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# Invisible Girls: Victimization, Teacher Support, and Pathways to Punishment for Black Girls

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INVISIBLE GIRLS: VICTIMIZATION, TEACHER SUPPORT, AND PATHWAYS TO  
PUNISHMENT FOR BLACK GIRLS

by

SAMANTHA DAWN MARTIN

Under the Direction of Tomeka Davis, PhD

ABSTRACT

Black girls' unique experiences of victimization, deviant behavior, and punishment are largely obscured from discourse on the cradle-to-prison pipeline. While there have been many studies that establish a link between victimization, offending, and criminalization, few quantitative studies capture the unique processes of resistance and punishment that victimized Black girls experience. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult health, I explore the relationships between adolescent victimization, teacher support, and exclusionary punishment for Black and white girls. By centering the experiences of Black girls, I aim to generate a causal model that accounts for the ways in which exposure to violence and teacher-student relationships shape pathways to school-based criminalization.

INDEX WORDS: School to prison pipeline, Juvenile delinquency, Education, Punishment, Race, Gender, Intersectionality

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SAMANTHA DAWN MARTIN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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PUNISHMENT FOR BLACK GIRLS

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late siblings; Lemont Antonio Thomas, Clyde Martin III, and China Marie Lyons-Upshaw, who never got the chance to read my writing. To my mother, Dr. Dawn M Richard-Martin, who I watched finish her education against all odds as a constant reminder that Black girls are brilliant, capable, and resilient despite the challenges that are stacked against us. To my brother, Cameron Alan Martin, who constantly reminds me never to give up, and that my work has purpose and meaning. To my mentor, sister, and confidant, Dr. Michele Watkins, for reminding me that I am never invisible, for instilling my courage to speak since I was a young girl, and being a constant model of the bridge between scholarship and service as I move through my academic career. To my friends: Asantewaa Darkwa,, Victor Hicks, Tierra Jackson, Krista Cooksey, Morgan Rochelle, Rachael McCrosky, Veronica Salcedo, Joshua Simpkins, Tiffany Edwards, Kevin McCauley, Hersheda Patel, and countless others who fed, clothed, talked, and walked me through the most challenging years of my life. To my beloved, Sean Phillip Perry, for the many long days and nights you stayed up with me as I wrote this thesis. Lastly, to all the Black girls whom this thesis serves—those girls who feel invisible, silenced, and marginalized from this world. I hope not to speak for you, but to speak with you, and to make our voices be heard.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Black girls' unique experiences of victimization, deviant behavior, and punishment are largely obscured from discourse on the cradle-to-prison pipeline. Focusing on the experiences of Black and Latino boys, the literature highlights the role of racialized masculinity and differential treatment in school and neighborhood contexts in the construction of Black male victimization, deviant behavior, and punishment (Howard 2013; Rios 2011; Anderson 2008). Several authors have noted that this exclusionary focus is limited in its ability to encompass the pathways to criminalization experienced by Black girls (Annamma, et al. 2016; Wun 2016b; Morris 2016; Morris 2012; Jones 2009). Consequently, prevailing scholarship fails to explore and explain the mechanisms through which Black girls navigate gendered and racialized institutional oppression. Black girls are disproportionately exposed to interpersonal violence, as well as disproportionately represented among criminalized and incarcerated youth (Wun 2016a; Morris 2012; Blake et al. 2011; Wallace et al. 2008). While there have been many studies that establish a link between victimization, offending, and criminalization, few quantitative studies capture the unique processes of resistance and punishment that victimized Black girls experience. By centering the experiences of Black girls, I aim to generate a model that accounts for the ways in which exposure to violence and teacher-student relationships shape pathways to school based criminalization.

Much like their male counterparts, Black girls are disproportionately represented among adolescents who are punished and incarcerated in the United States. Despite representing a minority in American schools, Black girls are more likely to be suspended, expelled, and labeled as deviant and/or defiant than other girls (Annamma et al. 2016; Wun 2016a; Wun 2016b; Morris

2012). Consequently, it is important to highlight the ways in which intersecting systems of race, gender, and class shape pathways to criminalization.

Explanations for the pathways that might lead to adolescent female criminalization often explore the established link between victimization and offending, which suggests that adolescents who offend are likely to have been victimized themselves (Farrell 2017; Posick 2013; Jennings et al. 2012; Jennings et al. 2010). Further research suggests that experiences with and processes of victimization and deviant behavior vary by race and gender (Bazyler 2013; Belknap & Holsinger 2006; Zaykowski & Hunter 2013; Zimmerman & Messner 2010). Black and Latinx youth report higher rates of violent victimization as well as violent offending than their white counterparts (Tillyer & Tillyer 2016), and Black and Latina girls specifically report higher rates of victimization than their white female counterparts (Halsip & Miofsky 2011). While exploring these patterns may begin to illuminate the unique experiences of intersecting oppressions that Black girls face, limiting focus to the relationship between victimization and offending fails to capture the processes of *school-based* criminalization that routinely push victimized Black girls out of schools and into various systems of social control.

Qualitative narratives of Black girls' experiences suggest that Black girls who are punished in school have experienced prior exposure to violence and "act out" within institutions that refuse to recognize their capacity to be vulnerable. Black girls who have been punished often report being exposed to or victims of violence as well as a lack of compassion and empathy on behalf of the teachers that often punish them (Wun 2016a; Wun 2016b; Jones 2009; Arnold 1990). There are few quantitative studies that discuss Black girls' experiences with prior victimization and school systems that render their experiences with gendered and racialized violence invisible. Though limited in generalizability, these studies start to capture the processes

of criminalization not captured by studies that focus primarily on disparities in victimization, offending, and punishment for offenses. Black girls have been found to be referred to disciplinary offices and personnel for behaviors that are often subjectively evaluated by teachers and/or administration (Wun 2016a; Wun 2016b; Blake et al. 2010; Skiba et al 2002). These behaviors reflect Black girls' unwillingness to be complacent in the face of victimization as well as a refusal to be silent in institutional spaces that regularly ignore their routine exposure to violence (Morris 2016; Jones 2009; Arnold 1998). Consequently, since Black girls are more likely to be punished for subjectively evaluated instances of noncompliance within the classroom, focusing only on rates of offending and deviant behavior obscures the ways in which school context, teacher bias, and a lack of institutional support for victimized Black girls contributes to higher rates of school-based criminalization.

