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Bullying and Zero-Tolerance Policies: The School to Prison Pipeline

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Abstract: The centrality of zero-tolerance policies as a component of anti-bullying strategies is the focus of this paper. A review of the literature of social justice advocates, journalists, and scholars reveals that zero-tolerance policies tend to push students out of public schools into the criminal justice system in a pattern of institutional racism. This phenomenon has come to be labeled the "school to prison pipeline." Interviews with teachers and administrators reveal that they see no alternative to their implementation of zero-tolerance policies, because they believe that violent behaviors manifested by racial minority students are grounded in cultural norms beyond the control of public educators. The authors conclude that the "school to prison pipeline" can only be ameliorated by a program of radical reform.

Keywords: bullying, zero tolerance, institutional racism

Introduction

Our nation's model of democracy has often been proclaimed as the moral authority for our foreign policy. As the height of the Cold War coincided with incipient phases of our Civil Rights movement, some African American leaders challenged the credibility of this proposition. In a document entitled "We Charge Genocide," prepared for presentation at the United Nations, William Patterson (1970) explicated the centrality of institutional racism in U.S. society. During the same historical epoch, Paul Robeson's stellar career as an actor/singer was undermined by repercussions in response to his speaking in international forums about the racist abuse of African Americans (Foner, 1978).

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The precedent of Barack Obama being elected as our nation's first African American president has prompted some pundits to proclaim that we have entered a new historical epoch, which they have labeled as a "post racial society." As they did in the 1950s, social justice activists such as the Southern Poverty Law Center (2014) and the American Civil Liberties Union (2014) have called such dubious claims into question by citing the phenomenon of the "school to prison pipeline." They claim that racist disparities in the implementation of zero-tolerance policies including school suspensions and expulsions contribute to a "pushout" mechanism that exacerbates corresponding racial disparities in our nation's patterns of incarceration constituting a "school to prison pipeline."

Our own previous research (Berlowitz & Jette, 2013) investigated socioeconomic status as a predictor of bullying behavior and administrative policies and practices in response to it. This paper addresses the proposition that the emphasis on zero-tolerance policies as an administrative response to bullying is implemented in a pattern of institutional racism that could serve as a component of the "school to prison pipeline" phenomenon.

Review of the literature

School to prison pipeline

In a comprehensive study of the "school to prison pipeline" phenomenon, Kim, Losan, and Hewitt (2010) emphasize three critical components:

1. "Zero-Tolerance" policies, which include school suspensions and expulsions as well as abandoning juveniles to the criminal justice system for offenses such as truancy and incorrigibility (which would not be deemed offenses in adults), are frequently implemented in a pattern of institutional racism;
2. Dropping out of school is not a spontaneous act of volition, but rather a cumulative process of victimization, which constitutes a "pushout" mechanism;
3. Dropping out of school is a major predictor of incarceration.

There is consensus among social justice organizations, journalists, and academic researchers elaborating upon these major points. Dennis Parker, director of the ACLU Racial Justice Program, supports the fight against the misuse of zero-tolerance policies. The ACLU published an article in 2013 challenging the

public school systems' uses of zero-tolerance policies, which include video segments of conversations with victims of the pushout phenomenon. The article also relays the unfortunate rise in incarceration of African American males who have been expelled as a result of a zero-tolerance policy being implemented in their school system. The article states:

> These (zero tolerance policies) have contributed to the over-criminalization of the classroom, whereby small infractions that in the past would have led to a trip to the principal's office and a sharp warning or detention now become the basis of out-of-school suspension, expulsion, or, increasingly, a trip to the police station. (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014)

According to C.D. Smith (2013)

> It's a pipeline that consumes some students more than others; students of color and disabled students are being suspended, expelled, and sent into the justice system at much higher rates than their white, nondisabled counterparts. Growing criticism of zero-tolerance policies has highlighted the way they ruin lives, burden the justice system and create more work for everyone, with experts like the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) noting that "research [on such policies] indicates that, as implemented, zero tolerance policies are ineffective in the long run and are related to a number of negative consequences, including increased rates of school drop-out and discriminatory application of school discipline practices." (p. 3–4)

In May 2013, The Southern Poverty Law Center published a riveting article on the topic of zero-tolerance policies and the "school to prison pipeline." The article focused on the micro- to macro-level causations that contribute to the overall problem.

