
**WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPROPORTIONALITY
IN SCHOOL SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION?**

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WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPROPORTIONALITY IN SCHOOL SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION?

Racial and ethnic disparities remain ubiquitous in American education. Increasing attention has been paid to these disparities as they manifest themselves in the achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006), disproportionality in special education (National Research Council, 2002), dropout and graduation rates (Wald & Losen, 2007), and eligibility for gifted/talented programs (Milner & Ford, 2007). Of particular concern are severe and consistent racial disparities demonstrated in school suspension and expulsion (Skiba & Rausch, 2008). Among the most consistently documented of educational inequities, disproportionate representation in school discipline places culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students at risk for a wide range of negative outcomes. The purpose of this paper is to report on the history, current status, and unanswered questions in the area of racial and ethnic disproportionality in school discipline. Intervention research remains sparse in this area; recommendations for increasing the focus on intervention at the local, state, and federal level will be offered.

I. History of the Issue

In one of the earliest studies of statistical evidence concerning school suspension, the Children's Defense Fund (1975) studied national data provided by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) on school discipline, and reported rates of school suspension for black students that exceeded white students on a variety of measures. Rates of suspension for black students were between two and three times higher than suspension rates for white students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Over two thirds of the school districts represented in the national OCR sample showed rates of black suspension that exceeded rates for white students.

Since that report, the over-representation of African American students in a variety of school punishments has been consistently documented. Black students have been found to be exposed more frequently to a wide range of school disciplinary measures, including office disciplinary referrals (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Rocque, 2010), suspension (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Hinojosa, 2008), school arrests (Theriot, 2009), and corporal punishment (Gregory, 1995; Owen, 2005; Shaw & Braden,

1990), and receive fewer mild disciplinary sanctions when referred for an infraction (McFadden et al., 1992; Payne & Welch, 2010). The adoption of zero tolerance policies in the United States over the last 20 years also appears to have been associated with overrepresentation of African Americans in those punishments for zero-tolerance related expulsions (Tailor & Detch, 1998), and increased exposure to both school security measures and police presence in schools (Payne & Welch, 2010). Indeed, the disproportionate representation of African American students in out-of-school suspension and expulsion appears to have increased in the last 30 years (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010b; Wallace et al., 2008).

II. Extent of Current Problem

Consistency of African American Disproportionality.

Documentation of the disproportionate representation of African American students in suspension and expulsion has been highly consistent over time. Significant racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline have been documented in a wide range of studies in both peer-reviewed journals (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Lewis, Butler, Bonner & Joubert, 2010; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2010; Payne & Welch, 2010; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Rocha & Hawes, 2009; Skiba, Horner, Chung et al., 2011; Theriot & Dupper, 2010; Wu et al., 1982) and advocacy reports (e.g., Advancement Project, 2005; Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2011; Losen & Skiba, 2010). Such disparities have been found in national, state, and local level data, using a variety of measures, and at all school levels (e.g., elementary vs. secondary).

A number of facets of disproportionality have been explored, often with counterintuitive results. Although rates of absolute suspension appear to be highest in poor urban districts (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009), disparities between black and white suspension rates appear to be as great or greater in higher resourced suburban districts¹ (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Rausch & Skiba, 2006; Wallace et al.,

¹ These latter findings seem consistent with recent work of) who found that, while higher income schools offered more options in gifted and advanced Carter (2010) placement programs, the representation of students of color was far greater in less well-resourced urban schools.

2008). Similarly, although absolute rates of suspension and expulsion are higher at the secondary school level for both black and white students, the discrepancy between black and white rates of suspension is greater at the elementary school level (Rausch & Skiba, 2006; Wallace et al., year). Finally, Wallace et al. reported that, although males of all racial and ethnic groups were more likely to be disciplined, disparities between African American and White students were greater among female students.

