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Applying Critical Race Theory and Risk and Resilience Theory to the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Theoretical Frameworks for Social Workers

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Social workers are essential stakeholders in the mounting efforts to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. This article presents a theoretical framework integrating Critical Race Theory and Risk and Resilience Theory as a tool for social workers and other school-based social service providers seeking to create meaningful change to school discipline policies. In this article, we apply the theories to expand the understanding of the school-to-prison pipeline and why it has persisted, compare and contrast each theory's relative strengths and limitations, and conclude with implications for social workers, counselors, and social service providers at the practice, policy, and research levels.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, Risk and Resilience Theory, School Social Work, School-to-prison pipeline

Introduction

In solidarity with the movements centered around the liberation of Black and Brown communities such as #BlackLivesMatter, #SayHerName, and others, this article seeks to explore the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Risk and Resilience Theory (RRT) with direct implications for practice, policy, and research for school-based social workers, counselors, and social service providers. The STPP refers to the confluence of institutional failures within the education and criminal legal systems at the national, state, and local levels, wherein K–12 students are increasingly being pushed out from environments of learning and into interactions with the court system and carceral institutions (Wald & Losen, 2003). Inordinate school discipline such as suspension and expulsion, over-policing, insufficient school funding, and a dearth of counselors, social workers, and special education providers prime students for proximal and distal interactions with the criminal legal system (Kim et al., 2010). With tens of thousands of students being arrested (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2016) and millions of students suspended each year (Smith & Harper, 2015) it is imperative we work tirelessly to dismantle the school-house to jailhouse system that has emerged in recent decades.

Using Social Workers to Address the Pipeline

We recognize that there are numerous interprofessional teams and unique disciplines all focused on intervening with school discipline, mental health, and school-based services related to the STPP (Joseph et al., 2020). Indeed, even within social work these roles can vary greatly. For example, there are differences between school social workers and school-based restorative justice practitioners, who often hold a master's degree in social work. There are also social workers who visit schools as therapists or case managers but are not based within any given school or district. In other disciplines, it is common to have counselors, psychologists, and other social service providers housed within schools working collaboratively in interdisciplinary teams. As such, there is a vast array of disciplines and positions engaged in the STPP, all of which share elements of commonality while ultimately remaining distinct.

For clarity's sake, this paper will primarily use language focused on social workers with an understanding that these implications extend out to all professionals seeking to engage with the STPP. We focus on social workers as our primary group for three reasons. First, social work as a profession is located in multiple systems relevant to the STPP such as schools, child-welfare, juvenile and criminal justice and correction facilities, and behavioral health care services. Second, the profession values eclectic knowledge and generalist approaches to practice. As such, social workers hold a broad view of the problem that contends with students' contexts and social determinants inside and outside of the classroom. Third, several of the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare's Grand Challenges of Social Work have direct implications for the STPP including: (1) the elimination of racism; (2) the promotion of smart decarceration; (3) ensuring the healthy development of all youth; and (4) achieving equal opportunity and justice (Grand Challenges of Social Work, 2020). However, we contend that the lessons learned here have value that can extend to all social service providers interested in dismantling the STPP.

Critical Race Theory

CRT was developed to scrutinize the social phenomena of race-neutral policies and laws that disproportionately impact minorities' well-being and has subsequently been applied to understanding racism within the field of education. A pivotal work by Ladson-Billings (1998) promoted the use of CRT to tackle educational disparities, which has led to a great wealth of CRT literature focused on K-12 academic settings. CRT confronts the leading discussions on race and racism as they connect to education by analyzing how educational theory, policy, and practice can be weaponized to control and diminish specific racial and ethnic groups (Solorzano, 1998).

Dixson and colleagues (2016), in their writing on CRT in education, note that core components of the theory are the use of storytelling, counter-storytelling, and analysis of narrative. CRT has been applied to many aspects of school discipline, such as examinations of zero-tolerance punishments on Black girls (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020); and recommendations on how to incorporate

the issue of racism within school discipline policy, and practice, as well as incorporating trauma-informed care for interprofessional teams in schools (Joseph et al., 2020). CRT has also been applied to narratives of teacher and counselor bias (Allen & White-Smith, 2014), stories of students resisting microaggressions (Allen, 2013), examinations of the role White teachers play in sustaining the STPP (Bryan, 2017), and identification of how inequitable school funding has led to unequal knowledge and subsequently filtered educational placement (Oakes, 2005).