> Policies that encourage police presence at schools, harsh tactics including physical restraint, and automatic punishments that result in suspensions and out-of-class time are huge contributors to the pipeline, but the problem is more complex than that. The school-to-prison pipeline starts (or is best avoided) in the classroom. When combined with zero-tolerance policies, a teacher's decision to refer students for punishment can mean they are pushed out of the classroom—and much more likely to be introduced into the criminal justice system. (Rethinkingschools.org, 2013)

Co-director, Judith Browne Dianis of the Advancement Project testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee in December 2012 on the topic of "School to Prison Pipeline." The Advancement Project

> works with communities throughout the country to end the use of school policies that push young people out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Through our nationally acclaimed research and analysis of school discipline data and policies,

> communication strategies, and policy advocacy, we are eliminating the needless exclusion of young people from their schools through the use of suspensions, expulsions, and arrests.

The Advancement Project has been successful in developing a concrete list of goals that would aid in the termination of misappropriated punishments (Dianis, 2012):

1. To document and expose the use of zero-tolerance and other harsh disciplinary policies and the "School-to-Prison Pipeline";
2. To develop and implement school discipline reforms on the local level that will serve as models for other communities;
3. To strengthen the capacity of the youth and parents involved in this work to become engaged citizens and agents of change;
4. To impact the national conversation about this issue in order to facilitate broader reforms.

The publication by Heitzeg (2009) states:

> In the past decade, there has been a growing convergence between schools and legal systems. The school to prison pipeline refers to this growing pattern of tracking students out of educational institutions, primarily via "zero tolerance" policies, and, directly and/or indirectly, into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. The school to prison pipeline has emerged in the larger context of media hysteria over youth violence and the mass incarceration that characterize both the juvenile and adult legal systems. While the school to prison pipeline is facilitated by a number of trends in education, it is most directly attributable to the expansion of zero tolerance policies. These policies have no measureable impact on school safety, but are associated with a number of negative effects, such as increased suspensions and expulsions, elevated dropout rates, and multiple legal issues related to due process that are notably racially disproportionate. A growing critique of these policies has led to calls for reform and alternatives. (Heitzeg, 2009)

Kimberly Hefling (2014) of The Huffington Post writes:

> WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration is urging schools to abandon overly zealous discipline policies that civil rights advocates have long said lead to a school-to-prison pipeline that discriminates against minority students. The wide-ranging series of guidelines issued Wednesday in essence tells schools that they must adhere to the principle of fairness and equity in student discipline or face strong action if they don't. The American Civil Liberties Union called the recommendations "ground-breaking."

The New York Civil Liberties Union contends that

> The School to Prison Pipeline operates directly and indirectly. Schools directly send students into the pipeline through zero tolerance policies that involve the police in minor incidents and often lead to arrests, juvenile detention referrals, and even criminal charges and incarceration. Schools indirectly push students towards the criminal justice

> system by excluding them from school through suspension, expulsion, discouragement and high stakes testing requirements.

Tavis Smiley (2013) of PBS, reports:

> Black and disabled students are disproportionately being labeled as those "bad apples," often for offenses such as talking back to a teacher or schoolyard scuffles. Rather than correcting behavior, zero tolerance policies have seen those students booted from class via suspensions and funneled into the judicial system. If you can get kicked out for any kind of minor misbehavior, it's sending the message that we don't want everybody here.

Elbert H. Aull, of Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, studied the "school to prison to pipeline" in 2012. Aull (2012) cited incidents of zero-tolerance policy abuse across our nation, including arrests of students for infractions such as "passing gas" in class, taking chicken nuggets from students' trays, and turning off student computers as a "joke." Aull found

> the aforementioned incidents reveal a disturbing trend in our nation's public schools: the criminalization of student misbehavior that has accompanied the shift toward "zero tolerance" disciplinary policies over the past two decades. This change is one of many factors feeding the "school to-prison pipeline," a phrase often used to describe the complex, multi-dimensional process that funnels large numbers of minority students from the classroom into the adult prison system. One factor that has strengthened the pipeline's grip on America's young is the spike in the number of youth who land in the juvenile justice system for in-school offenses that, in another era, would have been handled by school officials. This newfound reliance on juvenile court has had a disparate impact on minority youth. Despite the suggestion that these practices violate the constitutional rights of students funneled into the pipeline, courts have been reluctant to interfere with school disciplinary policies without proof of discriminatory intent (p. 181).

