

RING THE ALARM

Black Girls in the Discourse on the School-to-Prison Pipeline

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Abstract

In this research, I use theories of framing and social construction to investigate how race and gender are featured in national news coverage of the school-to-prison pipeline, and how policies and practices funnel students from school to the criminal justice system. Results indicate that there are three primary narratives surrounding the school-to-prison pipeline. The first is a narrative that harsh disciplinary practices in schools are irrational and negatively impact all students. The second narrative crafts the school-to-prison pipeline as a social problem for all Black students irrespective of gender. The final narrative emphasizes the impact of exclusionary discipline on Black boys. Each of these narratives functions to erase the experiences of Black girls. Ultimately, I argue that we need to take a more intersectional approach to school discipline policies and take into account how Black women and girls are situated within popular and policy discussions.

Keywords: Black Girls, Race, Framing, Social Construction, School Discipline

INTRODUCTION

Black feminist scholars and activists keep ringing the alarm about the inequities between men and women (Collins 2005; Harris-Perry 2011; Haynes 2016; Patton et al., 2016; Wun 2018); they note that in order to adequately address the social and economic conditions of the Black community we have to pay more attention to the well-being of Black girls and women. While Black women's educational gains are often touted as a sign of success and well-being (Patton and Croom, 2017), statistics rarely relay that only 25.2% of Black women complete their degrees within four years; and 43.9% within six years (NCES 2018). Although they experience successes in education and entry-level employment when compared to Black men, Black women are not quickly admitted into positions of power (Dixon and Chambers, 2012). Furthermore, Black women earn less than White women at each educational level (Women's Bureau 2016). Alarmingly, Mariko Chang (2010) found that the median wealth of single Black women in the United States is just \$100. Additionally, Black women consistently deal with assaults on Black

Du Bois Review. 17:1 (2020) 147–163.

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doi:10.1017/S1742058X20000132

motherhood (Roberts 1999), negative portrayals in the media (Collins 2005), the disproportionate impact of domestic violence (Petrosky et al., 2017), and police brutality (Crenshaw et al., 2015a).

In 2019, at least six Black women were killed by or after encounters with police (Washington Post, 2020). Emblazoned in the psyche of many Black Americans are the names and stories of Trayvon Martin, Oscar Grant, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, and George Floyd. However, as many activists and scholars have attested, Black men are not the only ones suffering from police violence and brutality, yet the public is less likely to know the names and stories of the Black women impacted. Kimberlé Crenshaw, legal scholar and co-founder of the African American Policy Forum, has been a valiant voice in stressing the plight of African American girls and the ways that they are diminished in comparison to the spotlights offered to Black boys (Crenshaw 2014). Crenshaw and the #SayHerName campaign remind us that Breonna Taylor, Mya Hall, Rekia Boyd, Miriam Carey, Michelle Cusseaux, Shelly Frey, Kayla Moore, and Sandra Bland have all suffered state-sanctioned violence.

These violent police encounters are mirrored in schools. For example, a 16-year-old girl identified in the media as Shakara was flipped and dragged across a classroom in her seat by a police officer at Spring Valley High School, in South Carolina. She and a classmate, Niya Kenny, who filmed the incident, faced misdemeanor charges for disturbing school (Craven 2015). In acknowledging how state-sanctioned violence crosses institutional boundaries, scholars have employed the phrase school-to-prison pipeline to refer to “policies and practices that systemically push at-risk youth out of mainstream public schools and into the juvenile or criminal justice systems” (Kim 2009/2010, p. 956). Within schools, there is a direct path (arrests and tickets) and indirect path (exclusionary discipline practices such as suspensions and expulsion) to the criminal justice system (Advancement Project 2005).

Much of the discourse on the school-to-prison pipeline is centered around Black boys, and, to a slightly lesser extent, Hispanic boys, despite consistent evidence that Black girls are impacted just as much by exclusionary discipline practices. In a report about the academic success of Black boys, Ivory A. Toldson (2011) found that 59% of Black boys reported being suspended or expelled from school compared to 43% of Hispanic boys, and 26% White boys. He also found that Black girls were about as likely to be suspended as Hispanic boys (also see Fabelo et al., 2011). While boys of all racial and ethnic groups are more likely to be disciplined, the disparities between African American and White girls are far greater than the disparities between male student groups (Crenshaw et al., 2015b). Across the United States, Black girls are disciplined six times as much as White girls (DOE Office of Civil Rights, 2014). Additionally, the rate of growth in suspension rates for Black girls is higher than any other group (Losen and Skiba, 2010; Wallace et al., 2007). Jamila J. Blake and colleagues (2011) found that Black girls were overrepresented in all disciplinary sanctions. In particular, they were twice as likely to receive both in-school and out-of-school suspension compared to other girls. Often these sanctions occur disproportionately for defiance, disruptive behavior, disrespect, and profanity (Annamma et al., 2019; Mendez and Knoff, 2003).