Risk and Resilience Theory

RRT is an extension of ecological development theory and is a multi-theoretical framework that can aid in understanding and predicting how people achieve well-being, even in the face of adverse events (Greene, 2008b). Notably, the theory has sparked some heated debate over the definition and operationalization of the constructs of resilience and risk, with particular attention paid to how those in positions of power identify and label risk. This debate has important relevance within this article, as we consider how racism is embedded within seemingly neutral systems and assumptions, which we will discuss through the lens of CRT. Despite the debate over terms used in the theory, there are several tenets that are generally agreed upon. First, risk and resilience should be conceptualized as ecological phenomena (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fraser & Galinsky, 1997; Greene, 2008a). Furthermore, RRT utilizes a strengths-based approach to discern assets for each person and community. These concepts allow for a resilience-building model; resilience is something that can be enhanced, rather than seen as innate or fixed (Greene, 2008a). Rutter (1987) identified several predictors of resilience related to systems-level adaptations to disruptions caused by dynamic interactions between individuals and their environments. Authors of ecological systems theory have applied the theory to the STPP to better conceptualize interventions both broadly (Kalvesmaki & Tulman, 2017) and specifically by targeting risk and resilience (Glenn, 2019).

Much of RRT to date has focused on how discipline has functioned as a risk factor as well as what risk factors put students in jeopardy of experiencing harsh discipline. Exploration into the role

of mental health (Kataoka et al., 2012), teacher bias (Gershenson et al., 2015; Rudd, 2014), and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Burke et al., 2011) on the STPP have all been conducted. Protective factors such as teacher support have also been examined (Theron & Engelbrecht, 2011). Additional research has demonstrated that exclusionary discipline itself is a considerable risk factor for student well-being (Hemphill et al., 2006). Extensive research has demonstrated the role suspensions and expulsions play in increasing the risk of harmful behaviors and negative life outcomes (Balfanz et al., 2015; Morris & Perry, 2016; Zweifler, 2009). While a great deal of the literature has focused on individual risk factors, we contend that RRT is best operationalized by examining systems-level risk and protective factors, as will be discussed in the following section.

Applying the Principles of Critical Race Theory and Risk and Resilience Theory to the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The term STPP is intended to capture the overall mechanism of students experiencing increasingly high rates of exclusionary discipline that result in declining academic performance, disengagement from school, drop out, and ultimately the removal of students from the school environment into the apparatus of incarceration and the broader criminal legal system (Wald & Losen, 2003). While the STPP impacts hundreds of thousands of students, it is most acutely experienced by members of racial minority groups, students of lower socioeconomic status, students with disabilities, and/or students in urban school districts (Kim et al., 2010). The pipeline experience for many students often begins with attendance in under-invested schools with a lack of educational resources, trained staff, and a dearth of social service providers. In place of mental health and social services, many schools have opted to utilize police instead. An excessive reliance on exclusionary discipline removes students from the classroom and promotes declining academic, behavioral, and social outcomes (Kim et al., 2010). In numerous schools, students are subjected to physical violence (frequently from school police and staff) and are treated by school personnel as intellectual trespassers who do not belong within their classrooms (Hines-Datiri

& Carter Andrews, 2020). For many students, these factors lead to being pushed out of the public-school system and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Wald & Losen, 2003). Three main contributing factors to the STPP will be discussed using our theoretical frameworks: zero-tolerance discipline policies, the increased presence of police in schools, and implicit bias (Huguley et al., 2018).

Zero-Tolerance Policies

As national narratives about rising drug-use, gangs, and violence on school property grew in the 1990s, many schools began to mirror the mandatory minimum sentencing procedures of the criminal legal system by implementing zero-tolerance policies. Zero-tolerance discipline policies within schools have mandatory consequences such as detention, suspension, or expulsion for specific violations (Roberge, 2012). One of the first and most influential of these policies is the 1994 Gun Free Schools Act—a federal mandate for schools to expel any student found in the possession of a weapon on school grounds. Troublingly, as time progressed from the 1990s into the 2000s, zero-tolerance policies quickly began to be over utilized in minor and non-violent offenses so that incidents such as defiance and attendance became systematically punished with extreme exclusionary measures (Huguley et al., 2018). In the 2015-2016 school year, roughly 2.7 million students (about 6%) in K-12 education received one or more out-of-school suspension (USDOE, 2018).

