



MONTCLAIR STATE
UNIVERSITY

Montclair State University
**Montclair State University Digital
Commons**

Department of Teaching and Learning
Scholarship and Creative Works

Department of Teaching and Learning

6-1-2019

“Orange is the New Black” Comes to New Jersey’s Public Schools: Black Girls and Disproportionate Rates of Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions

Dierdre Paul

Montclair State University, pauld@montclair.edu

Jacqueline Araneo

Princeton University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/teaching-learning-facpubs>



Part of the [Elementary Education and Teaching Commons](#)

MSU Digital Commons Citation

Paul, Dierdre and Araneo, Jacqueline, "“Orange is the New Black” Comes to New Jersey’s Public Schools: Black Girls and Disproportionate Rates of Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions" (2019).

Department of Teaching and Learning Scholarship and Creative Works. 10.

<https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/teaching-learning-facpubs/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Teaching and Learning at Montclair State University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Department of Teaching and Learning Scholarship and Creative Works by an authorized administrator of Montclair State University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@montclair.edu.



“Orange is the New Black” Comes to New Jersey’s Public Schools: Black Girls and Disproportionate Rates of Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions

Dierdre Glenn Paul^{1,2,3,5} · Jacqueline Araneo⁴

Published online: 27 October 2018
© Springer Nature B.V. 2018

Abstract

This paper explores out-of-school suspensions and expulsions among Black females, who have often been ignored in the extant educational research literature. More specifically, the authors explore the question of whether Black females have been overrepresented in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions in New Jersey public schools. Using data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), the authors found that Black females in New Jersey have in fact been overrepresented in both, out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. The extent of that overrepresentation of Black females has not only worsened over time but could also be considered graver in New Jersey than in the rest of the United States. The authors additionally contend that these school push-outs increase the likelihood that Black girls will enter the school-to-criminal justice pipeline. After discussing the study findings in detail, the authors provide several recommendations that are designed to help better comprehend and address the various discipline-related issues impacting Black girls in the New Jersey public school system and that could potentially have broader implications for all of the nation’s schools.

Keywords Black girls · School discipline · Resilience

Foundationally, this study rests on a basic premise specific to the fact that much contemporary research on Black girls and school discipline is devoid of nuance,

✉ Dierdre Glenn Paul
pauld@montclair.edu

¹ Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City, USA

² Lehman College, New York City, USA

³ University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, USA

⁴ Princeton University, Princeton, USA

⁵ Department of Early Childhood, Elementary and Literacy Education, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ 07043, USA

depressing, and primarily casts Black girls in the role of victim. These studies frequently fail to acknowledge Black girls' agency; instead they suggest that Black girls' responses to the dysfunctional school discipline that disproportionately besets them are always reactive and often casts their resistance efforts as counterproductive, negative and misunderstood.

Neither do these studies truly capture the amazing strength and resilience of Black females who admittedly encounter a large number of obstacles on the road to success, nor do the inquiries appear to concede the point that (albeit at a slower rate than other female demographic groups), Black women and girls have and continue to make gains nonetheless.

While some problems facing U.S. women and girls of African descent have shown few signs of abatement, a number of seemingly intransigent problems have been mitigated over the course of time. For example, there has been a notable uptick in the numbers of U.S. black women who self-identify as having "some college" or holding bachelor's degrees post-1970 (Patterson 1998).

In 2004, the percentage of Black women who graduated from college sat at 24.1%. Although that rate has remained static for some time now and hasn't grown commensurately with the graduation rates of women identifying as White, Hispanic or Asian American (Guerra 2013), it is exponentially higher than the rate of Black men who were even enrolled in college during 2002. At that time, Black males comprised an underwhelming 4.3% of students enrolled at post-secondary institutions (Center for Community College Student Engagement 2014).

Regarding Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) disciplines, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBUs) reported awarding 46% of the STEM degrees received to Black women during the years 1995–2004 (Harper 2018). Additionally, Black women constituted the largest percentage of minority women earning bachelor's degrees in computer science (Harper 2018).

All of this information on Black females' rates of educational attainment can be cast as "good news." For this study's authors, the data is also reflective of the strength and resiliency demonstrated by Black females in the face of long odds and tremendous adversity. These findings are also emblematic of the following. While the problems facing the nation's Black women and girls have been and remain weighty and some of them have been around for quite some time now, change and progress have come as well. Although the process of change (itself) is slow and methodical most times, it occurs regardless.

There is also a false syllogism created by researchers who fail to acknowledge a group's progress while continuing to document its problems and the continuing discrimination that impact the community. The suggestion is that little to no progress has been made, when that supposition is historically and factually flawed.

This study's authors instead proffer that such recognition of growth and advancement only serves to enhance the credibility of our findings and the strength of our arguments. As evidenced thus far, this study starts in a distinctive fashion by first highlighting present-day gains made by Black females. Subsequently, it identifies the problem of harsh and punitive school discipline policies that stand in the way of additional progress yet to be made. We assert that any issue that impedes Black girls' ability to realize their full potential must be explored and remedied.

