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(Un)Doing Hegemony in Education: Disrupting School-to-Prison Pipelines for Black Males

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The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the disturbing national trend in which children are funneled out of public schools and into juvenile and criminal justice systems. The purpose of this article is to theorize how this pipeline fulfills societal commitments to black male over-incarceration. First, the author reviews the troublesome perceptions of black boys and men in educational settings throughout the educational pipeline. Next, the ways in which black American boys are scripted out of childhood humanity are discussed, drawing upon tenets of discipline and punishment theory. Second, drawing from additional theories of power, the article re-interprets school discipline and achievement data in the educational pipeline as tools of containment that support school-to-prison pipelines for black males. The third section synthesizes the literature on black male behavioral responses in disempowering educational settings. The article closes with discussion and implications for schools and society.

Black males remain one of the most socially and academically marginalized student groups in US schools (Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013; Dancy & Brown, 2012; Ferguson, 2003; Howard, 2013; Lewis & Erskine, 2008; Noguera, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999). Differential achievement and school completion rates; curricular inequities; over-expulsions and suspensions; over-representations in special, general, and vocational education; and under-representation in rigorous or gifted and talented courses characterize this marginalization (Ford, 2011; Garibaldi, 1992; Grantham, 2011; Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998; Noguera, 2003; Ross, 2012). Although the plight of black males in schools is well-documented, there has been little change in policy or practice and little learning from this student group that is not associated with negative indicators (Garibaldi, 1992; Price, 2000). For instance, disparate learning and discipline trends flow from assumptions that black males are “unteachable” and “up-to-no good” (Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013; Polite & Davis, 1999). These realities work to construct what researchers and media pundits identify as the “school-to-prison pipeline.” Students of color, particularly black males, are vulnerable to this path (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2013).

The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the disturbing national trend in which children are funneled out of public schools and into juvenile and criminal justice systems. Supporting this system are several policies and practices. For instance, the proliferation of zero-tolerance school policies in the 1980s and 1990s, complete with drug-sniffing dogs and metal detectors, has met minor infractions (e.g., lateness and dress code violations) with suspensions, expulsions, and

arrests, instead of the customary trip to the principal's office (ACLU, 2013). Furthermore, many K-12 public schools across the country staff law enforcement agents on school campuses in growing numbers (Kim & Geronimo, 2009). High school teachers and public school students report an increase of armed police officers stationed on school grounds (Kim & Geronimo, 2009).

Black males experience disproportionately high infant mortality rates, are more likely to be reared in chronic and abject poverty, and are over-represented in underfunded schools (Anderson, 2008; Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013; Dancy & Brown, 2012; Polite & Davis, 1999). The persistence of social ills in the lives of young, black males reveals unique and harmful effects even in adulthood (Dancy, 2012; Howard, 2013). For instance, black males have chronically high unemployment, are over-incarcerated, have disparately more negative health conditions, and ultimately lower life expectations than any of the largest racial/ethnic and gender groups in the United States (Alexander, 2012; Howard, 2013; US Department of Commerce, 2009). Public perceptions of black males also are studied in the literature. Black males occupy a paradox in the American public psyche that plays out in schools, where they are both admired and despised (Dancy & Brown, 2012; Davis, 1994, 2001). Open praise of black male heroics in peer and athletic circles in schools coexists alongside the negative stereotypes of violence, fear, and hypersexuality. Public enjoyment of black male talent and genius in music and entertainment concurrently survives with modern-day police and neighborhood lynchings of unarmed black males. In her discussion of the "U.S love-hate relationship with black males" (p. 8), Ladson-Billings (2011) observes:

We see black males as "problems" that our society must find ways to eradicate. We regularly determine them to be the root cause of most problems in school and society. We seem to hate their dress, their language, and their effect. We hate that they challenge authority and command so much social power. While the society apparently loves them in narrow niches and specific slots—music, basketball, football, track—we seem less comfortable with them in places like the National Honor Society, the debate team, or the computer club. (p. 9)

Ladson-Billings' words appropriately indict educational settings as complicit in the societal banishment of African American males. Her words also recognize that any suspension of this aim occurs only when black male bodies operate within the narrow paradigms established in a white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal world (hooks, 2004a).

While educational settings are found to reproduce inequity for black males (Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013), public and school failures to institutionalize supports persist. The purpose of this article is to theorize the ways in which the school-to-prison pipeline fulfills societal commitments to black male over-incarceration. First, I briefly review the troublesome perceptions of black boys and men in educational settings throughout the educational pipeline. Specifically, I pay attention to the ways black American boys are scripted out of childhood humanity, drawing upon tenets of Foucault's (1980) social control thesis. Second, drawing from Foucault's (1980) and Collins' (1989) theories of power, the article re-interprets school discipline and achievement data in the educational pipeline as tools of containment that support school-to-prison pipelines for black males. The third section synthesizes the literature on black male responses in disempowering educational settings. Finally, the article closes with discussion and implications for educational settings and society. While I pay attention to issues of identity intersectionality in the review of literature, as appropriate, to disrupt monolithic portrayals of black males (Crenshaw, 1989), the focus of this piece is to interpret the educational challenges and factors that cut across multiple identities.