An essential facet to recognize in the STPP is that minority students are disproportionately targeted by exclusionary school policies and are therefore at greater risk of entering the pipeline compared to their White peers (Koon, 2013). In 2014, the Obama administration published a report that revealed the staggering disparities in school discipline for non-White students from elementary school through high school. The report indicated that Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than White students (USDOE, 2014). Similarly, Skiba (2014) reported that Black students are suspended “two to three times higher than other students, and are similarly overrepresented in office referrals, expulsions, and corporal punishment” (p. 30). In southern states alone, 1.2 million Black children were suspended during a

single school year (Smith & Harper, 2015). However, research has consistently demonstrated that racial disparities in discipline are not sufficiently explained by student behavior or individual characteristics such as gender, GPA, or free lunch status (Rocque, 2010). In other words, evidence suggests that racial disparities in school discipline are most directly the result of systemic problems in school policies and teacher bias.

The racial disparity in school discipline is best understood through the core CRT principle, the ordinariness of racism. This tenet posits that racism is normal, frequent, and central within societal functions, despite a color-blind façade to policies and laws. CRT argues that systems focused on meritocracy and neutrality within policies often instead replicate oppression through a guise of impartiality (Crenshaw, 1995). Zero-tolerance discipline policies epitomize the ordinariness of racism because, although these mandatory practices are ostensibly race-neutral and based solely on student behavior, they are in fact highly subjective and are based on racial bias (Huguley et al., 2018; Keleher, 2000). The data on student discipline rates makes it clear that racialized punishments are taking place within our schools. School suspension rates have nearly doubled since the 1970s, increasing from 3.7% to 7.4% of public school students being suspended at least once in an academic year (Koon, 2013). However, these trends are disproportionately worse for students of color. White students have experienced a moderate increase from 3% to 5% since the 1970s. Meanwhile, Latinx and Black students have skyrocketed from 3% to 7% and from 6% to 16% respectively (Koon, 2013). Critically, researchers have found that Black students are not acting out more often than their White peers, but they are appreciably more likely to be punished and punished more severely for small infractions (Rocque, 2010; Rudd, 2014). Schools with higher percentages of Black and Latinx students are more likely to use discipline to punish students compared to schools with majority White student-bodies, which are more prone to give medical or psychological interventions for their students (Swayne, 2015).

The impact of exclusionary discipline is well explained through a RRT framework that examines the tremendous risks associated with suspension and expulsion. Exclusionary discipline policies

such as suspension and expulsion increase students' risk of engaging with the criminal justice system and deprive them of educational opportunities. Through exclusionary discipline policies, students of color are criminalized for behaviors that are considered normative for their White peers. As a result, many students are deprived of classroom learning when suspended or expelled. They then experience declining academic and social outcomes (which are themselves correlated to increased risks such as dropping out and incarceration), and they are often subjected to juvenile and criminal legal authorities instead of being able to resolve discipline issues within the school (Welsh & Little, 2018).

Current research suggests that being suspended as little as one time during your primary education is linked with being up to ten times more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system or to drop out of school (Fabelo et al., 2011). Suspension has also been linked to declining test scores and greatly increases the risk of students dropping out of school (Balfanz et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2010). These outcomes subsequently lead to a greater risk of entering the criminal justice system in adulthood (Huguley et al., 2018; Smith, 2009). Furthermore, research suggests that students are twice as likely to be arrested during the months when they are suspended or expelled, in contrast to the months that they are in school and under adult supervision (Monahan et al., 2014). Moreover, despite the fact that harsh punishments are designed to reduce recidivism, multiple suspensions are instead associated with the subsequent increase of risky and antisocial behaviors, which in turn are related to an increased exposure to the criminal justice system (Hemphill et al., 2006). These risks compound on one another and by one estimate, experiencing one out of school suspension increases the likelihood of a felony by a factor of 3.6 (Clifford, 2019).