The patterns of institutional racism central to the school to prison pipeline phenomenon are exacerbated by the problem of "cultural insensitivity" among classroom teachers. According to Madkins (2011), the critical shortage of Black teachers in general and the particularly acute shortage of Black male teachers in particular contribute to the problem of cultural insensitivity and the substitution of zero-tolerance policies for stricter classroom discipline.

"Pushout Phenomenon"

Research also suggests that punitive measures culminating in suspension and expulsion combine to systematically push students to "drop out" of school. In

their exploration of "the complexity of non-completion," Bradley and Renzulli (2011) develop the construct of the "pushout phenomenon". When this "push-out phenomenon" manifests patterns of institutional racism, then this contributes to the disproportionate incarceration of African American males popularly referred to as the "school to prison pipeline." *S. Sandler of the Justice Matters Institute*, "Turning To Each Other Not On Each Other, How School Communities Prevent Racial Bias in School Discipline" (2000), found that the strongest predictor of school drop out was, in fact, a student history of disciplinary problems. The same study cites that "African American males are more likely to drop out of high school for disciplinary reasons more than any other ethnic or gender group." The American Psychological Association concurred that the research of The Justice Matters Institute was not accidental, and concluded that in some school districts, suspension was "used explicitly as a tool for push out."

In 2006, Christopher B. Swanson conducted research in the state of Texas, which is notorious for punitive action through use of zero-tolerance policies. Swanson found that, "data reflects a spike in disciplinary referrals beginning in 6th grade and continuing through 9th grade. If students are more likely to drop out of school for disciplinary reasons before the age of 16, high referral rates during this time period may be a particular cause for concern." (p. 33–34) The 2006 Comprehensive Annual Report on Texas Public Schools found that Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPs) in which students are removed from the school population were exposing drop out rates five times higher than those of mainstream programs.

The Office of Education Ombudsman (OEO) in Washington State claims that the number two complaint received at their agency was from parents regarding zero-tolerance punishments and public school students. The Office of Education frequently intervenes on individual cases of zero-tolerance misuse. According to the data collected by OEO, suspensions and expulsions rose by 13% in the 2011–2012 school year. The largest complaint was from parents claiming that schools used zero-tolerance policies arbitrarily and had no other educational services available for students in these situations. As a result, 35,000 public school students, 33% of which were African American, did not graduate from high school during the 2011–2012 academic year (2013).

There is much debate regarding how to address bullying in schools, and how institutions have adopted zero-tolerance policies as a response. Per Borgwald and Theixos (2013), research suggests that these policies are a knee-jerk reaction and are punitive in their approach. Zero-tolerance policies are "mechanisms of expulsion" and not an effective approach in reducing

bullying behavior and school violence. Borgwald and Theixos (2013) posit that zero-tolerance policies are "not only ineffective, but are harmful, unjust and stigmatizing" (p. 149).

Despite these criticisms, legislation is still on the rise that supports zero-tolerance policies in schools as a mechanism to address bullying. Carroll and Connaughton (2010) suggest that having strict zero-tolerance anti-bullying and harassment policies is necessary for risk management. Bullying and other forms of harassment under Title IX are actionable, and therefore, leave institutions open to litigation. Having these policies mitigates the threat of lawsuits.

Cultural insensitivity

Townsend (2000) suggests that

> ...many teachers, especially white teachers, may be unfamiliar and even uncomfortable with the more active and boisterous style of interaction that characterizes African American males. Fear may play a role in contributing to over-referral. Teachers who are prone to accepting stereotypes of adolescent African-American males as threatening or dangerous may react more quickly to relatively minor threats to authority, especially if such fear is paired with a misunderstanding of cultural norms of social interaction.

Sheets (1996) interviewed students and teachers in an urban high school setting about their perceptions of discipline as it pertained to the subject of racial discrimination. White students perceived sources of racial discrimination in discipline as "unintentional" or "unconscious" while students of color saw discipline strategies as "conscious" and "deliberate." Students of color argued that teachers often applied classroom rules and guidelines arbitrarily to exercise control or as a removal strategy. Specifically, black students felt that contextual variables, such as lack of respect, differences in communication styles, and disinterest on the part of teachers, were commonly used as reasons for removal.