MEN IN LITTLE BODIES: SCRIPTING BLACK BOYS OUT OF CHILDHOOD

In his social control thesis, Michel Foucault (1980, 1996, 1997) argued that institutions (e.g., schools) confine selected groups as a method of controlling or isolating the socially undesirable. According to Foucault, schools are institutions that teach people to respond in predictable ways, and education is a form of disciplinary power used to maintain social order (Foucault, 1980). Educational practices are associated with the emergence of innovation, and these practices have a central role in increasing professionalization and bureaucratization of western society. Moreover, these practices have a direct impact on all sections of society through mass education. Foucault (1980) viewed power as a mechanism used to objectify human beings and bring order through human interactions. Power is used to define and replicate what is “normal” and is used to enforce conformity (Jardine, 2010).

Three instruments of power serve to control, monitor, and classify individuals: hierarchical observation (i.e., surveillance), normalizing judgment, and examination (Foucault, 1980). Hierarchical observation is evident in the bureaucratic systems of checks and balances in schools, among other means and methods of structural oversight. An example of hierarchical observation in school is the use of constant observation or surveillance to intimidate students from breaking rules and regulations. Normalizing judgments are the standards institutions use to sanction and police the body around behavior, time, speech, and sexuality, among other elements (Foucault, 1980). Dress codes, for example, enable school personnel to decide whether student clothing is “appropriate.” The examination tool involves power-holders assessing whether political subjects fit with or deviate from the norm or mainstream, and then documenting the judgment. Deviation from the norm is subject to punishment while rewards are given for the ability to stay within normal limits. Foucault found the examination to be the most important instrument of disciplinary power because it combines hierarchical observation with normalizing judgment.

White, male, elite class standards comprise the basis for the politics of containment (i.e., school discipline and surveillance) for black males (Dancy, 2012). American education emerged to broker the larger colony’s interests in many ways (Apple, 1992). The colonial school functioned to educate the developing nation’s white male descendants in ways that taught them the methods of the controlling class (Dancy, 2013; Solomon, 1985). Over time, American education has successfully maintained colonial interest through various traditions including the creation of different schooling institutions to preserve class divides (Memmi, 1965).

Societal employment of all Foucault’s (1980) three tools works to exclude black boys from the social construction of childhood (Dancy, 2012; Ferguson, 2003; Kunjufu, 1986). One recent example of this effort is the shooting of Trayvon Martin. On February 26, 2012, an unarmed black Florida teenager, Trayvon Martin, was shot and killed by white Hispanic George Zimmerman, an adult citizen. While the guilt or innocence of the assailant, George Zimmerman, was tried in the courts, one relevant question went curiously ignored: Did society view Martin as a child? In a number of press conferences and interviews, Martin’s mother, Sybrina Fulton, reminded the public that Martin was a child, that he was a boy and not a man. In one press conference, she observed, “Trayvon Martin was a child . . . I think sometimes it got lost” (Joseph & Somaiya, 2013). While policy definitions of persons as children or adults appear relatively uncontroversial in the public, Trayvon Martin’s 17-year-old body seemed an exception. Many in the courts and media who felt Martin’s murder was justified also carefully ignored, or summarily dismissed,

any construction of him as a child, reaching rather for labels like “suspect,” “thug,” “punk,” or “asshole” (in the words of his assailant, George Zimmerman) (Pitts, 2013). Some pundits actually sought to debate Trayvon Martin’s age, despite the birth certificate, in effort to consign Martin to adulthood (Pitts, 2013).

According to media reports and essays, Zimmerman’s defense attorneys appeared successful in erasing any jury considerations of Martin as a child, including any intuitive assumptions that childhood invokes in American culture (Ford, 2013). Juror #B37’s casual observations that Martin caused his own death and was unjustified in defending himself, fell outside of how America thinks about childhood. In addition, this framing counters the common advice public officials, educators, and parents give to children about how to react when assailed by strangers (Wikihow, 2013). The public cheers when children in movies hit, kick, punch or otherwise mount attacks in self-defense. The public also mourns and presses for retribution even if children’s actions result in their deaths or severe injuries (Ladson-Billings, 2011). However, Martin’s ex-communication from this narrative of childhood responds to historical tropes about black men.

Childhood as a construct in American culture is contrived innocence, a projection of an invented pristine moment outside of the cruelties of life (Ladson-Billings, 2011). In addition, the structural classifications of persons aged 0–18 as, legally, children, respond to the modern K-12 education lifecycle as well as biological growth cycles (Aries, 1962). With the last century’s proscriptions of child labor and the rise of the middle class, social understanding of childhood as blissful innocence has largely freed children from public expectations of economic productivity. However, middle-class attainment was not intended for the poor and certainly not for people of color (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Black children in the United States historically never had a separate status from their mothers. Children were units of an enslaver’s chattel from whom wealth was extracted through the sale of bodies or abusing labor on the plantation. This paradigm embeds institutional observations (i.e., surveillance) against a societal rubric for normative judgments (Foucault, 1980). The resulting examination, therefore, finds black boys as fully-exploitable men in little bodies (Foucault, 1980). Following the liberation of the enslaved, white supremacy fashioned a concept of both black men and boys as menaces to society, in order to create a new way of knowing bodies that were no longer controllable assets (Dancy, 2012). This new normative judgment has been observed as a tool of power in the 1955 lynching of 14-year old black male, Emmett Till. Schools are complicit in preparing black boys for other forms of societal containment or other harsh life outcomes.