We further contend that the school-discipline problems befalling too many Black girls have a greater effect as a result of the synergistic nexus of their gender, race, and socioeconomic status than would come into play if the positionalities of gender and race were considered in isolation from class status. And although the statistics scrutinized and used to complete this study do not sufficiently tease apart all three positionalities, past research on Black females lends support to the existence of a heightened intersectionality amongst all three.

Contemporary Data on the School-Based Discipline of U.S. Black Girls

According to data obtained from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2014), Black females in the United States were suspended at higher rates than females of any other race and ethnicity, as well as most boys during AY2011–2012. And that rate has remained steady. Although Black girls constituted 8% of the K-12 student demographic during AY2013–2014, they accounted for 14% of students receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions during that time frame (U.S. Department of Education 2016).

The trend of temporarily denying Black girls schooling for often questionable behavioral infractions also starts earlier than most reasonable people would believe. Black girls made up 20% of public preschool enrollment, yet they were approximately 54% of all preschool girls who received out-of-school suspensions (Morris 2016). Even more disturbing is the fact that 31% of Black girls were recipients of law enforcement referrals while attending K-12 schools and 34% of Black girls were actually arrested on a school-based charge (Morris 2016).

Despite these concerning facts however, there remains a dearth of research literature devoted to this timely and disturbing phenomenon. As explained by Blake, Butler, Lewis, and Darenshour (2011), “when studies have explored the discipline experiences of Black females, research has mainly focused on Black girls’ discipline sanctions in relation to Black boys, with Black girls rarely mentioned outside of descriptive statistics” (p. 91).

The oversight of Black females in educational research is not a new development. In fact, 15 years ago, in her book *Talkin’ back: Raising and educating resilient Black girls* (Paul 2003), one of the authors noted that the experiences of Black females were frequently subsumed under broader categories, such as Black, female, and poor. In addition, it was noted that the study of Black girls most frequently appeared as a footnote in the much broader discourse on the *endangered Black male*. Unfortunately, with a limited number of exceptions, there’s been little perceptible change in the status of research on Black girls since that time.

While research on Black males and school discipline is certainly an important and well-warranted area of study, it is equally important that researchers explore the discipline-related experiences of Black females. School discipline, including disparities specific to race, gender, and class is a critically imperative topic, especially in consideration of the fact that there are well-researched negative short-term and long-term outcomes associated with exclusionary school discipline practices.

As explained by Petras, Masyn, Buckley, Ialongo, and Kellam (2011), the use of exclusionary school discipline practices does not appear to improve student behavior and is associated with “higher risk for several negative outcomes, including academic failure, grade retention, negative school attitude, and, consequently, high school dropout, juvenile delinquency, and incarceration” (Petras et al. 2011, p. 223). Additionally, “several decades of research document that exclusionary discipline is consistently applied disproportionately to Black students” (Vandenaar et al. 2015, p. 224).

Furthermore, school discipline has been found to be associated with negative outcomes specifically for females. For example, among females, the strongest predictor of subsequent arrest during adolescence is whether one experienced school discipline (e.g., suspension or expulsion) in middle school (American Bar Association & National Bar Association 2001, as cited in Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman 2008). In addition, among Black females, those who experience exclusionary discipline practices are at significant risk of teenage pregnancy and juvenile delinquency (Clark et al. 2003, as cited in Blake et al. 2011).

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the extant body of school discipline research by exploring out-of-school suspensions and expulsions among Black females. This article further asserts that there is an explicit link between Black females’ out-of-school suspensions and expulsions and subsequent incarceration and involvement in the criminal justice system.

Specifically, we examine whether Black females have been overrepresented in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions in New Jersey public schools, using data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). Our study specifically focuses on New Jersey for several reasons. First, New Jersey is of particular interest to us, given it is our home state. Second, school discipline is a highly relevant topic in New Jersey, especially post-enactment of the *Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights* law in 2011.

That law, described as “the toughest legislation against bullying in the nation” (Hu 2011), concomitantly fits the widely-accepted definition of a zero-tolerance policy. It is also interesting to note that such zero-tolerance, school discipline policies are viewed by most administrators in schools with high rates of poverty as a magical panacea (of sorts) for undesirable student conduct (Morris 2016).

Finally, we contend that New Jersey is understudied when it comes to educational research and scholarship generated in-state and as it pertains to Black girls, in particular. Researchers typically find richer target areas in more populous states like Florida, Michigan, and New York. Studies conducted in smaller, population-dense states like New Jersey, however, can also make viable contributions and hopefully add to burgeoning national dialogues on the education and schooling of children of color as well as the impact of those social institutions on the status of Black girls.