Findings for Other Racial/Ethnic Groups

In contrast to the literature on African American disproportionality, disparities in rates of school discipline for other racial/ethnic categories have been less well studied, and the results of those investigations more inconsistent. In an analysis of generational data and school disciplinary outcomes among Latino students, Peguero and Shekarkhar (2011) reported that first generation Latino/a students were less likely to report school misbehavior as White students, but were equally likely to receive school punishments. Third generation Latino/a students reported levels of school misbehavior equal to White students, but received school punishments at a higher level. A number of other studies, however, have reported rates of out-of-school suspension for Latino students that were not significantly different from White students (Horner, Fireman & Wang, 2010; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron (2002) reported negative correlations at the elementary school level between percent Latino enrollment and school suspension rates. In one of the few national investigations of disproportionality that included a number of racial/ethnic groups, Wallace et al. (2008) found evidence that American Indian students were over-represented and Asian students under-represented in both school discipline in general and suspension in particular.

It is possible that this inconsistency in findings relates to differences in Latino disciplinary rates by school level or geographical distributions. A national report examining disaggregated data on suspension and expulsion in a major urban area found evidence of Latino disproportionality in some locales but not others (Gordon, Della Piana, & Keleher, 2000; Losen & Skiba, 2010). In a national study across 436 schools in 17 states, Skiba et al. (2011) found evidence of Latino over-representation in office disciplinary referrals at the

middle school but not at the elementary level.

Associated Risk Factors

Over-representation in out-of-school suspension and expulsion appears to place African-American students at risk for a number of negative outcomes that have been found to be associated with those consequences. First, given documented positive relationships between the amount and quality of engaged time in academic learning and student achievement (Brophy, 1988; Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002), and conversely between school alienation/school bonding and subsequent delinquency (Hawkins, Doueck, & Lishner, 1988), procedures like out-of-school suspension and expulsion that remove students from the opportunity to learn and potentially weaken the school bond must be viewed as potentially risky interventions. Second, a substantial database has raised serious concerns about the efficacy of school suspension and expulsion as a behavioral intervention in terms of either reductions in individual student behavior, or overall improvement in the school learning climate (see e.g., American Psychological Association, 2008). Finally, by removing students from the beneficial aspects of academic engagement and schooling, suspension and expulsion may constitute a risk factor for further negative outcomes, including poor academic performance (Skiba & Rausch, 2008), school dropout (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986), and involvement in the juvenile justice system (Toldson, 2008; Wald & Losen, 2003). Thus, the over-representation of African-American students in such high risk procedures must be considered to have substantial consequences.

III. Research on Causes/Contributing Factors

Research on the factors that contribute to disproportionality has increased in recent years. At the individual level, issues of poverty and differential behavior have been widely studied, while recent studies have begun to explore the contributions of classroom and administrative processes, and school climate to disciplinary disparities.

Socioeconomic Status: Is Disproportionality Due to Poverty?

Correlations in American society between race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; McLoyd, 1998), raise the possibility that any finding of disproportionality due to race is primarily a by-product of disproportionality

associated with SES. Yet the relationship between race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status is complex, suggesting that the relationship between poverty and racial disproportionality cannot be described in such a linear manner.

Relationship between socioeconomic status and disproportionality. Studies of school suspension have consistently documented over-representation of low-income students in the use of that consequence (Brantlinger, 1991; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010a; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Wu et al., 1982). Hinojosa (2008) reported that a variety of variables typically associated with socioeconomic status, including presence of mother or father in the home, number of siblings, and quality of home resources were all predictors of the likelihood of suspension.

Yet findings demonstrating a relationship between poverty and suspension rates do not guarantee that indicators of socioeconomic status will also predict racial and ethnic disparities; that relationship appears to be more complex. Skiba et al. (2002) found free and reduced lunch status to be an inconsistent predictor of suspension and expulsion when entered into a regression equation simultaneously with race. Noltemeyer and McLoughlin (2010a), in a multivariate analysis of variables contributing to suspension across a single state, reported poverty was a significant predictor of a school's *rate* of suspension, but not of *disproportionality* in suspension.