Unlike the simplicity of zero-tolerance and other punitive measures, alternatives require a resolution of the cultural insensitivity that undermines the educational experience of minority student populations. Other research consistently indicates that schools with minority students are more likely to enforce more strictly harsher, zero-tolerance policies. (Fitzgerald-Fowler, 2007) Similar studies found that while these zero-tolerance policies were being enforced at a more intense and frequent rate, therefore increasing the

proportion of African American suspensions and expulsions. A closer look found that the disproportion was not higher due to increased severity of misbehaviors like disruptions and violence, rather the over-usage of the policy (Fitzgerald-Fowler, 2007).

Ideological biases dominant in public education

One of the dominant themes of education policymakers is the directive to remain "objective" and thereby avoid controversy. The implementation of this directive distorts the knowledge base by minimizing or even eliminating materials dealing with topics such as racism, ethnic bias, and social justice.

The most recent microcosm of this phenomenon is the banning of books in Tucson, Arizona's educational system. The book list ranged from current authors like Mumia Abu Jamal, Luis Urrea, and Jerome Herbert Skolnick to the seminal works of Paulo Freire and Howard Zinn to the classics of William Shakespeare. This body of work was even painted with the neo-McCarthyite brush strokes of "unsuitable," inflammatory," and "Marxist." Such delimitations on the knowledge base inhibit constructive alternatives to zero tolerance, which require exploring many of the basic causes of behavioral problems.

Pilot study

The research studies and reports from activist organizations cited thus far amply support the thesis of this paper. What follows is original research completed by one of the authors, Dr. Kelli Jette, as a pilot study. The narratives provided are based upon interviews with teachers and administrators.

Methodology

Data collection

Data sources included individual interviews conducted at the end of the 2011–2012 school year. Each source was interviewed at a place of his or her choice, and all interviews were free of distraction, meaning that no students were present. The initial questions were presented at the onset of the interview. Teachers and administrators were told that their discourse would be confidential

and that there would be no identifying information. All teacher meetings were audio-taped and/or computer-recorded for later transcription. Interviews were based on the aforementioned question set; however, interviewees often deviated from these questions. Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes to an hour.

Method of analysis

The interviews were coded using two methods. First, the text segments were coded as addressing one or more factors involving race, class, or gender issues as they pertained to bullying behaviors and trends in their classroom or school. Second, the text was analyzed using an open-code scheme which indicated segments of text that were coded in regards to changing perspectives: definition, current regulations, and potential ideas for improvement. This revealed differences in perspectives as to how teachers define bullying when taking into consideration race, class, and gender differences. Equally informative was the notion that the chronic bullying issues in the school settings could be mitigated or prevented. The comparison of current rules and continued misbehaviors provided a segue into teacher perspectives regarding missing elements in current anti-bullying trends.

Delimitations

This study focused primarily on interviews conducted with teachers and administrators who implement the policies. Parents and students were not interviewed, although teachers and administrators referenced them in comments. Although disability is mentioned in some of the literature, the race and socioeconomic status of the students were the demographic focus of the study. Participants in this study were from schools located in a city in the Midwestern region of the United States. Furthermore, convenience sampling was utilized; therefore claims of generalizability are limited.

Interview questions

Questions administered to teachers and administrators:

1. Please define bullying as it pertains to you.
2. What are your personal thoughts regarding bullying?
3. What attempts do you make to thwart or alleviate bullying behaviors?

4. What effects have you witnessed as a result of bullying? Psychologically? Physically? Socially? Academically?

Sampling

The participants of this study were certified teachers and principals serving in the school and classroom for no less than six and as many as 40 years. The administrators were responsible for monitoring and reporting bullying incidents to the school board and superintendent. They were also enforcers of school-wide rules based on the district guidelines. Teachers maintain the rules specified in the individual school handbook, which were determined by the administrators, as well as designing micro-level classroom climate techniques to manage bullying behaviors among students they oversee.

SCHOOL	Top Academy	AAA Elementary	Arvada Elementary
ETHNICITY	White – 1% Black – 97% Hispanic - < 1%	White-62% Black-37% Hispanic-<1%	White -99% Black -0% Hispanic -<1% Asian/Pacific Islander -<1%
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	79%	79%	51%

Figure 1: Sample.

Participants of this study included three administrators and three teachers from each of the schools described in Figure 1.

Participants

What follows is a small but representative sample of interviewees. The names of those who were interviewed have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Principal: Mr. Rollins, AAA Elementary, has been a principal at this urban, diverse school for twelve years. The school serves a population ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade. It has a majority of white, Appalachian immigrants with a large population of African Americans and Guatemalans. The school has community supports that maintain safety and also contribute to the general welfare of the student body. Mr. Rollins was quick to recognize that the behavior problems are severe in his school; he places blame on family and poverty issues. This is a severely impoverished school.