Literature Review

A couple of thoughts guided the design of our literature review. We started with a supposition that the problem of disproportionate suspensions/expulsions for Black girls had intensified over the course of the recent past. Based upon one of

the authors' prior work on Black girls, we also made an educated conjecture that very different dynamics were at play and influencing decisions specific to the school disciplinary actions imposed on Black girls in contrast to those affecting Black boys and other demographics of girls. We were interested in identifying those trends as well as being able to candidly state that we had reviewed the lion's share of noteworthy scholarship and research that had been conducted on the topic.

Although we fervently believed that there was a paucity of work done in the field, we needed to put forth a good faith effort to test our assumptions. Here's that which we determined. While the overall amount of research on school discipline and black females is limited, there have been some important studies on this topic. In one such study, Wallace et al. (2008) examined racial, ethnic, and gender differences in school discipline among high school students from 1991 to 2005. The study was not specifically focused on black females, but some interesting findings were unearthed nonetheless. For instance, the study found that the race gap in discipline was actually larger among females than males. More specifically, the study found that black females were more than five times as likely to be suspended or expelled than white females. These findings were based on nationally representative, self-reported data from the *University of Michigan's Monitoring the Future* study.

Other studies based on regional data have found similar patterns in school discipline. For instance, Raffaele Mendez and Knoff (2003) examined data on 142 elementary, middle, and high schools in West Central Florida and found that black females were more than three times as likely to be suspended than white females. Morris and Perry (2017) found very similar results when examining data on office referrals from school records in twenty-two middle schools and high schools in Kentucky. They determined that black females had the same probability as white males for receiving an office referral and a higher probability than Latino males, Asian males, and all other females. In another study, Blake et al. (2011) examined elementary and secondary female students in a Midwestern urban school district and found that black females were overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions. Black females were also found to be twice as likely to receive in-school and out-of-school suspensions compared to all other female students.

Some of these studies took the research a step further by not only looking at the rates of school discipline, but also examining the severity and types of rule infractions. Blake et al. (2011) found that black females were disciplined for different types of infractions than other females. For example, their analysis indicated that black females were more likely than white females to be disciplined for defiance, improper dress, and fighting.

In another study, Morris and Perry (2017) found that black females received a disproportionate number of office referrals for infractions such as disruptive behavior, aggression, dress code violations, and disobedience, which the researchers appropriately considered more subjective and ambiguous types of infractions. On the other hand, for the most severe and clear-cut violations, such as drug or alcohol possession, weapon possession, and major law violations, the researchers found few significant effects of race or the intersection of race and gender. These findings are similar to a study conducted by Forsyth et al. (2015), where researchers found that "African American students are punished primarily for subjective infractions such

as disobedience or defiance, suggesting that implicit bias might influence interpretations of student behavior” (as cited in Morris and Perry 2017, p. 129).

In one last study to be presented, Epstein, Blake and Gonzalez (2017) proffer that the disparate and harsh treatment received by Black girls—in both the education and juvenile justice systems—is fueled by the negative perceptions of black girls held by those adults with the power to make discipline-related decisions impacting them. Within the context of this study, survey respondents self-reported their perceptions that Black girls needed “less nurturing, less protection, to be supported and comforted less” than White girls of a comparable age” (p. 1). In addition, the study participants deemed Black girls to be “more independent, know more about adult topics and sex” than their White female counterparts.

These findings are quite rich when considered within the context of K. Sue Jewell’s 1993 groundbreaking work *From Mammy to Miss America and beyond: Cultural images and the shaping of US social policy*, wherein she identifies several cultural images of Black women that have shaped public consciousness and impacted the ways in which Black women are generally perceived and treated. The typologies discussed by Jewell include *Mammy*, *Aunt Jemima*, *Sapphire*, and *Jezebel/the-bad-black-girl*. It is quite interesting that many of the traits associated with Black girls by study respondents in the inquiry completed by Epstein et al. seem to have their roots in the archetypal images of Black women identified by Jewell.

Now, the authors also identified a flaw in the vast majority of the studies we reviewed. That defect speaks to the fact that the nexus between race, gender and socioeconomic status hasn’t been sufficiently explored. Yet, blame shouldn’t necessarily be assigned to the researchers, as schools are not obligated to present this level of disaggregated data to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights or their State Departments of Education. In fact, the vast majority choose against providing this information at all as it isn’t mandated by law. Without that data, it is very difficult to confirm that which we believe to be true. Black girls who are poor are even more susceptible to the negative effects of harshly punitive forms of school discipline.

Data and Methodology

Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)

To explore out-of-school suspensions and expulsions among Black females in New Jersey, we used publicly available data obtained from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). The CRDC is a biennial survey of public schools in the United States “required” by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights since 1968. Yet, it must also be acknowledged that there are no real consequences for failure to participate. The data cover a wide range of topics, including student enrollment, educational programs and services, and school discipline. Important to our study, the CRDC collects data specifically on suspensions and expulsions and also disaggregates the information (to a certain extent) by race and gender. While the

survey covers public schools across the United States, our study focuses specifically on New Jersey, including how New Jersey compares to the United States as a whole.