In order to address the aforementioned weaknesses in the literature, I intend on creating a model that supports a pathway from victimization to criminalization that accounts for the ways in which Black girls who have been exposed to violence are less likely to feel supported by their schools, and in turn are more likely to be punished than their non-black peers, guided by the following research questions:

1. Are girls who are exposed to violence more likely to engage in delinquent behavior?
2. Are Black girls who are exposed to violence more likely to be suspended and/or expelled from school?
3. Do Black girls who are exposed to violence feel less supported within their schools than their peers?
  - a. Does a lack of perceived school support increase the likelihood of victimized girls to act out?

- b. Does a lack of perceived support within schools for victimized Black girls increase the likelihood of suspensions and expulsions?

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1.1 Intersectionality and Black Feminist Criminology***

In the tradition of Black Feminist Thought, this study centers the experiences of Black women and girls in order to reject the marginalization and suppression of Black women's scholarship as well as the erasure of our narratives (Collins 1990). The rejection of Black women's narratives results in a failure to adequately conceptualize the intersections of race, gender, and class, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of marginalization for people at varying intersections of identity (Crenshaw 1998). More specifically, Hillary Potter (1990) argues for the development of a Black Feminist criminology that addresses the limitations of feminist scholarship that has an exclusionary focus on the effects of gender on victimization, deviancy, and punishment. Furthermore, the integration of intersectional approaches will address the weaknesses in policies and practices that attempt to support at-risk populations but fail to address the full range of mechanisms and pathways through which marginalized groups are victimized and criminalized. This study will contribute to this growing body of work by using an intersectional framework that centers how Black girls respond to dual victimization inside and outside of schools.

### ***2.1.2 Gender and the School-to-Prison Pipeline***

The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the collection of institutions, policies, and practices that disproportionately place marginalized children on a trajectory into the criminal justice system. Through various mechanisms of social control, labeling, and punishment, scholars have used the pipeline to explore the ways in which Black, brown, and poor adolescents

are disproportionately introduced to the criminal justice system. Furthermore, a careful look at the implementation and outcomes of these policies illuminates the racial disparities in school-based punishment, illustrating the possible pathways to the disproportionate incarceration of Blacks in the United States. Literature on the pipeline is characterized largely by critical interrogations of these punitive policies and practices in schools that reinforce deviant behavior among students, increase the likelihood of contact with police, and disproportionately affect students of color.

The origins of the pipeline are attributed to an institutional paradigm shift from rehabilitative approaches to punitive practices and ideology to address student behavior (Mallet 2015). These ideological approaches are compounded by specific policies that push “problem” students out of educational systems and put them at higher risk for contact with the police as well as at risk for further victimization and deviant behavior (Rodriguez Ruiz 2017). The shift could be observed through the increased use of zero-tolerance policies, increased presence of police officers, as well as school-based referrals to the police (Rodriguez Ruiz 2017; Pigott, Stearns, & Khey 2017; Peak 2015). It has been suggested that this ideological shift emerged from movements to remove guns from schools and reduce school shootings (Morris 2016; Peak 2015). However, the vast majority of students who are affected by these practices pose little threat to their peers and are often referred for nonviolent behaviors (Peak 2015).

In practice, the implementation of these policies reflects long standing racial bias in schools, whereas Black and Latino students are labeled as problem students, subject to increased surveillance, and subject to harsher punishments (Payne and Brown 2017; Haight, Kayama, and Gibson 2016; Rios 2011; Skiba et al. 2002). Black adolescents are consistently represented among students who are suspended, expelled, and otherwise experience exclusionary punishment



at disproportionate rates (Dyke 2016; US Department of Education office of Civil Rights 2014; Wallace et al. 2008). These exclusionary punishments have been suggested to increase the likelihood of contact with the police and subsequent incarceration of low income minority populations (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, and Valentine 2009; Hirschfield 2008).

While the body of literature regarding the school-to-prison pipeline highlights some of the important mechanisms through which educational institutions perpetuate racial disparities through pedagogical approaches and disciplinary practices, its current state fails to encompass the entirety of the Black population that it effects. The school-to-prison pipeline dialogue focuses primarily on the experiences of boys, leaving the experiences of Black girls out of the discussion (Morris 2013; Morris 2016; Annamma et al. 2016). Consequently, the gendered construction of early criminalization for women of color remains largely disregarded. Monique Morris (2013) argues that the pipeline metaphor fails to encompass the mechanisms of incarceration for Black girls by adhering to an exclusionary and deeply patriarchal model of analysis that prioritizes narratives of masculinity and obscures the ways gender informs ““racial threat”, stereotyping, and surveillance” (4). As a result, the nature of punishment experienced by Black girls remains largely misunderstood. Consequently, there has been a growing body of work addressing the limitations of the pathways to incarceration illustrated by the pipeline, suggesting the utility of intersectional approaches to understanding criminalization. While this emerging body of work is limited, it illuminates the ways race, class, and gender intersect to create a multitude of pathways to incarceration and other outcomes of punitive schooling.

Much like their peers, Black girls in the United States are disproportionately affected by school based discipline (Morris 2013), and often for non-violent and subjectively evaluated behaviors (Morris & Perry 2017). According to the Civil Rights Data Collection survey, in the

2009-10 school year, African American girls represented approximately 16% of the female student population, while accounting for approximately 39% of one time suspensions, 52% of students with multiple suspensions, and 39% of expulsions for females (US Department of Education 2014). Much like their male counterparts, Black girls are grossly overrepresented when it comes to school based disciplinary practices—practices which have strong correlations with subsequent involvement in judicial systems (Monahan et. al 2014).