Does socioeconomic status explain disproportionate representation in discipline? Multivariate studies have been consistent in finding that sociodemographic variables are in no way sufficient to account for the over-representation of students of color in school suspension and expulsion. Using a regression model controlling for school socioeconomic status (percent of parents unemployed and percentage of students enrolled in free lunch program), Wu et al. (1982) reported that, even with socioeconomic effects accounted for, nonwhite students still reported significantly higher rates of suspension than white students in all locales except rural senior high schools. In a large national study documenting disproportionality in major and minor offenses across a variety of racial/ethnic groups over time, Wallace et al. (2008) found that consistent difference in rates of office referral and suspension and suspension for Black, Hispanic, and American Indian 10th graders remained significant even when controlling for family structure and parental education. Noltemeyer and McLoughlin (2010b) found that

urban schools consistently suspended a higher proportion of students out-of-school even after controlling for poverty suggesting to them that “there is something above and beyond poverty that explains disciplinary differences between school types” (p. 33).

Differential Rates of Disruption: Do Students of Color Misbehave More?

The apparent lack of explanatory power of socioeconomic status on disproportionality rule out a hypothesis that students of color, for whatever reason, may engage in more disruptive or violent behavior in school, which would suggest that disproportionate punishment is not an indicator of bias, but rather an appropriate response to disproportionate misbehavior. The most compelling test of this hypothesis would be a direct observational study of the behavior of different groups of students, and the consequences attendant on those behaviors (Rocque, 2010), but such a study has yet to be conducted. Evidence from a number of more indirect methods, however, appears to converge in failing to support the hypothesis that differential punishment is a response to differential rates or types of school behavior.

Differences in severity of disruption? The lack of independent observation of student behavior in studies of school disciplinary outcomes means that rates of office referrals are confounded: any referral to the office is a product of student behavior, school policy, and teacher judgment. Thus, simple differences in rate of office referrals or suspension/expulsion are not sufficient to assess cross-group differences in behavior. One might expect however, that a group that was disciplined more frequently might also be referred to the office for types of behavior that were more severe, that is, more likely to result in more serious consequences.

There appear to be few differences between racial groups in the types of behavior that typically lead to more serious school punishments. Shaw and Braden (1990) investigating race and gender bias in the administration of corporal punishment in a single Florida school district, reported that although black students were more likely to be referred for corporal punishment, white students were referred for corporal punishment for more serious rule violations. Similarly, in an analysis of the national University of Michigan Monitoring the Future study, Wallace et al. (2008) found that African American, Latino and Native American students were more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions, despite few racial differences in offenses likely to lead to zero tolerance policy violations (e.g., drugs, alcohol, weapons).

In general the racial and ethnic differences that have emerged in studies of school discipline tend to be small at best, and tend to occur in more interactive or subjective categories of infraction (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba et al., 2002). Skiba and colleagues analyzing one year of office referral, suspension and expulsion data in all middle schools in an urban setting, found racial differences on 8 of the 32 possible reasons for referral. White students were referred to the office significantly more frequently for offenses that appear more capable of objective documentation: *smoking, vandalism, leaving without permission, and obscene language*. In contrast, African American students were referred more often for *disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering*, behaviors that would seem to require more subjective judgment on the part of the referring agent. Reviewing the suspension database of a urban, mid-sized high school, Gregory and Weinstein (2008) reported that *defiance* was the single most common reason for referral to the office, and that African Americans were significantly more likely than white students to be referred for that reason—fully 70% of all students in the school received a referral for *defiance*.