The CRDC data is also beneficial as it traditionally covers multiple time periods, therefore allowing us to explore whether there have been changes in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions over time. In our study, we specifically examined CRDC data from 2000 and 2011–2012. While the CRDC data on out-school-suspensions and expulsions is also available for 2004, 2006, and 2009–2010 respectively, we chose to eliminate these years from our analysis due to concerns regarding their reliability. More specifically, the 2004 and 2006 data tables note that some of the “numbers should be used with caution due to large statistical uncertainty in the estimate.” The 2009–2010 data tables also note similar issues regarding interpreting the data with caution. Therefore, rather than using potentially questionable data, we decided to simply focus on two points in time, 2000 and 2011–2012, in our analysis.

Demographics

Table 1 contains a demographic breakdown of students in New Jersey public schools based on the 2011–2012 CRDC data. In total, there were 1,361,381 students in New Jersey elementary and secondary public schools during 2011–2012. Total males were 699,264, or 51.4% of the population, while total females were 662,117, or 48.6% of the population. Based on race, White students represented the largest percentage of the population at 51.2%, followed by Hispanics at 21.9%, Blacks at 16.4%, and Asians/Pacific Islanders at 9.2%. Black female students, the focal point of our analysis, represented 8.1% of the population. Demographically, this percentage of Black female students is similar to the one in 2000, where Black females represented 8.6% of the population according to the CRDC (data for 2000 not shown in table).

Table 1 Number of elementary and secondary public school students in NJ by race/ethnicity, 2011–2012. Source: CRDC, 2011–2012

	Amer Indian/ Alaska native	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Black (non-His- panic)	White (non-His- panic)	Two or more races	Total
Total	1720	125,605	297,740	223,555	697,484	15,277	1,361,381
% of total popula- tion	0.1%	9.2%	21.9%	16.4%	51.2%	1.1%	100.0%
Male	863	64,215	152,829	113,887	359,752	7718	699,264
% of total popula- tion	0.1%	4.7%	11.2%	8.4%	26.4%	0.6%	51.4%
Female	857	61,390	144,911	109,668	337,732	7559	662,117
% of total popula- tion	0.1%	4.5%	10.6%	8.1%	24.8%	0.6%	48.6%

Table 2 Number of elementary and secondary public school students in the US by race/ethnicity, 2011–2012. *Source:* CRDC, 2011–2012

	Amer Indian/ Alaska native	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Black (non-Hispanic)	White (non-Hispanic)	Two or more races	Total
Total	573,406	2,537,385	11,697,439	7,883,124	25,627,170	1,287,013	49,605,534
% of total population	1.2%	5.1%	23.6%	15.9%	51.7%	2.6%	100.0%
Male	294,136	1,294,293	5,992,878	4,029,005	13,235,780	650,528	25,496,620
% of total population	0.6%	2.6%	12.1%	8.1%	26.7%	1.3%	51.4%
Female	279,267	1,243,092	5,704,561	3,854,119	12,391,390	636,485	24,108,914
% of total population	0.6%	2.5%	11.5%	7.8%	25.0%	1.3%	48.6%

Table 2 contains a demographic breakdown of students in the United States. Based on the 2011–2012 CRDC data, there were 49,605,534 students in elementary and secondary public schools. Total males were 25,496,620, or 51.4% of the population, while total females were 24,108,914, or 48.6% of the population. Based on race, White students represented the largest percentage of the population at 51.7%. This was followed by Hispanics at 23.6%, Blacks at 15.9% and Asians/Pacific Islanders at 5.1%. Similar to New Jersey, Black females represented 7.8% of the population in the United States in 2011–2012. This is also similar to the year 2000, where Black females represented 8.4% of the population according to the CRDC (data for 2000 not shown in table).

Methodology

In order to explore whether Black females are overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions in New Jersey, we conduct a descriptive study with a series of cross tabulations. More specifically, we examine the number and percentages of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions by race and gender. We then compare Black females as a percentage of total out-of-school suspensions and expulsions to Black females as a percentage of the total population, which enables us to determine whether Black females are overrepresented. Finally, we compare the findings in New Jersey to national averages.

The purpose of this study is to understand whether Black females are overrepresented in -out-of-school suspensions and expulsions in New Jersey. Our hypothesis is that Black females in New Jersey are indeed overrepresented in both out-of-school suspensions (OSS) and expulsions. This hypothesis is based on the existing literature, which has revealed that Black females have been overrepresented in school discipline in other areas of the United States.

