had a 30% risk of suspension.[169] Therefore, the risk of suspension for black students grew by 36 points for black students in Worcester between elementary and secondary school and by 22 points for white students of the same ages.[170]

With much of the school to prison pipeline discourse being relegated to the disparities faced by black boys in schools, the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies and The African American Policy Forum at Columbia Law School released the report *Black Girls Matter: Pushed out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected* to bring the overdue attention and reform to the negative experiences black girls face in schools in regards to the school to prison pipeline. To do so, this report specifically looks at New York City Public Schools and Boston Public Schools disciplinary policies and practices. Based off of the data collection and focus groups that they conducted in both districts, the authors found that black boys and girls in both cities were subjected to larger achievement gaps and harsher forms of discipline than their white

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167 Ibid.,

168 Ibid.,

169 Losen, D. J., & Martines, T. E. (2013, April 8). *Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools*(Rep.). Retrieved April 16, 2019, from The Civil Rights Project UCLA website: https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/out-of-school-and-off-track-the-overuse-of-suspensions-in-american-middle-and-high-schools

170 Ibid.,

counterparts.[171] For discipline rates in Boston for the 2011-2012 school year, black girls made up 28% of enrollment yet 61% of those disciplined, while white girls made up 15% of the enrollment and only 5% of those disciplined.[172] Likewise, black boys comprised of 28% of enrollment in Boston Public Schools and 57% of those disciplined, and white boys as 15% of enrolled students made up only 7% of students disciplined.[173] Alarmingly, black girls in Boston made up about 2 times the enrollment of white girls yet were disciplined in schools at 10 times the rate of white girls in Boston and black boys who didn't even make up 3 times the enrollment of white boys in Boston were disciplined at a rate of 8 times that of white boys in the district.[174] Just as worrying, for the 2011-2012 academic year not one white girl was expelled in Boston while black girls made up 63% of the expulsions that girls faced in Boston that year, and black boys were expelled at a rate of 6x more than white boys in the Boston school district.[175] As for suspensions, black girls in Boston were suspended at a rate of 12 times that of white girls and black boys were suspended at a rate of almost 8 times that of white boys.[176]

A more recent look at the affects of the school to prison pipeline and zero tolerance policies in Boston Public Schools indicates that in the 2014-2015 school year, 10% of black boys were suspended and 32% of black boys were "chronically absent" from school.[177]

As of 2010, Boston Public Schools revised its "code of discipline" which included changing its name to a "code of conduct." Through this change restorative justice practices were indicated as resorts for handling misbehavior in schools rather than suspension and expulsion,

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171 Crenshaw, K. W., Ocen, P., & Nanda, J. (n.d.). *BLACK GIRLS MATTER: PUSHED OUT, OVERPOLICED, AND UNDERPROTECTED*(Rep.).

172 Ibid.,

173 Ibid.,

174 Ibid.,

175 Ibid.,

176 Ibid.,

177 Dismantling the School to Prison Pipeline / BPS Dismantling the School to Prison Pipeline. (n.d.). Retrieved April 16, 2019, from https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/domain/2117

and two years after such changes were made the number of students suspended or expelled decreased from 743 students to 120 students.[178]

The current research on the school to prison pipeline includes the voices of students and the demands of administrators. What is missing from the research on the school to prison pipeline in Massachusetts is the view of Massachusetts' teachers who hold a fundamental role ultimately as the authority figures in schools who can either funnel children through or protect children from the intersection of the classroom and the criminal justice system.

OVERVIEW OF STUDY

My study analyzes teacher perceptions of white and black school-aged children, classroom behavior, zero tolerance policies, and school discipline. More specifically, I look to determine whether teachers perceive the behaviors of black boys, black girls, white boys, and white girls differently by viewing black students as less childlike and hence older, less innocent, and more accountable for their actions, and more deserving of harsh punishment in schools. My study examines how both race and gender together influence teacher perceptions and urges researchers to scrutinize the job of a teacher as critically as they do the administration and the police when thinking about the school to prison pipeline.