Quantitative studies have found that Black girls are more likely to be sanctioned, suspended, and expelled than other girls (Annamma et al. 2016; Wun 2015; Wun 2014). Even when Black girls are referred to disciplinary personnel for the same behaviors as other girls, Black girls are punished more harshly (Annamma et al. 2016). Furthermore, while Black boys are most disproportionately represented among incarcerated and punished youth, Black girls experience a wider “discipline gap” between themselves and white girls (Morris & Perry 2017), and are increasing at higher rates than any other group in representation among incarcerated youth (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera 2017; Puzzanchera, Adams, & Sickmund 2011).

Intersectional scholars suggest that such disparities between Black and white girls in school-based punishment are the result of gendered factors, largely Black girls’ rejection of mainstream standards of femininity (Morris & Perry 2017; Morris 2016; Morris 2012; Jones 2009). Regularly deviating from white middle-class norms of femininity, Black women are often positioned at a lower social status and criminalized for their deviation. While Black women’s behavior may be constructed as the mere epiphenomenon of intersecting oppression, Monique Morris argues that Black girls are active agents in the construction of their relative position and experience (2016). Put another way, Black girls are punished for their expressions of agency against their marginalization; their loudness, rejection of mainstream femininity, and otherwise

deviant behavior. Often feeling unprotected both inside and outside of schools, they take it upon themselves to defend themselves from violence and harassment, question the authority of mistrusted teachers and staff through willful defiance, and assert their existence vocally as they navigate school from the margins. Consequently, Black girls' deviant behavior can be understood as a form of resistance against intersecting class, race, and gender oppression.

### ***2.1.3 Negotiating Black Girlhood: Responses to Invisibility and Victimization***

Understanding Black girls' pathways to criminalization requires consideration of the ways in which they are exposed to and negotiate racialized and gendered violence. Victimization has been consistently linked to patterns of offending (Popsick 2013; Jennings et al. 2012; Jennings et al. 2010), and several studies have highlighted the increased vulnerability Black girls and women have to experiencing violence. Black women are reported to have higher rates of intimate partner violence, more likely to report sexual assault, and more likely to report other forms of violent victimization than women overall (DuMonither, Childers, & Milli 2017; West 2004; Rennison & Welchans 2000). These disparities in victimization likely being at adolescence, as several studies have revealed substantial numbers of Black girls reporting sexual victimization (Thompson, Mghee, & Mays 2012; Lang et al 2011; French and Neville 2008)

For many Black women, stories of criminalization and incarceration start with such experiences with abuse, violence, and neglect (Arnold 1998; Shakur and Chesimard 1978). Qualitative studies suggest that, for Black girls, deviant behavior can be understood as resistance against the perpetuation of their victimization. For Black girls, resistance to victimization manifests itself in the many ways that they "act out." Interviews with incarcerated Black women revealed pathways to incarceration shaped by adolescent "pre-criminal" behaviors—this includes but is not limited to skipping classes, running away from home, stealing, and fighting with

peers—that were often responses to domestic abuse, sexual assault, and economic marginalization that ultimately led to their incarceration as adults (Arnold 1998). In *Between Good and Ghetto: African American Girls and Inner City Violence*, Nikki Jones explores such responses to victimization, as she observes Black girls who negotiate the threats of violence posed by their environments. Expanding upon Anderson’s (1999) “code of the street”, whereas responses to violence in marginalized communities are shaped by a social expectation to defend one’s status and prevent repeated victimization, Jones argues that Black girls, largely cognizant of their potential risk for repeated exposure to violence, are similarly socialized for survival through violent or otherwise aggressive means. Rather than being passive agents in their oppression, Black girls often recognize their deviant behavior as a part of their negotiation of the gendered and racialized violence that they are subject to (Wun 2018; Wun 2016a; Wun 2016b).

The structural violence that Black girls experience both inside and outside of schools impacts their behaviors and experiences in school settings. Wunn (2018) argues that school discipline policies fail to evaluate their behavior and anger within the context of structural violence to a point where girls become increasingly resistant to their teachers and act on their frustrations often by fighting, bullying, and willful defiance. Rather than receiving additional support, Black girls who have been exposed to violence are criminalized and arrested in schools while the violent circumstances that provoke their behavior remain unaffected (Wunn 2018; Chesney-Lind 1997).

In this way, Black girls’ deviant behavior can be understood as responses to their victimization and the perpetuation of the invisibility of their experiences within the school context. Monique Morris illustrates this process in her investigation of Black girls’ experiences being pushed out from various social institutions into systems of incarceration and further

victimization. Aware that their lowered social status warrants them little to no support from peers or instructors, Black girls often renegotiate their status and vulnerability by attempting to create “family,” questioning authority, and defending themselves from threats of violence (Morris 2016; Jones 2008). Their resistance, however, is met with opposition within school settings. Black girls are labeled as deviant and eventually pushed out of schools, leaving them vulnerable to substance abuse, incarceration, repeated victimization, and other negative adult outcomes (Morris 2016).

#### ***2.1.4 School Climate: Teachers’ Perceptions of Black Girls***

The lack of consideration teachers give to the circumstances of victimized Black girls when enforcing discipline policies suggests the critical role teachers play in advancing Black girls’ pathways to punishment and criminalization. Research suggests that the ways Black girls are perceived by teachers may explain their disproportionate rates of punishment. I argue that preconceived perceptions of Black girls preclude the failure of schools to respond to victims of violence appropriately, resulting in a dual victimization that ultimately pushes girls out of schools.