Teacher: Mrs. Haburn, AAA Elementary, has been an elementary and middle school teacher for nine years and has an intervention specialist license as well. She instructs a diverse classroom, with several children on an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Her concerns focused on an increase in female violence at this school. She supports the zero tolerance policy, which was strictly enforced at the school. This is a severely impoverished school located on the west side of the city.

Principal: Mr. Fields has been principal and founder of the charter school, Top Academy, for eleven years. He is proud to have earned the "Excellence in Academics" award for four years. The population is diverse with African American students in the majority. This school attracts the brightest students through testing and pre-acceptance interviews. The emphasis is on parental involvement and community outreach. This is an urban school located north of downtown Cincinnati with a low SES student population.

Significance of study

The richness of data and the comparative nature of the research design will create the possibility for further research agendas. Given the current emphasis on zero tolerance as a response to bullying, its pattern of institutional racism, and its implications for the "school to prison pipeline," this research merits the urgent attention of policymakers. The deconstruction of definition, perception, and response is a fundamental and necessary element in proper design of future anti-bullying campaigns.

Results

Teachers surmised that alternative punishments tended to be "worked out" for white, middle-class students in an attempt to appease anxious parents' concerns about high school records and collegiate applications. On the other hand, minority students that were considered behaviorally problematic were eliminated from the student population by use of strict adherence to zero-tolerance policies.

Lower income schools with higher proportions of Black Students are most likely to implement and strictly enforce the zero-tolerance policy, thus expelling

students for instances of violence, or threats thereof. While upper socio-economic schools do include a zero-tolerance policy, either embedded or strategically listed in the school handbook, rarely did the administrators or teachers recall enforcing full-out expulsion as the rule implies. On the other hand, administrators and teachers at the lower income school were commended for upholding the literal definition of the "zero-tolerance" policy, thus increasing the proportion of Black students expelled from public schools. Teachers felt that the strict application of policy was necessary for safety. They also complained about disrespectful attitudes and comments from the students as justification for zero tolerance. Ultimately, the intent of the "zero-tolerance" policy, which was to protect and prevent violence, was actually supporting an undercurrent of institutional racism.

Further interviews revealed the details of disparities in punitive measures among students of poverty when compared with students of non-poverty. Mr. Rollins and Mrs. Haburn, at a lower SES school, reported a decline in malicious and violent bullying. However, these incidences still remained at a higher level than that of the upper SES counterparts. Mr. Rollins and Mrs. Haburn, though interviewed separately, both attributed the decline of violence to an initiative taken throughout the school to promote diversity acceptance issues and a zero-tolerance violence policy.

One basis of the zero-tolerance policy that contributed to its success is that a student found guilty of physical aggression/bullying behaviors will be issued an out-of-school suspension, beginning with three days for the first offense. This poses a significant problem to parents, especially single-parent families that must make considerable adjustments to provide child-care for those days the student will be on home suspension. Payment for child-care services, or a failure to work during those days not only causes economic issues for the household, but also requires parents to address the situation and prevent it from occurring on a regular basis.

Participants stated that cultural and environmental antecedents to bullying behaviors, resulting in suspensions and expulsions, are a key factor exacerbating disproportionate punishments. Because the student population of AAA Elementary consists of 79% economically disadvantaged students, this zero-tolerance policy can prove financially devastating to students' families who must contend with this policy. Although the school is of high poverty demographics, the population reflects an urban, extremely diverse atmosphere. The neighborhood consists of black, white, Hispanic, and Guatemalan populations that are essentially mirrored in the population of the school. Mr. Rollins and Mrs. Haburn place blame on community, or lack thereof, as well as parenting techniques as a reason for increasingly overt bullying behaviors. They reason

that a lack of supervision, due to the breakdown of the nuclear family and lack of resources, as the number one factor for greater violence in the community and school. Mr. Rollins notes,

> The number one aid in stopping violence is the parents. It is supervision… kids that run wild in their neighborhoods are typically not up to anything good.

