

PERCEPTIONS OF ANTI-BLACKNESS AND THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON
PIPELINE AMONG SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

A Project

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Austin Hooks

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Division of Social Work

Abstract
of
PERCEPTIONS OF ANTI-BLACKNESS AND THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON
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There is a myriad of data regarding racism, criminal justice, and the school-to-prison pipeline, however more insight is needed to better understand the relationships between these phenomena. This research study explores the following: 1) how do school social workers understand anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline; 2) what factors do school social workers believe contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline; 3) what are the experiences of school social workers in dealing with anti-blackness in education. These questions were explored through an in-depth literature review and eight qualitative interviews with social workers engaged with the Sacramento region public education system. Research participants were recruited via snowball sampling. In addition, this research utilized two theoretical approaches to guide research analysis and the review of relevant literature. The prominent themes, which emerged from interviews, reflected an overwhelming need for changes in school discipline policies and procedures to reduce the pervasiveness of anti-black practices in education. The implications of this research can affect future policy directions and social work practice.

Keywords: anti-blackness, school-to-prison pipeline, discipline

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Chapter 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The notion of race includes perceived biological and cultural differences between groups of people (Clair & Dennis, 2015). Racialization classifies such differences to organize people into different racial groups. The concept of race was socially constructed to establish a social hierarchy which historically benefitted Whites (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Furthermore, social hierarchy is maintained through racism. Racism describes the perception of racial superiority over another group, thereby asserting dominance over populations deemed inferior (Lorde 1992; Solorzano et al., 2000). Throughout United States history, direct and indirect practices were utilized as forms of oppression. Oppression is designed to maintain the status quo and codify Whiteness. Codifying whiteness places whiteness in the center, which normalizes racist practices by upholding hegemonic views (Carr, 2015).

Despite inauguration of the first African-American president in 2008, White power and privilege continue to cause concern in government, economics, education, and social spheres (Carr, 2015; Watson, Howard-Wagner, & Spanierman, 2014). Racism persists in American society and continues to pose a challenge to the Black community. In a 2017 survey, 81% of Black participants viewed racism as a significant problem in society (Neal, 2017). Racism is a systemic issue that led to the creation of anti-blackness. Anti-blackness is a form of racism that specifically impacts the Black community.

Anti-blackness

Anti-blackness refers to the systemic dehumanization of Black people.

Dehumanization is demonstrated by the historical inhumane treatment of Black bodies via slavery, lynching, Jim Crow laws, racial profiling, and police brutality (Dumas, 2016). Anti-blackness addresses anti-black racism, which conceptualizes Black suffering and the notion that Black people are “the antithesis of humanity” (Dumas, 2016, p. 12). Anti-blackness is detrimental to society because it contributes to the vast amount of racial disparities in society. Furthermore, Black people not only experience the potential of violence but encounter economic and political barriers to success, which hinder upward mobility. The desire to continue to subjugate and oppress the Black community includes covert and overt strategies. Forms of oppression include employment-based discrimination, racial profiling, and voter suppression. Such tactics contribute racial disparities experienced by the Black community.

Mistreatment of the Black community is deeply rooted into the fabric of the United States. Throughout American history, Black people were subjected to slavery, Jim Crow laws, and school segregation. These forms of oppression contributed to the disparities in health, economics, and education between the Black community and other groups. For instance, Black people experience medical racism and are more likely to encounter barriers to receiving medical care (Gamble, 1997). Moreover, frequent exposure to racism and discrimination has negative effect on physical and mental health (Mays, Cochran, & Barnes, 2014; Harrell, Hall, & Taliaferro, 2003). In 1985, an official report released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services revealed African-

Americans had worse health outcomes than their White counterparts. African-Americans also had higher rates of chronic illnesses, infant mortality, and death (Heckler, 1985).

Current statistics from the Center for Disease Control (2017) demonstrate a consistency in health disparities facing the Black community. Health disparities occur due to a multitude of factors. Factors include inadequate access to care, exposure to harmful toxins, high levels of stress, economic inequality, and residential segregation (Mays et al., 2014). African-Americans are twice as likely to die of heart disease, more likely to die at an early age of all causes, and have higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, and stroke (CDC, 2017). Anti-blackness takes on a physiological toll as individuals cope with effects of generational trauma and manage their own responses to oppression. Anti-blackness in dominant discourse allows these alarming racial inequalities to persist.

Despite historic progress, racial disparities persist. Disparities in education, criminal justice, and health are representative of a legacy of anti-blackness embedded into American society. African-Americans continue to experience inequality in economics, housing, politics, and access to quality health care because anti-blackness is normalized in American society (Dumas & Ross, 2016).

Mass Incarceration

The United States Department of Justice (DOJ) is responsible for upholding and defending American values by enforcing laws to maintain public safety. The desire to keep citizens safe emphasizes social control to maintain law and order. Under the guise of safety, individuals were arrested at an alarming rate, which led to the era of mass incarceration. Mass incarceration refers to the high rate of imprisonment in the United

States. Between 1973 and 2009, imprisonment rates skyrocketed (National Research Council, 2014). Approximately 200,000 people were incarcerated in 1973. By 2009, approximately 1.5 million people were incarcerated (National Research Council, 2014).

America has the highest rate of incarceration compared to other developed nations (Newell, 2013; Sentencing Project, 2018). It is estimated one in four people in the United States have a criminal record (Newell, 2013). An annual report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics revealed approximately 2.1 million people were under correctional supervision in 2016 (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2016). Data revealed a slight decline from reports in 2013, which reported 2.1 million people were incarcerated in federal or state prison and local jails (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014). Mass incarceration is an aspect of the prison industrial complex, which describes the profitable establishment of the prison system. Changes in social policies particularly for sentences for drug-related offenses paved the way for the current state of the United States correctional system (Roberts, 2004). Discrimination and prejudice based on race continue to plague the criminal justice system. About one-third of young Black men are under correctional supervision at any given time (Roberts, 2004). Mass incarceration not only creates challenges for individuals facing incarceration; the social implications of incarceration are prolific in environments with a large population of African-Americans (Roberts, 2004).

According to the Sentencing Project (2018), African-American men are six times more likely to be imprisoned compared to White men. African-American men and women have the highest probability of incarceration based on demographics of individuals who are incarcerated. Evidence of oppression is apparent in the criminal

justice system given the overrepresentation of African-Americans. The term justice includes the assumption that all people have the right to be treated with dignity and fairness under the law. However, incarceration rates demonstrate justice does not occur for all people. The crisis of mass incarceration is an example of institutional racism. Systems of oppression such as institutional racism demonstrate more effort is needed to mitigate social injustice, reduce racial disparities, and eliminate anti-blackness practices. The implementation of anti-blackness into mainstream society maintained racial hierarchical decreasing the likelihood of collective progress for the Black community. Unfortunately, research suggests that mass incarceration for African-Americans begins at a very young age. The cycle that places children on the path to prison is referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP).

School-to-Prison Pipeline

Anti-blackness is a systemic vehicle of oppression that operates in a variety of manners. To better understand the influence of anti-blackness, this study will examine factors contributing to a prominent issue in the education system. The school-to-prison pipeline describes a trend in education that occurs in schools across the United States. The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) is defined as an indestructible cycle that begins when a student is in trouble for displaying “bad” behavior (Pane & Rocco, 2014). The student often becomes labeled as unruly and disruptive. The steps in the unbreakable cycle include: 1) school administration involvement, 2) suspension, 3) expulsion, 4) school failure, 5) school dropout, 6) juvenile incarceration, and 7) adult prison. School dropout rates can be attributed to “deep-rooted favoritism and prejudice” furthermore,

one of the underlying causes of the school-to-prison pipeline is discretionary school discipline practices (Pane & Rocco, 2014, p. 5).

One of the major factors in the school-to-prison pipeline is zero tolerance policies. School zero tolerance policies include mandatory punishments for specific behavior such as a mandatory five-day suspension for fighting. The effects of school zero tolerance policies demonstrate a correlation to school suspensions, low academic performance, truancy, and high school dropout rates (Teasley & Miller, 2011). Suspension is characterized as disciplinary action requiring student to remain out of school for a period no longer than ten days. Zero tolerance policies create several challenges. They increase dropout rates for minority youth, which are the population most at-risk of school-to-prison pipeline. Many students who dropout of high school have been suspended and are more likely to experience incarceration (Belfield 2014; Teasley & Miller, 2011). Given the significant impact zero tolerance policies have on minority youth, further exploration into alternative policies would be advantageous.

From difficulties in school, the next step in the school-to-prison pipeline is often incarceration. The prison industrial complex includes the detention of juveniles. The demographics of youth experiencing incarceration mirror the demographics of adults experiencing incarceration. A 2018 National Report on Juvenile Justice Statistics revealed about 50,000 youth are incarcerated on a given day (Hockenberry, 2018; Sentencing Project, 2017). Black youth are five times as likely to be placed in juvenile detention center compare to White youth (Sentencing Project, 2017). Given the high proportion of Black youth experiencing incarceration, they represent 44% of the detained

population. However, Black youth only account for 16% of the US population. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) categorized the STPP as the most significant challenge in education (NAACP, 2013). The STPP includes policies and practices that push students out of the classroom and into prison which are often carried out via by zero tolerance policies. Black students and White students often exhibit the same “disruptive” classroom behaviors (Brown Center Report, 2017). However, Black students are more likely to receive punitive punishments such as school suspension (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015).

Societal Impact

Schools have numerous policies and procedures to address problematic behavior, yet the decision to suspend or expel students occurs at a cost (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015). School suspension not only results in fiscal losses, out-of-school suspensions increase the likelihood of criminal behavior for at-risk youth. The more time students spend out of school the greater the opportunity for crime and arrest to occur (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015). An increase in at-risk behavior occurs because students are unable to attend school, likely do not have adult supervision during the duration of school suspension and miss an opportunity to learn. Therefore, the connection between suspension, school drop-out, and crime cannot not be overlooked.

Purpose of the Study

This research will focus on the significance of anti-blackness on the school-to-prison pipeline. This study focuses on one group, the Black community, however; it is not meant to overlook nor negate the experiences of other disenfranchised communities. This

research will explore the implications of anti-blackness on Black youth through the experiences of school social workers. Developing a school-level understanding about how anti-blackness might contribute to mass incarceration can help understand factors contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline.