Black girls’ experiences are largely invisible within school settings. Patricia Hill Collins conceptualizes controlling images as the prevailing negative portrayals of Black women as aggressive, hypersexualized, and incompetent, that justify their gendered and racialized mistreatment as well as their diminished social status (1990) Similarly, Black girls are subject to a host of racialized and gendered archetypes of Black girlhood that shape how they are perceived. Black girlhood is erased through “adultification,” whereas girls are not perceived nor treated as children (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez 2017; Dancy 2014), resulting in their victimization being ignored. Studies show that Black boys are more likely to be perceived as

older, more violent, and guilty of crimes than their peers (Dancy 2014; Goff 2014; Rios 2011) When extended to Black girls, we see strikingly similar patterns. A 2017 survey of 325 adults found that adults believe Black girls need less nurturing, protection, support, comfort, and are more independent, more knowledgeable of adult topics, and know more about sex than their peers (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez 2017). This type of racialized and gendered bias on the behalf of adults directly impacts the educational experiences of Black girls. Through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, Morris (2007) observes that, despite gains in academic achievement, African American girls' attempts to make themselves visible are negatively perceived as more threatening to authority, more disruptive, and "prematurely adult." Epstein, Blake, and Gonzalez (2017) argue that such perceptions of Black girls contribute to the increased likelihood of Black girls to be punished. Further research suggests that these distorted perceptions of Black girlhood not only contribute to Black girls' disproportionate punishment, but also inform the types of subjectively evaluated behaviors that they are more likely to be punished for. Black adolescents disproportionately experience exclusionary punishments for largely subjectively interpreted behaviors such as "disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering" (Skiba, Michael, & Nardo, 2000). More specifically, Black girls are more likely to be punished for "disruptive behavior, dress code violations, disobedience, and aggressive behavior" (Morris & Perry 2017; Morris 2016; Morris 2012; see also Wun 2014). This form of "adultification" of Black girls purported by teachers is supported by student self-reports on school climate.

While there are varying definitions of school climate, it generally refers to the collection of norms, expectations, relationships, and practices that characterize the overall quality of school life (Thapa et. al 2013). Measures of school climate have been used to indicate levels of school

safety. More specifically, teacher support is regarded as one of the more important aspects of school climate to indicate levels of school disorder (Bandyopadhyay, Konold, and Cornell 2009). Black students tend to score lower on reports of positive school climate. Self-reports on school climate surveys reveal that Black students are less likely to feel supported by their teachers, and less willing to seek help from school personnel when faced with threats of harm or violence (Shirley & Cornell 2011).

School climate, specifically perceived teacher support, has been linked to racial disparities in deviance as well as in school-based punishment. Schools with low scores for school support tend to have higher rates of discipline disparities (Greg, Cornell, Fern 2011). Furthermore, it has been suggested that positive perceptions of teacher support have protective effects on deviant behavior (Sandahi 2016). Using results from the School Climate Bullying Survey, Shirley and Cornell (2011) find that students who perceived their schools as more supportive and who were more willing to seek help from teachers and other adults in school were less likely to be referred for discipline.

Real and perceived support and expectations of Black girls in schools are increasingly important to understanding their pathways to criminalization. Consequently, accounting for the role of the relationships between teachers and students may capture pathways to criminalization unaccounted for by focusing primarily on rates of deviant behavior. Centering the relationship between students and teachers may shed light on the ways students reject schooling that renders them vulnerable. Valenzuela (2010) refers to this as subtractive schooling, whereas the social structure of schooling—particularly the manner in which teachers fail to sufficiently “care” for their students—fail to meet the needs of students on the margins as well as effectively “subtracting resources from their students.” While it is plausible that student behavior may be a

driving factor behind strained relationships between students and teachers, ethnographic research reveals that Black girls' perception of their teachers' support and protection—or lack thereof— informs their decisions to act out in school settings. Wunn (2016a) suggests that Black girls are punished for questioning authority figures who fail to treat them with respect and who generally cultivate an environment that over polices Black students. In this way, Wunn illustrates how Black girl's defiance is a deliberate response to oppressive conditions in schools. Black girls' behavior is indicative of the strained relationships between students and teachers, as well as the overall structure of schooling that furthers their marginalization

These studies only skim the surface of understanding the unique mechanisms that connect victimization to punishment for Black girls. It is increasingly important to consider how intersecting planes of inequality put some adolescents at higher risks for criminalization than others. Put another way, it requires interrogating the ways race, class, and gender influence the mechanisms between victimization, school climate, and ultimately punishment. The relationship between victimization and punishment occurs within a simultaneously gendered and racialized context, whereas Black girls are disproportionately vulnerable to victimization, rendered invisible within the school context, and punished when their responses to victimization and the erasure of their experiences do not fit neatly into expectations of how “good girls” should behave.

I argue that victimization and school climate, particularly perceived support from teachers and other school personnel, are primary mechanisms through which Black girls are pushed out of schools via suspension and expulsion. The reported bias that adults have of Black girls suggests that they are more likely to be perceived as deviant by their teachers and consequently more likely to be punished for their behavior. Black girls, largely aware of the lack



of support that they receive in schools, may consequently be more likely to act out. These processes are exacerbated by Black girls' disproportionate exposure to violence and abuse that strain relationships with unsupportive school staff as well as increase the likelihood of Black girls to respond more aggressively to their invisibility and potential for repeated victimization.

This proposed pathway to punishment is illustrated in Figure 2-1. As a response to their victimization and the ways in which their victimization is rendered invisible in schools, I suggest that Black girls who are victimized will report less support from their teachers. A lack of school support for these girls will increase the likelihood for girls to engage in deviant behavior as well as increase the likelihood of the use of exclusionary punishment (suspension and expulsion). Because Black girls are often referred to disciplinary offices for subjectively evaluated behaviors (talking back, being disruptive, etc.), engaging in explicitly delinquent behavior is presented as a distinct pathway. Furthermore, I suggest that perceived school support may act as an intervening variable that may increase or decrease the role that delinquent behavior may have on the likelihood of getting suspended or expelled from school.