Statistical controls for type of misbehavior. A number of studies have utilized multivariate procedures to control for type of misbehavior in examining racial/ethnic contributions to rates of suspension and expulsion. If racial or ethnic disproportionality in discipline were due to more serious disruption, one would expect the contribution of race to disciplinary outcomes to be reduced to non-significance when behavior is entered into a regression equation. Examining African American and Latino disproportionality at the elementary and middle school level, Skiba et al. (2011) controlled for 17 categories of infraction in a logistic analysis of a national sample of office disciplinary referral and suspension data from 436 schools implementing Positive Behavior Supports for at least a year. Hinojosa (2008), drawing upon a teacher survey to predict the presence or absence of a suspension in a single year for African American students in an urban school district, controlled for student behavior with a four-point teacher rating of fighting. Analyzing rate of African American over-representation in official school suspension data across a single state, Eitle and Eitle (2004) controlled for behavior through a measure of rate of school disorder that included incidents of violence, weapons possession, property crimes, and substance use and possession. Peguero and Shekarkhar (2011) analyzed student self-report data from the

Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 predicting a range of school punishments while controlling for self-reported misbehavior. Regardless of the extent or type of sample, such controls have at best led to slight decreases in the size of disproportionality, indicating that factors related to poverty are not sufficient to account for racial and ethnic disparities in discipline.

Controlling for teacher or student ratings of behavior. In what may be the most convincing data concerning classroom behavior and disproportionality, a number of studies have sought to control for teacher or student ratings of behavior when examining disparities in school disciplinary data. Horner, Fireman, and Wang (2010) reported that even after accounting for peer ratings as aggressive or prosocial, being African-American was among the most significant predictors of serious disciplinary action. Both Rocque (2010), and Bradshaw et al. (2010) found that African American students were significantly more likely to be referred to the office, even when controlling for teacher ratings of externalizing or disruptive behavior.

In sum, converging evidence from a number of different research designs and sample types has universally failed to support the perception that African American or Latino students are suspended or expelled at higher rates due to differential rates of disruptive or safety-threatening behavior. Studies of severity of behavioral infractions suggest that racial/ethnic differences in school discipline outcomes may be due more to subjective or interactional elements of disciplinary encounters than to student behavior. Multivariate studies consistently demonstrate that race and ethnicity is a robust predictor of school punishment even when controlling statistically for student misbehavior. Finally, racial/ethnic disparities in disciplinary consequences occur even when holding teacher or peer ratings of student behavior constant.

Relationship to the Achievement Gap

Gregory & Thompson (2010) examined data regarding school discipline and school achievement and concluded that the discipline gap and the achievement gap may be “two sides of the same coin” (p. 59). Certainly relationship between student externalizing behavior and academic skill deficits has been well-documented (Cairns & Cairns, 2000; Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004; Toldson, 2008). Students experiencing academic skill deficits

are more likely to engage in disruptive classroom behavior (Lopes, 2005). A functional assessment model might postulate that students with poor academic skills are engaging in disruption in order to *escape* academic demands (Sarno, Sterling, Mueller et al., 2011). Thus, schools serving students with lower academic skills would be expected to have higher rates of suspension and expulsion in response to disruptive behavior.

Yet individual pathways between low achievement and school disruption may be insufficient to explain the systemic relationship between achievement and disproportionality in discipline. Multivariate studies of the relationship between achievement and student discipline have found that race remains a predictor of suspension even after accounting for student grade point average (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Ladson-Billings (2006) argues that what is widely viewed as an achievement gap between White and Black students could more properly be termed an “education debt” in that educational opportunities in the United States have historically never been equalized for different groups. Poor students of color are more likely to attend schools with lower quality resources and facilities (Kozol, 2005), higher teacher turnover, and a lower percentage of highly qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2004). These resource deficits could well contribute to both the achievement and discipline gap in a given school. Thus, although there is very likely a relationship between the achievement and discipline gaps, the relative contribution individual and systemic factors to that relationship has yet to be specified.

Differential Selection: Classroom Processes

Drawing upon the work of) suggest that disproportionality is influenced by processes of both differential selection (classroom referral) and differential processing (administrative decisions with respect to consequences). *Differential selection* refers to the hypothesis that Black, Latino, or American Indian students may be more likely to be referred for disciplinary action despite relatively similar rates of disruption. *Differential processing* asserts that disproportionality is the result of variability in the consequences Piquero (2008) in the field of disproportionate minority contact (DMC) in the juvenile justice system, Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) issued by administrators that is independent of characteristics of the infraction.