There is richness in data regarding school social workers, the school-to-prison pipeline, and discriminatory practices and policies in education. Research statistics reveal that Black youth are disproportionately involved in the school-to-prison pipeline (Losen & Martin, 2018; Wun, 2018). More research is needed to determine if school social workers perceive a connection between anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline. This research study examines school social workers understanding of anti-black practices and the school-to-prison pipeline; perceived factors which contribute to anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline; and overall experiences in addressing anti-blackness in education. These questions will be explored through an in-depth literature review and qualitative interviews recruited via snowball sampling.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will synthesize relevant literature and research to establish the foundation for this research study. This study explores the perceptions of anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline among school social workers. The literature review is organized into themes: historical background of mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline, proposed solutions to the school-to-prison pipeline, and relevance of anti-blackness in education to the field of social work. This chapter will also introduce a theoretical framework which will be utilized to conceptualize the research concepts. In addition, the literature review will identify areas where more research is needed to provide the basis for this study. Two theoretical frameworks will be utilized to guide this research study and help better understand anti-blackness in education.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides an opportunity for social workers to consider societal factors that contribute to an individual's social location based on racial inequalities. Social workers are knowledgeable about how power dynamics and systems of oppression operate to disenfranchise vulnerable populations. Despite social work's foundation in serving communities and promoting social justice, CRT has not been emphasized in social work education and social work practice (Kolivoski, Weaver, & Constance-Huggins, 2014). It is advantageous for social work professionals to incorporate CRT into social work practice because it provides a framework to

conceptualize the construction of race and increase understand on the impact of anti-blackness on the Black community.

Critical race theory outlines six key tenets to conceptualize the pervasiveness of racism in American culture. CRT allows researchers, educators, and social work practitioners to work in a manner that places race in the center. When race is the focal point when it can lead to increase cultural understanding and cultural responsiveness. A person's life experiences, their treatment in society, and their social location are influenced by their race and ethnic background.

School social workers are responsible for supporting a student's social and emotional well-being by providing resources to student families. School social workers are in a unique position to intervene in the school-to-prison pipeline by advocating for social justice. Advocacy can take many forms depending on the social worker's comfort level in addressing social injustice specifically issues of racial discrimination.

School social workers are an essential resource on school sites throughout the nation. School social workers aim to reduce barriers to academic success by providing support for students and families (Riordan & Aguilar, 2009). School social workers have first-hand experience with youth in the education system and the ability advocate to for youth and identify strategies to reduce anti-blackness in education.

A critical race lens will be used for data analysis as well as a review of literature. This research study will explore perceptions of anti-blackness and its' relevance to the school-to-prison pipeline among school social workers. A qualitative approach will be utilized to increase knowledge about attitudes and beliefs surrounding anti-blackness

practices, policies, and the school-to-prison pipeline. This study may have several implications for the field of social work as it can provide insight on future policy directions that could eventually decrease social injustice against Black youth.

Social Conflict Theory

In addition to CRT, theories on social conflict can provide a framework to better understand race relations in American society. Conflict theory explores social conflict and its impact on progress towards social change. Increased tensions between groups and within groups occur due to struggles between “what is and what some groups feel ought to be, the conflict between vested interests and new strata and groups demanding their share of power” (Coser, 1957, p. 197). The establishment of White supremacy is viewed as the norm and what some feel society should be. Anti-black practices prevail to maintain the vested interests of the dominant group. The push towards equity is desire for collective progress. Disenfranchised communities strive for a brighter future with fairness in the distribution of goods and resources. Furthermore, some theorists analyze conflict by examining social class and view conflict as beneficial because it restores creativity and helps society establish new expectations and values (Coser, 1957).

Social conflict or group conflict are terms used interchangeably to describe the pursuit of goals of one party which may inflict harm, damage, or otherwise oppress another group (Oberschall, 1978). The subjugation and oppression of the Black community can be conceptualized through a conflict theory perspective. Conflict is expected as there are periods of stability and instability. Society is in a constant struggle to maintain homeostasis and maintain the status quo. Issues occur when the status quo is

challenged and no longer accepted as the norm. This tension is viewed through a variety of social movements regarding social injustice such as the Civil Rights Movement.

Exogenous social conflicts are bound to occur whenever certain structural conditions are met (Dahrendorf, 1958). In addition, exogenous conflict created from external factors is placed upon or into a specific group (Dahrendorf, 1958). In response to external threats based on White supremacy, the Black community actively resisted and advocated for radical social change. Individuals collaborated to engage in collective action through marches, boycotts, and other forms of protest. Engagement in collective action to address anti-blackness does not abolish unjust treatment and practices. However, it does increase awareness to systemic barriers faced in the path towards racial equity.

Racism is viewed as inevitable and widespread in society by CRT, similar sentiments exist on the likelihood of social conflict between groups. Social conflict is pervasive in American society. Practices of anti-blackness result in an increase in social conflict as the Black community attempts to mobilize to advocate for equitable treatment. Increased social conflict can indicate a sign of group cohesion as groups organize to engage in collective action such as participation in protests (Oberschall, 1978). This notion can be explained through an exploration of anti-black practices in society. The history of race relations be defined as periods of contention and turmoil compared to unity and cohesion (Coser, 1957; Oberschall, 1978). The Civil Rights Movement was identified as a time for strengthening bonds within the Black community. Individuals of various backgrounds united to demonstrate disapproval of anti-black policies such as Jim

Crow Laws. Although, the path to civil rights was met with resistance and there were periods of turmoil, the abolishment of Jim Crow laws demonstrates that social conflicts can result in radical change through collective action.

Historical Context of Mass Incarceration

This section will explain origins of mass incarceration, why it continues to persist, and its' relevance to the school-to-prison pipeline. In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, the criminal justice system is described as America's modern form of slavery via a new racial caste system. Alexander (2012) argued that the concept of colorblindness concealed racial bias in the criminal justice system. Proponents of colorblindness support the notion America is in a post-racism era. Colorblindness does not provide a solution to anti-blackness. Instead, colorblindness allows anti-blackness to thrive because racism and discrimination are not prioritized.

Prominent research explored the causes and effects of mass incarceration while providing solutions for reducing incarceration rates based on Alexander's (2012) provocative assertions. Data revealed incarceration contributed to a reduction in economic opportunities, increased likelihood for mental health disorders, increased prevalence of single-parent households, and family separation (Galea, 2016).

The origins of mass incarceration are complex, as numerous factors contributed to the drastic increase in imprisonment from 1980 to present day (Alexander, 2012; Roberts, 2004). Factors included changes in social policies which resulted in the criminalization of drugs which largely affected the Black community, poverty, and mental illness (Alexander, 2012; Beckmann, Myrick, & Shtasel, 2019; DeFana & Hannon, 2009). For

example, the occurrence of incarceration is most prominent in inner-city neighborhoods with a high population of African-Americans (Roberts, 2004). The exponential increase in incarceration rates after 1972 were also attributed to social policies from the 1980's to 1990's (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). The American government's emphasis on punitive punishment and tough on crime policies significantly targeted disenfranchised communities (Newell, 2013). The effort to address public concern and fear regarding prolific violent crime resulted in the implementation of criminal justice policies rooted in racial bias (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Newell, 2013). Furthermore, the sense of urgency to address perceived prolific crime resulted in the passage of the 1994 Violent Control and Law Enforcement Act which established tough on crime policies (Clinton, 1994).

In 1971, President Richard Nixon introduced the phrase "war on drugs" when he identified drugs as a critical threat to American values. Nixon declared a war on drugs and established a precedent which shaped the criminal justice system. Since Nixon's declaration, prison rates rose without corresponding decreases in crime rates or drug use (Moore & Elkavich, 2008). The war on drugs has been identified as an essential factor that contributed to mass incarceration (Alexander, 2012; Lynch, 2012; Tonry & Melewski, 2008). In addition, scholars assert the war on drugs was a racialized public policy that led to more arrests and instances of imprisonment for the Black community (Tonry & Melewski, 2008).

Continuing the war on drugs, President Ronald Regan passed the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984 as well as the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. Both laws included mandatory minimums for drug offenses. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act included the

controversial 100:1 possession of crack and powder cocaine mandate. Individuals with 500 grams of powder cocaine received the same sentence as individuals with 5 grams of crack. The 100:1 disparity disproportionately impacted communities of color. By 2003, African-Americans were 86% of defendants in drug court despite the fact that 66% of cocaine users were White (Vagins & McCurdy, 2006). Furthermore, 44% of male prisoners were African-American men (Harrison & Beck, 2004). More tough on crime policies followed. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 introduced provisions such as the three strikes rule, mandatory sentencing for drug crimes, and increased funding for prison construction and law enforcement officers. These policies have led to disproportionate imprisonment today. People of color are imprisoned at a higher rate; 60% of the prison population is people of color (Sentencing Project, 2018). In addition, notions of freedom, redemption, and rehabilitation are minimized for individuals who are in prison. Tough on crime policies influenced perceptions of criminal behavior. Mass incarceration is an example of institutionalized racism as demonstrated by the disproportionate rates of imprisonment for minority populations. According to Pew Research Center, African-Americans are imprisoned five times the rate of Whites (Gramlich, 2018).

Through CRT, strategies like the war on drugs can be defined as intentional acts implemented to uphold hegemonic views regarding Black people. The war on drugs is interpreted as a race war given the disproportionate impact on African-Americans (Nunn, 2002). The war on drugs resulted in targeting of the Black community; this occurred through increased time and resources searching for crime in Black neighborhoods (Nunn,

2002). In the 1980s, rates of imprisonment for the Black community continued to surge despite a decline in Black involvement in violent crime (Tonry & Melewski, 2008, p. 1). Race and crime are intertwined. The war on drugs involved unjust punishments based on racial bias and discretionary discipline which created a cycle of punishment and victimization for the Black community (Agozino, 2000). These anti-black practices were normalized as Blackness become synonymous with crime which appeared to justify racial profiling (Welch, 2007). Thus, anti-blackness continues to permeate multiple systems and institutions because due to institutional racism continues to operate because it uses coded language to remain undetected (Dvorak, 2000). The war on drugs is an excellent example of the desire to maintain hegemony by centralizing a connection between race and crime (Nunn 2002).

The era of mass incarceration further entrenched the ability for the Black community to gain upward mobility. There is a plethora of evidence revealing the irreversible harm mass incarceration has imposed on the Black community. Mass incarceration of African-Americans damages social networks, changes social norms, and destroys social citizenship (Roberts, 2004). Social networks promote communicate, exchange of resources, and provide support. Social networks are essential to building social capital, which can allow communities to thrive. The high rate of imprisonment of Black people normalizes the likelihood of incarceration. Moreover, incarcerated individuals are excluded from social citizenship in a litany of ways depending on their conviction and location. A felony conviction in most states results in loss of voting rights,

exclusion from certain employment fields, inability to serve on a jury, and inability to receive public assistance.