Results

We began our study by examining out-of-school suspensions in New Jersey for females by race, which can be found in Table 3 for 2000 and Table 4 for 2011–2012. These tables included the number of out-of-school suspensions for females by race, as well as the percentage of total out-of-school suspensions and the percentage of total population for each group. By comparing the percentage of total out-of-school suspensions to the percentage of the total population, it is clear that Black females are overrepresented in out-of-school suspensions. More specifically, in 2000, Black females represented 13.44% of total out-of-school suspensions in New Jersey, but represented only 8.62% of the total population. By looking at the 2011–2012 data in Table 4, it becomes apparent that the overrepresentation of Black females in out-of-school suspensions has worsened over time. In 2011–2012, Black females as a percentage of total out-of-school suspensions increased to 15.76%, while Black females as a percentage of the total population slightly declined to 8.06%. On a positive note, between 2000 and 2011–2012,

Table 3 Female out of school suspensions in NJ, 2000. *Source:* CRDC, 2000

	Amer Indian/ Alaska native	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Black (non-His- panic)	White (non-His- panic)	Total
Out of school suspension: female (number)	17	401	3918	9959	7737	22,033
Out of school suspension: female (%) ^a	0.02	0.54	5.29	13.44	10.44	29.72
% of total population ^b	0.09	3.03	7.47	8.62	29.53	48.73

Students counted only once regardless of the number of times suspended

^a% calculated as number of females w/out-of-school suspension (by race) divided by total number of males and females w/out-of-school suspension

^b% calculated as number of female students (by race) divided by total number of male and female students

the absolute number of out-of-school suspensions declined from 9959 to 7172 for Black females and from 22,033 to 15,504 for all females.

Next, we examined expulsions in New Jersey for females by race, which can be found in Table 5 for 2000 and Table 6 for 2011–2012. These tables include the number of expulsions for females by race, as well as the percentage of total expulsions and the percentage of total population for each group. Similar to the out-of-school suspension data, Black females are clearly overrepresented in expulsions. In 2000, Black females represented 14.17% of total expulsions, but only represented 8.62% of the total population. Even more alarming is the overrepresentation in 2011–2012, where Black females represented 20.95% of expulsions, but only 8.06% of the population. In terms of absolute numbers from 2000 to 2011–2012, expulsions slightly increased from 72 to 79 for Black females and increased from 106 to 125 for all females.

Lastly, we compared the findings of our New Jersey analysis to the national averages. This data is outlined in Table 7, which shows Black females as a percentage of total out-of-school suspensions, total expulsions, and total population for both New Jersey and the United States. The data indicate that Black females as a percentage of the total population is approximately the same in New Jersey and the United States at 8–9% in 2000 and 2011–2012. Furthermore, the data indicate that Black females are overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions in both New Jersey and the rest of the nation, but that the extent of overrepresentation is greater in New Jersey.

More specifically, in 2000, Black females represented 11.5% of total out-of-school suspensions (OSS) in the United States and 13.4% in New Jersey. In 2011–2012, Black females represented 15.0% of total out-school suspensions in the United States and 15.8% in New Jersey. The difference between New Jersey and the United States is larger for expulsions. Additionally, while Black females represented only 7.9% of total expulsions in the United States in 2000, this number was 14.2% in New Jersey. In 2011–2012, Black females represented 11.3% of total expulsions in the United States but 20.95% of total expulsions in New Jersey. Overrepresentation

Table 4 Female out of school suspensions in NJ, 2011–2012. *Source:* CRDC, 2011–2012

	Amer Indian/ Alaska native	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Black (non- Hispanic)	White (non- Hispanic)	Two or more races	Total
Out of school suspension: female (number)	18	246	4139	7172	3801	128	15,504
Out of school suspension: female (%) ^a	0.04	0.54	9.10	15.76	8.35	0.28	34.08
% of total population ^b	0.06	4.51	10.64	8.06	24.81	0.56	48.64

Students counted only once regardless of the number of times suspended

^a% calculated as number of females w/out-of-school suspension (by race) divided by total number of males and females w/out-of-school suspension

^b% calculated as number of female students (by race) divided by total number of male and female students

Table 5 Female expulsions, 2000. *Source:* CRDC, 2000

	Amer Indian/ Alaska native	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Black (non-His- panic)	White (non-His- panic)	Total
Expulsion: female (number)	0	2	13	72	18	106
Expulsion: female (%) ^a	0.00	0.39	2.56	14.17	3.54	20.87
% of total population ^b	0.09	3.03	7.47	8.62	29.53	48.73

^a% calculated as number of females with expulsions (by race) divided by total number of males and females with expulsions

^b% calculated as total number of female students (by race) divided by total number of male and female students

Table 6 Female expulsions in NJ, 2011–2012. *Source:* CRDC, 2011–2012

	Amer Indian/ Alaska native	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Black (non-His- panic)	White (non-His- panic)	Two or more races	Total
Expulsion: female (number)	0	0	30	79	14	1–3	125
Expulsion: female (%) ^a	0.00	0.00	7.96	20.95	3.71	0.53	33.16
% of total population ^b	0.06	4.51	10.64	8.06	24.81	0.56	48.64

^a% calculated as number of females with expulsions (by race) divided by total number of males and females with expulsions

^b% calculated as number of female students (by race) divided by total number of male and female students

Table 7 Out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for black females in NJ and the US. *Source:* CRDC, 2000 and 2011–2012

	2000		2011–2012	
	US (%)	NJ (%)	US (%)	NJ (%)
% of Total out-of-school suspensions	11.5	13.4	15.0	15.8
% of Total expulsions	7.9	14.2	11.3	21.0
% of Total population	8.4	8.6	7.8	8.1

is, therefore, clearly a concern for both the United States and New Jersey, but it is a heightened concern in the Garden State.