## **2.2 Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of the current study is that victimization will increase odds of exclusionary punishment, especially for Black girls. More specifically, I hypothesize that Black girls will be more likely to be punished than their white peers, and that their disproportionate rates of victimization will exacerbate these outcomes. If Black girls' defiant behavior is to be understood as resistance and responses to victimization, exposure to violence should increase delinquent behavior. School climate should act as a protective factor against the effects of victimization: since positive school climate has been associated with decreases in school based punishment, increases in school climate are expected to reduce the likelihood of exclusionary

punishment. Due to Black girls' systemic vulnerability to victimization, however, I expect that Black girls will report lower scores for school climate, which may explain the mechanisms through which black girls are disproportionately punished.



*Figure 2.1 Causal Model for Punishment for Black Girls*

### 3 EXPERIMENT

#### 3.1 Sample

This study uses data from the first and third waves of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (AddHealth), a nationally representative survey on the economic, social, and psychological well-being of adolescents over time, as well as contextual information including family, neighborhood context, school climate, peer groups, romantic/sexual relationships, and other adult outcomes.

The initial in-school questionnaire was administered to a sample of more than 90,000 students in grades 7 through 12 between September 1994 and December 1995. Eligible schools included 11<sup>th</sup> grade and had a minimum enrollment of 30 students. Following the in-school questionnaire, a core sample of 12,105 adolescents were interviewed for the in-home questionnaire. A follow up interview was conducted during wave 2. Wave 2 surveyed 15,000 of the same students after wave 1 in 1996. The in-home wave 3 sample consisted of respondents who were able to be located and re-interviewed as young adults in 2001 and 2002.

Several things were taken into consideration to construct the sample for this study. As a result of the overarching goal to investigate the relationship between school climate and adolescent behavior, this study relies primarily on data from wave 1—the only wave where all of the respondents are of school age, as many respondents at wave 2 had already graduated and/or were already 18 or older. In order to focus on the unique gendered pathways to criminalization of girls, only female cases (marked ‘2’ for female using the BIO\_SEX categorical variable) were included in the analyses. Respondents who did not participate in the initial in-home questionnaire during wave 1 or the follow-up in 2008 were not included in the analyses. The remaining respondents who reported not attending school at the time of the data collection (n=76) were also dropped from the analysis. The final sample size for this study is 2,654.

## **3.2 Constructs**

### ***3.2.1 Exclusionary Punishment***

Exclusionary punishment is a binary dummy variable that indicates whether a respondent has ever been suspended or expelled from school, using two survey items from wave 1. The majority of students who reported being expelled also reported being suspended from school (See table 3.1). These items are reported as a single outcome variable, where students who have neither experienced suspension nor expulsion are coded as ‘0’ and students who have ever been suspended and/or expelled are coded as ‘1’.

### ***3.2.2 Adolescent Victimization***

Prior research suggests that different forms of victimization may have different effects on adolescent behavior (Jennings, Piquero, and Reingle 2012). In order to test for different outcomes, victimization is measured using two separate variables. Violent victimization is a binary variable that indicates whether respondents had ever been shot, stabbed, jumped, in a

fight, or witnessed someone being shot or stabbed in wave 1. Respondents that reported experiencing one or more of these events were coded as '1.' Sexual victimization is a binary variable that indicates whether or not respondents reported ever having been forced to have sex against their will during wave 1. This item may be subject to underreporting due to the skip pattern that only asked respondents this question if they reported ever having sex, as well as not accounting for the multitude of forms of sexual victimization that are not captured by the initial wave 1 survey. In order to address this, values for sexual victimization are supplemented with an item from wave 4 that retroactively asks respondents how often a parent or adult caregiver touched them in a sexual way, forced them to touch in a sexual way, or forced them to have sexual relations before the age of 18. Respondents who reported one or more of these events was coded as '1' for sexual victimization.

### ***3.2.3 School Climate***

School Climate is a scale variable computed from 9 items from wave 1 that include self-reports of respondents' perceptions of their relationships with teachers, other students, and their school overall using Likert scale responses. Each item was coded with 5 values from 0 to 4, with 0 indicating poorer school climate and 4 indicating positive school climate. Mean scores for each of these items can be found in table 3.1. Reliability of this scale was measured using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = .751$ ).

### ***3.2.4 Delinquency***

Delinquency is a scale variable computed from 16 items on wave 1 that ask respondents to report how frequently they engaged in various delinquent behaviors: skipping school without an excuse, painting or drawing graffiti, damaging property, shoplifting, theft, burglary, automobile theft, threatening someone with a weapon, assault, fighting, selling drugs, and being

loud and/or rowdy in a public place. Each item was coded with 4 values ranging from 0 to 3, with 0 indicating no engagement in the corresponding behavior and 3 indicating a frequency of 5 or more instances of the corresponding behavior. Reliability of the measures in this scale were tested using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = .781$ ).

### **3.2.5 Race**

Race is measured using three variables computed from two questions from wave 1. Because this study focuses on the disparities in punishment between black and white girls, race is measured with three categories: Black, white, and other. The first race survey item allowed respondents to select more than one racial or ethnic category. The second item, presented only to respondents that had selected more than one category asked them to select a single racial category. Respondents who only selected "white" or selected white in the single item question were coded as "1" for the white dummy variable and 0 for all other race variables. Respondents who only selected "Black/African American" in the first item or selected Black in the single item variable were coded as "1" in the Black dummy variable and 0 for all other race variables. All other respondents, who either selected more than one category and refused to select a single category or who did not report being Black or white on either question were coded as "1" on the "other" variable and "0" on all other race variables. White is the reference category for all analyses

### **3.2.6 Neighborhood Type**

Neighborhood type is included as a control variable in these analyses as residential context may impact the meanings associated with the violence experienced by adolescents (Anderson 1999; Jones 2009). Neighborhood type is measured using 4 dummy variables constructed from interviewer reports of the dominant land use in the location of the wave 1 in

home interview: rural, urban, suburban and other. Suburban is the reference category for all analyses.