The disproportionate number of African-Americans under correctional supervision is a crisis. The effects are prolific and establish cumulative disadvantages for individuals in prison and their families (Foster & Hagan, 2007). Cumulative disadvantages create intergenerational barriers to success. A staggering number of children have a parent who is incarcerated. More than one million children have a parent who is incarcerated (Reilly, 2013; Turney, 2014). Given the high rate of imprisonment of African-American men and women, many Black children are growing up without one or more parent. African-American children are more likely to have an incarcerated parent (Foster & Hagan, 2007). Furthermore, an emerging area of research studies the cumulative risks of parental incarceration on Black families. Understanding how parental incarceration effects children and the family unit is imperative. Having a parent in prison effects school performance, social relationships, child rearing practices, economic security, and overall well-being (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Turney 2014).

In addition to the three ways in which mass incarceration causes harm to the Black community, mass incarceration creates adverse effects for subsequent generations when a caregiver is incarcerated. Black children with fathers who do not have a high school diploma are 50% more likely to experience incarceration by age 14, compared to 7% of White children with fathers without a high school diploma (Turney, 2014). Parental incarceration has a negative effect on educational attainment. Educational attainment refers to the ability to perform well academically. Challenges in school can

manifest as changes in classroom behaviors and social exclusion from peers. The process of parental incarceration places strain on the family system which influences a child's well-being thus their ability to thrive in school. Imprisonment also has social, economic, and psychological impacts on individuals experiencing incarceration and the community in which they reside.

Historical Context of the School-to-Prison Pipeline

School policies have evolved throughout the course of US history to create the current punitive punishment paradigm (Mallett, 2015). The collaboration between schools and the juvenile justice system increases the likelihood of students being involved with the juvenile justice system through various policies and practices (Advancement Project et al., 2011; Mallet, 2015). The school-to-prison pipeline increases the likelihood students will be “locked up and locked out of mainstream society” which increases the likelihood of poor long-term outcomes (Alexander, 2012, p.7; Mallet, 2015).

Youth involved in the juvenile justice system experience the challenge of being locked out of a quality education. Factors which contributed to the pipeline include: public fear about youth crime, unintended consequences of several laws, utilization of school resource officers, adoption of school zero tolerance policies, and reemergence of school segregation by race and social class (Justice Policy Institute 2011; Mallet 2015). The implications of the pipeline had a devastating effect on Black youth.

The ability for African-Americans to gain access to education was an arduous journey. Sixty years have passed since the ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education* in

1954. The court ruled in favor of social justice and determined school segregation was unconstitutional. The Supreme Court mandated equal access to education for all students. Discriminatory practices were no longer justified. The landmark ruling was a poignant moment in America history as it demonstrated support for civil rights from the highest court, which established a precedent for future cases. However, the education system continues to struggle to support Black youth.

Zero tolerance policies mirror mandatory sentencing policies, as they require specific punishment for certain behaviors. Several bills helped provide the foundation for the implementation of a zero tolerance approach to discipline in schools. Legislation includes the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994 and the Consequences for Juvenile Offenders Act of 2002 (Heitzeg, 2009; Mallet, 2015). The GFSA mandated the following: 1) schools which received federal funds were obligated to expel students for one year for bringing a weapon in the school zone; 2) schools were also mandated to report the student notify local law enforcement (Heitzeg, 2009). This solidified the link between schools and the criminal justice system. Zero tolerance policies were a response to fears about school safety. Yet, zero tolerance policies expanded to include mandatory punishments for non-threatening issues such as defiance and disruption, alcohol/tobacco, and other minimal infractions (Mallet, 2015). Like policies enacted to decrease crime, marginalized communities were negatively impacted by adoption of zero tolerance policies in schools. Children are on a path to prison due to zero tolerance policies, punitive punishment, and discretionary discipline practice which can result in discrimination.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was designed to improve the public education system. The bipartisan legislation was based on four pillars: increased accountability, control of allocation of funds, evidence-based instruction, and parental choice. The NCLB was predicated on the notion of reducing racial inequalities in education by addressing the achievement gap, providing more opportunities for students attending Title I schools, and implementing standardized testing. The predominant theme was if standards were in place academic performance would improve and establish better outcomes for all students (Harrison-Jones, 2007).

Despite efforts, the proposed changes did not eliminate racial inequalities in education. NCLB was a contributing factor in the formation of the school-to-prison pipeline (Knaus, 2007). African-American students are more likely to attend high minority and high poverty schools which are often among the lowest performing schools in the nation. Such schools are classified as Title I schools based on the number of low-income students attending the school. Defunding of public education is a contributing factor in the STPP. Lack of funding limits the ability for school districts to provide adequate resources to support students and staff members. In addition, lack of funding for education further disenfranchises vulnerable communities. Education is a vital as it increases opportunities for populations and the opportunity to improve life outcomes. Inequity in education is a systemic issue.

Anti-Blackness in Education

Education represents an opportunity for upward mobility for Black communities (Cole & Omari, 2004). Access to a quality education increases economic opportunities

which can disrupt generational poverty (Cole & Omari, 2004). The difficulty for Black students to receive their right to education guaranteed by the NCLB Act is an example of institutional racism. The criminalization and dehumanization of Blackness begins at a young age. In early childhood education students learn about appropriate behavior, discipline, and stereotypes. A Yale research study revealed educators exhibited implicit biases when they were primed to search for disruptive classroom behavior (Parker, 2017). The video presented to subjects featured preschool-aged children. Subjects observed Black children longer than other children. Subjects disclosed they had expectations regarding the expected behavior of Black children which may explain why they gazed longer at Black children. Preconceived notions about Black youth influences how children are treated.

Zero Tolerance Policies

Zero tolerance policies aim to increase school safety however, such policies lead to a plethora of unintended consequences such as the school-to-prison pipeline. School zero tolerance policies contribute to the trend of students leaving mainstream school and being funneled to continuation schools, alternative schools, and the juvenile justice system (Knaus, 2007). Zero tolerance policies limit the ability to use discretion when students are facing disciplinary action. Such policies push children out of school and lead them to the criminal justice system. This is evident by the amount of youth who are disciplined for truancy, fighting, and minor classroom related behaviors (Parker, 2017).

Zero tolerance policies promote punitive punishment for students who violate school regulations. For example, students may receive detention, a referral, or school

suspension if they do not follow proper dress codes. Individuals who are most impacted by the STPP include youth of color, student with disabilities, undocumented students, and children from low-income households (Heitzeg, 2009). However, Black students are far more likely than any other group to experience the repercussions of zero tolerance policies via the school-to-prison pipeline (Heitzeg, 2009).

Poverty and Oppression

Children who grow up in impoverished communities will likely attend a school with inadequate resources due to limited funding. Inadequate resources result in the child's inability to exercise their right to education guaranteed by the No Child Left Behind Act. Schools in low-income areas might be surrounded by high crime and violence. Children may stay home from school because there are unsafe routes to school. Frequent absences may result in truancy, which criminalizes low-income youth and their families. School districts may not consider how the environment helps or hinders a child's ability to thrive. Poverty and oppression are contributing factors that increase the likelihood youth may experience the school-to-prison pipeline (Dolan & Carr, 2015).

The desire for secure communities in Illinois led to the criminalization of youth. Incarceration rates and criminal justice policies affect US schools (Scott & Saucedo, 2013, p. 2). The introduction of law enforcement officers into the school system was a response to societal fears. The implementation of gun-free and drug-free school sites mirrored rhetoric in the mass media about fear of school safety. Fear stemmed from notion of inner-city violence seeping into the local schools. Zero tolerance policies in schools create a nexus between schools and prison (Scott & Saucedo, 2013). Such

policies push students out of school into prison. Lack of education leads to increased risk factors which diminishes the likelihood for successful life outcomes.

School Suspension and High School Dropout

In an analysis of the social and fiscal impact of high school dropouts, Belfield (2014) discovered that high school dropouts impact the entire community. It is estimated that approximately 100,000 California students from each cohort will dropout each year (Belfield, 2014). Individuals without a high school diploma increase fiscal costs due to the need for health and social welfare services (Belfield, 2014). Moreover, access to a quality education is one predictive factor in accessing long-term economic opportunities, and positive health outcomes thus, high school dropout rates cannot be overlooked (Belfield, 2014; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007). The lack of a high school diploma significantly impacts economic opportunities as high paying positions often require a high school diploma and a college degree (Belfield, 2014; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Robust evidence demonstrated education attainment was crucial for the opportunity to improve social determinants of health (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007). There is a positive relationship between school suspension and high school dropout (Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015). Given the risks of high school dropout, it is imperative to provide support for those most at-risk of high school dropout.

School suspension and expulsion are key practices involved in the school-to-prison pipeline. Suspension rates and expulsion are highest among students of color, specifically Black students. Data from *The Five Critical Facts Series* examined racial disparities in education (Wood, Harris, & Howard, 2018). Statistics revealed in school

districts throughout California, Black youth were overrepresented in records of disciplinary action. Disciplinary action often includes school suspension. Black males were approximately five times more likely to be suspended (Wood et al., 2018). In addition, Black males were nine times more likely to be suspended in early childhood education which is kindergarten to third grade (Wood et al., 2018). Suspension rates across the nation mirror figures from California. Black students continue to be overrepresented in school disciplinary action in US public schools.