Within the school-to-prison pipeline discourse, there is a hyper-focus on Black boys, which has resulted in interventions at the local, state, and national levels with little thought about how the punitive practices or even the responses to them might impact Black girls (Annamma et al., 2019; Morris 2012). The experiences of young women of color are obscured by academic and policy interests explicitly focused on Black boys (Lopez 2002; Osler et al., 2002). This remains worrisome for several reasons. First, research has shown that negative attitudes towards school and school failure are powerful in predicting the delinquency of girls (Simkins et al., 2004). Second, the single

largest predictor of later arrests among adolescent girls is having been suspended, expelled, or held back during the middle school years (Wald and Losen, 2003). Third, exclusionary discipline is associated with teenage pregnancy (Clark et al., 2003). Finally, girls who leave school early are less able to access work and training than boys (Archer et al., 2007). Given the impact of the media on public opinion and policy, this research seeks to understand how race and gender fit into national media coverage of school discipline. Specifically, I ask: to what extent are Black girls included or excluded from the national print media coverage of the school-to-prison pipeline? In answering this question, I seek to “ring the alarm” and extend the literature on the school-to-prison pipeline by interrogating how the popular discourse and the resultant policies and practices of exclusionary discipline are raced and gendered.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Within the indirect path of the school-to-prison pipeline, exclusionary discipline, meaning suspension and/or expulsions, is generally associated with adverse educational outcomes. These include lagging achievement for students of color, weakened bonds between students and schools, students becoming less invested in school rules and course work and less motivated toward academic achievement, and future involvement in criminal justice system (Arcia 2006; Fabelo et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2010). Despite these negative impacts of exclusionary discipline, the number of school suspensions nearly doubled between 1974 and 1999 (Thomas and Stevenson, 2009) and, by 2002, suspensions become the most common form of school discipline. This is despite mounting evidence that they are not effective (Fenning and Rose, 2007; Skiba and Peterson, 2003).

The statistics on exclusionary discipline reflect a distinct racial and gender pattern. Black students face exclusionary discipline at rates more than double White students (Fabelo et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2011; Toldson 2011). Moreover, within gender groups, 84% of Black males had at least one discretionary violation compared to 59% of White males, and 70% of Black girls had at least one discretionary violation compared to 37% of White girls (Fabelo et al., 2011). While both Black boys and girls are disproportionately impacted by the school-to-prison pipeline, many studies on exclusionary school discipline are not reported with respect to gender, but couch their introduction, conclusion, and implications with respect to the impact that exclusionary discipline has on Black boys (Annamma et al., 2019; Haynes 2016). The work of Monique Morris (2012, 2015) suggests that the lack of an intersectional lens obscures the disciplinary experiences of Black girls. Specifically, while Black males may be subjected to exclusionary discipline as a result of their perceived threat to public safety, Black girls are often disciplined because of their nonconformity to White femininity.

The Erasure of Black Girls

According to Blake and colleagues (2011), the disciplinary experiences of girls are studied routinely in relation to boys, and their experiences rarely mentioned outside of descriptive statistics. For example, Chance W. Lewis and colleagues (2010) examined the discipline patterns for African American boys in a Midwestern school district, yet they describe their study as examining “this school district’s responses to discipline, and disciplinary actions meted out to African American students and the resulting impact on these students’ academic achievement” (p. 8). In this instance, and throughout their study, the authors use “African American” and “African American males” interchangeably, thus erasing the

experiences of Black girls and diminishing the impacts of gender on students' experiences. They go on to tell the readers that in this school district, Black boys comprise 11% of the student population, but make-up nearly 37% of all boys cited for disciplinary action. These statistics are used to justify a further examination of the disciplinary patterns of Black boys.