“PUSH ‘em OUT, LOCK ‘em OUT”: SCHOOLS TROUBLING BLACK BOYS

Foucault (1990/1978) observed that Western regimes must maintain cultural norms by containing and policing the deviant. Extending Foucault’s work, Collins’ (1998) new politics of containment theory questions how the “changing patterns of the global economy, the wholesale denial of deeply entrenched racial practices in the United States, and the emergence of a rhetoric of color blindness arguing that institutionalized racism has disappeared” (pp. 30–31) undercuts claims from African Americans that race discrimination persists. The emergence of the rhetoric of colorblindness obscures the workings of institutional power and challenges the notions of black disadvantage due to racial barriers. The imperceptible nature of the politics of containment creates exclusionary practices detrimental to African American boys navigating the education pipeline. Furthermore,

criminalizing and pathologizing the behaviors of black boys and men work to maintain social order. Even black males who are praised in athletic arenas are not relieved of the public scrutiny surrounding black male bodies, which are read as threatening and prone to misbehaving (Cole, 2001). The “black males misbehaving” narrative (Clarke, 1991), which expresses, affirms, and authorizes popular fears and anxieties around raced bodies, intersects with school sanctions in ways that result in the following six disturbing trends.

First, black males comprise close to 4 million, or 7% of the US student population (US Department of Education, 2011). However, data in *The Urgency of Now: The Schott Foundation 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males* (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012) noted that black males are the least likely to secure a regular diploma four years after beginning high school. The report also included an analysis of state-reported graduation rate data (2009–2010) and found that in 38 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, black males have the lowest graduation rates among black, Latino, and white, male and female students¹.

In general, only 52% of black males graduate from high school in four years, compared to 78% of white males who do. Yet, the national graduation rate for black males has increased by ten percentage points, from 42% in 2001–2002 to 52% in 2009–2010 (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). The progress over nine years toward closure of the black male and white male graduation gap has only achieved a three percentage point gain, from a 29 percentage point gap to 26. According to the Schott Foundation Report, it would take nearly 50 years for black males to secure the same high school graduation rates as their white male peers. Therefore, the urgency of this figure is not only about educational attainment but the speed with which education reform efforts meet the disparate rate of graduation.

Some states perform well below the national black male graduation average. For instance, a meager 37% of black boys graduate from New York high schools in four years in comparison to 78% of their white male counterparts. Additionally, states with glaringly large gaps between graduation rates for black and white males include the District of Columbia (50%), Iowa (49%), and Nebraska (43%). States with relatively small black populations achieve high graduation rates for black male students and suggest that black males, on average, perform better when they are not relegated to under-resourced districts or schools. When provided similar opportunities (e.g., schools in Maine, Utah, Vermont, Idaho), black males produce similar or better outcomes compared to their white male peers (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). On average, states with low graduation rates for black male students (e.g., New York, Nebraska, South Carolina) tend to have concentrations of those students in under-resourced districts, where both black and white male students perform poorly.

The Schott report identifies two key interventions in school districts with the highest graduation rates for black males. First, on average, states and districts that limit the impact of poverty and resource disparities on students, reach better outcomes. Second, innovative support-based programming is a valuable intervention in school districts. While school districts in New York reform education based on standards, the district has not provided supports for a critical mass of black males to reach those standards (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). A critical area of support, for instance, is the reform of temporary school closings, or “snow days,” which negatively affect black student achievement (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012).

State investment in the status quo reproduces the politics of containment. As Collins (1998) contends, racial segregation is one of the primary tools. Racial segregation leads to “the division of racial groups into physical and symbolic spaces based on the belief that proximity to the group

deemed inferior will harm the allegedly superior group” (Collins, 1998, p. 280). People of color are disproportionately poor and subsequently schooled in poorer districts (Dancy & Horsford, 2010). This kind of consistent social arrangement around black male lives remains remarkably unchanged in contemporary American society (Dancy & Brown, 2012; Noguera, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999). In spite of the advancements of the civil rights movements, black boys and men generally remain excluded from good jobs, schools, and neighborhoods (Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013). Thus, the practice of de facto racial segregation is one strategy of control that illustrates how politics of containment persist amid societal laws that abolish such maneuvers. For instance, formal desegregation in schools gave African American boys and men access to educational attainment; however possessing the right to be in a public space, such as schools, did not necessarily translate into the right of equitable treatment in those public spaces (Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013).