Methodology

I conducted this study through a survey method by surveying 115 elementary, secondary, and high school public school teachers in the Greater Boston area. The survey respondents were solicited from the following 15 public school districts: Arlington, Boston, Brookline, Chelsea, Concord, Lexington, Randolph, Malden, Medford, Newton, Somerville, Quincy, Waltham, Watertown, and Wellesley. The survey respondents were recruited by email and surveys were

[178] Kang-Brown, J., Trone, J., Fratello, J., & Daftary-Kapur, T. (n.d.). *A Generation Later: What We've Learned about Zero Tolerance in Schools*(Rep.). The Vera Institute of Justice.

completed online. For the purposes of this study, only public school teachers teaching in the core subject areas of English, math, science, and social studies/the humanities, not including teachers teaching English Language Learners and students with disabilities teachers were surveyed. Of the survey respondents, the majority were white (69.61%), 11.76% were black, 6.86% were Asian and 2.94% were Hispanic or Latino; 8.82% self identified as mixed race, other, or all that apply. As for teaching experience in Boston area schools, 32% of teachers surveyed have worked in Boston area schools for 2-5 years, 25% have 6-10 years of experience, 20% have 11-20 years of experience, and 15% of survey respondents have been teaching in Boston area schools for more than 20 years. Only about 4% of teachers have been working in Boston area schools for only up to a year. 45% of the teachers surveyed teach grades K-5, 23% currently teach grades 6-8, and 29% teach high school- grades 9-12.

Respondents completed a 24-question survey of both multiple choice and short answer questions. The respondents were not explicitly informed about the survey's purpose; rather they were informed that it was a survey about teacher experiences and were compensated with a value of $10 following completion of the survey. Each respondent was randomly assigned a survey which included 1 of 4 vignettes either depicting a black girl, white girl, black boy, or white boy student enacting the exact same scenario at school and were asked the exact same questions about their opinions on their given scenario. This method allowed for analyses specifically of both race and gender differences. The differences in racial cues between the four vignettes were included by the use of stereotypical racial names. The four students in the vignettes were Lakeisha (black girl), Emily (white girl), Jamal (black boy), and Jake (white boy); all other information in the vignette was controlled. The vignette was included as followed:

> **I'd like to learn more about how teachers think certain situations should be handled. Please take a moment to read the following vignette.**

> Today [student name ('s)] first class at school is English. On this day in English class during an interaction with another student [student name] crumpled up and threw a piece of paper at her/his classmate and also refused to participate in the lesson. After an attempt to get [student name] to engage with the lesson, her/his teacher called the school resource officer to bring [student name] to the principal's office. [Student name] received a 1-day suspension.

The survey was also prefaced by open-ended questions asking teachers how they like working at their schools and if they feel as though teachers have input in the ways decisions are made in their schools. Following the vignette, participants responded to a seven-point scale that both asked how appropriate the punishment was and how appropriate the teacher's response was (1) being "very appropriate" (2) "appropriate" (3) "slightly appropriate (4) "neutral" (5) "slightly inappropriate (6) "inappropriate and (7) "very inappropriate. Secondly, after the vignette the survey asked respondents to indicate how old they perceived the child in the vignette to be by choosing from 1 of 6 age brackets (0-4) (5-9) (10-13) (14-17) (18-21) and (22-25) to test for differences that would indicate the presence of adultification and/or reliance on stereotypes. The vignette also followed with an open-ended question asking why the teacher felt what they indicated on the scale as well as open-ended questions and multiple-choice questions intended to garner opinions on and knowledge of zero tolerance policies their perceptions of school disciplinary methods both at their schools and nationwide, and to collect data on discipline via suspension and expulsion in their schools and more generally.

Results

I used Stata statistical software to analyze the results of my survey. Stata allowed me to compare and obtain frequencies and percentages of different demographic information regarding the teachers, produce difference of means tests, and perform significance testing to establish

whether empirical differences in the rating of punishment appropriateness, teacher response appropriateness, and perceived age of students existed among the student who is a black girl, black boy, white girl, and white boy.

Interestingly, the majority of teachers surveyed (50.47%) believe that teachers have input in the way decisions are made in their schools. Yet following completion of the vignette, on average teachers said "no" when asked if they feel as though teachers have enough input in their school's disciplinary policies.

APPROPRIATENESS DATA: Punishment

For the appropriateness of the punishment of a 1-day suspension for the behaviors exhibited in the vignette Jamal received an average rating of 6.07 (6 "inappropriate") Jake: 6.08 (6 "inappropriate") Lakeisha: 5.7 (6 "inappropriate") and Emily: 6.12 (6 "inappropriate").