Former President Barack Obama's My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Initiative, while claiming to be evidenced based, tells an incomplete story. MBK describes the outcomes of Black boys in comparison to White boys. However, these data should only be presented if they have been disaggregated by both race and gender, yet data on girls of color are never included—and rarely, if ever, discussed. MBK's 90-day interim report makes 114 statements about children and youth of color based on these data. Eighty-nine of those statements (78%) are about children and youth of color undifferentiated by gender. However, Black girls face a majority of the same barriers faced by Black boys; albeit the causes may be different (Morris 2012). Heidi Hartmann and colleagues (2015) argue, "By excluding girls and young women of color without making a data-based claim for doing so, the initiative and report seem to rely on widely held stereotypes that minority males face the greatest barriers and have the least opportunities" (p. v). This exclusion could lead to disproportionate allocation of philanthropic and public dollars towards addressing the needs of boys and young men of color while the needs of girls continue to go unmet.

Policing Black Femininity

Louise Archer and colleagues (2007) argue that femininity is seen as compatible with education, and therefore, a male-centered gaze misses the manner in which girls disengage from school. The definition of problematic behaviors has traditionally been constructed around the behavior of boys who, when disengaging, exert their masculinity and maintain a public appearance of being disruptive and not working. On the other hand, young women disengage through behaviors such as missing school or pretending to do work while listening to music (Archer et al., 2007; Osler et al., 2002). In many overcrowded urban schools, feminine traits such as silence and passivity are valued and rewarded (Lopez 2002). This gendered construction of behavior defines girls who disengage from school as anomalies and, therefore, the girls' disengagement was seen as less pressing (Archer et al., 2007).

The construction of femininity is also problematic for Black girls who do not comply with being passive and silent. They must contend with stereotypes that view African American girls as loud and confrontational (Annamma et al., 2019; Fordham 1993; Morris 2007). Failure to conform to race-gender stereotypes may be the cause of the disproportionate discipline of Black girls. Black girls are at a higher risk for disciplinary actions for behaviors such as chewing gum, defiance, dress code violations, and failure to comply with prior discipline (Blake et al., 2011; Smith-Evans et al., 2014). Similarly, Blake and colleagues (2011) found that Black girls were most often cited for defiance, inappropriate dress, profane language, and physical aggression—behaviors that challenge traditional (White) standards of femininity and correspond to stereotypical images of Black women. As a result of this "no-win" scenario, too many Black girls have to participate in identity politics that marginalize them or place them into polarizing categories—such as "good" or "ghetto" (Jones 2010). These polarizing categories and the ways that they have to navigate them exacerbate stereotypes about Black femininity and place Black girls at risk of being criminalized for not conforming to White middle-class ideas about how females should behave.

Gendered Language

Feminists argue that language has been, and continues to be, a tool of women's oppression and liberation (Pauwels 1998; Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2012). From the myth of the male generic to the use of honorific titles (Miss, Ms., Mrs.) that define women by their relationship to men, language reduces women to the status of subsumed or invisible. Male generics have been defined as linguistic forms that have dual functions: "they are used sex-specifically in reference to male persons and generically in references to mixed groups and people whose sex is unknown or irrelevant" (Stahlberg et al., 2011, p. 169). While the word *man* and the pronoun *he* are supposed to include both men and women, generic male-linked words are often perceived as referring solely to men (Fischer 2009; Stahlberg et al., 2011). Thus, the dual function of male generics equates maleness and humanity and represents the male as the norm (Spender 1990).

According to Dagmar Stahlberg and colleagues (2011), female references are marked; that is, expressions referring to women are often formally more complex than expressions involving men. For example, in English, we see the use of female suffixes in words such as *heroine* or *waitress*. In representing men as the norm, the English language presents masculinity as the unmarked form, rendering the world male unless proven otherwise (Spender 1990). Empirical studies have found that individuals that read material using male generics are more likely to imagine male rather than female characters (Hamilton 1988; Hyde 1984; Martyna 1980; Switzer 1990). The gendering of activities and gender stereotypes also impact how gender is read with the use of the male generic (Garnham et al., 2002; Gygax et al., 2008; Irmen and Rossberg, 2004; Kidd 1971; Oakhill et al., 2005). Sentences with the generic *he* were generally interpreted as male but less so when traditional female roles or behaviors such as "emotional" or "teacher" were referenced (Kidd 1971). In a study conducted by Manuel Carreiras and colleagues (1996), participants built a representation of gender during reading relying on stereotypes. When a stereotypical gender role is applied to an individual, an inference about the probable gender of that person is made (Ganham et al., 2002). Pascal Gygax and colleagues (2008) found that "when no mark of gender is provided by role names or their accompanying definite articles, the representation of gender is based on stereotypicality" (p. 480).