In summary, our analysis shows that Black females in New Jersey are overrepresented in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, as originally hypothesized. By looking at data in 2000 and 2011–2012, it is also clear that overrepresentation for Black females has worsened over time. Furthermore, we found that the extent of overrepresentation for Black females is worse in New Jersey than the national

averages. The reasons for these alarming trends remains unclear, but this topic clearly represents an area where further study is needed.

Limitations

It should be noted that there are limitations to this study. In particular, we are unable to determine the reasons for the overrepresentation of Black females in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. Based on prior research (as discussed in the literature review), it is possible that the overrepresentation of Black girls for school discipline is inequitable and unjust. Morris and Perry (2017), for instance, found that black females received a disproportionate number of office referrals for what they considered more subjective and ambiguous types of infractions (such as disruptive behavior, aggression, dress code violations, and disobedience), therefore suggesting an unjust treatment of Black females. In our study, however, we were unable to carry out this type of analysis, given that the CRDC data does not include the reasons for the suspensions and expulsions. Therefore, a more detailed and sophisticated data set and analysis are needed to better understand these school discipline trends for Black females.

Discussion and Recommendations

If we are to get a better handle on the school discipline gap, an appropriate starting point might be the enactment of federal legislation requiring states and their attendant school districts to include discipline data in the annual report cards that they are legally mandated to submit each year (Losen 2015). In considering New Jersey and its distinctive problem with Black girls, the authors would recommend that the data also be disaggregated to a greater extent and in a more comprehensive fashion that includes race, gender, type of infraction, English Learning status, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. Further, there must be consequences for those states and school districts that fail to maintain the requisite data.

Research suggests that nationally Black girls' disciplinary sanctions have been precipitated by those behaviors most likely to be construed by school personnel as "defiant," "non-compliant" or "unlady-like," as opposed to actionable offenses involving immediate and violent, threatening behaviors (Morris 2007). However, we simply cannot determine whether that national trend holds true in the Garden State because that data is not centrally maintained and/or available to our knowledge.

And while the maintenance of appropriate data is important, we must also remain mindful of the fact that any effective effort towards resolution is multipronged. There are some measures that can be implemented, without the anticipation of change at the federal level. For example, there must be an explicit understanding that all disciplinary infractions aren't the same in respect to the level of threat imposed or severity of the student's actions. We must also ensure that sanctions are developmentally appropriate. The authors further suggest that, in far too many cases, removal from school (over a protracted period) is developmentally inappropriate and

fails to consider the immature decision-making prevalent in many middle and high school-aged students.

And there is one additional thing that the authors are fairly certain about. There is no deficit situated within Black girls that makes them more prone to the harsh disciplinary sanctions imposed upon them, as evidenced by the fact that they are fully capable of excelling under the right circumstances. As such, it is our conjecture that the deficit is instead situated in the schools. They need reform, so we have developed three (3) recommendations for addressing this complex and byzantine problem. Our recommendations encompass:

1. A greater emphasis on introducing and integrating culturally responsive, classroom management practices in preservice and in-service professional development offered by New Jersey colleges/universities.
2. The implementation of threat assessment systems by New Jersey school districts that distinguish the level of threat imposed by a student's actions and the associated consequences that are necessitated (Cornell and Lovegrove 2015).
3. The exploration of restorative justice models that could be implemented throughout many of the State's school districts.

Professional Development Centered on Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

As stated earlier in the article, one of the authors is a professor in a College of Education where she has been employed for more than 25 years. During her tenure at the University, there has never been a State-level certification requirement for a classroom management course. That blatant hole in the certification process has made it necessary for individual professors to either integrate the content of their own volition or leave the enterprise solely to the school administrations that eventually hire these new teachers. Both options, however, have proven woefully inadequate or wholly unacceptable.

So, many of these new teachers go onto teach in areas where they encounter unfamiliar behaviors from students who are culturally "foreign" to them and whose behavior they naturally perceive as "threatening" or "potentially violent." They do not understand the behaviors or their motivations and they are ill equipped to address those behaviors in positive and constructive ways because they were never taught to do so. This is consistent with the following statement in Blake et al.'s (2011) research article: "Teacher inexperience, lack of cultural synchrony between teachers and students, and inept classroom behavior management skills have all been offered as plausible explanations for teachers' overreliance on office referrals and punitive discipline strategies to manage Black children's behavior" (p. 93).