Using a RRT perspective, zero-tolerance policies are clear risk factors that greatly increase the chance of a student interacting with the criminal legal system at some point in their life. Zero-tolerance policies have been linked to numerous negative life outcomes socially, emotionally, academically, and legally (Welsh & Little, 2018). Coupled with CRT's understanding of how racism seeps into neutral appearing policy, it is clear that the risk factors from the STPP emerge most clearly at the systemic level in school discipline policy rather than through specific individual behaviors.

Police Presence in Schools

Simultaneous to the increase of zero-tolerance policies in schools has been the national trend of an increase in the number of police officers and resource officers being stationed in schools. In 1975, police officers were stationed in 1% of schools. Recent evaluations found that in 2018 58% of schools reported having a police officer present in the building (Connery, 2020). By one estimate, nearly 65% of all public-school students have some level of interaction with school police (USDOE, 2014a). Moreover, school resource officers (SROs) have taken up a substantial role within school settings. SROs are sworn law enforcement officers affiliated with a police department or agency who are designated to patrol one or more schools full-time. Notably, few SROs are trained in adolescent or child development (USDOE, 2014b), and numerous cases of violence perpetrated by SROs against students have been documented in recent years (Hines-Datiri & Cater Andrews, 2020). Per Theriot (2009), when controlling for poverty status, schools with an SRO placed in them had approximately five times the rate of arrests for disorderly conduct compared to schools without an SRO. The increased presence of police and SROs in schools removes control over discipline from school authorities and instead utilizes the criminal legal system to mediate conflicts and address school behaviors (Petteruti, 2011; Theriot, 2009).

A vital component that has provoked the rise of police and SROs in schools is gun violence in the form of school shootings. The increase in school shootings over the last 30 years has had a profound effect on the policies and procedures around school discipline, but not equally and often not where the threat of a school shooting is highest. In a study of school shootings from 1990–2011, it was found that although school-based gun violence proliferated in primarily White suburban and rural communities, it was urban and minority students who were the recipients of the subsequent zero-tolerance policies and over-policing (Triplett et al., 2014). Similarly, research has shown that zero-tolerance, even when applied to weapon possession, is highly subjective and informed by racial prejudice (Keleher, 2000). As such, although mass shootings often occur in White suburban and rural areas, enforcement is largely targeted in urban

communities, subsequently disproportionately harming Black and Brown students.

CRT offers insight into the discrepancy between where shootings are occurring and where police are stationed as racist stereotypes around Black violence and aggression drive many of the conversations around “safety.” Instances of Black children as young as 5 and 6 years old being arrested at school help exemplify how safety is often not connected with the use of police in schools (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020). CRT asserts that racialized over-policing is an intentional practice based out of racist stereotypes used in an effort to assert social control, rather than being connected to student safety (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Dutil, 2020).

Through an RRT perspective, policing itself becomes seen as a risk factor, even if its purported purpose is to ensure student safety. Police in schools bypass school authority in disciplining students and instead bring in the criminal legal system, leading to a disproportionate use of arrest, court appearances, and fines (Petteruti, 2011; Wald & Losen, 2003). A survey found that 77% of SROs arrested a student just to calm them down, and 55% indicated that they arrested students for minor offenses simply because the teacher wanted the student to be removed from the classroom (Wolf, 2014). Numerous examples of violence and assault perpetrated by SROs against students have been documented over the years (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020). The acknowledgement of this risk for minority students is understood and expressed by many children. A survey found that only 9% of Black youth and 17% of Latinx youth responded that the statement “the police make me feel safer” was “very much” true, compared to 36% of White youth (Nakamoto et al., 2019).

Implicit Bias

The third contributing factor to the STPP is implicit bias, defined as the manifestation of unconscious stereotypes and attitudes that influence a person’s actions and thoughts involuntarily or without their active recognition (Rudd, 2014). Recent research studies have found that in the United States up to 80% of White and 40% of Black adults endorse anti-Black discriminatory biases, either associating Black people with negative traits such as aggression or laziness or

by promoting positive beliefs about White individuals compared to Black individuals (Wald, 2014). Moreover, non-Black teachers tend to have significantly lower expectations of their Black students as compared to Black teachers (Gershenson et al., 2015). A study found that when asked about threats to schools, police officers were more likely to view threats as external to the school (e.g., fear of attack from a stranger) when in predominantly White schools, and view the threats as internal to the school (e.g., fear of students) when in urban and predominantly minority schools (Fisher et al., 2020). Within schools, implicit bias has been found to be a significant contributor to the racial disproportionality of office discipline referrals (Girvan et al., 2017) and school discipline more broadly (McIntosh et al., 2014), even when accounting for the same behaviors (Huguley et al., 2018).