Through conducting a t test, I first compare the mean ratings for the appropriateness of the punishment when given to Jamal to the appropriateness of the punishment when given to Jake, Lakeisha, and Emily. When comparing with Jake the computed p value of .9834 at the alpha level of .05 suggests that we fail to reject the null hypothesis that the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the punishment given to Jamal is equal to that given to Jake. Therefore, there is no evidence from this survey sample that the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the punishment for Jamal is different than the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the punishment for Jake. Likewise, I failed to reject the null hypothesis that the mean scale rating between Jamal and Lakeisha (p value= .2994) and Jamal and Emily (p value= .8584) were equal as well. In comparing the mean ratings for the appropriateness of the punishment when given to Jake to Lakeisha (p value= .3121) and Emily, (p value= .8826) at the alpha level of .05 suggests that we fail to reject the null hypothesis that the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the

punishment given to Jake is equal to that given to either Lakeisha or Emily. Therefore, there is no evidence from this survey sample that the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the punishment for Jake is different than the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the punishment for Lakeisha or Emily. Lastly, comparing the mean ratings for the appropriateness of the punishment when given to Lakeisha and to Emily I computed a p value of .2681, which at the alpha level of .05 suggests that we fail to reject the null hypothesis that the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the punishment given to Lakeisha is equal to that given to Emily. Therefore, there is no evidence from this survey sample that the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the punishment for Lakeisha is different than the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the punishment for Emily.

APPROPRIATENESS DATA: Teacher Response

Respondents were then asked to rate on a seven point scale how appropriate they believed the teacher's response was. The Jamal vignette received an average rating of 5.18 (5 "slightly inappropriate") Jake: 5.34 (5 "slightly inappropriate") Lakeisha: 4.63 (5 "slightly inappropriate") and Emily: 5.28 (5 "slightly inappropriate")

Through conducting a t test, I first compare the mean ratings for the appropriateness of the teacher's response when given to Jamal to the appropriateness of the teacher's response when given to Jake, Lakeisha, and Emily. When comparing with Jake the computed p value of .6938 at the alpha level of .05 suggests that we fail to reject the null hypothesis that the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the punishment given to Jamal is equal to that given to Jake. Therefore, there is no evidence from this survey sample that the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the teacher's response for Jamal is different than the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the teacher's response for Jake. Similarly, I failed to reject the null

hypothesis that the mean scale rating between Jamal and Lakeisha (p value= .2158) and Jamal and Emily (p value= .8121) were equal as well. In comparing the mean ratings for the appropriateness of the teacher's response when given to Jake and to Lakeisha (p value= .1393) and Emily, (p value= .8874) at the alpha level of .05 suggests that we fail to reject the null hypothesis that the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the teacher's response towards Jake is equal to that towards either Lakeisha or Emily. Therefore, there is no evidence from this survey sample that the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the teacher's response for Jake's behavior is different than the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the teacher's response for Lakeisha or Emily. Lastly, comparing the mean ratings for the appropriateness of the teacher's response when given to Lakeisha and to Emily I computed a p value of .1797, which at the alpha level of .05 suggests that we fail to reject the null hypothesis that the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the teacher's response towards Lakeisha is equal to that given to Emily. Therefore, there is no evidence from this survey sample that the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the teacher's response towards Lakeisha is different than the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the teacher's response towards Emily.

AGE DATA: Adultification

Following the vignette survey respondents were asked to indicate how old they perceived the child in the vignette to be by choosing from 1 of 6 age brackets (0-4) (5-9) (10-13) (14-17) (18-21) and (22-25). 44% respondents said Jamal was 14-17 years old, 20% respondents said Jake was 14-17 years, 41% said Lakeisha was 14-17 years old, and 20% said Emily was 14-17 years old. On the other end of the spectrum, 15% said Jamal was 5-9 years old, 24% said Jake was 5-9 years old, 7% said Lakeisha was 5-9 years old, and 12% said Emily was 5-9 years old. All students (Jake, Lakeisha, and Emily) but Jamal had majority of their votes go towards the

age range of 10-13 years old. Both Jamal and Lakeisha had over 40% of respondents who thought they were 14-17 years old, whereas Jake and Emily both had only 20% of respondents assume they were within that age bracket.