The Schott Foundation Report (2012) also argues that black males are at the center of a “pushout crisis,” which responds to Foucault’s theory of power (p. 31). The report identifies two ways in which black students, particularly males, are kept out of schools. First, the report noted that third graders who attend schools with an average of five unscheduled closures report reading and math achievement scores that are nearly three percent lower than third graders who attend schools with no closings. Fewer learning opportunities along with other factors contributing to school absence only exacerbate achievement gaps for black students. For instance, chronic absenteeism is linked to lower achievement, while more time devoted to learning is highly correlated with higher achievement (Dobbie & Fryar, 2011). A second and more well-established issue in the literature is the high rate of suspension among black males (Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013; Dancy & Brown, 2012; Howard, 2013; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Because black males are disparately policed in schools due to their hypervisibility, others’ subjective interpretation, and inequitable punishment (Ferguson, 2000), suspensions embed surveillance, normative judgments, and examination vis-à-vis Foucault’s arguments. A report from the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at UCLA’s Civil Rights Project (Losen & Gillespie, 2012) indicates that over three million students were suspended at least one time in the 2009–2010 academic year. Students who have been suspended are three times more likely to drop out of school by the tenth grade when compared to students who have never been suspended. Moreover, students who drop out of school are three times more likely to be incarcerated in their lives (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). When these students return to school, they are sanctioned in inequitable ways, including increased barriers to guidance counselors, mentors, or mental health professionals who could support their needs (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). Black males are three times more likely than white, Latino, and Asian males to be suspended from elementary and secondary schools (Aud, Fox, & Kewal Ramani, 2010). Not only are the wages of suspension associated with sociocognitive development, they also are associated with learning and retention.

Administrative punishment policies are largely correlated with decreased learning outcomes and increased student attrition (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). In the US, nearly 1 out of every 6 black students (17%), were suspended at least once in 2009–2010, compared to 1 in 20 white students (.05%). More extreme cases include a school district in Pontiac, Michigan, in which 66% of the black students have been suspended at least once (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). While the pushout crisis increases the likelihood for incarceration, the Schott Foundation Report (2012) also calls attention to America’s “lockout crisis” as a simultaneous phenomenon (p. 39). This crisis describes the pathological blocking of black males’ access to

several critical resources (e.g., access to highly effective teachers, opportunities for advanced placement) that support learning. The Schott Report identifies five areas in which black male achievement is hindered or black male bodies are “locked out”: (a) early childhood education, (b) student-centered learning, (c) well-resourced community schools, (d) gifted/talented and advanced placement opportunities, and (e) post-secondary attainment opportunities. These areas are briefly elucidated below.

Foucault (1980) noted the role of classification in efforts to contain groups. Black boys are more likely than other student groups to be classified as mentally deficient or to be identified as suffering from a learning disability and placed in special education (Losen & Orfield, 2002; Noguera, 2012). Even though black students account for less than 20% of the overall public school population, they are grossly over-represented in all special education categories, accounting for 33% of students classified as mentally retarded (MR), 27% of students classified as emotionally disturbed (ED), and 18% of students classified with a specific learning disability (SLD) (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2007; Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). In addition, several researchers discovered teacher misunderstanding of black male students, which severely impacts the process of over-identification for special education referrals and the underachievement of students (Howard, 2001; Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003). In fact, some black parents have accused school systems across the country of using special education, a federally subsidized program tailored for children with documented disabilities, as a dumping ground for disruptive black children (Lewis & Erskine, 2008).

As the country moves toward Common Core educational standards, the National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) data question whether the required supports to meet academic standards are available at state and local levels, particularly for black males. In 2011, only 10% of black males in the US were proficient in Grade 8 reading as compared to 35% of white males. In fact, no state has NAEP Grade 8 reading proficiency levels for black males above Connecticut’s 19%. In addition, black male math proficiency scores continue to significantly trail behind those of their white, Latino, and Asian male counterparts despite progress over the last decade (US Department of Education, Institute of Education Science, & NCES, 2009). In 2009, black males in Grades 4 through 8, who were not eligible for free or reduced lunch, had lower math scores than white males who were eligible to receive free and reduced lunch (US Department of Education, NCES, 2011). Black males also are most likely to be retained during their K-8 education (Howard, 2013).

A recent report from the National Center for Children in Poverty (Aratani, Wight, & Cooper, 2011) found socioemotional gaps in early child development among black and white boys that continue to grow through preschool. Although the report finds significant differences between reading and mathematics achievement scores for black and white boys in preschool, the scientists also noted that gaps in most school readiness outcomes disappear by kindergarten. Therefore, early developmental gaps likely correlate with dismal realities for many black males, including low birth weight, foster care, poverty, and hunger, among other challenges to this kind of development (ETS, 2011). In addition, reading at grade level by the third grade has been identified as a benchmark with critical implications for high school completion and college transition (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012).

Second, student-centered learning refers to the ways in which decades of US achievement gap and outcome data make clear a need for more subjective approaches that recognize black male educational needs, social contexts, and learning styles (Schott Foundation for Public Education,

2012). It is likely that the sociocultural norms, practices, and tools that many black males use to navigate their world are completely misaligned with their teachers (Gay & Howard, 2001; Howard, 2013). Thus, recent scholarship contends that culturally responsive educational delivery provides black males with much better chances for school success (Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013; Dancy & Horsford, 2010; Howard, 2013).

Third, black male students are prevented the benefits associated with well-resourced community schools. At a macro-level, the lack of adequate tax revenues in urban areas strain school funding, particularly as residents move. Furthermore, most urban districts spend at least \$500 less per pupil than suburban districts (Legters, Balfanz, Jordan, & McPartland, 2004). Urban school districts serve students with greater educational needs and also face the challenges of aging facilities that require expensive maintenance and renovation. At a micro-level, property-based funding methods used to distribute existing fiscal and learning resources (e.g., access to early education and highly qualified teachers), create inherent inequities (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012).