There is increasing evidence that differential selection at the classroom level may contribute to the production of disciplinary disparities. In a nationally representative sample of 364 elementary and secondary schools, Skiba et al. (2011) found that African American students are twice as likely to receive office disciplinary referrals at the elementary level and up to four times as likely in middle school. In an ethnographic observational study of urban classrooms, Vavrus and Cole (2002) found that most office referrals leading to school suspension were not the result of serious disruption or flagrant violation of disciplinary codes, but instead were due to what the authors described as a students' "violation of implicit interactional codes"; students of color were more likely to be referred to the office for such violations. Other research suggests that differential selection may operate across as well as within classrooms. Gregory and Weinstein (2008) reported that African American student referrals for defiance appeared to be situational, occurring in fewer than half a student's classrooms for the vast majority of students, while Gregory and Thompson (2010) found that students who reported feeling less fairly treated by a teacher were more likely to be perceived by the teacher as defiant, more likely to receive a referral from the teacher, and less likely to be perceived as cooperative by that teacher.

Differential Processing: Administrative Decision-Making

There is also evidence that administrative processing makes a contribution to racial and ethnic disparities in suspension and expulsion, independent of contributions made at the level of classroom referral. Examining school disciplinary records from a national sample of schools in 17 states, Skiba et al. (2011) reported that, although minor infractions in general receive less serious consequences, African American and Latino students were more likely than White students to receive suspension and expulsion for minor infractions, even when controlling for the previous step of teacher referral. Similarly, when assessing the percent of students of each race who received an out of school suspension, rather than some lesser sanction, Nicholson-Crotty et al. (2009) found that approximately 95% of Black students who committed a weapons offense received an out-of-school suspension, as opposed to 85 % of White students. With respect to less serious offenses, African American students were one and half times more likely than White students to receive an out-of-school suspension for tobacco related offenses.

School Climate

Research has found that a positive school climate is associated with lower rates of misconduct and discipline (Bickel & Qualls, 1980; Welsh, 2003), and that African American students have more negative perceptions of school climate than their White peers (Kupchik & Ellis, 2008; Mattison & Aber, 2007; Ruck & Wortley, 2002; Watkins & Aber, 2009). It is not surprising then, that there is evidence of a link between rates of disproportionality and student ratings of racial school climate (Mattison & Aber, 2007), as well as more general measures of school climate (Gregory, Cornell & Fan, 2011; Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997).

Racial differences in perceptions of school climate. Differences in ratings of school climate between White and African American students have been found across studies and generally indicate that African American students perceive less fairness and consistency of school rules and their enforcement than do White students (Kupchik & Ellis, 2008; Mattison & Aber, 2007; Ruck & Wortley, 2002; Watkins & Aber, 2009). Toldson (2008), in the national *Breaking Barriers* study, documented factors that improve educational outcomes for African American males. In particular, feelings of personal safety among African American males is related to academic success: High achieving black male students reported feeling safe at school, while low achieving black male students were more likely to carry a weapon to school for self-defense. Given that positive school climate is a protective factor in school discipline, what do racial/ethnic differences in school climate mean for disparities in discipline?

Ratings of school climate and disproportionality. Research has attempted to address the relationship between school climate and disciplinary rates for African American students using self report, teacher ratings, and disciplinary records. Mattison and Aber (2007) compared self-reported rates of detention and suspension with ratings of racial school climate in a study of 1,838 White and African American high school students. African American students reported more experiences of racism and lower ratings of racial fairness at school, and both of these ratings were associated with higher rates of detentions and suspensions.

Steinberg, Allensworth, and Johnson (2011) surveyed students and teachers in Chicago Public Schools and found that schools with harsh discipline policies resulting in higher rates of suspensions are perceived as *less* safe by students and teachers; schools serving a higher proportion of African American students were in general perceived as less safe. Utilizing self-report measures of school climate, along with teacher ratings, and disciplinary records at a large urban middle school, Kuperminc and colleagues (Kuperminc et al., 1997) found that African American boys who reported a more positive school climate were rated by teachers as exhibiting less aggression and delinquent behaviors.

Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011) explored the relationships between factors of school climate, student perceptions of teacher support and academic expectations, and discipline rates. Using a sample of 9th grade students from 199 schools across the state of Virginia, multivariate analyses were used to examine the relationships between suspension rates and academic expectations and support in high school climate. Schools rated as having the lowest levels of support and academic expectations were associated with the highest rates of suspension, as well as the largest Black-White suspension gap.

Overall, these studies suggest a consistent connection between school climate and racial/ethnic disproportionality in discipline. While it is not certain whether the relationship between school climate and disproportionality is unidirectional or bidirectional, these studies provide evidence that school climate may serve as a protective factor for African American students. Likewise, negative ratings of school climate seem to be a contributing factor to racial/ethnic disparities in discipline.

IV. New Research Examples and Directions

New research on disproportionality in school discipline has replicated and extended findings on over-representation of African American students in school discipline (Lewis et al., 2010; Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010a; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008). In addition, recent research has significantly extended previous findings in four areas: multivariate analyses, the *school-to-prison pipeline*, the impact of the representativeness of faculty and students on rates of disparity, increasing attention to theory.

Multivariate Analyses

In and of itself, statistical differences in rates of discipline between racial and ethnic groups do not constitute proof of the presence or absence of bias or discrimination. Indeed, numerical disparities in disciplinary outcomes could possibly be the result of any of a number of the factors cited above, or their interaction. In order to assess the contribution of such a range of variables and better understand the causal relationships that contribute to disproportionality, it is important to control for alternate hypotheses.

Thus, the use of some form of multivariate analysis to assess disproportionality in discipline while controlling for a range of other variables has been expanding dramatically in recent years. Logistic regression models have explored the influence of a range of variables on the likelihood of school suspension or expulsion (Hinojosa, 2008; Skiba et al., 2011). A number of recent studies have also capitalized on the multi-level capabilities offered by hierarchical linear modeling (Raudenbush, Bryk, & Congdon, 2004), examining the simultaneous contributions of student and teacher perspectives (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008), or student and school contributions (Peguero & Shkarkhar, 2011). The logic of such models is especially useful for research on school discipline and disciplinary disparities. Entry of multiple variables or multiple models enables researchers to examine the independent contribution of key variables (e.g., race), while controlling for other theoretically meaningful variables (e.g., gender, SES, school type).

School to Prison Pipeline

Research on both the overuse of, and disproportionality in, punitive consequences in school discipline and juvenile justice has been identified under the rubric of the *school-to-prison* pipeline (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (2005) described the school-to-prison pipeline as the funneling of students out of school, into the streets, and into the juvenile correction system. While the school-to-prison pipeline has been useful concept for describing similar processes in education and juvenile justice, until recently, there has been little direct evidence connecting disciplinary practices in school with outcomes in the juvenile justice or corrections system (APA, 2008). Two recent studies appear to provide some documentation of that connection. Nicholson-Crotty et al. (2009) examined school discipline and juvenile justice data for African-American and White youth aged 10-17 in 53 counties in Missouri, and found that racial disproportionality in out-of-

school suspensions proved to be a strong predictor of similar levels of racial disparity in juvenile court referrals, even when controlling for levels of delinquent behavior, poverty, and other demographic variables. More recent evidence concerning the school-to-prison pipeline has emerged from a longitudinal study by The Council of State Government (CSG) Justice Center (2011) that followed every seventh grader in the state of Texas through their high school years. Even after controlling for more than 80 individual and school-level variables, multivariate analyses indicated that suspended or expelled students had a greater likelihood of contact with the juvenile justice system in subsequent years; the relationship was even stronger for African American students.

Representation of Students and Faculty

Among the more important questions to be addressed in research on disproportionality is whether the racial and ethnic diversity of either school staff or the student body itself are related to disciplinary disproportionality. Recent research has begun to address both those questions.