TEACHER DATA: Zero Tolerance, School Discipline

The majority of survey respondents rated their own knowledge of zero tolerance school discipline policies as "moderate" followed by 31% of respondents rating their knowledge as "low" when given the options of "high" "moderate" "low" and "none." A majority, 77% of respondents, indicated that they do not believe school discipline is administered equitably among students of different racial groups nationwide and a majority, 63% of respondents stated that they do believe that school discipline is administered equitably among students of different racial groups at their respective schools. 13% of respondents perceive school disciplinary methods at their school as "poor," 38% believe their school disciplinary methods at their school to be "fair" and 37% reported they are "good." Only 11% of teachers surveyed expressed that school disciplinary methods at their schools are "very good" and less than 1% said "excellent."

SCHOOL DATA: Racial Demographics

When describing the racial makeup of their schools, 36% of the respondents stated that the their classroom is made up of majority white students, and 21% have a majority of black students in their classroom, with 43% stating "other." In describing the racial makeup of the overall student body, 37% of the respondents expressed that their school's student body is majority white, 24% said majority black student bodies, and 39% said "other." Lastly, when reporting about the racial makeup of the teachers/faculty/staff at their schools a majority of respondents 77% said their school's teachers/faculty/staff are majority white and less than 2% said their schools teachers/faculty/staff are majority black.

DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

For all students, the teachers surveyed expressed that the punishment and teacher response was "inappropriate" and "slightly inappropriate" respectively and what the teacher needed was to build better relationships with their student and to talk with their student to find out the root causes of their outburst rather than relying on suspensions to remove them from the classroom.

Although there were no significant differences in the average ratings for the appropriateness of the punishment given and teacher response across the four students, the teachers surveyed did express different concerns when analyzing the four student's identical behavior. For instance, Lakeisha was the only student to receive a rating of "very appropriate" for both the punishment and the teacher's response. Additionally, when speaking about Lakeisha a teacher asked if Lakeisha was *"special ED or has special needs"* another stated that *"you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make her drink,"* and another respondent expressed that *"if L[akeisha] knew that the consequences of this type of behavior would result in the school resource teacher removing her from class and reporting to principal's office and a suspension, then the actions are not inappropriate."* The occurrence of respondents probing at personal causes and culpability within the child did not appear elsewhere in the survey aside from respondents who were assigned to Lakeisha's vignette. Additionally, Jamal's behavior was interpreted as "*a temper tantrum*" a suggestion was given to "*call the administrator*" another respondent asked if Jamal is a "*repeat offender.*" Meanwhile Jake's behavior was interpreted as "*kids do[ing] silly things all the time*" and Jake "*just having a bad day*" and suggesting that the teacher does not send him to the principal, and instead talks to him. Here, in Jake's vignette more of a "kids will be kids" mentality was present. Similarly to Jake, Emily's behaviors were not

questioned and a majority of the critique was positioned against the teacher, stating that the teacher was "*extreme*, "*overreacted*," or "*should have given Emily space*."

It is clear that although teachers were able to qualify the scenarios as involving an inappropriate use of discipline and teacher discretion, when given the space to explain, teachers demonstrated the tendency to question and probe at the behaviors of the black children more so, while the white children were given more of a benefit of the doubt, and the teachers became the main source of concern and criticism. Asking whether a student has "special needs" or is "a repeat offender" is substantially distinct from and more harmful than assuming a student is being "silly" or "needs space." The inclination to resort towards special education and criminalized rhetoric for black children, while dismissing white children's behaviors as common and childlike is not an isolated phenomena by teachers in the classroom.

However across all students, participants viewed black boys, through "Jamal" as older than white boys, white girls, and black girls. With the majority of respondents indicating that they believed all of the students Jake, Lakeisha, and Emily with the exception of Jamal to be between the ages of 10-13 this calls me as the researcher to question what creates this discrepancy. With all aspects of the classroom scenario held constant, except for the variable student names, this distinction may be a potential indicator of the presence of adultification or a heuristic that consciously or subconsciously prompts individuals to view black children, specifically black boys, as older due to stereotyping and repeated societal messages. The evidence that both Lakeisha and Jamal had over 40% of respondents think they were 14-17 years old while only 20% of respondents believed Jake and Emily were between ages 14-17 shows potential for the adultification of black children by teachers when contextualizing behaviors in the school setting. Although this did not translate to a statistically significant difference in the

rating scale in the appropriateness of the teacher's response and punishment administered, this finding still shows evidence of teachers viewing black children as older than their peers in equivalent scenarios.