### **3.2.7 Parental Education**

Parental Education is an ordinal variable that indicates the highest level of education of any parent of respondents in wave 1. Parental education serves as an indicator of family socioeconomic status, as it is a strong predictor of occupational prestige, household income, and increased social capital—all of which have been found to contribute to students' educational experiences and adolescent behavior (Dubow, Boxer, and Huesmann 2009).

### **3.3 Descriptive Statistics of All Variables**

Table 3.1 displays the means and standard deviations of scale measures and the proportions of categorical variables for the entire sample according to race. Chi-squared tests were used to report significance for all variables. Just considering the descriptive statistics, there are a few things worth mentioning. Despite representing only 24.2% of the sample, Black girls make up a greater proportion of girls experiencing violent victimization. Black girls are also disproportionately represented among girls who are dually victimized: of the 116 girls who reported experiencing both sexual victimization and violent victimization, Black girls made up 38.8% ( $n = 45$ ) while white girls made up 46.5% ( $n = 54$ ). However, despite significant differences in violent victimization, there appears to be no significant difference between Black and white girls in delinquent behavior, suggesting that any racial differences in punishment will not be explained using delinquent behavior alone.

As expected, Black girls make up a disproportionately larger proportion of girls who have been suspended and/or expelled from school (41.63%,  $n = 209$ ). Cross tabulations of suspension and expulsion revealed potential racial disparities in the severity of punishment experienced by

girls. Of the 490 girls who experienced some form of exclusionary punishment, 57 girls experienced both suspension and expulsion by the end of wave 1. More than half of these girls are Black ( $n = 32$ ) compared to only 17 white girls. While this sample may not be large enough to yield any significant results, further research of the severity of punishment may reveal persistent racial disparities in school-based discipline.

Table 3.2 displays descriptive statistics for all variables for girls who have experienced either sexual victimization and/or violent victimization. As expected, victimized girls have significantly higher scores for delinquent behavior than non-victimized girls. Additionally, victimization is significantly associated with suspension and expulsion. These findings suggest that—even when punishing girls who engage in delinquent behavior—schools are punishing girls who are responding to experiences with victimization. The strength and plausibility of these relationships are tested in the results section below.

Table 3.1 descriptive statistics of all variables – Race

Variable	All		Black		white		other	
	N (%)	Mean (st.d)	N (%)	Mean (st.d.)	N (%)	Mean (st.d)	N (%)	Mean (st.d.)
Sample	2654 (100)		643 (24.2)		1739 (65.5)		272 (10.2)	
Adolescent Victimization								
Violent Victimization	443 (16.7)	-	174*** (27.1)		207*** (11.9)		62** (22.8)	
Sexual Victimization	391 (14.7)	-	103 (16.0)		243 (14.0)		45 (16.5)	
Delinquency Scale	-	3.47 (4.21)		3.42 (3.85)		3.31** (4.13)		4.53*** (5.29)
School Climate Scale	-	23.99 (5.38)		23.48 (5.63)		24.14 (5.34)		24.2 (5.01)
Punishment	490 (18.46)	-	204*** (31.7)		231*** (13.3)		55 (20.2)	
Suspension	485 (18.27)	-	201*** (31.3)		229*** (13.2)		55 (20.2)	
Expulsion	62 (2.34)	-	35*** (5.4)		19*** (1.1)		8 (2.9)	
Parental Education								
Less than High School	228 (8.6)	-	40 (6.2)		127 (7.3)		61*** (22.4)	
High School/GED	804 (30.3)	-	199 (30.9)		535 (30.8)		70*** (25.7)	
Some College/Associates	554 (20.9)	-	142 (22.1)		364 (20.9)		48*** (17.6)	
College Degree	662 (24.9)	-	158 (24.6)		437 (25.1)		67*** (24.6)	
Professional/Graduate	406 (15.3)	-	104 (16.2)		276 (15.9)		26*** (9.6)	
Residential Type								
Rural	768 (28.9)	-	131*** (20.4)		597*** (34.3)		40*** (14.7)	
Suburban	940 (35.4)	-	168*** (26.1)		662*** (38.1)		110 (40.4)	
Urban	830 (31.3)	-	312*** (48.5)		419*** (24.1)		99 (36.4)	
Other	116 (4.4)	-	32 (5.0)		61** (3.5)		23** (8.5)	
n=2654	n=2654		n=643		n=1739		n=272	

\*p&lt;.05, \*\*p&lt;.01, \*\*\*p&lt;.001



Table 3.2 Descriptive Statistics of All Variables - Victimization

Variable	All		Violent Victimization		Sexual Victimization	
	N (%)	Mean (st.d.)	N (%)	Mean (st.d.)	N (%)	Mean (st.d.)
Sample	2654		443		391	
			(16.7)		(14.7)	
Adolescent Victimization						
Violent Victimization	443	-	-		116	
	(16.7)	-	-		(29.7)***	
Sexual Victimization	391	-	116		-	
	(14.7)	-	(26.2)***		-	
School Climate Scale	-	23.99		21.702		22.023
	-	(5.38)		(5.875)***		(5.954)***
Delinquency Scale	-	3.47		6.97		5.06
	-	(4.21)		(6.06)***		(5.42)***
Punishment	490	-	169		134	
	(18.46)	-	(38.1)***		(34.3)***	
Suspension	485	-	167		133	
	(18.27)	-	(37.7)***		(34.0)***	
Expulsion	62	-	30		23	
	(2.34)	-	(6.8)***		(5.9)***	
Parental Education						
Less than High School	228	-	47		48	
	(8.6)	-	(10.6)***		(12.3)***	
High School/GED	804	-	153		136	
	(30.3)	-	(34.5)***		(34.8)***	
Some College/AA	554	-	100		85	
	(20.9)	-	(22.6)***		(21.7)***	
College Degree	662	-	97		86	
	(24.9)	-	(21.9)***		(21.7)***	
Professional/Graduate	406	-	46		36	
	(15.3)	-	(10.4)***		(9.2)***	
Residential Type						
Rural	768	-	99		125	
	(28.9)	-	(22.3)**		(32.0)	
Suburban	940	-	125		118	
	(35.4)	-	(28.2)		(30.2)*	
Urban	830	-	194		128	
	(31.3)	-	(43.8)		(32.7)	
Other	116	-	25		20	
	(4.4)	-	(5.6)		(5.1)	
n=2654	n=2654		n=443		n=391	

\*p&lt;.05, \*\*p&lt;.01, \*\*\*p&lt;.001

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Model Fit Tests

Before testing the suggested causal model for exclusionary punishment as illustrated in Figure 2-1, I conducted several regressions in order to test the relationships between the variables in the model. Additionally, they allowed me to test if there were any significant racial differences in victimization, delinquency, and school climate suggested by the descriptive statistics.