The CRT tenets regarding the social construction of race and differential racialization help contextualize how and why implicit bias occurs so frequently within schools. These tenets argue that although race is a malleable social construct designed by the dominant society to meet the needs of those in power, the implications of these social definitions have powerful repercussions which inform everyone's lived experience (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Applied to the STPP, it is easy to identify how the social construction of race has informed discipline policies against Black and Brown students. Hyperbolic and racist fears surrounding Black youth, such as the term "superpredator," inform how policies are designed (Alexander, 2012). Lei (2003) demonstrated that Black girls were perceived as loud, aggressive, and oppositional, which made them vulnerable to disciplinary action and the subjects of frequent and harsh school discipline. Similarly, Hines-Datiri and Carter Andrews (2020) argue that cultural definitions of White femininity put Black girls particularly at risk for experiencing zero-tolerance policies because of socially constructed definitions of race and gender. Because of the racist fear that associates Black youth with danger and violence, schools have utilized zero-tolerance punishments and increased the presence of police in schools, despite research suggesting that gun violence also occurs within White suburban and rural spaces (Triplett et al., 2014).

Additionally, the CRT tenet of intersectionality helps frame the understanding that implicit bias and disparate outcomes occur

across a host of social identities (Crenshaw, 1994). Oppression due to race, gender, ability-status, socioeconomic status, and other facets of identity are all salient concerns of ways in which school discipline may disproportionately harm students (Zweifler, 2009). Further, the intersection of racism, sexism, ableism, classism, etc. can create unique experiences of oppression that are not easily generalized between or within student groups (Joseph et al., 2020). Despite the growing evidence that intersections of identity such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status are powerful contributors towards disparate punishments due to systemic and individual acts of injustice (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020; Joseph et al., 2020), work remains to be done to center an intersectional approach towards ending the STPP (Meiners, 2011).

The Persistence of the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The consequences resulting from the STPP and the slow response to stop them can be explained using Derrick Bell's (1980) concept of interest convergence. Bell's assertion is grounded in the belief that those with power in society (i.e., White people) have little incentive to address racism because it is lucrative financially and beneficial psychologically to those who profit from it. Importantly, all classes of White people benefit in some manner from racism and therefore have few reasons to seek out the dismantling of the system, even if there are massive differentials in who benefits the most from these systems of oppression.

Profit, social control, and social status are perceived advantages of the STPP for White beneficiaries. Indeed, for-profit prisons and exploited prisoner labor have been well-documented forms of lucrative financial practices in the wake of mass incarceration (Alexander, 2012; Elk & Sloan, 2011) that maintain social control for those in power. Some current CRT scholars have argued that education functions largely in an effort to control minority students and maintain White supremacy (Dutil, 2020). By focusing the "disciplinary gaze" upon minority students, White students are shielded from excessive surveillance and punishment within schools (Welsh & Little, 2018). Zamudio and colleagues (2010) assert that school segregation has in part persisted because of the perceived benefits

of housing and education that are provided to White people. As such, there are clear and defined interests at play for those benefiting from the STPP; reform efforts then lag, as those in power are reticent to share their resources and control (Bell, 1980).

Cross-Examining the Theories

While these individual theoretical analyses are beneficial in providing insight into the STPP, they are far more profound when examined together. When taken in tandem, the theories complement and bolster one another by identifying and addressing potential weaknesses within the respective paradigms. In particular, CRT provides an augmentation and reframing for RRT that creates an incisive examination of the pipeline that centers racism as the critical risk factor. Specifically, CRT offers a critique that prevents RRT from perpetuating discrimination or inherent bias within solutions. In discussing the role of CRT in education, Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that instructional and intervention strategies operate with an assumption of deficiency for Black students that necessitate remediation. RRT is similarly vulnerable to this critique when not employed with specific attention to systemic racism and oppression. Without a theoretical approach that addresses the environmental context, there is risk of pathologizing the children and families with fewer protective factors to overcome an unjust system, despite the unjust system already limiting those protective factors.