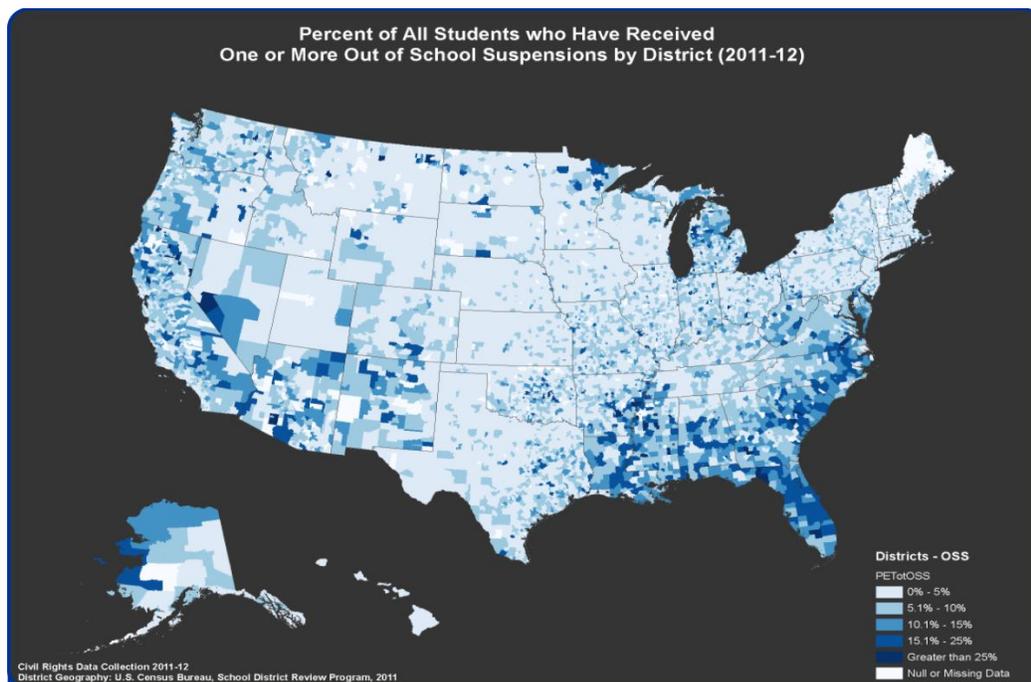


Figure 1. Percentage of US students with one or more suspension from 2011-2012

Adapted from the U.S. Department of Education. (2016). School climate and school discipline: Know the data. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/data.html>

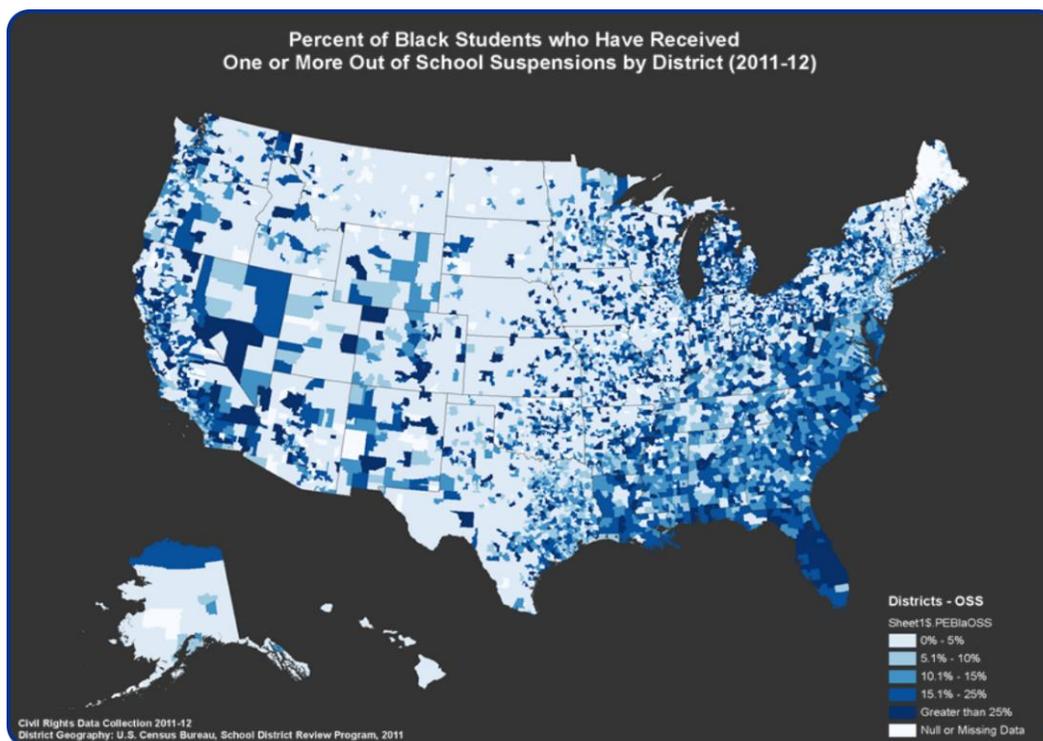


Figure 2. Percentage of Black students with one or more suspension from 2011-2012
Adapted from the U.S. Department of Education. (2016). School climate and school discipline: Know the data. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/data.html>

The Civil Rights Data Collection is responsible for ensuring the Department of Education is adhering to civil rights mandates regarding education. For instance, data collected includes information on compliance with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, school suspension, school climate, and the Gun-Free Schools Act. Figure 1 includes a diagram of the percentage of student in each school district suspended across the United States during 2011 to 2012. As demonstrated in Figure 1, many school districts in the Midwest suspend between 5 to 10% of students. Higher rates of suspension were noticeable along the East coast where many districts suspended greater

than 25% of students for one or more days. Figure 2 displays data disaggregated by race/ethnicity. Figure 2 illustrates in school districts throughout the US, greater than 25% of Black students received at least one school suspension.

Data obtained from the California Department of Education revealed a disproportionality in school suspension rates. These data are representative of a national trend of high rates of suspension for Black and Latinx youth (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). African-Americans account for 5.6% of the total enrollment in California public schools but the rate of suspension at 15.1% exceeds the number of students enrolled. Given the demographics of youth experiencing punitive punishment, it is evident anti-blackness hinders the ability for Black youth to receive fairness and equality in the education system.

Table 1

2017-18 Suspension Rate State Report Disaggregated by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Percent of Cumulative Enrollment	Percent of Students Suspended
African American	5.6%	15.1%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.5%	1.1%
Asian	9.1%	2.7%
Filipino	2.4%	0.9%
Hispanic or Latino	54.2%	55.3%
Pacific Islander	0.5%	0.6%
White	23.2%	19.9%
Two or More Races	3.6%	3.6%
Not Reported	0.9%	0.8%
Total	6,384,919	223,867

Implications

In 2013, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) published a template to outline the process to dismantle the school to prison pipeline. Youth of color are disproportionately affected by zero tolerance policies. Youth of color experience higher rates of school suspension in elementary and secondary school (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2013). School suspension creates an achievement gap as students miss the opportunity to attend class. Furthermore, once youth become involved in the criminal justice system it is likely that they will continue to

be in the criminal justice system as adults. The insidious process of mass incarceration begins in schools as zero tolerance policies and punitive punishments seep into the core foundation of the education system.

This research study can have several implications for social work practice. Findings can help develop a dialogue among social work professionals to incorporate CRT tenets into social work practice. With an understanding about the role of race in social work practice and policy, practitioners can advocate for inclusive practices and programs to promote equity (Kolivoski, Weaver, & Constance-Huggins, 2014).

Social work practitioners involved with youth interact with diverse populations. Research shows minority populations are more at risk for incarceration and school disciplinary action. Therefore, it is imperative to intervene to prevent the irreversible effects of punitive punishment. Increased knowledge regarding barriers to well-being is essential for individuals working with youth in academic settings. School social workers, teachers, principals and other school site staff have a critical role in a child's success.

Social workers can help reduce school suspension rates through preventive measures to ensure students have the necessary resources to thrive. Resources include access to basic needs, a safe school environment, socioemotional support, and culturally responsive teachers (Teasley & Miller, 2011). School social workers can intervene in instances of discriminatory practices and procedures that can disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. Given the critical role school social workers have on school campuses, it is imperative to understand their experience with anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline.

Data collection is needed to support the implementation of alternative policies such as restorative practices to promote student retention, academic achievement, and conflict resolution. Restorative policies in schools provide an opportunity to heal through communication. Schools with fewer resources are more likely to suspend students of color compared to high-income schools (Brown Center on Education Policy, 2017). The information gathered from this study will add to general knowledge while increasing understanding on strategies to advocate for disenfranchised communities through direct practice and social policy advocacy.

Education and training are essential to improve social workers sense of self-efficacy. If social workers are equipped with skills and knowledge then they can effectively identify anti-blackness practices, advocate for Black youth involved in the school-to-prison pipeline, develop and implement alternative policies to school discipline.

Proposed Solutions to the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The school-to-prison pipeline is complex, therefore multiple solutions are necessary to eliminate the STPP. Wilson (2014) proposed four strategies to keep students in school and create a school environment conducive to learning. Steps towards change include removal of zero tolerance policies, personal efficacy and system change, community collaboration, and youth engagement. Evidence demonstrates there are more effective strategies than the implementation of zero tolerance policies to increase school safety (Wilson, 2014).

The elimination of zero tolerance policies is a necessity. If individuals are invested in making change in their school environment, systemic change will occur. Understanding strengths within the community can improve school climate and build community relationships. Lastly, providing opportunities to promote youth voice lead tom more cultural responsiveness and foster authentic relationships between students and staff (Wilson, 2014).

A research study about Black girls, intersectionality, and school discipline proposed several solutions to address the effects the school-to-prison pipeline. Among the proposed solutions was to reframe the narrative about Blackness (Wun, 2018). Blackness is often associated with crime, danger, drugs, and violence (Douglas, 2017; Nunn, 2002). Such terms have a negative connation and contribute to stereotypes about Black youth. To explore the nexus between race and crime, individuals were asked to view mugshots of Black suspects and White suspects. Subjects were more likely to recommend harsher penalties for Black subjects, view them as less likeable, and believe they were more likely to engage in future crime (Heitzeg 2009; Peffley, Shields, & William, 1996). Establishing a new narrative regarding Black youth involvement in the criminal justice system can disrupt the prolific impact anti-blackness has on education. A paradigm shift can develop a conversation that racism is still a significant issue in American society and more awareness is needed. A reframing is needed to acknowledge that Black students are not the problem, rather the problem is systemic issue which have existed for generations (Wun, 2018).

A comprehensive approach is necessary to address the overwhelming amount of youth experiencing punitive punishment. Professional development regarding microaggressions, implicit bias, and the historical context on anti-blackness in education can establish cultural humility. Cultural humility is one approach that can be used to reduce the criminalization of Black youth in education (Wood et al., 2018).

In addition to cultural humility, school site staff such as school social workers can advocate for youth and suggest alternatives to school suspension. Teasley and Miller (2011) stated that school social workers have a critical role in curbing suspension rates. Research explored social workers perceptions on their ability to evoke change at their school sites. Social workers with direct practice experience demonstrated more perceived self-efficacy in their ability to advocate for students and curb suspension rates. Furthermore, licensed social workers reported high levels of perceived self-efficacy (Teasley & Miller, 2011). Addressing barriers to direct practice can provide an opportunity for school social workers to increase professional skills and gain competence in tasks related to disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline.

Gaps in Literature

Literature provides insight on the school-to-prison pipeline but often negates to identify the underlying societal issue of anti-blackness as a contributing factor in the staggering number of Black youth on the pathway to prison. Individuals whose mission is to mitigate social injustice are stakeholders with a vested interest in promoting social change to benefit marginalized communities. Stakeholders involved in the effort to eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline are school social workers.