THEORETICAL FRAME: FRAMING AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

In investigating the racialized and gendered discourse on the school-to-prison pipeline, this research draws upon theories of Framing and Social Construction. According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), humans socially construct reality through interaction and internalize their realities as real and natural. The media is an ideological tool and thus plays a significant role in the construction of social issues (Binder 1993). Furthermore, the way an issue is framed affects public opinion (Chong and Druckman, 2007; Lakoff 2004; Lippman 1960). For this research, I situate framing within the broader paradigm of social constructionism (Gamson and Modigliani, 1980; Gitlin 1980; Van Gorp 2007).

Framing may be viewed from the micro or macro-level. At the micro-level, framing refers to how individuals interpret information. Framing at the macro-level refers to the tools journalists use to present complex information in an efficient and accessible manner (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). In other words, framing refers to a central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987). In simplifying complex ideas, journalists employ frames through the selection, emphasis, and exclusion of ideas, events, and groups (Gitlin 1980). Edward M. Kian (2008) demonstrated the practice of exclusion, arguing that sports media exclude women by

rarely covering women in sports and trivialize them by comparing their abilities to men's, minimizing their accomplishments, or describing them as sex objects.

Beginning with the assumption that each news story has a central organizing theme or frame, Pan Zhongdang and Gerald Kosicki (1993) identified four framing devices: syntactical structure, script structure, thematic structure, and rhetorical structure. First, the syntactical structure, which mirrors an inverted pyramid, involves the sequential organization of structural elements, beginning with the headline, and followed by lead, episodes, background, and closure. Second, the script structure is comprised of storytelling in a recognizable and predictable format. News stories are typically organized by following the prompts of who, what, when, where, why, and how. Third, the thematic structure of an article consists of a hypothesis about a particular issue or topic and presents supporting evidence in the form of examples, quotes, and background information. Finally, the rhetorical structure encompasses the stylistic choices journalists make to elicit vivid imagery and promote the salience of a point.

While frames do not govern how people think, they have the ability to make certain problems appear more salient. Therefore, what is included in a news story is just as important as what is excluded (Watkins 2001). For example, if a story about a Ku Klux Klan rally is framed around issues of free speech and First Amendment rights, rather than violence and disorder, people are more likely to tolerate the rally on the basis of their respect for civil liberties (Nelson et al., 1997). Similarly, Kimberly Gross and Marcie Kohenak (2007) found that news coverage in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina focused attention on issues of race, class, and poverty with images of citizens begging for water, food, and rescue. However, this did not result in policies addressing poverty and inequality because these images competed with coverage of looting and crime, and reports that suggested that those left behind could have evacuated and only had themselves to blame. The coverage of the latter reinforced stereotypes about the poor and African Americans. Because this frame drew on conscious or subconscious beliefs held in society, it had a better chance of succeeding (Binder 1993).

METHODS

The primary research question for this study asked: To what extent are Black girls included or excluded from national print media coverage of the school-to-prison pipeline? In order to answer this research question, I conducted a content analysis of articles published in three major news outlets: *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Washington Post*.¹

These three outlets were identified for three primary reasons: (1) they are considered elite newspapers; (2) they affect reporting decisions made in other national and regional news coverage (Taylor-Clark et al., 2007); and (3) these newspapers have a broad national circulation and have a history of being used for content analysis research (An and Gower, 2009; Christie 2006; Kian 2008; Wanta and Hu, 1993; Winter and Eyal, 1981). I performed a LexisNexis keyword search of "school discipline," "zero tolerance," and "school-to-prison pipeline," which are all phrases that are regularly used to describe exclusionary school discipline and the accompanying racial disparities that are associated with future involvement with the criminal justice system. This search resulted in ninety-seven unique articles across the three newspapers. Thirty-one articles were excluded because they were completely unrelated to the subject at hand or mentioned school discipline only in passing. This left sixty-six articles, thirty-two of which mentioned race and/or gender. The articles mentioning race and/or gender are the basis of this study. The keyword search rendered articles published between 1983 to 2018, with a

concentration of articles published between 2010 and 2014 (see Appendix). The findings of this paper are focused on three articles published at the ascent and height of recognition of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon in order to examine how it entered the national consciousness.

After narrowing down the list to sixty-six articles, I uploaded the data into Atlas.ti, a qualitative software program, which was used to facilitate data analysis of the project. Drawing on a grounded theory approach, I conducted an initial phase of line-by-line coding to familiarize myself with the concepts, themes, and messages present across the news articles (Charmaz 2010; Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Glaser and Strauss, 1999). Initial coding resulted in four codes related to race: race, racial disparities, colorblind rhetoric, and racial composition. Embedded in these codes was the absence of gender, indicating that the intersection of race and gender was a critical aspect of framing. Any article that had an aforementioned code was re-examined during focused coding to assess to what extent gender was implicated. This inductive approach provides an in-depth description of the three main frames utilized.