Without an understanding of racism, RRT falls prey to the questionable beliefs inherent in race-neutral perspectives, e.g., seeing a person's failure to achieve an arbitrary standard based on implicit or explicit racial preference as an individual deficiency rather than a result of systemic oppression. As a result, instruction or application of an intervention is viewed as a neutral skill that should benefit all students, and when it does not, the students, and not the techniques, are blamed for the failure (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Moreover, as Davis (2014) argues, too great a focus on personal resilience belies the reality of the impact of systemic forces in play that cause the necessity for resilience to begin with. As such, individual assessment of risk poses many deeply troubling concerns. Therefore, systemic forces should be the focus of the underlying problems identified and the interventions offered regarding the STPP.

In light of those valuable critiques, RRT must be approached with nuance and specificity in how risks are identified and how resiliency is promoted. Advocating a more nuanced approach to RRT can be seen in the growing ideation of racism as a risk factor that is gaining traction within the field. For example, both the National Survey of Children's Health and the Philadelphia ACE survey ask respondents if they have ever been treated unfairly because of race or ethnicity in their respective constructs of adverse childhood experiences. In this vein, school policy that is steeped in racial prejudice (unconscious or otherwise) and discriminatory exclusionary discipline becomes viewed as a risk factor that jeopardizes student well-being. These alterations are taking place within school settings as well. Joseph and colleagues (2020) and Dutil's (2020) recommendations on centering CRT within trauma-informed care highlight the cohesion between traditional RRT services on mental health and the necessity of addressing racism within school discipline practices.

Conversely, RRT offers its own insight into the STPP that enhances CRT. The most prominent augmentation that RRT offers CRT is the centering of human agency and strengths-based resiliency that uplifts individuals and communities within broken systems. CRT centers anti-essentialism within its tenets, but because of its recognition of the invasive racism that dominates society, there is the potential for determinism and a lack of consideration of the power of human agency within systems of oppression. RRT utilizes a strengths-based approach that highlights the need to continually identify and utilize the capabilities and resources that exist within every person and community, regardless of the oppression they have withstood. For example, Kozol's (1991) book *Savage Inequalities* highlights the systemic racism embedded within the education system, but it did not account for the resilience of the community therein. In their reauthoring of this book, Farmer-Hinton and colleagues (2013) described how deficit-oriented writing normed on White expectations of risk can erase the resilience that exists within a non-White community. As such, it is important to ensure that examinations of racism do not reduce their subjects to merely "the oppressed," but instead recognize and embrace the multiplicities of strength and resilience that reside within every community, regardless of their marginalization by current power structures.

Implications for School-Based Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

The application of these theoretical frameworks in understanding and predicting the STPP have salient implications for school social service providers, particularly to the field of social work, because of four of the Grand Challenges for Social Work: (1) promoting smart decarceration (Pettus-Davis & Epperson, 2015); (2) achieving equal opportunity and justice (McRoy et al., 2016); (3) ensuring the healthy development of all youth (Grand Challenges for Social Work, 2020); and (4) eliminating racism (Grand Challenges for Social Work, 2020). The field of social work has committed itself towards dramatically reducing the number of people incarcerated as well as adopting more efficacious and just approaches towards public safety and criminal legal proceedings. Moreover, within the Grand Challenges, social workers strive to eliminate racism and address social injustices through efforts aimed at dismantling inequities and eradicating unfair policies and practices that impede the success of marginalized communities. Framed within that context, CRT and RRT provide clear implications for social work practice, policy, and research focused on ending the STPP.

Practice

As a first step towards addressing the STPP, McCarter (2017) recommends that social workers strive to improve data collection, analysis, and dissemination. While many children interact across settings such as child welfare, education, juvenile justice, mental health, and health care, many of these service providers are siloed (i.e., collect and use data only within their particular service), use different sets of terminology, and do not share data with other settings. To better strengthen the collective understanding of the STPP, diverse agencies should seek to collaborate and share data collection and analysis to improve the ability of interventions to fully meet the needs of the children they serve.