Another Schott Foundation Report, *A Rotting Apple: Education Redlining in New York City* (2013), finds that in many urban and rural areas, inequitable resource distribution policies and practices result in education redlining, which occurs when students' neighborhoods significantly determine performance outcomes. One of the nation's largest districts in New York City provides an example of education redlining (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012; Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012). The process involves segregating black students in schools with high poverty levels, reducing critical resources for high quality learning opportunities (including recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers) through budget and staff cuts, and subsequently creating disproportionately high rates of teacher turnover. The result is often closed schools or state takeovers of schools in communities of color. In this context, any chance of connecting students in these neighborhoods to well-resourced community schools is highly unlikely (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012).

Fourth, black male students are noticeably under-represented in Gifted and Talented programs in the US, and very few are allowed to take Advanced Placement (AP) classes. In New York City, few students in predominantly black community school districts, if any, are tested for admission to Gifted and Talented programs. In other states, magnet schools are found to promote AP participation among white students but reduce participation among college-bound black students, particularly males (Klopfenstein, 2004). These programs are traditionally better resourced, with more experienced and more highly qualified teachers (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). At the high school level, black males are generally least likely to take and pass AP courses, and black males score significantly lower than their white, Latino, and Asian counterparts in these courses (US Department of Education, Institute of Education Science, & NCES, 2009). Furthermore, teachers and counselors disproportionately track black boys into low academic-ability classrooms, whereas many of their white counterparts are placed in advanced courses that prepare them for college placement in competitive institutions (Palmer & Maramba, 2011).

Fifth, a shift in the global economy toward a demand for higher-order skills has placed emphasis on post-secondary education and training as a maker of opportunity in America. A recent study found that, by 2018, more than two-thirds of the 47 million projected job openings will require some level of post-secondary education of training, including industry certification (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). Over the last four decades, roughly 39% of

American adults have held a two- or four-year degree. In many states like New York, nearly two-thirds of entering college students require some remediation. In addition, financial aid supports are often not readily available to help this make this transition (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). Prince and Choitz (2012) argue that the United States will need to produce about 24 million additional credentials by 2025 to keep pace with leading Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, and achieve a 60% degree attainment rate among adults ages 25 to 64. However, at current attainment rates, the US is on track to produce 278,500 additional credentials by 2025—a significant shortfall (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). The aforementioned data show that schooling conditions have not adequately served black males well. Although the experiences of black males in schools are the subject of many reports and studies, the following section interrogates a body of research on black male reactions to education inequities. The literature base supports the idea that while society and educational settings trouble black boys, black boys aptly trouble these systems back in resistance.

BLACK BOYS AND THE SPACE OF RESPONSE: RESISTANT IDENTITIES AND BEHAVIORS

Scholars found that common stereotypes, including “popular youth” and “classroom terror,” lead to a range of behaviors, strategies, and constructions within and beyond schooling spaces that influence how black boys make meaning of themselves over time (Billson, 1996; Davis, 2000; Ferguson, 2000, 2007; Majors & Billson, 1992; Sewell, 1997). Black men who have attended school in the American educational systems consistently tell graphic stories that bear out this argument (Cose, 2003; Wright, 1945/2005). Their autobiographical sketches reveal the impact of disparate schooling and collegiate experiences on academic outcomes and the construction of identity. For example, *Black Boy* by Richard Wright (1945/2005) provides an autobiographical description of an early black boy’s experience in school. This account has been the subject of scholarship interrogating the ways black male bodies are policed in education (Cose, 2003; Dancy, 2012, 2014; hooks, 2004b). For instance, hooks (2004b) writes: “A reader and a thinker, Wright was constantly interrogated by classmates and teachers who wanted him to remain silent. They wanted to know ‘why do you ask so many questions?’” (p. 35).

In *The Envy of the World: On Being a Black Man in America*, Ellis Cose (2003) writes that poor black children during Richard Wright’s time were classified as unable to learn. In fact, Wright (1945/2005) argues that learning to read and write in his early childhood angered white American communities who wanted him to remain uneducated. The narratives of black feminist scholars recall sobering contemporary stories of black men similar to the 1920s (hooks, 2004b). Cose reflects:

That elementary school experience made it difficult for me to take school seriously. I was never a bad student, but I simply didn’t see it as a venue where much learning would take place or where my mind would be stretched. And the more schooling I received, the more my assessment was confirmed . . . [I learned to be] so mistrustful of school, so alienated from its methods, and so convinced that I was too smart to be there, that I was in no mood to give it my heart. (Cose, 2003, as cited in hooks, 2004b, p. 35)

In *Makes Me Wanna Holler*, Nathan McCall (1995) describes the racial harassment he encountered as an 11-year-old alone in a predominantly white school:

I was the only [black] in most of my classes. When I walked into one room and sat down, the students near me would get up and move away . . . It wasn't much better dealing with white teachers. They avoided eye contact with me as much as possible . . . It was too much for an eleven-year-old to challenge, and I didn't try. Instead, I tried to become invisible. I kept to myself, remained quiet during class discussions, and never asked questions in or after class. I kept my eyes glued to my desk or looked straight ahead to avoid drawing attention to myself. I staggered, numb and withdrawn, through each school day. (as cited in hooks, 2004b, p. 37)

Some studies note the ways in which the Wright (1945/2005) and Cose (2003) narratives demonstrate why black boys find it necessary to trouble schools and influence other black boys to act similarly (Harris, 1995; Kunjufu, 1986). Subsequently, the peer group becomes a precarious incubator for an orthodox black boyhood that resists oppressive environments.

