

ADULTIFICATION AND CRIMINALIZATION:

The Repercussions of the Adultification of Black Children by School Teachers in the United States Education System

Abstract

Extensive amounts of research have found that the American public view black children as older, less innocent, and more deserving of harsh treatment than white children. This adultification of black children has been tied directly to their experiences with punitive discipline and neglect within criminal justice and educational contexts. Yet, this analysis of adultification contributing to the school to prison pipeline has lacked gravely by failing to examine the role of school teachers in the adultification of black students and proliferation of zero tolerance policies.

Research Questions

To what extent do teachers in the Greater Boston Area contribute to the adultification of black students?

How does the adultification of black children by school teachers lead to racial disparities in school discipline and/or to the support for zero tolerance policies?

Hypotheses

- (1) Teachers view black students as older and less innocent than their white peers - weakly supported
- (2) When teachers encounter black children, in terms of disciplinary action, they treat them differently than white children - unsupported
- (3) Teachers’ attitudes about race correlate with their attitudes about zero tolerance policies - supported
- (4) The gender of the child as well as their race have significant effects on the above analyses - unsupported

Literature Review

By age 10, black children are viewed as older and as having equal or less innocence than white children at least 4 years older than them (Goff et al. 2014)

Adults misperceive black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers, especially black girls among the 5-14 age range (Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2017)

Police officers overestimate the age of black suspects, and officers who showed more implicit dehumanization of black children were more likely to have used physical force on black children in their career (Goff et al. 2014)

Preschool teachers watch black preschool students most in the classroom (Gilliam et al. Yale Child Center)

Teachers’ adultification of black boys is enabled by their lack of knowledge about the black students and communities that they serve (Ann Ferguson, 2003)

Black students are more likely to be referred to the office by their teachers and for more arbitrary reasons (Skiba et al. 2012)

Nationally, black children are overrepresented in school discipline across all discipline types, all public school types, and across all school poverty levels (US Government Accountability Office analysis of Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection 2013-2014)

In 2009-2010 sy, 13.6% of public schools with less than 5% minority students had full time officers while 41.3% of public schools with 50% or more minority students had full time officers (US Department of Education, US Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs)

In Massachusetts, for the 2015-2016 sy, 16 days per every 100 enrolled student were lost all due to suspensions. Majority for minor behaviors. Black students: 34 days lost, white students: 10 days lost (Suspended Education in Massachusetts, The Center for Civil Rights Remedies)

In 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 sy, black students in Boston made up 2/3 of all arrests, despite accounting for 1/3 of the district (Arrested Futures, American Civil Liberties Union)

In Boston Public Schools, for the 2011-2012 sy, black girls were suspended at 12x the rate of white girls, and expelled at 10x the rate of white girls. Black boys were suspended at 8x the rate of white boys, and expelled at 6x the rate of white boys (Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected, Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies and African American Policy Forum)

Methodology

24 question survey, completed by 115 public school teachers in the Greater Boston Area

Multiple choice and open ended questions about job satisfaction, teacher input in school decisions, knowledge of zero tolerance policies, and opinions on race in schools

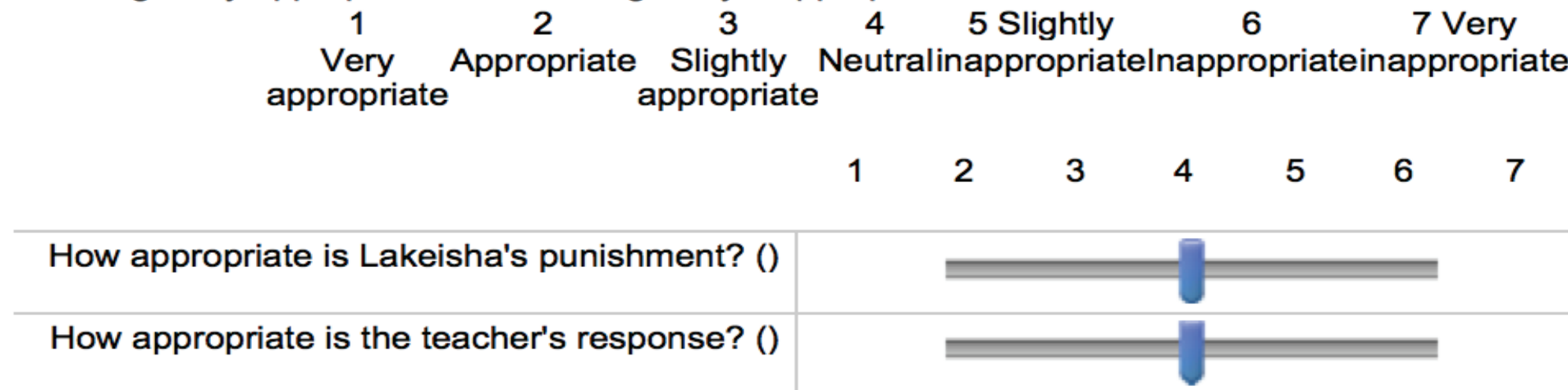
Each respondent was randomly assigned a vignette detailing a student (black girl “Lakeisha” black boy “Jamal” white girl “Emily” white boy “Jake”) enacting the exact same scenario in the classroom and were asked on a 7 pt scale about their opinions on the appropriateness of the teachers’ response and the punishment administered as well as their perceived age estimate of the student