FINDINGS: THE ERASURE OF BLACK GIRLS AND WOMEN

Frame analysis examines the salience of certain aspects of an issue by exploring images, stereotypes, metaphors, actors, and messages (Matthes 2009). The majority of the articles resulting from the keyword search were not framed around the racial implications of exclusionary discipline. In a vast majority of cases, discourse around the school-to-prison pipeline often renders Black students invisible either by not specifically discussing their experiences or by only mentioning them in passing. There is a deracialized discussion, which positions racial disparities as secondary and often uses alternative explanations for why these disparities exist or why readers should care. This is in line with dominant narratives such as colorblind ideology and the Black male crisis discourse. Several articles focused on the role of litigation, namely the lawsuits that school districts across the country have faced. Others focused on the growth of exclusionary discipline overall and the detrimental impact that it has on the entire student population. In the few instances where racial disparities were discussed, the reader is encouraged to direct their sympathy toward Black boys, in essence, ignoring the experiences of Black girls.

My analysis of the news stories revealed that there are three primary ways that Black girls and women are erased in articles on the school-to-prison pipeline. First, Black girls may be non-existent in the narrative about school discipline, and the manner in which the article is written encourages the reader to think about students overall as the victims of the school-to-prison pipeline, ignoring the underlying racial dynamics. Alternatively, in cases where the school-to-prison pipeline is racialized, the reader is encouraged to direct their sympathy toward Black students irrespective of gender. If a Black girl is featured, her story is used to highlight the experiences of Black students overall rather than demonstrating their unique challenges as Black girls. Finally, a hyper-focus on Black boys and the utilization of the Black male crisis narrative buttresses policy solutions that do not attend to the lived experiences of Black girls.

All Students Matter

Similar to the refrain “All Lives Matter,” which suggests that all lives matter equally and therefore we do not need to attend to racial disparities, a portion of articles addressing the school-to-prison pipeline suggests that all students are affected by punitive school

discipline policies such as zero tolerance. An article published in 2000 in *The New York Times*, titled “Becoming Fed Up with Zero Tolerance,” is an example of how readers are encouraged to think about the overall student population as victims of the school-to-prison pipeline. In the introduction, the author, Debra Nussbaum, documents how all student behaviors have been criminalized. She states, “What was once a toy is now a weapon. What was once name-calling is now a threat. What was once a prank is now a cause for police action.” Nussbaum goes on to provide statistics demonstrating school violence has decreased in New Jersey, and the chances of a child being killed in school are minute. Then she humanizes the issue by profiling five students who have suffered harsh school discipline:

- A Montclair high school pupil is suspended after brandishing a cigarette lighter shaped like a handgun and jokingly pointing it at another student.
- Four kindergarten students in Sayerville are suspended for three days after apparently using their hands as make-believe handguns.
- A nine-year-old boy is suspended and made to undergo a psychological evaluation after threatening to use a rubber band to shoot a wad of paper at a fourth grade classmate at Upper Elementary School in Plainsboro.
- A six-year-old in Harrisburg, PA is suspended for ten days after bringing a toenail clipper to school.
- In Bucks County, PA a sixteen-year-old high school student is suspended and threatened with a one-year expulsion because he has a small Swiss army knife attached to his keychain.

Through the syntactical structure of this article, including the headline, lead, statistics, and stories, Nussbaum builds a robust argument that students from a variety of backgrounds are impacted by over-harsh school discipline. However, Nussbaum’s rhetorical choices suggest that male students are the actual targets of zero tolerance; each of the exemplar cases presented are gender neutral or masculinized. The reader does not know if the student from Montclair is a boy or girl, but because the student was suspended for brandishing a cigarette lighter shaped like a handgun, the reader is primed to imagine a male student because guns are routinely associated with males.

All Black Students Matter

An article with a similarly constructed argument appeared in *The New York Times* in 2007. Bob Herbert, the author of “School-to-Prison Pipeline,” also offered several case examples in order to provide a face to those affected by the harsh disciplinary practices in schools. The article states:

Far more disturbing (and much less entertaining) is the way school officials and the criminal justice system are criminalizing children and teenagers all over the country, arresting them and throwing them in jail for behavior that, in years past, would never have led to the intervention of law enforcement.