Some schooling experiences are so transformative in the lives of black boys that they can even reverse homegrown values (Dancy & Brown, 2012; Ferguson, 2000; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Years ago, scholars contended that black boys learn to behave in accordance with a culture in which coolness is most respected and attained by breaking rules or receiving poor grades in school (Ferguson, 2000; Kunjufu, 1986). Outcomes usually include social rewards like security in peer groups, achievement, belonging, status, and self-validation (Harris, 1995; Taylor, 1989). Conversely, black males who perform well academically or exhibit different instincts are potentially labeled by same-race peers as selling out and acting white (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The likelihood of peer group acceptance or rejection, however, is not the only force that shapes boys' identities and behaviors (Kunjufu, 1986; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Black boys learn early to value peer group admiration following success in athletics, fighting, or risk-taking or "playing the dozens" well (Kunjufu, 1986). Playing the dozens is defined as a competitive ritual characterized by an exchange of verbal insults related to the participants or members of the participants' families (Harris, 1995).

The adultification of black boys in schools is the subject of a variety of additional studies in educational research (Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013; Dancy & Brown, 2012). The phenomena refers to the ways that acts of childhood transgressions are read as sinister, intentional, and fully conscious attitudes, stripped of any of the innocence and naiveté people generally perceive in children (Ferguson, 2000). For instance, Ferguson (2000) found elementary school teachers with a tendency to invoke such images of "looters" in the LA Riots of the 1990s and "refugees" in Hurricane Katrina, whenever black males did children's behavior such as borrowing library books and not returning them or returning them late. As Ferguson argued, in the case of African American kids, what might be interpreted as the careless behavior of children is displaced by images of adult acts of theft that conjure up violence and mayhem. Thus, the assumption is that black male children embody a willful, destructive, and irrational disregard for property rather than simple carelessness. What is read as natural naughtiness in white children becomes inherent viciousness and insubordination that must be controlled in black male children. Though our culture sees children humanely and worthy of the perception of innocence (although immature), systems of oppression deny black males even that benefit of the doubt.

Like Foucault's (1980) theory argues, Noguera (2003) asserted that more attention should be focused on the institutional dynamic. He writes, "[Black] males may engage in behaviors that

contribute to their underachievement and marginality, but are more likely to be channeled into marginal roles and to be discouraged from challenging themselves by adults who are supposed to help them” (p. 452). Ferguson (2000) makes a similar argument, asserting that black males display aggressive behavior because they are labeled as “unsalvageable” at the beginning of their educational experiences. In *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*, Ann Ferguson (2000) studies how institutional norms and procedures in the field of education are used to maintain a racial order, and how images and racial myths frame how individuals perceive themselves and others in a racial hierarchy.

Ferguson (2000) found evidence that school environment contributes to the marginalization of black boys. Specifically, labels such as “troublemakers” imposed by authorities (teachers, principals, staff) predispose black boys to socially unaccepted and deviant life outcomes. Additionally, Ferguson found that black boys in the study become less eager to persist in their fourth grade year, and learn to model themselves after future professional athletes or black men in urban neighborhoods at the same time. Unfortunately, this plan is shaped for them by contexts that have labeled them as unsalvageable.

Garibaldi (1992) argues that teachers play a seminal role in reversing “unsalvageable” perceptions as well as harmful academic and social behaviors of black boys. However, he further contends that teachers are susceptible to internalizing and projecting negative stereotypes and myths to unfairly describe black boys as a “monolithic group with little hope of survival and success” (p. 8). Garibaldi ultimately maintains that teacher locus may resist positive self-concepts and personal expectations about and among black boys, leading to these students’ disassociation with the learning experience. Similarly, hooks (2004b) recalls how black boys were unfairly stereotyped despite excelling in schools:

White teachers were not eager to teach black boys and white parents were not eager to have black boys sitting next to their sons and daughters. Suddenly, smart black boys were invisible. When a “special” black boy was allowed to be in the gifted classes it was only after he had proven himself to be appropriately subordinate. Always, he was the one smart boy who managed to excel, learned to be obedient, to keep his mouth shut. Smart black boys who wanted to be heard, then and now, often find themselves cast out, deemed troublemakers, and placed in slow classes or in special classes that are mere containment cells for those deemed delinquent. Individual poor and working-class boys who excel academically in the public school system without surrendering their spirit and integrity usually make it because they have an advocate, a parent, parental caregiver, or teacher, who intervenes when the biased educational system threatens them with destruction. (pp. 38–39)

Ferguson (2000) notes three key behaviors that emerge from the biased educational system hooks mentions. These behaviors, Ferguson argues, provide evidence that black boys, to a large degree, perceive manhood as a power struggle. The first, heterosexual power (understood as male heterosexual), refers to the physical, biological, and representational differences to perform acts (i.e., physical touching) that define black boys as perpetrators and black girls as victims. Personal violations of heterosexual power include transgressive behaviors (i.e., same-sex curiosity and attraction). Like other boy groups, when black boys want to show supreme contempt for another boy they call him a girl or liken his behavior to a girl’s behavior (Ferguson, 2000). In general, transgressing rigidly heterosexual masculine codes likely results in victimization and alienation from black boy cultures at school (Davis, 2000).