Second, social workers should take the initiative to facilitate open and honest conversations on race and racism among stakeholders in schools and provide professional development

opportunities to collaboratively strengthen school climate by prioritizing race-focused solutions (McCarter, 2017). Acknowledging the primacy of racism within structures allows for social workers, counselors, and their interprofessional teams to ask and explore important questions with students, question internalized racism of staff and faculty, and challenge dominant perspectives (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020; Joseph et al., 2020). Using a CRT lens emphasizes the importance of centering and valuing students' perspectives, particularly when it comes to discussions on race and racism within their schools.

For social workers engaged in the dismantling of the STPP there are clear applications of CRT that frame both the problem and the solutions (Kolivoski et al., 2018). Although some have attempted to address school discipline without addressing racism (Fronius et al., 2019), CRT argues that the ordinariness of racism and interest convergence necessitates an acknowledgement of racism as fundamental to any solution or intervention focused on correcting racial disparities. As Kolivoski and colleagues (2018) argue, CRT provides social workers the tools for self-reflection to assess the ways in which their own behaviors and procedures within agencies and organizations may propagate racial disparities. As such, interventions such as trauma-informed care, restorative justice, or collective efficacy are subject to self-examination using CRT and can then be implemented incorporating a historical approach that addresses racism through a commitment to social justice (Joseph et al., 2020).

RRT provides guidance for three levels of intervention that social workers can utilize: risk prevention, asset development, and creating adaptive systems (Masten, 2014). Historically, RRT has been used to make arguments about how individual factors such as poverty, geographical location, trauma history, mental health, and other factors put individuals at greater risk of experiencing pushout and exclusionary discipline practices. However, this line of thinking is deeply flawed, because it assumes individual culpability over systemic influences. As discussed throughout the article, a better explanation of the pipeline using RRT is to view punitive policies, an overreliance on law enforcement, racism, and schools' inability to meet their students' needs as the true risk factors. What is perhaps most powerful from this conceptualization is the ability

to provide interventions concurrently at the interpersonal, communal, and systemic levels.

RRT promotes human agency and strengths-based approaches, which can be used to provide immediate interventions at the individual level such as social-emotional learning, trauma-informed care, and other behavioral health interventions. However, it can also conceptualize protective factors at the school, community, or national level for interventions that address systems. This most directly impacts policy, which will be discussed next. In practical terms, an example of an RRT intervention applied to the STPP would include trauma-informed care to meet individual student needs while simultaneously eliminating zero-tolerance policies and providing reforms to school funding to ensure that parity is maintained in the services available to all students across and within school districts.

Social workers are uniquely positioned to carry out these interventions for two reasons. First, because of the ecological perspective and person-in-environment approach embraced by the profession, social workers are adept at navigating across multiple systems and recognizing the reciprocal nature of influence that people and environments have on one another. Second, social workers provide valuable knowledge in community organizing and outreach to build coalitions for action. In practice, this can look like a school social worker implementing restorative justice circles to meet immediate student needs as conflicts emerge, while simultaneously contributing to the creation of a coalition of faculty, staff, parents, and students to advocate for funding reform to address systemic inequalities.

Policy

McCarter (2017) provides two additional insights into how social workers can inform policy changes within the STPP. First, schools should create new discipline policies that promote and reward positive behaviors and use exclusionary discipline such as suspension or expulsion only as a last resort. The harm inflicted by zero-tolerance policies and arrest are too great to ignore and must be restricted outside of the direst of circumstances. Second, there should be intentional programmatic efforts to facilitate continued education for students who are placed out of school, as well as intentional

policy efforts to reintegrate students who have experienced out of school placement.

To accomplish these aims, evidence-based practices that utilize positive and community-oriented discipline strategies must be adopted. The Just Discipline Project in Pittsburgh is a good example of a novel research-to-practice initiative centered on best practices in creating policies supporting a positive school climate and restorative school discipline (Huguley et al., 2020). Within the school setting, interactive group processing, building critical thinking, supporting student responsibility, utilizing students to create classroom rules, curriculum, and school policies, and developing teachers' beliefs in the innate capacity of their students are all interventions suggested by RRT (Benard, 1995). To do this, interventions should seek to provide adequate resources to schools, build consistent community norms that diverge from traditional discipline, foster a school climate which focuses on relationship, safety, and inclusion, and allow for children to participate the development of their community collaboratively (Greene, 2008a; Theron et al., 2011).