Herbert goes on to remind readers that in previous work he has written about a six-year-old girl in Florida who was handcuffed by police and taken to a county jail after a temper tantrum in class. He also provided an example of a case where thirty young adults between the ages of thirteen and twenty-two were arrested and accused of gathering unlawfully and engaging in disorderly conduct as they walked toward a subway station on their way to a wake for a teenage friend who had been murdered. In another case, a

seven-year-old boy in Baltimore was handcuffed for riding a dirt bike on a sidewalk. Similar to Nussbaum, Herbert provided these examples to build an argument that the manner and the types of behaviors that kids are being disciplined for is irrational and problematic.

After quoting the Racial Justice Program at the American Civil Liberties Union on racial disparities in school discipline, he tells the reader that the six-year-old in Florida and the seven-year-old in Baltimore introduced earlier are Black youth. Perhaps Herbert, recognizing racial biases, made an intentional choice to delay disclosing the race of the students in order to draw sympathies from the audience. After revealing that those students are Black, he also provides a more extended story, which focuses on the experience of Shaquanda Cotton, a fourteen-year-old Black girl in Paris, TX who was arrested for shoving a hall monitor. Cotton was convicted of assault on a public servant and sentenced to a prison term of up to seven years. Her family, outraged, noted that the judge who sentenced her had just given probation to a fourteen-year-old White girl who was convicted of arson.

While the author provided these startling cases to buttress the statistics regarding racial disparities, the framing message of this article remains that school discipline is irrational, and all students are impacted. Herbert does not provide much analysis as to why students of color are disproportionately suspended or expelled, nor does he contextualize Cotton's experiences as a Black girl. Furthermore, by using Cotton's case as an example of potential racism in the justice system, Herbert engages in a long-held practice of using the experiences of Black girls and women to highlight the experiences of Black people in general. According to bell hooks (2015), this rhetorical move extends back to the 1960s movement toward Black liberation when activists were so concerned with promoting the interests of Black men that they failed to draw attention to the dual impacts of sexism and racism on women. While Herbert's writing does not explicitly construct Black boys as the primary victim of the school-to-prison pipeline, readers may contextualize this story/issue with others that they have heard about Black boys suffering at the hands of the criminal justice system and in schools.

Black Male Students Matter

The final manner in which Black women and girls are erased is rooted in the utilization of the Black male crisis narrative. In 2013, Courtland Milloy published an article in *The Washington Post* titled, "Needed: More Black Men in School." As a structural element, this title draws on well-entrenched rhetoric that suggests that Black men are missing and/or not doing their job when it comes to educating Black youth. In the first paragraph, Milloy poses the question, "Where are the African American male school-teachers and administrators?" He then goes on to claim,

It has been pretty obvious for years that if you really want to do something about high rates of truancy and suspensions among black students—to cap that 'school-to-prison pipeline'—put more black men in classrooms and principals' offices.

In this passage, Milloy reiterates the assertion from the title that Black men are missing—as teachers and administrators—within Black boys' schooling experiences. He then argues that these men are the answer to closing the school-to-prison pipeline. This argument is problematic for several reasons. First, the assertion that Black men are both missing and the solution to the problems of suspensions and truancy negate the contributions and efforts of Black women teachers. Second, he ignores that Black girls face similar rates of suspension and truancy. Milloy does not provide evidence that Black boys are the only

ones facing truancy and suspension, yet suggests an intervention aimed solely at Black boys.

Also in this article, Milloy offers statistics regarding the racial make-up of faculty and student populations and juxtaposes the absences of Black men with truancy and suspension rates. For example, he writes:

- In Montgomery County there are 148,000 students, 21% (31,000) are Black, yet there are only 282 African American male teachers, 38 assistant principals, and 19 principals.
- In Prince George's County truancy and suspensions are chronic, (with) only 983 Black men as teachers out of 7,772.
- (The) Fairfax County suspension rate for White students (is) 1.5% (and) 7% for Black students—out of 14,728 teachers only 231 are Black men.

While there appears to be a correlation between truancy/suspension and Black male teachers based on the statistics that Milloy presents, this does not mean that there is a causal relationship. Simply putting Black men in schools will not ameliorate structural problems that confront boys in schools. Furthermore, this strategy fails to take into account both the Black female teachers and administrators who work in these schools and the Black girls who attend these schools and their unique challenges. In this article, Black girls remain erased in both the framing of the problem and in the proposed solutions.