#### 4.1.1 *Race and victimization*

Are Black girls more likely to be victimized than white girls? In order to confirm that Black girls' pathways to criminalization may be guided by their unique experiences with victimization, I conducted several regression models to test the strength of the relationship between race and both types of victimization. Table 4-1 displays the results for violent victimization. In all three models, race is a significant predictor of violent victimization, with Black and non-Black girls of color consistently being more than twice as likely to experience some form of violent victimization than white girls ( $p = .000$ ). Neighborhood context and parental education—an indicator of socioeconomic status—are introduced in models 3 and 4, respectively. As expected, the odds of being exposed to violence are significantly increased within an urban context ( $p = .000$ ), while increases in parental education are associated with a decline in odds of exposure to violence. However, controlling for these factors does not reduce the significance of race in predicting violent victimization, as Black girls remain about 2.5 times more likely to experience violent victimization than white girls. Binary regression models for sexual victimization (see table 4-2) revealed no significant racial differences in adolescent sexual victimization.

Table 4.1 Summary of Binary Regression Models Predicting Violent Victimization

		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
		B (SE)	Odds Ratio	B (SE)	Odds Ratio	B (SE)	Odds Ratio
Variable							
Race							
	Black	1.010(.116)***	2.746	.885(.119)***	2.424	.898(.120)***	2.455
	Other	.782(.162)***	2.185	.703(.165)***	2.020	.633(.167)***	1.883
Neighborhood Type							
	Rural			.022(.146)	1.022	-.060(.148)	0.941
	Urban			.517(.130)***	1.677	.461(.131)***	1.585
	Other			.446(.249)	1.562	.410(.250)	1.506
Parental Education						-.163(.045)***	0.85
Constant		-2.002		-2.169		-1.633	
r <sup>2</sup>		.051		.064		.072	

Table 4.2 Summary of Binary Regression Models Predicting Sexual Victimization

		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
		B (SE)	Odds Ratio	B (SE)	Odds Ratio	B (SE)	Odds Ratio
Variable							
Race							
	Black	.161(.128)	1.174	.152(.132)	1.164	.162(.132)	1.176
	Other	.199(.177)	1.220	.320(.139)	1.247	.133(.182)	1.142
Neighborhood Type							
	Rural			.320(.139)*	1.377	.220(.142)	1.246
	Urban			.209(.140)	1.232	.136(.142)	1.146
	Other			.340(.266)	1.404	.290(.267)	1.337
Parental Education						-.201(.047)***	0.818
Constant		-1.817		-1.997		-1.337	
r <sup>2</sup>		.002		.005		.018	
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001							

#### ***4.1.2 Victimization and School Climate***

Does victimization have an effect on self-reports of school climate? Table 4-3 displays results for linear regression models estimating reports of school climate. As predicted, exposure to sexual and violent victimization significantly reduces scores for school climate in Model 1 ( $p = .000$ ). While controlling for delinquent behavior in Model 2, both sexual victimization and violent victimization still significantly reduce scores for school climate. This suggests that girls' behavior alone does not explain declines in self-reports of school climate. Consistent with the proposed causal model for school-based punishment, these findings suggest that girls who experience victimization out of school feel less connected to their teachers, peers, and their school as a whole. Additionally, when controlling for victimization, delinquency, neighborhood type, and parental education, race is significant in the model, whereas Black girls have a reduction in scores for school climate in model 3 ( $p = .036$ ). This suggests that Black girls who are victimized may feel less supported than their white peers.

*Table 4.3 Summary of Regression Models Predicting School Climate*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Variable			
Race			
Black	-.247(.246)	-.423(.238)	-.513(.244)*
Other	.379(.343)	.627(.333)	.683(.338)*
Victimization			
violent	-2.450(.280)***	-1.075(.291)***	-1.055(.292)***
sexual	-1.930(.290)***	-1.508(.283)***	-1.434(.284)***
Dilenquency			
		-.336(.025)***	-.335(.025)***
Neighborhood Type			
Rural			.038(.252)
Urban			.334(.249)
Other			.199(.502)
Parental Education			
			.271(.082)**
constant	24.701	25.592	24.634
adjusted R squared	0.051	0.11	0.112
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001			

## 4.2 Predicting Exclusionary Punishment Outcomes

How do race, victimization, and school climate affect outcomes for suspension and/or expulsion? Several binary logistic regression models were conducted to test the strength of the proposed causal model in predicting odds of exclusionary punishment. All outcomes are displayed in table 4-4.

### 4.2.1 Race and Punishment

This study relies on the premise that Black girls are subject to more frequent exclusionary punishment than other girls. When controlling for all variables in the model, Black girls still have significantly increased odds of being suspended or expelled: Black girls are 3.5 times more likely than white girls to be punished when predicting outcomes using sexual victimization in Model 3 and 3.2 times more likely to be punished than white girls when predicting outcomes

using violent victimization in Model 6. This confirms that race continues to be a salient factor in the disciplinary experiences of adolescent girls.