A second behavior involves usage of “confrontational voice” or classroom performances that engage and disrupt the normal direction of the flow of power. Black boys use power to disrupt the standards and well-scripted roles in classrooms (i.e., constant noise, rapping, laughing, crumpling paper), and schools characterize these actions as disruption (Ferguson, 2007). Furthermore, black boy peer groups perceive other black boys as lively, fun, exciting, and cool in an otherwise bland context (Davis, 1999). However, when black males use confrontational voices in schools, the goal is likely to make a name for themselves (Ferguson, 2000). Harper (1996) adds that how black boys use their voice becomes an identifying marker for masculinity and that “a too-evident facility in white idiom can quickly identify one as a white-identified Uncle Tom who must also be weak, effeminate, and probably a fag” (p. 11).

Black males potentially use the third behavior, fighting, as a mechanism to demonstrate mistrust of authority figures in school due to socio-historical and current power relations in their communities (Ferguson, 2007). Ferguson’s work further contends that fighting is usually an exploratory site to construct media-endorsed identities, a social practice of entertainment, or an attempt to scare others to avoid future confrontations. Black boys who show competence in fighting, sports, teasing, and reporting actual or contrived sexual conquests, are bestowed with greater privileges than those perceived as less adequate in these areas. Corbin and Pruitt (1999) write that black boys turn to sexual promiscuity, machismo, risk-taking, and aggressive social skills to compensate for feelings of insecurity in a Eurocentric world. Such insecurity likely manifests itself in changes in posture, clothing, dialect and language, walking style, and demeanor (Harris, 1995). Majors and Billson (1992) further characterize this behavior as a coping mechanism labeled “cool pose.” The authors define cool pose as:

The presentation of self that many [black boys and] men use to establish their male identity. Cool pose is a ritualized form of masculinity that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, expression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength and control. (p. 4)

Majors and Billson (1992) argue that black boys, prior to college, learn early to project a façade of emotionlessness, fearlessness, and aloofness to counter the poor self-image and confidence expected from the race to which they belong. Majors and Billson also suggest that the cool pose becomes pathological in a sense, or self-sustaining, because of its continued use as coping mechanism. To view black boys (and men) in only this light, however, is problematic. Scholars and activists write that the endorsement of a behaviorally restrictive or uni-dimensional conception of manhood, (i.e., tough guy, player of women) is oppressive (Hunter & Davis, 1992). Unfortunately, families either intentionally or unintentionally reinforce notions of a uni-dimensional boyhood.

Black boys also may consider academic engagement less masculine because of how it is valued in families. In fact, hooks (2004b) argues that “soul-murdering” (p. 40) in families detrimentally affects the self-esteem of black boys and potentially shames their authentic selves:

In some [black] families where reading is encouraged in girl children, a boy who likes to read is perceived as suspect, as on the road to being a “sissy.” Certainly as long as [black] people buy into the notion of patriarchal manhood, which says that real men are all body and no mind, [black boys] who are cerebral, who want to read, and who love books will risk being ridiculed as not manly. (p. 40)

hooks reflects on experiences in her home in which her brother was constantly humiliated by her father for “not measuring up to the standards of patriarchal maleness” (2014b, p. 89).

Her suggestion that black boys are valued and indulged for being male, but also shamed for not conforming to acceptable patriarchal boyhood, charges educational systems with failing to impart or inspire learning in black boys. Both conditions infect the masculine identities of black boys with powerlessness and hopelessness (hooks, 2004b).

Because of these early socialization experiences, researchers claim that black men quickly understand the social rewards associated with exhibiting masculine behaviors, derogatory name calling, and peer disapproval frequently associated with feminine behaviors (Davis, 2001; Ferguson, 2007). Discipline and retention trends support this assertion. For instance, black boys have the highest suspension and dropout rates at elementary and high school levels. Widely, the academic performance of black boys is lower than those of their white and Asian counterparts in both urban and non-urban settings (Hrabowski, Maton, & Grief, 1998). These experiences subsequently inform black men's collegiate perceptions. In fact, there are a number of well-rehearsed gender roles that negatively correlate with black men's collegiate perceptions by the time black men reach traditional college age (Dancy, 2012; Fleming, 1984; Polite & Davis, 1999).

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS: A DISRUPTIVE DISCUSSION

In this article, I set out to theorize six trends of push-out and lockout that support school-to-prison pipelines for black males: (1) excessive school closings and disciplinary actions, (2) barriers to early childhood education, (3) an avoidance or inability to promote student-centered learning, (4) poorly resourced community schools, (5) under-representation in gifted/talented and advanced placement opportunities and (6) under-representation in post-secondary attainment opportunities. As Foucault's (1980) theory argues, these tactics respond to societal efforts to standardize white, elite male values and contain "the abnormal." Furthermore, the elimination of black boys from schools perpetuates the persistent stereotype of black male bodies, not minds, as commodities. Because schools act to deprive black males any access to childhood humanity (Ferguson, 2000), these boys' careless behaviors are re-scripted as deviant, requiring dismissal from school settings and, eventually, incarceration or death to their futures. Unsurprisingly, the research on black boys' experiences reveals student groups resisting institutional oppressions.