CONCLUSION

The manner in which journalists for major newspapers in the United States construct the school-to-prison pipeline draws on popular and dominant narratives surrounding race and gender and erases the experiences of Black girls. There are three primary narratives utilized in national media coverage of the school-to-prison pipeline. First, and most popularly, the school-to-prison pipeline is framed as an issue that impacts all students. Secondly, the school-to-prison pipeline is framed as an issue impacting all Black students. Finally, it is framed as an issue impacting Black male students specifically. Each of these narratives disregards, erases, and silences the experiences of Black girls and women through the use of raced and gendered frames and language.

The “all students matter” frame draws on colorblind rhetoric and presents an overarching narrative that school discipline is irrational and problematic while ignoring racial disparities in school discipline. While school disciplinary practices are problematic, explaining them as irrational is overly simplistic. Within the “all students matter frame,” authors such as Nussbaum present seemingly gender-neutral examples of student behavior such as brandishing a handgun-shaped cigarette lighter and bringing items such as toenail clippers and swiss army knife keychains to school. These types of behaviors are not characteristic of Black girls' experiences. Instead, they are routinely associated with male behaviors and reflect the narrative utilized in the 1990s to construct Black boys as a threat to public safety and to justify zero-tolerance policies (Morris, 2012). Furthermore, this framing ignores that Black girls face exclusionary discipline for behaviors such as defiance, “bad attitudes,” disrespect, profanity, and wearing revealing clothing (Annamma et al., 2019; Blake et al., 2011; Morris 2015).

In addition to overlooking the reasons that Black girls are disproportionately impacted by exclusionary discipline, framing of the school-to-prison pipeline, at times, has relied on the experiences of Black girls to highlight the general experiences of all

Black students. This is particularly apparent in the “All Black students matter” frame. When using the case of Shaquanda Cotton, Herbert’s article does not speak to the underlying causes of Black girls’ disciplinary experiences. In several cases, journalists decide to make gender-neutral claims or focus on boys and their behaviors. Much like we have witnessed in cases of the past, this framing renders Black girls and women invisible. While Black boys and girls both contend with stereotypes within schools, their experiences are not mirror images. Focusing exclusively on the contours of the school-to-prison pipeline as it affects Black boys ignores the raced-gendered dynamics that Black girls experience.

Finally, within the “Black male students matter” frame, authors relied upon the widely accepted belief that Black males are in a constant state of crisis and need special attention. This belief is used to justify race-gender specific programs directed toward Black males (Brown and Donner, 2011; Dumas 2016). Journalists, such as Milloy, are able to suggest Black male role models to remediate disciplinary issues because the Black male crisis narrative is well established, meaning that many believe Black boys just need more positive male influences in their lives (Nicolas 2014; Strauss 2015). Similarly, journalists can claim that schools are suspending Black male preschoolers disproportionately while presenting data aggregated by gender because the Black male crisis narrative ensures that we do not need to make the case that Black boys are in trouble. Meanwhile, Black girls and their experiences are rarely discussed alone. In fact, when their disciplinary experiences are discussed, they are used as a representation of Black students’ experiences overall.

I suggest we must “ring the alarm” about Black girls’ erasure from the framing and social construction of the school-to-prison pipeline. Journalists, policymakers, and practitioners must be intentional about disrupting dominant frames in defining social problems and promoting solutions. When stakeholders, such as the writers identified throughout this study, frame the school-to-prison pipeline, Black girls are left out of view. This exclusion could lead to disproportionate allocation of philanthropic and public dollars towards addressing the needs of boys and young men of color while the needs of Black girls continue to go unmet. The framing of the school-to-prison pipeline relays a significant gap in what the data reveal, how we read and report the data, and interventions established and espoused to create “solutions.” While the scholarly literature has begun to acknowledge the impact of the school-to-prison pipeline on Black girls, a similar trajectory is missing from popular discourse.

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NOTE

1. *The Wall Street Journal* was included in the original sample; however, the keyword search produced no articles.

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APPENDIX
Articles Mentioning Race