Single parents forced to work, yet unable to pay for adequate child care services, often leave large numbers of children/minors in the care of elderly relatives that are not capable of meeting the social, mental, or academic needs of school age children. A number of students are left in the care of relatives due to the incarceration of parent(s), or to mandated drug/alcohol treatment programs. Another large percentage of students are placed in foster care due to neglect and/or abuse investigations. Mr. Rollins and Mrs. Haburn also chose to acknowledge this lack of familial cohesiveness as a factor in the elevated violence among community members. Rival gangs and clan disputes that cause community violence then infiltrate the school setting. Mr. Rollins and Mrs. Haburn credit the anti-social behaviors of the adults surrounding the children as the main catalyst for increased violence in their school. They believe that students lack positive models, and thus fail to develop healthy coping skills. This in turn leads to anger, frustration, and physical bullying among the student body. Mrs. Haburn shared:

> I mean read the papers on them: they were in and out of foster care because their parents were convicted for drugs, domestic violence, dispute–drunk driving! The parents just partied all the time and there was no supervision. They caused us to fail our ISTEPS (testing) that year. Those kids were rejected by their own families. A lot of them lived with grandparents that weren't even fit to be raising kids.

Alike in their struggles, Mr. Fields (Top Academy) sounded the same frustrations as teachers at AAA Elementary. Most commonly, Mr. Fields addressed social problems stemming from conspicuous consumption, or the lack thereof, among students. Students were regularly bullied or "beaten up" for issues regarding clothing and appearances–either from owning expensive shoes such like Nikes or DC brand clothing, or for not having stylish clothes and brand name shoes. Children would verbally assault those who were slated as having "nappy" hair, a lack of motherly care/nurture, body odor, or poor oral hygiene. These verbal assaults always escalated into physical attacks. And, Mr. Fields noted, they were repetitious in nature. Once a child is termed "nasty", the title affixes itself not only to that child, but also to the siblings and parents or family. Mr. Fields' school also is demonstrative of a racially and ethnically diverse urban population whose poverty level lingers at 79%. The main issue that Mr. Fields deems as

problematic is lack of basic care at home. The students who are bullied in Top Academy are bullied because of a failure by parents/guardians to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and adequate clothing. In particular, Mr. Fields notes, "*That is elementary Maslow. If we aren't meeting the needs of the students, and I mean the bare necessities, then the learning process is hindered.*"

Mr. Fields cited many examples of students arriving at school hungry, unbathed, and wearing completely inappropriate clothing: for instance, a young girl might wear an old, used "flower girl" dress from a wedding or a provocative outfit obviously commandeered from someone else's closet. These examples establish economic hardships as the number one cause of bullying behaviors in Top Academy. Additionally, these behaviors validate the fact that households that are unable to provide basic needs (for example, clothes, food, medicine, for children) are ultimately unable to provide advanced technology such as computers and cell phones for children's usage. Thus covert bullying behaviors like texting, YouTube, or Facebook messages that the upper SES schools find so problematic, are not seen at SES schools. Rather, the economically less privileged students resort to physical altercations and verbal assaults as means of defense and aggression.

Conclusions

Bullying is a problem that is ubiquitous in our nation's public schools and has taken on a particular sense of urgency because it has been implicated as a factor in many highly publicized school shootings. Fear of litigation has prompted administrators to pursue a simple answer to a complex problem in the form of zero-tolerance policies. There is consensus among social justice organizations, journalists, and academic researchers that the cumulative effects of zero-tolerance policies tend to push students out of school and often into the criminal justice system. This systemic form of structural violence is referred to as the "school to prison pipeline" and tends to be implemented in patterns of institutional racism.

In interviews conducted in the original research component of this paper, teachers and administrators indicated a widespread belief that violent forms of bullying were an intrinsic component of the culture of lower socio-economic Black youth. Interviews also showed that these norms were assumed to be grounded in factors beyond the control of educators: i.e., poverty, and widespread neighborhood violence. Therefore, teachers and administrators were unlikely to explore the efficacy of zero-tolerance policies or possible alternatives.

Implications and policy recommendations

Current reform efforts tend to be grounded in neo-liberal ideology, which emphasizes privatization. The privatization of public schools and prisons leaves the school to prison pipeline intact while possibly exacerbating the problem with an emphasis on profit over the needs of students. The emphasis on "high stakes testing" tends to restrict pedagogical creativity, critical thinking, and curriculum content. It also de-emphasizes needs assessment and issues of resource allocation, and narrowly focuses accountability on classroom teachers.