In what some might consider to be a harsh critique, we feel that New Jersey's teacher education programs abdicate their responsibility to prepare teachers who will go on to be successful in the State's diverse school systems by failing to incorporate even a single classroom management course into their teacher education programming. As a result, we recommend that there is consistent and routine, system-wide

training in culturally responsive classroom management practices that include de-escalation skills, the implementation of restorative justice models in the classroom, culturally resonant behavioral models, workshops describing and identifying the role that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can play in the behavior of many urban and/or poor students, and teaching them how to secure the counseling/mental health supports that these students frequently need (Vandelaar et al. 2015).

Implementation of Districtwide Threat Assessment Systems

There should be districtwide implementation of threat assessment systems by New Jersey school districts that distinguish the level of threat imposed by a student's actions and the associated consequences that are necessitated (Cornell and Lovegrove 2015). One of the more successful threat assessment systems was conceptualized at the University of Virginia and implemented following the Virginia Tech massacre. The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG) are predicated on the belief that there are multiple levels of threats. Some might be considered jokes (even if they are impolitic), whereas others could be better characterized as "excited utterances," and still others might require the immediate attention of school personnel. The bottom line is that they aren't all the same and they do not all require the same heavy-handed response.

The VSTAG assigns levels to the threat and responds to them accordingly. Since the inception of their use of the VSTAG, students were approximately 4 times more likely to receive counseling services and 2–1/2 times more likely to have a parent/caregiver brought into the conflict resolution process (Cornell and Lovegrove 2015). Further, tiered approaches to preventing and addressing the trauma and/or mental health challenges that might sometimes motivate and/or contribute to students' academic and behavioral difficulties have proven successful in reducing the punitive nature of behavioral interventions and helping to concentrate the support that is delivered to students identified as being "in crisis" (Osher et al. Brown 2015).

The Exploration of Restorative Justice Models

We, the authors, also submit that the State of New Jersey would be well served by exploring restorative justice models that could be implemented in its many school districts. The central premise of *restorative justice* is specific to "develop[ing] educational policies and practices that are more responsive and restorative to the needs of the school community.... restorative justice models contribute to the goal of education by emphasizing accountability, restitution, and restoration of a school community," (Gonzalez 2015, p. 152).

With restorative justice, the emphasis is placed on the harm the student's actions did to the academic community and the ways in which that harm can be remediated. Additionally, stress is placed on restoring the relationship between the offending student and the school community of which s/he is an integral part. In most instances, the accused student has a discussion or panel hearing with other members of the community (including peers, faculty and mental health professionals) regarding the

offending behavior. The infraction is discussed and the accused student must listen to victim impact statements. Again, the emphasis isn't on vilifying the student. It is, instead, specific to helping the student understand the impact of her/his conduct on other members of the community. Often, those exchanges are powerful enough to help the student reflect on her/his choices and become willing to make restitution to the community.

For example, in a Denver, Colorado school district, a group of freshmen football players started the practice of surprising each other by throwing one another into garbage dumpsters at the end of the day. They viewed it as “fun” and their immature decision-making is also nakedly apparent. Shortly thereafter, they commenced targeting their peers (outside the team) and unwittingly throwing those students into the dumpster, as well (Gonzalez 2015).

Although the victims were rightfully upset about being thrown in garbage against their will, the young football players didn't understand the gravity of their actions or the impact their behavior had on those whose rights they violated. Via a restorative justice model, the players were guided through the process of empathizing with their victims, understanding the implications of their behavior for the school community, their parents, and the reputation of the football team that they loved. These students, ultimately, apologized to the students they violated, the school community and meted out their own punishment that was stringent enough to meet the expectations of the school community as a whole (Gonzalez 2015).

Restorative justice models have also been successfully used on university/college campuses for many decades now. In fact, one of the coauthors sits on a student disciplinary committee at our home institution, Montclair State University. Thus, the coauthors believe that it would be helpful for school districts interested in exploring restorative justice to partner with local colleges and universities that have successfully employed these strategies over the long haul.

Conclusion

While much of the research that has been conducted to date focuses on discovering the origins and causes of perceived discipline problems among Black youth, the authors believe that it is important to examine specific, understudied populations like Black, K-12 females. In this study, we therefore explored whether Black females are disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions. We focused specifically on Black females in New Jersey and compared our findings to national averages. The findings of our study show that Black females are indeed overrepresented in both out-of-school suspensions and expulsions in New Jersey. The extent of overrepresentation has not only worsened over time but is also worse in New Jersey than the rest of the United States.