#### ***4.2.2 Victimization and Punishment***

Does exposure to sexual or physical violence increase odds of suspension and expulsion from school? As expected, both violent victimization and sexual victimization are significant predictors of exclusionary punishment in all models. Even when controlling for the effects of delinquent behavior, girls who experience sexual victimization are almost twice as likely to be suspended or expelled, while girls who experience violent victimization are 1.6 times more likely to be suspended or expelled than girls who have not. In the context of earlier model fit tests, these findings suggest even worse conditions for Black girls, as they are more likely to experience violent victimization.

#### ***4.2.3 School Climate and Victimization***

Does school climate have protective effects for girls who are exposed to physical and sexual violence? When school climate is included in Model 2 and Model 5, the effects of victimization on exclusionary punishment is reduced. Increases in school climate are also significantly associated with a decrease in odds for exclusionary punishment. These findings indicate the importance of school climate for disciplinary trends in schools. The impact of school climate is increasingly important, as previous model fit tests suggest that Black girls who are victimized may feel less supported in schools (see table 4-3).

Table 4.4 Binary Logistic Regression Models Predicting Exclusionary Punishment

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	B(SE)	B(SE)	B(SE)	B(SE)	B(SE)	B(SE)
Variable	odds ratio	odds ratio	odds ratio	odds ratio	odds ratio	odds ratio
Race						
Black	1.120(.112)***	1.122(.116)***	1.258(.126)***	.952(.114)***	.985(.117)***	1.187(.127)***
	<b>3.064</b>	<b>3.070</b>	<b>3.518</b>	<b>2.592</b>	2.677	<b>3.227</b>
Other	.485(.169)**	.529(.174)**	.280(.189)	.367(.171)*	.443(.175)*	.250(.189)
	<b>1.624</b>	<b>2.697</b>	<b>1.323</b>	<b>2.592</b>	<b>1.558</b>	<b>1.284</b>
Victimization						
violent				1.134(.118)***	.913(.123)***	.485(.138)***
				<b>3.109</b>	<b>2.493</b>	<b>1.624</b>
sexual	1.040(.125)***	.849(.130)***	.651(.137)***	-	-	
	<b>2.828</b>	<b>2.338</b>	<b>1.917</b>	-	-	
School Climate	-	-.106(.010)***	-.082(.010)***	-	-.103(.010)***	-.084(.010)***
		<b>.899</b>	<b>.921</b>			<b>.919</b>
Delinquency	-		.115(.012)***			.104(.013)***
			<b>1.121</b>			<b>1.109</b>
Neighborhood Type						
Rural	-		.269(.147)			.293(.146)*
			<b>1.308</b>			<b>1.341</b>
Urban	-		.210(.141)			.192(.142)
			<b>1.234</b>			<b>1.211</b>
Other	-		.073(.277)			.089(.276)
			<b>1.076</b>			<b>1.093</b>
Parental Education	-		-.424(.050)***			-.427(.050)***
			<b>.655</b>			<b>1.803</b>
constant	-2.073	0.405	0.454	-2.065	0.335	.589
r squared	0.098	0.168	0.262	0.11	0.175	0.257
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001						
IV Sexual Victimization						

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Prior research on the school-to-prison pipeline focused largely on the experiences of black boys, rendering the experiences of Black girls largely obscured from the discourse. This study builds on the growing body of work that attempts to illuminate these experiences and fill that gendered and racialized gap in the literature. The overarching goal of this study was to investigate how Black girls' experiences with school-based punishment are driven by their experiences with victimization and with teachers that fail to respond appropriately to their victimization.

My findings indicate that Black girls are not only more likely to be exposed to physical violence, but that their disproportionate exposure to violence renders them increasingly vulnerable to harsh disciplinary practices in schools. Furthermore, victimization appears to be a better predictor of suspension and/or expulsion than delinquent behavior, suggesting that teachers and administration are punishing girls who may be struggling to cope with their exposure to violence, rather than responding predominantly to students who characteristically engage in delinquent behavior.

This study also suggests that Black girls' delinquent behavior is a consequence of their disproportionate exposure to violence, as victimization is a consistent predictor of delinquency. This is consistent with research on the victim-offender overlap, suggesting that those who are exposed to violence are likely to be offenders themselves (Wesley et al. 2012). Within the context of this study, this finding is alarming, as it suggests that even when punishing girls who may engage in delinquent or disruptive behavior, school personnel may be punishing girls who are actively resisting the routine violence they experience throughout their lives.



Furthermore, these findings indicate that increasing school climate may be a viable approach to reducing delinquent behavior as well as reducing punishment outcomes for students. While this study found few significant racial differences in school climate, school climate consistently reduces the odds of exclusionary punishment in all models. This may have implications for educators and practitioners, suggesting that repairing relationships and building strong ties between marginalized students may potentially reduce the likelihood of pushing Black girls out of schools and further onto the trajectory of criminalization and incarceration. If schools fail to respond appropriately to girls that are exposed to violence, this study suggests that girls, especially black girls, have their victimization rendered invisible by the very institutions that are intended to remedy the systemic disadvantage that students experience outside of school due to their various social contexts. In this way, school climate acts as a mediator of

This study has several limitations. This study is limited in its ability to describe the experiences of non-black girls of color: when grouped together in an “other” category, this study may not assess variation that may exist between various non-black groups of color. Secondly, due to the scope of the measures used from this study, rates of sexual victimization may be subject to underreporting. Additionally, it may be suggested that the relationship between victimization and punishment may be a result of suspensions and expulsions pushing girls out of schools and into environments that render them vulnerable to exposure to violence. However, this approach assumes that Black girls are more exposed to violence within their social and neighborhood contexts, suggesting that their exposure to violence may be independent of their experiences with school based discipline.

There are several questions that are beyond the scope of this study. By relying on self-reports of school climate, this study does not fully capture the ways in which teacher attitudes

influence the odds of relying on exclusionary punishment as a means to address student behavior. While school climate can indicate the strength or weakness of teacher-student relationships, future research should inquire about these relationships in more depth. More specifically, future research should consider the ways in which gender based and racialized attitudes about deviant behavior impact the likelihood of harsher and more frequent punishment of Black girls.

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