Additional information is needed to begin to gain an understanding about the experiences of school social workers exposure to anti-blackness in education. Gaining insight on the perceptions of anti-blackness in education can help identify the insidious ways anti-blackness operates and allows phenomena like the school-to-prison to thrive.

Social policies are the driving force for social change. Social policies can change perceptions about social issues and implement practices to. Literature can inform practices when creating policies to determine the best practice to protect marginalized communities. This research study gathers data from individuals on the frontlines of the school-to-prison pipeline. Such data can fill gaps in literature regarding school social workers experiences as engaging in anti-racist practices to advocate for Black youth in education.

Relevance to Social Work

The social work profession is guided by the National Association of Social Workers set of ethical guidelines and principles. Social workers are committed to service, respecting the dignity and worth of a person, advocating for social justice, understanding the importance of human relationships, and demonstrating competence and integrity (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). Social justice involves advocating for marginalized communities to reduce barriers injustice and promote equity. Social workers can advocate for social justice in a myriad of ways such as supporting legislation that prevents racial bias and discrimination in schools. Thus, addressing anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline is within the scope of social work practice.

As demonstrated by CRT, racism is endemic in society. Racial hierarchy is woven into the fabric of American society which explains why anti-blackness is omnipresent. Anti-blackness is evident in the crisis of mass incarceration and the growing trend of the school-to-prison pipeline. Mass incarceration is a public health, social, economic, and human rights issue. Social workers in the criminal justice and education system work directly with individuals impacted by mass incarceration. School social workers have a vested interest in ending the school-to-prison pipeline to ensure students are treated equally. School social workers have keen insight on how oppression and discrimination negatively impact children.

The overrepresentation of people of color in the criminal justice system is cause for change. Mass incarceration is an unjust practice because it disproportionately affects African-Americans. Furthermore, mass incarceration has contributed to the increasing number of children being pushed out of educational institutions and placed on a path to prison. Social workers are responsible for protecting vulnerable groups according to the National Association of Social Workers *Code of Ethics*. Social workers are ideal candidates to address this crisis because they are committed to combating social injustice. Social workers engage in social justice through advocacy for equitable treatment and services for client populations. Therefore, social workers have an opportunity to reduce the prevalence of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Chapter 3

METHODS

The methodology includes a detailed description about procedures used to collect and analyze data. Methods provide insight on research objectives, sampling procedures, data collection, and measurement instruments. This qualitative study includes in-depth interviews to explore anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline among school social workers.

Human Subjects

This researcher applied for exempt research to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Division of Social Work at California State University, Sacramento. This study was approved by the IRB on December 13, 2018 (Appendix A). The Human Subjects Application Protocol number is: 18-19-026. Participants were informed via an informed consent form that participation was completely voluntary (Appendix B).

Study Objectives

This study examined school social workers perceptions about anti-blackness in education. This research specifically explored anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline. Additionally, the research objectives include: identify a sample of school social workers to gain insight on thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions of anti-blackness in education.

Population

The research population included stakeholders who were knowledgeable about the school-to-prison pipeline and had direct experience working with youth in schools.

This study defined stakeholders as an individual with the ability to intervene in the school-to-prison pipeline. Stakeholders are current or former school social workers or school social work interns who had a vested interest in eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline. School social workers engage with a diverse population of youth impacted by zero tolerance policies and thus are familiar with the school-to-prison pipeline. Furthermore, social workers advocate for social justice therefore, school social workers likely had experience addressing racial injustice.

Sampling Procedure

To obtain the sample from the identified population, this research used snowball sampling for participant recruitment. Snowball sampling involved research participants helping the researcher find additional participants through their existing network. The first research participant was contacted via email to inquire about participation in the research study. Following the first interview, the research participant suggested additional school social workers to interview. The research participant provided their contact information and the research followed up via email to recruit suggested individuals. This procedure continued until the recruiting period of the study concluded (February-March 2019). A total of eight participants were recruited for and participated in the study during this period.

Data Collection Procedure

The qualitative research design provided an opportunity to gather rich data from a first-person narrative. The researcher met with one research participant face-to-face. The interview was conducted at a location convenient to the interviewee. However, due to

scheduling conflicts, the remaining seven interviews were conducted over the telephone using the Google Voice application. Seven participants called the researcher and were asked for consent before recording the phone interview. The study researcher explained the study and described the risks and benefits of participation to the participants.

Participants provided implied consent to participate, meaning that their participation in the final interview implied their consent and no signatures were recorded. The researcher ensured that the interviewees were in a private place while the interview was being conducted.

The interview guide consists of 14 open-ended questions to explore the participant's experiences with anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline as a school social worker. The interviews took approximately 35 to 45 minutes. In addition, research participants were asked to complete a questionnaire (Appendix D) to obtain demographic data. The brief questionnaire was emailed to each participant. Participants emailed the completed form to the researcher.

Measurement Instrument

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used as the primary source of data collection. The interview guide was created following a literature review of prominent data regarding the research topic. One of these sources was the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The ACLU is engaged in advocacy efforts to dismantle the school-to-prison and create safe learning environments where students can thrive. Discussion questions from the ACLU reflect an opportunity to: engage in critical thinking regarding the underlying issues contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline, explore alternative

school discipline policies, and propose potential solutions to reduce prevalence of the STPP (ACLU, 2018.). Three questions from the ACLU were used in this research study's interview guide. The remaining questions were drafted to elicit responses about the research participant's experience with anti-blackness in education and advocating for Black youth to interrupt to school-to-prison pipeline. Finally, the demographic questions that were collected included age (categorical), gender (open-ended), and racial identity (open-ended).

Data Analysis

The collected data was stored on a password-protected device. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. After the transcriptions were completed, the researcher read and re-read transcripts and searched for themes in data. The themes that emerged also included subtopics, which were identified as concepts. Once the concepts and themes were identified, the researcher coded the transcripts by highlighting where the concepts and themes were found in the transcripts. Efforts were made to include data from all the interviews to assure that the themes and concepts were representative of the sample as a whole. The qualitative data was then written by describing the themes and concepts and providing in-depth quotes to validate the findings. The demographic data was entered into SPSS, which was used to calculate frequencies of the different variables. All study analyses were conducted by the study researcher, although the study advisor had access to the data.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline. Research focused on the prevalence of anti-blackness in education, experiences in advocating for Black youth, and challenges when engaging in advocacy. Research also examined the use of restorative justice practices in schools, impact of school zero-tolerance policies, and proposed solutions to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. Many participants identified the history of anti-blackness in society as influential in the overrepresentation Black youth in the school-to-prison pipeline.

Demographic Data

A total of eight school social workers were interviewed for this research study. Demographics presented in Table 2 provide information on gender, age ranges, and race/ethnic background of participants. Seven out of eight (88%) research participants identified as female. One out of eight (12%) research participants identified as male. Four out of eight (50%) of participants identified as Black or African-American, while a quarter (25%) participants identified as Latina, 12% identified as Asian, and (12%) identified as White.

Table 2

Characteristics of Research Participants

Demographics	n = 8 (%)*
Gender	
Female	7 (88)
Male	1 (12)
Age Range	
20-24	3 (38)
25-34	3 (38)
35-44	
45-54	2 (25)
55-64	
65+	
Race/Ethnicity	
African-American	4 (50)
Asian	1 (12)
Latina	2 (25)
White	1 (12)

*Percentages in each category do not necessarily equal 100 due to rounding.

Qualitative Interviews

Data collection occurred from a sample of eight school social workers. Seven interviews were conducted via telephone and one interviewed occurred face-to-face. The sample of participants was diverse in age, years of experience, gender, race and ethnicity. Research participants answered 13 questions about anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline (Appendix B). Each interview was transcribed verbatim.

Several themes emerged as interviews were transcribed and analyzed. These themes included: education, institutional racism, community, and advocacy. Each theme had two to three corresponding concepts.

Institutional Racism

Participants asserted that institutional racism continued to be a crucial factor in the disproportionate number of Black youth involved in the pipeline to prison. All eight participants perceived institutional racism as a factor contributing to the high rate of Black youth in the school-to-prison pipeline. For instance, anti-blackness was perceived as prolific because institutional racism is systemic.

Racism is so engrained in our not just society but like every crevice in institutions and system that we have. Systemic and institutional racism that is just prevalent everywhere. (Respondent three: female, age range 25-34)

The prevalence of anti-blackness in education was normalized given its' prevalence in other systems. Furthermore, one participant identified the historic prevalence of anti-blackness in society. Understanding the history of the treatment of Black people in society, helped conceptualize how anti-blackness continues to thrive.

I am thinking—everything in our education system is embedded in racism—anti-blackness. Even in different countries, there is anti-blackness. Racism is strong and very prevalent...So I think at the end of the day, everything in our education system is embedded in anti-blackness. It is still prevalent right now unfortunately.

(Respondent four: female, age range 20-24).

Participants also highlighted the prison-industrial complex and the relationship to the school-to-prison pipeline. Participants reported on the relationship between third grade literacy and incarceration rates. They also discussed the perceived significance of childhood literacy and the likelihood of incarceration.

Why wait until you are an adult, or you actually commit a crime? I can actually start prepping you for that now. To the point that like even the piece around third grade literacy and being able to mirror future incarceration rates. You can't necessarily say this causes that. I think that's too simplistic. It's the entire infrastructure. It's economic. It's a multibillion-dollar industry and Black people have always had their bodies used for economics—monetary value in this country. So, this just sort of feeds that machine. It's just the next wave.

(Respondent one: female, age range 45-54)

Many participants asserted that there were a multitude of risk factors that increase the likelihood of falling into the school-to-prison pipeline. As participants emphasized, the reason for the overrepresentation of Black youth on the pathway to prison is complex and cannot be reduced to one contributing factor.

A participant shared a story of her work with a past client, which provided an example of the complexities of anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline. Mike (pseudonym) grew up in a single-parent household, lived in poverty, and was the youngest of several siblings. Despite her efforts and “Mike’s” linkage to supportive services, “the system was so set-up to prepare him for something else—they weren’t enough”. Respondent one recalled seeing the deterioration in the young African-American male’s well-being due to “the complexity of his trauma while battling against this oppressive system”.

He probably started getting in trouble in fourth or fifth grade. [You know] suspended. He started going to those alternative programs. It just continued. At

every opportunity there was for him to have educational success, it was like there was another force that came behind and sent him back to wherever. Some incredibly racist and oppressive things would happen to him that were part of this system. He is just one story but represents many. (Respondent one: female, age range 45-54)

Respondent one continued to reveal Mike is currently serving a prison sentence of over 200 years. She discussed how institutions, specifically the criminal justice system can influence the likelihood of negative life outcomes for Black youth. A touch in the in the criminal justice system has lasting impacts that can disadvantage future generations. Furthermore, other participants shared stories of witnessing instances of the school-to-prison pipeline operating. Anecdotes shared were reminiscent of Mike's story; Black youth who needed support but were forgotten and fell into a pathway to prison.