Faculty representativeness. It has been suggested that the lack of diversity in America's teaching force may lead to cultural mismatch (Townsend, 2000) and that a more racially diverse staff would lead to less disparity in discipline. Recent data appears to at least partially support this theory. Using survey data gathered by the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights on all public schools in the United States, Rocha and Hawes (2009) found that the presence of a higher proportion of minority teachers on teaching faculties resulted in lower levels suspension and expulsions among minority students of the same race/ethnicity. Support for this relationship has also been reported by Roch, Pitts, and Navarro (2010), who found that schools with more racial and ethnic representation are more likely adopt learning-oriented discipline policies, and Mccloughlin & Noltemeyer (2010) who found the percentage of African American teachers to be negatively associated with suspension rates in urban, high poverty schools in Ohio.

Student Representativeness. Recent work has also begun to explore the influence of rates of enrollment of students of color, in particular percentage of African Americans, on suspension, expulsion, and other school punishments. Using a national sample of 294 public schools, Welch and Payne (2010) reported that, regardless of levels of misbehavior and

delinquency, schools with a higher percentage of black students were more likely to use higher rates of exclusionary discipline, court action and zero tolerance policies, and to use fewer mild disciplinary practices. These results have been replicated by Payne & Welch (2010) and Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer (2010), who found a positive relationship between the percentage of African American students and the use of harsher disciplinary practices.

Increased Attention to Theory

Until recently, research on racial disparities in discipline has not been particularly theory-driven, but some investigations are beginning to place their results within theoretical frames drawn from sociology, criminology, or political science. Disproportionality in discipline has been examined using the framework of representative bureaucracy, which asserts that if administrators and the groups they serve share similar characteristics, they will also be more likely to share similar the same norms and values, and hence will be more likely to pursue courses of action more favorable to those groups (Kingsley, 1944; Meier & Stewart, 1992; Pitts, 2007). Drawing upon that theory, Roch, Pitts, and Navarro (2010) reported that schools with a teaching staff more representative of the racial/ethnic composition of the student body had lower rates of severe punishments and higher rates of less severe punishment; that relationship was not significant for representation of school administrators. Rocha and Hawes (2009) reported cross-race effects of representativeness, finding that higher proportions of African American teachers predicted lower rates of suspension for both African American and Latino students. In relation to student representativeness, Welch and Payne (2010) have drawn upon the *racial threat hypothesis* to explain the positive association between black enrollment and more punitive school disciplinary methods. That hypothesis, first developed in sociology and criminology (Blalock, 1967; Blumer, 1958) suggests that majority individuals will feel a greater degree of threat as the relative proportion of racial minorities in a given institution or community increases, and will therefore resort to increasingly stringent measures of control in response to that perceived threat (Jacobs & Carmichael, 2001; Taylor, 1998).

It is unclear, however, whether theoretical formulations drawn from other fields can fully describe disciplinary processes in educational settings. It is important to note that, while the statistical relationship between black enrollment and increased punishment has been well-

documented (Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2010; Rocha & Hawes, 2009; Welch & Payne, 2010), the particular explanation that this is due to school staff feeling threatened by increasing non-white enrollments and hence resorting to increased methods of social control has not yet been tested. The statistical relationship between proportion of black enrollment and increased punitiveness might just as well be explained by cultural mismatch (Townsend, 2000), differential perceptions and processing of student behavior at the classroom level (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba et al., 2002), or racial/ethnic stereotypes (Ferguson, 2001; Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008).

It is possible that the macro-level theoretical constructs from other fields will be less satisfactory for describing school and classroom processes that drive school disciplinary outcomes than theories drawn more directly from psychology or education. Examining school climate survey data from 199 public high schools from a single state, Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011) drew upon the parenting model of Baumrind (1968)—that effective parents avoid extremes of *authoritarian* or *permissive* parenting, in favor of an *authoritative* approach that is both highly demanding and highly responsive. Defining authoritative discipline in schools as a combination of warmth/support and academic press/clarity of school rules, Gregory et al. reported that schools that scored the lowest on the authoritative dimension demonstrated the highest rates of school suspension. Such education-specific theory-building appears to have a clear advantage in interpreting educational data, in a) better describing micro-level classroom and school processes that may create higher risk for exclusionary discipline, and hence b) providing a better guide for intervention and remediation.