In following pursuit of this research question, the inclusion of an additional question in the vignette scale which more directly asks for the respondent's personal view of the child, rather than through the lens of another teacher's actions may help to correlate the fact that respondents see the black children as older than the white children with the tendency to rate the harsh punishment and teacher response as more appropriate for the black children more so than for the white children. Potentially, asking the survey respondents "how responsible is [student name] for the outcome of the situation" or "how responsible is [student name] for their behavior" would have solicited ratings that bridge the adultification of black children to the perceived culpability and deservingness of their actions and punishment. In retrospection, the finding that the respondents see black children as older than the white children yet did not tend to rate the harsh punishment and teacher response as more appropriate for black children than for white children may be a result due to question framing. It is possible that, through the vignette scale, solely asking teachers to critique other teachers could have contributed to less variability among the ratings for the harsh punishment and teacher response, because it gave space for the survey respondents to critique teachers against the proper way they know situations should be handled, rather than more fully gauging how they instinctively view the child. Additionally, the small survey sample size of 115 respondents allows for less variability in responses.

Much of the recommendations for teachers to minimize the discipline gap are for teachers to partake in increased training for cultural competency for working with diverse groups of students. In the same vain, a respondent in my survey expressed that *"I think that many teachers*

and administrators are not aware of their biases, which can contribute to issues of inequity in discipline." My research demonstrates that although teachers express disdain for zero tolerance policies, results suggest that the teachers in Massachusetts sampled have an overall low understanding of zero tolerance policies themselves. Teachers surveyed either work in schools where discipline is arbitrary and out of their control or in schools where new "rubrics" and "pbis" (positive behavioral interventions and supports) have been recently implemented. For the protection of school children it is imperative that educators are educated on the policies funded by the federal government and supported by school districts. From my sample the majority of teachers shared that they are not made aware of the discipline policies enacted by school administrators and do not have input in developing them. A majority of teachers also expressed that they do not get informed on how and which students are being punitively disciplined. They commonly referred to a lack of data being readily provided to them. A teacher from the survey explicitly stated that they "*would love to see a state law mandating districts to regularly track and report this data to teachers and the public."* Without such knowledge or a role in the creation of discipline policies, teachers are blindly sending students out of the classroom and into territory where they are often unaware of the grave repercussions, that students, disproportionately black students, are vulnerable to facing. This can also allow teachers to develop misguided views on the ways in which their schools are administering discipline, which can lead them to be less critical of which students they tend to remove from the classroom.

Also critically, those teaching America's children are majority white regardless of the racial makeup of their classrooms and student bodies. Racial bias and cultural competency trainings cannot continue to be seen as the foremost viable option to strengthening relationships between teachers and an increasingly diverse public school student demographic nationwide. As

Paris and Alim write, "the need to reposition students of color in the space of normality in our teacher education programs is also critical. We cannot keep admitting teacher candidates who see students of color… as defective and whose major need is to become some version of White, middle-class students. We cannot continue to run teacher education programs that create fear and trepidation in the minds of teacher candidates about the students for whom they have responsibility."[179] Increasing diversity among those who are put through teacher education programs and recruiting more teachers of color as well as administrators of color is often overshadowed in the possibility of repairing relationships between America's teachers and students in the face of the school to prison pipeline.

Even among teachers that stated that they do believe their school administers discipline equitably among all students some still expressed evidence of possible racial bias or lack of cultural competency: "*I know we are hyper aware of not giving white kids privileges and treating students of color differently at the discipline level. I think in the hallways and in casual moments, the black kids are watched more closely but I don't consider that to be discipline."* Another respondent stated, *"we recently had a white student say the n word and on a separate occasion a student of color said it and they were given the same punishment."* And also, *"we have so few white students. I don't think students of color are unfairly targeted at our school. However, I do think our discipline policies are unclear. This makes consequences feel more random. I think this is bad for all students and for students of color."* As for teachers who responded that they do not think their school administers discipline equitably among students of different racial groups, many of their concerns were in line with the nationwide research on the school to prison pipeline. They stated that, *"they* [the school] *punish students of color very harshly"* and that *"I*

[179] Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2017). Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world. New York: Teachers College Press.

still find that students of color are more likely to miss class due to disciplinary action than white students." "It feels like sometimes our students of color are given less chances." "I believe bias and prejudice slip into the process. White students tend to have more allies who can fight for them. Some of our immigrant students and minority students do not always have these same resources when disciplinary issues come up." And lastly that, *"students of color are more likely to be put on an IEP for behavioral issues than white students. While this is not direct discipline, it is sending the message that they are disabled and our white students are not."* Within schools in the Greater Boston Area black children are being watched more closely by their teachers, disciplined, done a disservice by missed educational time, and referred to special education at rates surpassing those of their white counterparts.