Discipline Discrepancies

School social workers reported discrepancies in how discipline is enforced for Black youth compared to non-Black students. Moreover, participants explained the impact of school resource officers on campuses and how zero tolerance policies interfere with a student's academic achievement. Participants also identified zero tolerance policies and discipline discrepancies as key tenets of the school-to-prison pipeline.

We see them and we experience them in regards to how discipline is unfairly—is often time based on emotion. It is also based on power dynamics and not rooted in understanding. I know that within the discipline we (Black individuals) are overrepresented that way. (Respondent eight: male, age range 45-54)

Black youth are overrepresented in disciplinary action due to a lack of understanding about cultural norms and values. For instance, participants mentioned some students refusing to remove their headwraps, hats, or hoods while in class. Teachers perceived the refusal to remove headwear as an act of defiance and disrespect. These sentiments influenced how discipline was implemented which often led to the utilization of punitive punishments based on emotion. This act can be described as an anti-black practice because it disproportionately impacts Black youth and minimizes their identity.

Through zero tolerance policies and unfair discipline our Black and Brown boys are being affected. Instead of funneling them into education like the White kids are, they are funneled in a different route which is to the juvenile justice system or criminal justice system. That's why it is called the school-to-prison pipeline. Just statistics show that those students are targeted a little bit more targeted and treated harsher when it comes to discipline. (Respondent three: female, age range 20-24)

School zero tolerance policies result in inconsistency in how discipline is enforced.

Participants reported minority students received harsher punishments, which placed them on a different path compared to White students. Punitive punishments that increase the amount of time students are absent from the classroom, impact a student's ability to be engaged in their learning.

The increase in Black arrests in general and like mirror it to the increase in zero tolerance policies and kids getting suspended and they almost mirror each other...The school-to-prison pipeline is a part of that. (Respondent one: female, age range 45-54)

Participants had similar perspectives regarding the prevalence of zero tolerance policies in schools and high rates of suspension for Black youth. Alternative policies suggested to address institutional racism in schools included utilizing restorative justice practices and emphasized the removal of school resource officers on campuses.

Definitely not having police officers on campus. We need more trained mental health professionals- you know people who understand what the school-to-prison pipeline is. They need to really understand the implications and working with students of color especially Black youth (Respondent seven: female, age range 25-34).

When determining specific practices to replace punitive punishments, all eight participants emphasized the importance of a restorative approach to discipline. Additionally, listening circles were identified as a restorative justice practice designed to rebuild relationships and address harm. Participants at various school sites throughout Sacramento County reported utilizing alternative practices to implement appropriate consequences that enabled youth to learn from mistakes without sacrificing their education.

At one of my elementary schools we do what's called a restorative circle. It's a practice under the restorative practice umbrella. I also have done conflict mediation with students. I've had conversations with students about restorative justice and the importance of repairing harm when damage has been done. (Respondent five: female, age range 25-34)

Moreover, having school resource officers on school campuses were identified as a significant issue that contributed to the involvement of Black students in the school-to-prison pipeline. There were variations in specific implications of school resource officers in schools. However, participants agreed that overall having school resources officers in schools created several unintended consequences. Participants also considered school safety as a central justification for the use of school resource officers.

[I think] definitely not having police officers on campus. We need more trained mental health professional -you know people who understand what the school-to-prison pipeline is. They need to really understand the implications and working with students of color especially Black youth. (Respondent seven: female, age range 25-34)

Conversely, one participant explained how an increased effort to promote school safety contributed to the prevalence of school resource officers in schools.

I don't know people are just afraid of what can happen and then I think schools are investing more in law enforcement than you know counselors and social workers. (Respondent seven: female, age range 25-34)

The participant expressed the need for a holistic approach to promote safety on school campuses. Investment in mental health professionals in schools rather than police was perceived as a necessity to address presenting problems.

Willful Defiance

Willful defiance was perceived as a significant factor in the increase in school suspension and expulsion rates for Black youth “[s]o yeah willful defiance is the key that is getting a lot of our student suspended at least in this district” (Respondent eight: male, age range 45-54).

A lot of disproportion happens in willful defiance, which is a particular part of ed. [education] code that is basically the student was defiant in some way. So I can suspend you for that. So right now, there is a law that says you can’t suspend for willful defiance earlier than 4th grade. They have to have done something violent or dangerous. I think that’s helping a little bit, but I would like for that to not even be an option. If a kid is “disrespectful” that’s not something they should be suspended for. Very subjective. (Respondent one: female, age range 45-54)

Participants noted that school policies that prohibit subjective discipline are essential. School suspension for disrespect or disruptive classroom behavior can be described as subjective because acceptable behavior is contingent on the teacher’s preferences.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias described unconscious thoughts or beliefs that influenced how teachers and administrators engaged with Black youth. Implicit biases were preconceived notions that individuals were not aware of.

I think people just have implicit biases that they aren’t aware of. So sometimes I’ve encountered when I have spoken up that people don’t realize like their being lowkey racist. The fact that people have biases that they don’t necessarily check. (Respondent three: female, age range 20-24)

Anti-black practices were not always perceived as intentional. Participants recognized the challenges in addressing anti-blackness when individuals were unaware of problematic statements or behavior. Similarly, participants mentioned the lack of self-awareness regarding personal biases as a factor in anti-black practices.

I don't know if we go deep enough and really examine like our own biases when it comes to Blackness and really understand historically and generationally where that comes from. (Respondent two: female, age-range 25-34)

Implicit biases can present as microaggressions. Microaggressions can be rooted in biases. A participant attributed implicit bias to fear of youth of color.

I also think that the unconscious bias that a lot of teachers and a lot of educators have...is their just straight out fearful of students of color. Teachers having preconceived notions and biases against students of color—kind of throwing out their microaggressions. (Respondent five: female, age range 25-34)

Participants stated that making disciplinary decisions that are rooted in fear can cloud judgment and lead to overzealous punishments.

Microcosm of Societal Issues

School social workers perceived equity issues in school as a microcosm of issues in larger society. Issues that impact Black youth in schools were viewed as reflective of issues that occur in the larger society. Throughout history, the Black community has been discriminated against due to hegemonic views designed to maintain White supremacy. School can be sites of learning, nourishment, and growth, however, for Black students that is not always true. A participant said, “it is really hard for students, especially

African-American boys to fit that one size fits all model that education has been built on” (Respondent six: female, age range 20-24).

The need to address racial inequity in education is significant. Racial equity is not limited to schools rather issues of anti-blackness in education reflect a systemic issue of anti-black practices in multiple institutions. The perception of Black youth in society can be perceived as negative. In addition, Black youth in schools often receive similar negative messages about who they are. The experiences Black youth have in school “reinforces what society is already telling them” (Respondent eight: male, age range 45-54).

Participants noted an overwhelming need for school districts to promote social justice. Participants had similar views regarding the role of school districts in addressing injustice and actively reducing discriminatory practices against Black youth.

Apparently, this is not just a concern solely to schools and districts. This is sort of a societal concern. Schools and school districts are just a microcosm of that concern. But we have the ability to address it. We can address it. It takes leadership, it takes vision, it takes you know some direction. (Respondent eight: male, age range 45-54).

Unjust practices in education are a public concern. It is not limited to students and families. Schools have the capacity and obligation to find solutions to anti-black practices in education. The journey to find solutions involves strong advocacy efforts and dedication.

Education

All eight participants mentioned that education is one of many solutions to reduce anti-blackness and disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. Participants expressed interest in mandatory trainings, improvements to school curriculum, and other strategies.

Trainings

A participant identified one of many factors that contributed to overrepresentation of Black youth is school suspensions. This conclusion was related to the criminal justice system. Individuals who are deemed bad or engage in criminal behavior are removed from society permanently in some circumstances. The participant perceived the removal of youth from classrooms as a similar method.

Ultimately it comes down to the lack of willingness to learn, willingness to educate yourself, willingness to view the adequate trainings that it is to find alternatives methods of addressing like “problematic” behavior or whatever is deemed to be inappropriate like—it’s almost easier to just be like if I just remove you, if I don’t have to see you, if I don’t have to deal with youth. (Respondent two: female, age range 25-24).

Proposed policies to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and promote equity for Black youth included concepts such as the implementation of restorative justice and restorative practices in schools. In addition, requiring mandatory trainings for implicit biases, cultural responsiveness, and establishing trauma-informed school districts were mentioned as strategies to address anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline. In addition, the need for macro level advocacy and organizing were proposed to provide alternative policies in schools.

Curriculum

Changes in school curricula were suggested to increase awareness of the historical context of anti-blackness in society. Improvements to school curricula also reflected adopting restorative practices in the classroom and increasing dialogue between teachers and students.

When you look at the curriculum you know, a lot of the things can be tailored to a restorative practice approach. I think it first starts in the classroom with teachers being open to having these conversations. (Respondent five: female, age range 25-34)

The implementation of progressive ideas into the school curriculum does not occur without controversy.

Then education—we need ethnic studies. I know there's a bunch of laws that have been passed to try to change curriculum, which I think is great. But even in San Juan there is pushback right now [um], next year textbooks in history and social science they are supposed to be embedded LBGT, people of color and women's rights. There is pushback. (Respondent seven: female, age range 25-34)

School districts may strive to make changes and external forces can hinder their ability to do so. Additionally, spending more time learning about Black history is useful to educate all students on how and why anti-blackness persists.

Also, just like the curriculum that they learn—like instead of just rushing over the Civil Rights Movement like learning about the different leaders...maybe being more honest about our history. (Respondent four: female, age range 20-24)

Community

Capacity Building

While participants reported solutions to address anti-blackness, many mentioned the issues are not isolated to school or an institution. Issues reflect a lack of investment in communities with a high percentage of Black children and families. The lack of investment in these communities impacts the entire family system due to limited employment opportunities, lack of resources, and inadequate funding for schools. Capacity building referred to the need provide more support and resources for in the Black community.

First and foremost, I think investment in our communities and in our education because the fact that like these school(s) you know are in communities that are underfunded. A more holistic engagement in the community to provide jobs, translation services, and legal services. It needs...to be approached on multiple levels. It starts with putting our money where our mouth is. We can like rattle on about the issues in minorities communities but it's like how about are we doing the right ethical work to promote social justice in these communities invest in them. (Respondent two: female, age range 25-34)

Capacity building was identified as a mezzo level strategy to rebuild communities. Some respondents stated schools can be more involved in the community by being knowledgeable about community events. Events include issues in the community that may affect the student population.