Title	Author	Date	Publication
Reagan Asks Drive on Unruly Pupils	Steven R. Weisman	1/8/84	<i>New York Times</i>
Reagan's 'Blackboard Jungle' Broadside	Robert Pear	2/12/84	<i>New York Times</i>
Group Finds Racial Disparity in Schools' 'Zero Tolerance'; Policies May Exacerbate Pattern of Black Students Being Suspended, Expelled More Often Than Whites, Advocates Say	Kenneth J. Cooper	6/15/00	<i>Washington Post</i>
Zero Tolerance, Zero Sense	William Raspberry	6/19/00	<i>Washington Post</i>
Becoming Fed Up with Zero Tolerance	Debra Nussbaum	9/3/00	<i>New York Times</i>
For Their Own Good: Limit Students' Rights	Richard Arum	12/29/03	<i>Washington Post</i>
Zero Tolerance Takes Student Discipline to Harsh Extremes	NA	1/2/04	<i>USA Today</i>
Student Problems Can be Linked to Class	Letter to Editor	1/6/04	<i>USA Today</i>
School-to-Prison Pipeline	Bob Herbert	6/9/07	<i>New York Times</i>
How to Handle Unruly Student?	Letter to Editor	6/12/07	<i>New York Times</i>
School Discipline Rates Escalate after Katrina; Miss. Data: It's Not Just Displaced Kids	Greg Toppo	4/29/08	<i>USA Today</i>
Strip Searches at School: Discipline Gone Too Far?; Court Case Tests Limits of Anti-drug Programs	John Biskupic	4/16/09	<i>USA Today</i>
Schools Rethinking Zero Tolerance	Donna St. George	6/2/11	<i>Washington Post</i>
School Discipline Study Raises Fresh Questions	Alan Schwarz	7/19/11	<i>New York Times</i>
Study Challenges Assumptions on School Discipline	Donna St. George	7/20/11	<i>Washington Post</i>
Embattled Obama Should Tout Ongoing Fight for Minority Education	DeWayne Wickham	8/9/11	<i>USA Today</i>
Call 911, or Just Principal? Stricter Schools Under Scrutiny	Donna St. George	8/22/11	<i>Washington Post</i>
Federal Officials Probe Racial Disparity in Arundel Schools' Discipline	Donna St. George	4/22/12	<i>Washington Post</i>
Paddling: A Divisive Form of Discipline...	Alison Bath	4/23/12	<i>USA Today</i>
The 'School-to-Prison Pipeline'	Donna St. George	12/17/12	<i>Washington Post</i>
Deal Signed in Tennessee on Justice for Youths	Kim Severson	12/18/12	<i>New York Times</i>

Title	Author	Date	Publication
Report Criticizes School Discipline Measure Used in Mississippi	Campbell Robertson	1/17/13	<i>New York Times</i>
Needed: More Black Men in Schools	Courtland Milloy	2/10/13	<i>Washington Post</i>
Doctors Oppose Automatic School Suspensions	Greg Toppo	2/25/13	<i>USA Today</i>
Training a Lens on School Security	Annie Gowen	4/5/13	<i>Washington Post</i>
Civil Rights Groups Say 'No' to More Police in Schools; Instead Want Counselors, Social Workers	Greg Toppo	4/9/13	<i>USA Today</i>
Criminalizing Children at School	Editorial Board	4/19/13 (a)	<i>New York Times</i>
The School to Prison Pipeline	Editorial Board	5/30/13	<i>New York Times</i>
Sitting In to Fight 'Stand Your Ground'	Lizette Alvarez	8/12/13	<i>New York Times</i>
Mild Lead Levels Linked to Suspensions; Study Examines School Discipline Records of 3,763 Milwaukee Kids	Greg Toppo	8/14/13	<i>USA Today</i>
U.S. Aims to Guide Discipline in School	Donna St. George	1/8/14	<i>Washington Post</i>
Discipline in Schools Revisited	Donna St. George	1/9/14	<i>Washington Post</i>
New Discipline Guidelines Could Encourage More Disruptive Behavior	Letter to Editor	1/15/14	<i>Washington Post</i>
Why are Preschools Expelling Black Boys?	DeWayne Wickham	6/3/14	<i>USA Today</i>
Md. Drafts Student Discipline Options	Donna St. George	8/2/14	<i>Washington Post</i>
Will Betsy DeVos Expand the School-to-Prison Pipeline?	Michelle Goldberg	3/12/18	<i>New York Times</i>
Government Watchdog Finds Racial Bias in School Discipline	Erica L. Green	4/4/18	<i>New York Times</i>
Disparate School Discipline, in Black and White	Editorial Board	4/7/18	<i>Washington Post</i>
A Fight is Brewing over 'Rethink' of School Discipline	Joe Davidson	4/13/18	<i>Washington Post</i>
Racial Disparities in School Discipline are Growing, Federal Data Shows	Moriah Balingit	4/26/18	<i>Washington Post</i>
Trump Officials Plan to Rescind Obama-era School Discipline Policies	Erica L. Green and Katie Benner	12/17/18	<i>New York Times</i>
Education Dept. Revokes Effort to Reduce Racial Disparity in School Discipline	Laura Meckler	12/24/18	<i>Washington Post</i>