Recommendations

1. Alternatives to zero-tolerance policies such as peer mediation and conflict resolution programs must become standard elements of public education. These efforts should be supported by incorporating Peace Education components into Teacher Education programs.
2. In order to deal with student needs which go beyond the job description of classroom teachers, community schools must be developed that coordinate medical, psychiatric, counseling, and social work services.
3. The problem of "cultural insensitivity" exacerbated by the shortage of racial minority teachers can only be resolved by reforms in teacher education that strike down barriers such as the Praxis exams and replaces them with programs of aggressive recruitment, retention, and compensatory educational skills development. These programs must include recruitment from the strata referred to by Wilson (2012) as the "truly disadvantaged."
4. Privatization of public schools and "high stakes testing" must be opposed.

Zero-tolerance policies are also reinforced by a static genre of theoretical formulations originally referred to by Ryan (1976) as "victim blaming." These include "culture of poverty" theory as well as psychiatric and even genetic constructs. The "culture of poverty" includes violence, inability to delay gratification, family instability and lack of cohesion, and anti-intellectualism. Hamilton and Armando (2008) elaborate upon "oppositional defiance disorder" which defines defiance of authority as a psychiatric disorder. Violence among youth is also attributed to the phenomenon of the "super predator" which is defined as a genetic disorder (Loury, 2008). Thus, we might conclude that poor and racial minority students are disproportionately impacted by zero-tolerance policies and moved through the school to prison pipeline, because of their counterproductive cultural norms, psychiatric disorders, and even genetic predispositions. These constructs tend to be defined as

the cause of poverty and lack of social mobility rather than consequences of oppression and structural violence.

Ironically, challenges to the nihilism of "victim blaming" theory have originated in the longest wars in our nation's history in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many veterans of these wars have returned tormented by nightmares and fears as well as rage, anti-social behavior, and violence. Since many of them were economic conscripts steered toward the military by a lack of other opportunities for social mobility, it would be very easy to ascribe their problems to the "culture of poverty." However, veterans rights groups have struggled for the government to recognize that many of these veterans are actually victims of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Shakoor and Chalmers (1991) have pointed out that the conditions of ubiquitous violence and fear of violence in our urban underclass neighborhoods might also give rise to behaviors grounded in the PTSD syndrome. Thus, the structural violence of poverty might serve as a better explanation for violence among many of our school children than prevailing explanations grounded in "victim blaming."

Marxist scholars have contributed the intuitive leap to recognize that deviant and self-destructive behavior are often grounded in the structural violence of poverty and underdevelopment. They further make the case that this structural violence originates in colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Examples of this include Walter Rodney (1972) who asserted that "Europe underdeveloped Africa." The Algerian revolutionary and psychiatrist, Frantz Fanon (1965) had presented case studies to demonstrate that French colonialism directly contributed to the major psychiatric problems of Algerians. He was even generous enough to attribute much of the sociopathic behavior of French troops to the structural violence of colonialism.

Paulo Freire (1993) addressed the impact of colonialism in Latin America where he concluded that the psychological impact of "internalized oppression" and the "pedagogy of oppression" needed to be addressed by a "pedagogy of liberation." Manning Marable (2000) surveyed the history of African Americans and concluded that "capitalism underdeveloped Black America" in a form of "internal colonialism." As the theories of "internal colonialism" and "underdevelopment" captured the imagination of U.S. scholars, Freire's work was elaborated in the form of "critical pedagogy."

Bluestone and Harrison (1982) focused upon the psychological impact of economics in a case study of plant closings in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a historical epoch which they labeled as "the deindustrialization of America." They found that plant closings gave rise to dramatic increases in cases of depression, anxiety, violence, psychosomatic illness, divorce, and domestic

abuse. William Julius Wilson (2011) focused upon the racist cutting edge of this epoch to which he attributed the rise of an urban "underclass." He elaborated upon the destructive impact of the "disappearance of work" upon the culture of the "underclass."

Further recommendations

1. Programs for job creation, increased minimum wage, and social "safety nets" reminiscent of the New Deal and War on Poverty must be supported.
2. Educational policy makers should also join the united front composed of trade unions, the Progressive Congressional Caucus, a minority of Republicans, and the Tea Party to oppose the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), which threatens jobs, wages, and workers rights.

Thus Marxist scholars have created an alternative to "victim blaming" theories. They emphasize the impact of economic crisis and under-development as the root causes of deviant and self-destructive behavior. If educational policymakers wish to move beyond zero-tolerance policies and the school to prison pipeline, then they must align themselves with movements struggling for radical social transformation.

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