Unfortunately, dominant perspectives on "the black male problem" indict black males as creators of their own problems as opposed to the incapacities of schools (Howard, 2013; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). However, these reactions tend to reflect the narrow-minded and hidebound tenets of racism in the public's determination to ignore the histories of violent discrimination and uncritically construct America as post-racial. Racism refers to the global system of oppression that disempowers people based on skin-color or assumptions that people of particular races hold undesirable qualities (Omi & Winant, 1989). The extant research on black male experiences and the educational pipeline requires common thought and consideration among all educational personnel—in schools, colleges, and other settings—who care about the educational experiences of black males.

First, macro-level oppressions require macro-level interventions. The work of civil rights movements is not over and is a critical educational outcome. A citizenry's responsibility is to push people in positions of power and to resist unjust political calculus. Lovers of justice must join efforts to organize against the racist powers that threaten black male lives in society. These efforts must include attention to educational opportunity as a persistent vehicle for political

advancement and improved quality of life. Resisters must support these efforts or start our own, since conversations, while vital, are not substitutes for legislation.

There also are interventions at more micro-levels, many of which capture the attention of school administrators, local communities, and parents as possible solutions to the problems associated with black males in public schools. First, mentoring programs that assign professional black men as role models for young boys, typically in elementary and middle schools, have been established in many school districts, both urban and suburban. Second, teachers play a critical role in reversing black boys' academic and social behaviors that conflict with educational achievement. Teachers are leaders of the classroom experience. The messages teachers consciously or subconsciously give to black males will manifest themselves in black males' perceptions of schools and American society. Counselors also must refrain from stereotypical thinking about the intellectual capacity and aptitude of black males. In general, the public must commit to decolonizing its oppressive gaze on black boys and men.

This article argues that educational settings must mine the sources for improving institutional equity and climate. Rather than fostering positive and productive social environments, schools far too often reduce or minimize black male spirit and potential. Much evidence supports the claim that schools not only neglect the social, emotive, and developmental needs of black males but also abuse them emotionally (Brown, Dancy & Davis, 2013; Brown & Davis, 2000). Whereas black Americans traditionally have placed much faith in public schools, regardless of outcomes and deliverables, current schooling experiences of many black males remain yet another disappointment. For many of these boys, school is a place that ignores their aspirations, disrespects their ability to learn, fails to access and cultivate their hidden talents, and restricts their identity options. Unfortunately, too many of these students simply give up and give into low expectations and misguided notions about their authentic selves. In this regard, however, black males may be less different from other students in schools across the nation.

Stone (1997) defines security as "protecting people's identities as well as their existence" (p. 90). Although often disregarded, schools must first ensure that all reasonable student needs are met or accommodated. Hence, any examination of student achievement must essentially include an investigation of student social lives. The community is the whole and the school is the fragment (Jordan & Cooper, 2003). This line of reasoning begs the question: Do black males have access to basic needs, including meaningful networks, adequate resources, and enriching opportunities? As Anyon (1995) argued, endeavoring to reform schools without simultaneously strengthening the contexts in which they are located is like attempting to filter the air in a room with the windows open. Unfortunately, the scholarship in this article suggests that schools are disengaging meaningful educational reform in favor of executing a devious public strategy.

The school-to-prison pipeline works to support mass incarceration of black males in the larger society. The pathological incarceration of Black males is described in the literature as the new Jim Crow (Alexander, 2012).² One of the aims of the new Jim Crow is to justify racially biased practices and mass incarceration with the argument that black males are naturally violent and must be contained. To be sure, this perception is supported in media, which often depict black males as gangsters, drug dealers, and street thugs. Characterizations of black males as aggressive, nefarious, indolent, ignorant, and brutish respond to historical claims of black male inhumanity. However, any public insistence that violent crime is responsible for mass incarceration does not bear out in data analysis; it persists to intentionally victimize black males (Alexander, 2012).

Sadly, while society executes a prison-building boom unprecedented in world history (Alexander, 2012), schools attempt to prepare black boys around this reality.

This article is not just an additional critique of how educational politics, complex bureaucracy, and institutionalism ignore students' cultural background and shape a narrow-minded view of schools and schooling. Moreover, the location of Foucault's (1980) social control thesis in the aforementioned six trends is a clarion call for response to the insidiousness that is the American school-to-prison pipeline. If this hegemony is not resisted on macro- and micro-levels, much is at stake. America suffers when school-to-prison pipelines continue to persecute black males. Indeed, society has an opportunity to fulfill its own interests (i.e., increased tax revenue, reduced reliance on social services, and rising civic engagement) through supporting black male education and achievement. Instead, America appears to be forsaking its duty to educate all citizens in favor of fulfilling the low and unspeakable expectations of a sordid national past.

NOTES

1. It should be noted that Latino males had the lowest the graduation rates in the other 11 states (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012).
2. Jim Crow laws were racialsegregation laws enacted between 1876 and 1965 at the state and local level in the US. They mandated dejure racial segregation in all public facilities in Southern states of the former Confederacy with a separatebutequal status for AfricanAmericans (Alexander, 2012).

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