Teachers can do a better job of like knowing what's going on in the community and things like that. Even the whole Stephon Clark situation that happened two days ago—it could have been a teachable moment for students too. So utilizing what's going on in our communities and educating students. I think that's one way that it can happen, obviously not the only way. (Respondent six: female, age range 20-24)

Additionally, one participant reflected on the need for social workers to organize and advocate for change. School social workers must be proactive and intentional in their efforts to be a catalyst for change. Mobilizing to establish change can manifest as collaboration with community partners who share similar interest in promoting equity for the Black community.

I think turning things into action—building capacities and more school culture and climate. So really sort of looking at a bigger picture and really looking at legislation and what initiatives are out there that the district can tap into and begin to partner with community agencies in a way that we can begin build—not just those partnerships and collaborations but that partnership with the community in a way that we can bring some of the community's concerns—which is our students and our families in a way and we can heightened that awareness in our schools in a way that we begin to acknowledge what those barriers are and challenges are. (Respondent eight: male, age range 45-54)

Parent Engagement

Levels of parental engagement vary depending on a multitude of factors. Open communication between parents and teachers can increase a teacher's ability to build rapport with a student and gain a holistic view of the student and their needs.

Another policy is giving teachers cultural you know discipline that you know students of color of use to receiving in their household. You know talk to their parents. One of the policies should be having an open communication with a parents and educators with African-American students. I think if we could create an opportunity for teachers to communicate with parents and parents with teachers. (Respondent five: female, age range 25-34)

Establishing an open line of communication between teachers, students, and parents was described as useful to help build positive relationships. Relationship building can help teachers better understand a student's behavior. As one participated stated, "it is hard to provide a consequence when you know the reason but if you refuse to understand the reason it is a lot easier to provide a consequence" (Respondent eight: male, age range 45-54). Therefore, the effort to increase communication can also increase understanding and establish a holistic perspective of a student to prioritize their needs.

Advocacy

Youth Voice

Youth voice is allowing those who experience injustice to share their truth. Youth voice also provides an opportunity for youth engagement in solutions to share ideas on how to combat anti-blackness in education.

I think that social justice needs to start with the engagement of those most effected by whatever issue you're interested in taking a social justice approach with. That would be the first like role of a district, would be to create space for youth voice and parent voice. I think districts can invest in programming that has social justice frameworks. So to me equity can't really happen without social justice. (Respondent one: female, age range 45-54)

Promoting youth voice does not occur without disapproval or criticism. Some participants summarized their experiences of unapologetically advocating for equity for Black students. These participants often mentioned the risks and benefits in promoting youth voice. When Black youth attempted to share their experiences of anti-black practices in schools to the school board, there was pushback from administration. Administrators stated Black youth were "going rogue" as they disclosed their experiences of discrimination (Respondent one: female, age range 45-54).

When advocating for Black students, some participants were told to change the narrative to become more inclusive. These participants received statements that appeared to undermine culturally responsive programs aimed to specifically support Black students and families. Complaints stemmed from the inability to control the narrative. Regardless of pushback, there is value in schools encouraging students to use their voice.

The Superintendent asked, "why was I so angry" and that "[respondent's name] really needs to work on her messaging so it becomes more palatable for other populations". I was [kind of like—this is what I am talking about. This is an example of anti-blackness, so we can go into other spaces and have conversations

about inequity but the minute we call out lived experiences of Black folks. Kind of like Black Lives Matter. (Respondent five: female, age range 25-34)

Similarly, barriers encountered when advocating for Black youth also involved statements of opposition. The lack of understanding about culturally responsive programs for Black youth was reflected insensitive comments about equitable practices.

Like one of my sites started a BSU and the principal thought that it would be better to call it BSU and Allies. We had to have a deeper conversation. She came around eventually and kind of understood why that was important to be intentional about this work and to make sure that there weren't going to be any issues. I get it, I understand why she felt that way. She [principal] had anticipated backlash from families who felt uncomfortable and left out by that. Again, All Lives Matter as opposed to Black Lives Matter. (Respondent eight: male, age range 45-54)

Intentional work to eliminate anti-black practices and provide a safe space for Black youth to build community is essential to address racial injustice experienced by Black youth in education. Participants were not only responsible for supporting Black youth and advocating on their behalf; they educated staff on the need for specific programs for Black youth as well.

Participants noted that it is imperative to keep youth voice at the forefront of advocacy efforts even if the message is not well received. Moreover, participants explained negative feedback regarding youth voices occurred because Black students' experiences were not valued.

If they are treated unfairly or unjustly, they are going to speak up and say something about it. The minute they do it becomes a problem because their voice isn't valued. (Respondent five: female, age range 25-34)

A strategy to promote youth voice is to enable students to be involved in school policymaking. The opportunity for students and administrators to collaborate and develop appropriate discipline policies can provide more effective consequences compared to punitive measures.

I also think allowing students to come up with solutions. If a student was caught vaping, a student body decides on the discipline for that student. Students decide on the policy. Student are going to be not just much nicer but more empathetic.

(Respondent five: female, age range 25-34)

If students are provided with the opportunity to be involved in policies regarding discipline it can mitigate the prevalence of unjust practices as well as limit the target of students.

Context Determines Advocacy

A safe space for dialogue to address concerns to discuss racial injustice and anti-blackness policies was a prominent factor in the perceived ability to advocate for Black youth. Some participants who identified as Black described conflicting feelings when attempting to advocate for Black youth.

I try to avoid it at all costs. I don't want to be the one to have the emotional responsibility to have to help them understand. I think you know as a Black woman in education at times I don't have the emotional capacity to talk about

these issues with my White counterparts because it just takes a lot of you know emotional strength to do so. I'm pulling back, and you know it may be traumatic for me because I'm exposing myself to post-secondary trauma or exposing myself to things from my past that—especially in that setting...I have to have very intimate spaces to talk about these issues. (Respondent five: female, age range 25-35)

Self-identity appeared to affect advocacy efforts. Conflict occurred due to the potential overlap in personal experience and professionalism. Participants described the duality of wanting to adhere to social work values and advocate for social justice while protecting oneself from potential secondary trauma from sharing personal stories. Furthermore, engagement in advocacy appeared to be complex and was not limited to the participant's professional role. Fear of retaliation also influenced levels of comfort in engaging in advocacy for Black youth.

It depends on the context, if I am in a situation where there is potential reprisal than I'm not feeling comfortable at all. Meaning that there is a potential that I'm putting my job in jeopardy or that I am going to receive some kind of backlash because of it or be identified as the person who is always talking about Black power then I have to figure out a way to communicate that in a way that I think they can hear it. It's not that I won't say anything about it, I just won't use the context. I mean need to pull them to the side later instead of during the meeting. So context really dictates my level of comfortability in explaining or stepping forward. (Respondent eight: male, age range 45-54)

Nonetheless, one participant mentioned advocating for Black youth despite feelings of discomfort and being perceived as angry.

Sometimes there are moments when I feel like I am not safe to have these conversations. But I feel like it's important to always call out injustice when it's happened or is occurring even if you are viewed as you know an angry person.

(Respondent seven: female, age range 25-34)

Many factors dedicated the level of comfort in advocacy such as self-identity, personal experience, and fear of backlash.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study explored perceptions and attitudes of school social workers regarding anti-black practices and the school-to-prison pipeline. The research objective was to determine if there was a perceived relationship between anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline, as well as understand how anti-blackness functions in classroom environments. Following a thorough literature review and qualitative interviews, these findings were compared to existing research. The comparison between this research study and other studies revealed similarities in the perception of anti-blackness in education. This research study differed from existing research because it examined school social workers experiences with anti-blackness in education. The insight gained from research participants provided more understanding of the discriminatory practices which disproportionately impact Black youth and often place them on a pathway to prison.

Anti-blackness was identified as prolific throughout mainstream society and was not limited to the education system. However, understanding anti-blackness in education can help understand how it exists and operates in other systems. Previous literature has revealed the significance anti-blackness has on educational policy, as demonstrated by the struggle to desegregate and integrate schools (Dumas, 2016). Increased self-awareness of anti-blackness in education is imperative to adequately address these unjust practices. Utilizing a racialized lens when examining discipline practices can help identify discriminatory practices. For instance, school resource officers were highlighted

as significant factors in contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline. School recourse officers have flexibility in their role on school campuses and power to use discretion. Consequently, discretionary power “plays a role in the criminalization of students of color” (Merkwae, 2015, p. 151). These findings suggest that schools should re-think the policy of having such officers in place.

My findings reflected support for mental health professionals in schools instead of school resource officers. Like school zero tolerance policies, the presence of school resource officers in schools results in to unfavorable outcomes for Black youth (Payne & Welch, 2013). The collateral damage of school resource officers can result in increased referrals to the juvenile justice system, exclusionary discipline, and overall criminalization of students (Merkwae, 2015; Payne & Welch, 2013). Increasing supportive staff such as school social workers can more adequately support students due to knowledge about the school-to-prison pipeline, cultural responsiveness, mental health, and social justice frameworks.

School social workers proposed several solutions to promote equity for Black youth in education. These solutions included youth voice, systemic change, and community collaboration, which were all mentioned as solutions to address the systemic issue of anti-blackness in education. Such concepts were consistent with existing research to provide solutions to anti-black practices in schools (Wilson, 2014). In addition, my findings emphasized restorative justice as an opportunity for schools to implement alternative and more effect forms of discipline. When implemented correctly, restorative justice can rebuild relationships, promote communal healing, and allow for an

individualized approach discipline (Payne & Welch, 2013). A one-size fits all approach to discipline is ineffective and determinantal to Black youth. Restorative justice can help mitigate the equity gap and ensure all students can thrive.

Implications

There were several implications based on the findings from this qualitative study. The implications for future research for social work practice and policy are listed below.

Policy

The findings from this research provide insight on broad recommendations to address the prevalence of anti-blackness in education. Changes in policy can create a paradigm shift and begin to dismantle the insidious process of the school-to-prison pipeline. Policies that impact the school-to-prison pipeline include school policies as well as state and federal policies. Policy implications will explore the utilization of school resource officers, school suspensions, zero tolerance policies, and trainings.