Vignette I'd like to learn more about how teachers think certain situations should be handled. Please take a moment to read the following vignette.

Today Lakeisha's first class at school is English. On this day in English class during an interaction with another student Lakeisha crumpled up and threw a piece of paper at her classmate and also refused to participate in the lesson. After an attempt to get Lakeisha to engage with the lesson, her teacher called the school resource officer to bring Lakeisha to the principal's office. Lakeisha received a 1-day suspension.

Lakeisha Please indicate how you feel about the questions below on a 1-7 scale.

1 being "very appropriate" and 7 being "very inappropriate"



Data & Findings

No evidence from this survey sample that the mean scale rating for the appropriateness of the punishment or teacher response for the students differed

Majority of respondents chose age (10-13) except for in Jamal vignette

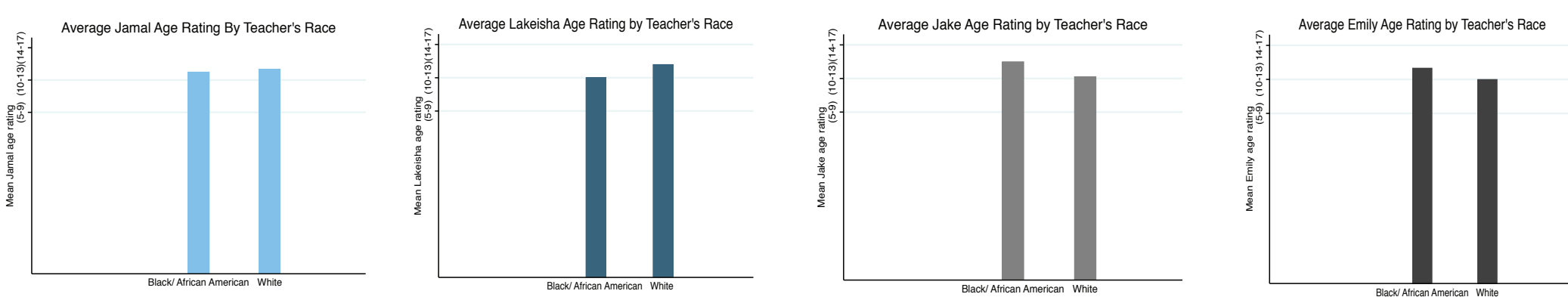
Both Jamal and Lakeisha had over 40% of respondents who thought they were 14-17 years old, whereas Jake and Emily both had only 20% of respondents assume they were within that age bracket

Teachers probed at more causes and culpability within the child for Lakeisha and Jamal, expressed a “kids will be kids” mentality for Jake, and only critiqued the teacher for “Emily”

Majority of teachers rated their knowledge of zero tolerance school discipline policies as “moderate.” 31% as “low”

77% of respondents indicated that they do not believe school discipline is administered equitably among students of different racial groups nationwide. Yet, 63% do believe that school discipline is administered equitably among students of different racial groups at their respective schools

Less than 1% of teachers rated their school's disciplinary methods as “excellent”



Conclusion & Implications

Black boys are viewed as older

Tendency to question and probe at the behaviors only of black children

Teachers are uneducated on zero tolerance policies and have minimal input in school discipline policies

There is a lack of school data on punishment available to teachers

No teachers questioned the presence of/need for a “School Resource Officer”

Teachers in majority non-white schools cited subjective reasonings for suspensions/expulsions in their schools while teachers in majority white schools only stated concrete misconduct as grounds for suspension/expulsion

The United States education system should be an institution that sincerely invests in the full being of black children. Teachers and school systems need to recognize the grave consequences of racism, school discipline and the ill knowledge about either, as a problem. Policies need to be implemented to mandate school wide releases on discipline data to teachers and to the public, as well as to require the active recruitment of black teachers into teacher education programs. Further studies on teacher perceptions and adultification are necessary for re-envisioning and re-creating a United States public school system in which black children are understood, protected, honored, and given chances- essentially given the deserved fundamentals of not only childhood, but of humanity.