While the factors responsible for these worrisome trends are not clear, we believe there are several ways to better understand and improve the situation. To start, it is important for data collection on school discipline to be more comprehensive. For example, knowing the types of infractions that Black females are being disciplined for, as compared to other students, could provide beneficial insights. We also believe

there should be consequences for states and school districts that fail to maintain and report complete and accurate data. While the maintenance of appropriate data is certainly important, we also believe that schools should consider more training and professional development in culturally responsive classroom management strategies, the implementation of threat assessment systems, as well as restorative justice models. In these ways, we will be able to more directly address the various discipline-related issues that currently exist in our school system.

References

- Blake, J., Butler, B., Lewis, C., & Darenbourg, A. (2011). Unmasking the inequitable discipline experiences of urban black girls: implications for urban educational stakeholders. *The Urban Review*, *43*, 90–106.
- Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2014). *Comprehensive fact sheet: Men of color in higher education*. Retrieved on September 25, 2018 from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED561195.pdf>.
- Cornell, D., & Lovegrove, P. (2015). Student threat assessment as a method of reducing school suspensions. In D. J. Losen (Ed.), *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Epstein, R., Blake, J. J., & Gonzalez, T. (2017). *Girlhood interrupted: The erasure of Black girls' childhood*. Washington, DC: Center of Poverty and Inequality, Georgetown Law.
- Gonzalez, T. (2015). Socializing schools: Addressing racial disparities in discipline through restorative justice. In D. J. Losen (Ed.), *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Guerra, M. (2013, November 7). *Fact sheet: The state of African American women in the United States*. Retrieved on September 25, 2018 from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2013/11/07/79165/fact-sheet-the-state-of-african-american-women-in-the-united-states/>.
- Harper, C. (2018, May 14). *HCBUs, BLACK women and STEM success. Higher education today*. Retrieved on September 25, 2018 from <https://www.higheredtoday.org/2018/05/14/hbcus-black-women-stem-success/>.
- Hu, W. (2011, August 30). *Bullying law puts New Jersey schools on the spot, NY Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/30/nyregion/bullying-law-puts-new-jersey-schools-on-spot.html?pagewanted=all>.
- Jewell, K. S. (1993). *From Mammy to Miss America and beyond: Cultural images and the shaping of US social policy*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Losen, D. (2015). Conclusion. In D. J. Losen (Ed.), *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Morris, E. (2007). “Ladies” or “Loudies”? Perceptions and experiences of Black girls in classrooms. *Youth & Society*, *20*(10), 1–26.
- Morris, M. (2016, November). *Protecting black girls. Educational leadership*. Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Morris, E., & Perry, B. (2017). Girls behaving badly? Race, gender, and subjective evaluation in the discipline of African American girls. *Sociology of Education*, *90*(2), 127–148.
- Osher, D. M., Poirier, J. M., Jarjoura, G. R., & Brown, R. (2015). Avoid quick fixes: Lessons learned from a comprehensive districtwide approach to improve conditions for learning. In D. J. Losen (Ed.), *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion* (pp. 192–206). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Patterson, O. (1998). *Rituals of blood: Consequences of slavery in two American centuries*. New York: Basic Books.
- Paul, D. G. (2003). *Talkin' back: Raising and educating resilient Black girls*. Westport, CT: Praeger Press.
- Petras, H., Masyn, K. E., Buckley, J. A., Ialongo, N. S., & Kellam, S. (2011). Who is most at risk for school removal? A multilevel discrete-time survival analysis of individual- and context-level influences. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *103*(1), 223–237.

- Raffaele Mendez, L. M., & Knoff, H. M. (2003). Who gets suspended from school and why: A demographic analysis of schools and disciplinary infractions in a large school district. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 26, 30–51.
- United States Department of Education: Civil Rights Data Collection. (2000). *2000 New Jersey estimations* [Data File]. Retrieved from http://ocrdata.ed.gov/StateNationalEstimations/Projections_2000.
- United States Department of Education: Civil Rights Data Collection. (2012). *2011–2012 discipline estimations for New Jersey* [Data File]. Retrieved from http://ocrdata.ed.gov/StateNationalEstimations/Estimations_2011_12.
- United States Department of Education: Civil Rights Data Collection. (2012). *2011–2012 estimations for enrollment* [Data File]. Retrieved from http://ocrdata.ed.gov/StateNationalEstimations/Estimations_2011_12.
- United States Department of Education: Office for Civil Rights (2014). *Civil rights data collection data snapshot: School discipline*. Retrieved from <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/downloads/crdc-school-discipline-snapshot.pdf>.
- Vandehaar, J. E., Petrosko, J. M., & Munoz, M. A. (2015). Reconsidering the alternatives: The relationship among suspension, placement, subsequent juvenile detention, and the salience of race. In D. J. Losen (Ed.), *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion* (pp. 222–236). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Wallace, J. M., Goodkind, S., Wallace, C. M., & Bachman, J. G. (2008). Racial, ethnic, and gender differences in school discipline among U.S. high school students: 1991–2005. *The Negro Educational Review*, 59(1–2), 47–62.