Through analyzing open-ended responses, it was found that none of the teachers surveyed questioned the presence of School Resource Officers in schools. Also, the majority of responses were critical of the use of suspension more so than the usage of a School Resource Officer. As research shows the presence of law enforcement stationed in schools increases youth arrest and suspension rates in schools as well as dampens the overall school environment and reduces the feelings of safety for many children. Therefore, I believe it is not just the use of or reliance on School Resource Officers that should be questioned, but their very existence, in efforts to disrupt the intersection between the educational and the criminal justice systems that is criminalizing America's black youth.

The discrepancy between what constitutes a suspension in majority white schools vs. majority black schools was stark in my data. In schools with majority white student bodies the most common offense for suspension was vaping and other forms of drugs, alcohol or violence. No unclear violations were mentioned as cause for suspension or expulsion in these schools.

However, in schools and classrooms with a majority non-white student body, along with drugs and violence, subjective, arbitrary, and non-violent behaviors were mentioned to be reasons for suspension or expulsion such as “cursing”, “aggressive language,” “throwing things,” “sexualized behavior,” “disruption,” “skipping class,” “verbal altercations with teachers,” “play fighting,” and “disrespectful behavior.” Simply put, although teachers recognize how some of their schools disciplinary policies or lack thereof are rather arbitrary, they did not seem cognizant of the subjective and arbitrary nature of much of the “offenses” that teachers are disproportionately calling black students out for and the dangers that this has potential to ensue when met with such arbitrary, discriminatory, non-discretionary, and criminalizing discipline policies. As the research has proven, this bias in what constitutes punishment between black and white students allows for behaviors such as “play fighting and “aggressive language” to be misconstrued as public order offenses and black children become delinquents and their childhood behaviors are deemed as deserving of criminal charges.

CONCLUSION

The proclamation that America’s public schools should be a site where black children are fully encouraged to have optimal learning opportunity, develop through childhood, and process their emotions, thoughts, and decisions, as well as are able to be educated by teachers who represent and understand them and their needs should not be an utopian vision. The school building should not be yet another site of the hyper surveillance and policing of black youth. This study calls on all of those working in schools, most especially teachers, to analyze the ways in which they may contribute to this culture of over monitoring, misinterpreting, and criminalizing black school children. So long as research on the school to prison pipeline

continues to regard law enforcement as the sole perpetrators deserving of this type of scrutiny, the school to prison pipeline cannot be addressed and dismantled in its entirety.

The results of this study begin to demonstrate that black boys are indeed viewed as older than their counterparts, and black children are vulnerable to more subjective and arbitrary punishment in schools, are watched more closely by their teachers, and are evaluated differently than their white counterparts. Furthermore, teachers, as the ones who spend the majority of the school day in close contact with students, are substantially unaware of their school's disciplinary procedures and patterns, and are rather uninvolved in the decision-making regarding how students and which students are administered suspensions and expulsions in their schools. Decades of policies and practices enacted by the federal government and school districts around the country have fundamentally changed the ways in which schools function and operate under the motives and needs of the criminal justice system.

A more comprehensive study on teacher perceptions and the adultification of black youth by schoolteachers is necessary. Yet understanding the findings and implications of this study, lends its readers to think about whether they fully view black children not only through the lens of childhood but more fundamentally, through the lens of humanity. The discrimination and lack of cultural understanding evident through the research on the school to prison pipeline, school discipline, adultification, and dehumanization poses a huge detriment to the educational potential and opportunity of all schoolchildren. Teachers are quite often the first adults who children come into contact with outside of the home setting. Confronting and internalizing that teachers are not exempt from racial biases, along with generating public data and discourse on how this in and of itself enables disproportionate referrals to punitive alternatives beyond the classroom are crucial steps in understanding and addressing how our nation has reached a point in which the

adultification of black children contributes to the fact that across suspension, referral to law enforcement, expulsion, corporal punishment, and school-related arrests, all school types, and differing poverty levels of schools and its students, black children beginning in preschool unwillingly become the undeserved and disproportionate victims of harsh and punitive disciplinary school policies. [180]

[180] *Discipline Disparities for Black Students, Boys, and Students with Disabilities*(Rep.). (2018, March). Retrieved https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/690828.pdf Advancement Project, Education on Lockdown: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track (Mar. 2005)

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