School resource officers (SROs) are designed to provide feelings of safety for students and families. The role SROs have in the reinforcement of zero tolerance policies cannot be overlooked in their influence on the school-to-prison pipeline (Mallett, 2015). Furthermore, there is an increased effort to insert SROs in schools throughout the country. However, more research is needed to determine if the consequences of SROs outweigh the perceived benefits. Indeed, the social workers interviewed in this study believed that the presence of SROs on campus is a factor contributing to the school-to-prison-pipeline.

The participants in this study all shared significant interest in mandatory trainings for all school staff members. Establishing a policy that mandated trainings on power and privilege, discrimination, social justice, and alternative discipline to all staff members would allow individuals to address implicit biases and ensure all students are treated justly.

Under Section 48900(k) of the California Education Code, willful defiance is broadly defined as “disrupting school activities or otherwise willfully defying the valid authority of supervisors, teachers, administrators, school officials, or other school personnel engaged in the performance of their duties” (Losen & Whitaker, 2017, p. 3). California’s Assembly Bill (AB) No. 420 is an existing mandate that prohibits schools from suspending students in grades K- 3 for willful defiance and disruption. Senate Bill (SB) No. 607 aimed to expand the suspension ban to include grades 4-8, but the proposal was denied by the former Governor Jerry Brown (Youth Law Center, 2018).

Out-of-school suspensions for willful defiance are among of one of common reasons for Black youth to be suspended (Loveless, 2017). Therefore, a policy which bans suspension for willful defiance and disruption is essential to address the high rate of suspension for Black youth. School suspensions do not occur without consequence. The effects of out-of-school suspension are a known factor in subsequent negative long-term consequences such as poor academic achievement due to loss of classroom instruction, high school dropout, and juvenile justice system involvement (Noltemeyer, Ward, & McLoughlin, 2015; Losen & Martin, 2018). The application of discretionary discipline practices results in school suspension for willful defiance and disruption. Willful defiance

and disruption can include a broad range of subjective behaviors. This issue was highlighted by several participants and emphasized due to the negative impact it has on Black youth.

Participants stressed that zero tolerance policies interfere with the ability to utilize discretion when implementing disciplinary action. However, there are only five situations that fall under the education's code for zero tolerance. School administrators must immediately suspend a student and recommend expulsion in the following instances:

- 1) Possessing, selling, or otherwise furnishing a firearm; 2) brandishing a knife at another person; 3) unlawfully selling a controlled substance; 4) committing or attempting to commit a sexual assault or committing sexual battery; or 5) Possession of an explosive (Vermeire, DeVuono-Powell, & Merluzzi, 2010).

Additional policies that reflect restoration and rehabilitation are needed to repair harm, keep students in school, and allow students to learn from their mistakes. Egregious disciplinary action should not be utilized for non-serious behavior as suspensions often are. This policy recommendation emphasizes the critical need to mitigate the discrepancies in discipline and implement oversight in discipline referrals. Oversight can ensure students are treated justly (Vermeire, deVuono-Powell, & Merluzzi, 2010).

Social Work

Social work aims to address micro to macro level issues that hinder an individual or a group's ability to thrive. Implications for social work practice correspond with the mission and values of social work. Anti-blackness is a systemic issue that can be addressed by social workers in all social work settings. All social workers must be

unyielding in their effort to combat racial injustice, especially when the injustice is experienced by youth. Social workers can advocate for youth and promote youth voice to encourage Black youth to share their experience. School social workers are directly involved with youth, families, and school site administration. Thus, they can disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and help students thrive.

Developing an increased awareness regarding the differentiation between anti-blackness and racism is needed. Furthermore, social work education can incorporate learning about anti-blackness in society. Social work education can teach students advocacy strategies to use when encountering anti-black practices or policies.

Recommendations

It is recommended that future research utilize an alternative sampling method to obtain a representative sample. Another recommendation for future research is to provide an exploration of additional concepts that were not examined in this research study. Concepts such as personal barriers to advocacy efforts and level of experience could be beneficial to explore. Further exploration is needed to determine how unexplored concepts in this study impact school social worker's perceptions of the school-to-prison pipeline and the connection to anti-blackness.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. For example, this research cannot be generalized due to the snowball sampling method. In addition, this study was limited by the number of school social workers interviewed, as more interviews may have uncovered additional themes. The researcher also utilized snowball sampling to recruit

participants for the research study. The researcher's prior relationships with research participants could have influenced responses throughout the interview. Respondents may have felt less comfortable responding to questions authentically. Furthermore, the researcher identified as a person of color. Therefore, it is plausible the researcher's background influenced how data was interpreted due to professional and personal experience. Lastly, research was limited by the perceived lack of experience in specific role in school social work. For instance, the lack of experience in an advocacy role influenced how some participants perceived their effectiveness addressing anti-blackness. Perhaps, future research can include insight on how years of experience in school social work can determine perceived effectiveness in advocating for Black youth.

Conclusion

The plight of African-American progress is complex as centuries of oppression resulted in intergenerational trauma. Racism continues to disenfranchise the Black community although discriminatory practices and policies are not as overt as they once were (Halloran, 2019). The school-to-prison pipeline describes a series of practices and policies that perpetuate the insidious cycle of inequity. Black students are placed on a path to prison at an alarming rate. This research aimed to explore this phenomenon to gain a better understanding of the significance of anti-blackness on the school-to-prison pipeline. This research process revealed there are a variety of factors that contribute to anti-black practices in educations. Findings revealed the historic legacy of anti-blackness in America society as one crucial factor in the treatment of Black youth in education.

Findings also emphasized the potential burden of addressing racial discrimination placed on social workers of color. Anti-blackness will not be mitigated if it is only challenged by social workers of color. It is essential for all social workers to address anti-blackness not only in education but in all respective workplace settings. An increase in allies is advantageous to address anti-black practices reduce racial inequity and promote social justice.

This research concluded that solutions to the school-to-prison pipeline must also address anti-blackness given the disproportionate amount of Black youth on the pathway to prison. Solutions reflect the need for increased effort from social workers to advocate for equity, and comprehensive trainings regarding social justice, restorative justice practices, and cultural responsiveness. Lastly, it is imperative to remember social work values and its' grounding principles. Social work is grounded in social justice therefore, advocating against anti-blackness is not a matter of choice but a matter of obligation. There is a need establish a new narrative where anti-black practices are not accepted as ordinary practices.

Appendix A
Human Subjects



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO
DIVISION OF SOCIAL WORK

To: Austin Hooks

Date: December 13, 2018

From: Research Review Committee

RE: HUMAN SUBJECTS APPLICATION

Your Human Subjects application for your proposed study, "**Perceptions of Antiracism and the School to Prison Pipeline among School Social Workers**" is **Approved as Exempt**. Discuss your next steps with your thesis/project Advisor.

Your human subjects Protocol # is: **18-19-026**. Please use this number in all official correspondence and written materials relative to your study. Your file will be shredded three years from this approval date. Approval carries with it that you will inform the Committee promptly should an adverse reaction occur, and that you will make no modification in the protocol without prior approval of the Committee.

The committee wishes you the best in your research.

Research Review Committee members Professors Maria Dinis, Kisun Nam, Francis Yuen, Jennifer Wolf, Arturo Baiocchi, Teiahsha Bankhead, Susanna Curry, Susan Nakaoka

Cc: Wolf

Revised Oct 18 KA

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM*Perceptions of Anti-blackness and its' Relationship to the School-to-Prison Pipeline among School Social Workers*

My name is Austin Hooks and I am a student at California State University, Sacramento in the Social Work graduate program. I am conducting a research study to gain insight on perceptions of anti-blackness and its' relationship to the school-to-prison pipeline among school social workers. If you volunteer to participate, you will be asked to answer 10 discussion questions. In addition, you will also be asked to complete a brief questionnaire. Your participation in this study will last approximately 35 to 45 minutes.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time. Questions asked will reflect knowledge on school-to-prison pipeline, anti-blackness practices or policies, and experience in education. There no anticipated risks expected due to involvement in this research study. There are no direct benefits to participants however, the study may contribute to general knowledge and social work practice.

Information collected for this study is anticipated to be completely anonymous and cannot be linked back to you. The anonymous data will be maintained in a safe, locked location, and may be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you. Several measures will be taken to maintain confidentiality. Data collected will be stored on a password protected device. Data will be destroyed after three years.

I appreciate your time. If you have any questions about the research please feel free to contact me at (hooks@csus.edu). You may also contact Professor Jennifer Wolf the project advisor at wolf@csus. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Office of Research, Innovation, and Economic Development, California State University, Sacramento, (916) 278-5674, or email irb@csus.edu.

Your participation indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time.

Please keep this form as your copy.

Appendix C

Email for Subject Recruitment

Dear _____:

My name is Austin Hooks. I am a graduate student in the Master of Social Work program at California State University, Sacramento. I am conducting a research study on perceptions of anti-blackness and the school-to-prison pipeline among school social workers. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study.

The study will consist of ten discussion questions that may take about 35 to 45 minutes depending on the length of responses. Interviews will be conducted in-person or via Skype/Google Voice depending on your preference. Interviews will be audio recorded using a password-protected device.

Privacy is essential therefore; no identifiable information will be collected to maintain confidentiality. Data collected will be stored on a password-protected device. Data will be saved in a secure location and destroyed after three years.

If you are interested or have further questions, please contact me via email at hooks@csus.edu. Thank you for your time. I hope to hear from you.

Best Regards,

Austin Hooks

Appendix D

Interview Guide

Anti-blackness

1. What are your experiences working with Black youth?
2. Have restorative practices or policies been used in your school site?
 - a. If yes, what specific practices or policies were implemented?
3. How can school districts promote social justice?
4. What are your experiences discussing anti-blackness practices/policies in education?
5. In what ways social workers can promote equity for Black youth?
6. How comfortable do you feel addressing issues of racial injustice in education?
7. What barriers have you faced when engaging in advocacy for youth of color?

School-to-prison pipeline

8. Have you heard of the school-to-prison pipeline? If so, what does it mean?
9. Why do you think youth of color specifically Black youth are disproportionately represented in school-to-pipeline?
10. Have you ever seen any instances of the school-to-prison pipeline operating (American Civil Liberties Union, 2018)?
11. What do you think are the reasons for the increase in suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests in schools across the country operating (American Civil Liberties Union, 2018)?
12. Describe the impact on zero tolerance policies on a student's right to education?
13. What alternative policies can be implemented to prevent the school-to-prison pipeline?

Appendix E

Demographic Data Questionnaire

1. Please indicate your age range
 - a. 20-24
 - b. 25-34
 - c. 35-44
 - d. 45-54
 - e. 55-65
 - f. 65+
2. Please indicate your race/ethnic background
3. Please indicate your gender

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