In practical terms, these efforts reflect interventions such as restorative justice that create alternative forms of discipline, utilize community resources, and integrate students into the decision-making process. However, to maintain fidelity to CRT, any solution developed (such as restorative justice or trauma-informed care) would be viable only in conjunction with anti-racism training and explicitly anti-racist practices (Joseph et al., 2020). Therefore, administrator and teacher education around bias and how to appropriately teach Black students, alongside the intentional hiring and recruitment of non-White staff, becomes paramount (Bryan, 2017).

In addition to school-based reforms, school funding and segregation are also key areas of concern. Non-traditional forms of discipline and school management are often expensive and require additional staff. However, many schools with majority Black student bodies are hyper-segregated and frequently lack adequate financial resources. Dismantling school segregation and instituting equitable funding policies are therefore essential in equalizing opportunities for children of color. This begins to incorporate elements of transformative justice, wherein reform is conceptualized at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. The scope widens and social workers are not merely advocating for schools to reduce suspensions—instead,

there is intentional coordination to strike out across all domains of oppression as they pertain to student well-being.

Finally, CRT argues that minority status embodies inside knowledge of racism through a term coined, a unique voice of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Applied to the STPP, it suggests that students' perspectives on school discipline are essential and must be incorporated into the dialogue around reform within school policy (Joseph et al., 2020). Policies cannot be created in isolation, but rather must be collaborative projects with the communities in which they are administered using all stakeholders. It is imperative that social workers ensure that any policy or intervention be designed with the solicitation of voices from marginalized communities who are directly impacted by the effects of these efforts. This is a massive transition from current forms of discourse, which often diminish and exclude student experience and input. As such, CRT offers an alternative approach to traditional forms of school communication and suggests that student counterstories and personal narratives should be given primacy within institutional communication and decision-making processes. Practical examples of this include youth advisory boards and peer juries.

Research

Although the STPP has a strong literature base examining how disparities have occurred within schools (Meiners, 2011), we are advocating for a deeper understanding of the pipeline and how to mitigate its effects based on what questions are asked, who is asking them, and who is given the platform to voice their answers. Examples such as Farmer-Hinton and colleagues' (2013) response to deficit-oriented descriptions of Black educational opportunities highlight the need for producing counternarratives that disrupt and challenge dominant accounts of how and why the pipeline occurs. Much of the current literature prioritizes researchers and administrators. We contend that future research must give voice to the strengths that exist within marginalized communities and account for all stakeholders (e.g., students, family, and teachers). Further, research should examine intersectional questions across race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, immigration status, and more.

Research questions focused on individual risk factors that pathologize youth and families for their oppression must be abandoned. Research should instead attempt to extrapolate how to best support youth and families in resisting oppression, and seek to identify and amplify counternarratives, elevate disenfranchised voices, and develop incisive tools to dismantle systematic forms of discrimination and injustice. To that end, making space for youth and family voices and avoiding essentialism within research becomes paramount. Whether this be community-based participatory research, a youth advisory board, or any other form of community integrated research, it is clear that scholarship should better incorporate the voices those researchers purport to represent. These are not trivial engagements and should fundamentally begin to shift how scholarship is viewed within the field.

Conclusion

CRT and RRT in tandem offer unique and ultimately complementary perspectives in understanding the STPP. CRT offers a comprehensive analysis of how racism embeds itself within every facet of society, shaping policies and influencing teachers' perceptions of Black and Brown students. RRT offers an understanding of how risk and protective factors at the individual, family, community, and societal level inform an individual's experience. RRT presents a wider variety of solutions, particularly ones that can be quickly enacted, whereas CRT poses solutions that seek to change the environment in which the phenomenon thrives. Comparatively, CRT provides a more comprehensive explanation of the STPP and even provides a critique of RRT that strengthens the theory. However, both theories are advantageous, and when drawn together, they provide an incisive framework from which social work practitioners, policy makers, educators, and researchers can seek to understand, explain, and dismantle the STPP.

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