Status of Interventions to Reduce Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Discipline

Considering the substantive data consistently documenting disproportionality over the past few decades, there is little research on the effectiveness of intervention efforts to reduce racial/ethnic disparities in discipline. A number of universal, school-wide interventions have been shown to be effective in improving school discipline or school climate and may have the potential for reducing disproportionality (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010), including School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009; Bradshaw, Mitchell & Leaf, 2010; Horner et al., 2009), social emotional learning (SEL) (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Ialongo, Poduska, Werthamer, & Kellam, 2001; Payton,

Weissberg, Durlak et al., 2008), and restorative justice (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2009; Jennings, Gover, & Hitchcock, 2008). Interventions with an explicit focus on culture, including culturally-responsive classroom management (CRCM) and versions of SWPBS and restorative justice, have also been recommended (Jones, Caravaca, Cizek, Horner, & Vincent, 2006; Wang et al., 2007; Wearmouth, McKinney, & Glynn, 2007; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). To date, however, there is not adequate research that specifically examines the effects of any intervention on disproportionality to determine the effectiveness of any interventions to reduce racial/ethnic disparities.

Universal/Schoolwide Interventions

Schoolwide positive behavior supports (SWPBS). SWPBS is a structured three-tiered system that acts as a continuum of supports to promote desired behavior outcomes (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Through a decision-making framework that guides a comprehensive and proactive approach to school discipline, SWPBS aims to prevent the development and intensification of behavior problems by emphasizing four elements (a) identifying measurable behavior and academic outcomes, (b) collecting data to guide decision making, (c) using evidence based practices that support these outcomes, (d) leveraging systems that support effective implementation (Sugai & Horner, 2009; Sugai, Horner, & McIntosh, 2008). In multiple studies at elementary, middle, and high schools SWPBS has been shown to be effective in reducing overall disciplinary rates (Bradshaw, Koth et al., 2009; Bradshaw, Mitchell & Leaf, 2010; Horner et al., 2009). Improvements in school climate and an increased focus on academics have also been attributed to the implementation of SWPBS (Bradshaw, Koth et al.; Horner et al., 2010).

Social emotional learning (SEL). SEL programs seek to facilitate the healthy development of children who are self-aware, caring and connected to others, and responsible in their decision-making by teaching and reinforcing life skills (Greenberg et al., 2003). SEL programs are often implemented as preventative curriculums and/or through the creation of supportive learning environments aimed at reducing problem behaviors by helping students: (a) recognize and manage their emotions, (b) appreciate the perspective of others, (c) establish positive goals, (d) make responsible decisions, and (e) handle interpersonal situations effectively (Payton et al., 2008). Meta-analyses, program evaluations, and case studies

provide evidence that SEL may be able to positively impact disciplinary rates and school climate (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Ialongo, Poduska, Werthamer, & Kellam, 2001; Payton et al., 2008).

Restorative justice. Based on the assumption that wrongdoing damages relationships, restorative justice programs aim to restore relationships and repair the harm caused by misbehavior. While programs vary, common strategies include: (a) collaborative decision-making about restitution to victims, (b) holding offenders accountable, (c) conferences and community meetings, and (d) preventing similar actions in the future by changing behavior and the conditions that caused it (Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, 2006; Strang & Braithwaite, 2001). Research examining the effects of restorative justice programs in U.S. public schools is in the early stages. Program evaluations and case studies provide some evidence that restorative justice programs may be able to positively impact disciplinary rates and school climate (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2009; Jennings, Gover, & Hitchcock, 2008; Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, 2006). However, as of yet, there are few peer-reviewed studies examining the impact of restorative justice on school discipline.

Universal interventions and disproportionality. The question of whether any universal, schoolwide intervention can successfully reduce racial/ethnic disproportionality remains unanswered. Although it might be presumed that an intervention that reduced suspension/expulsion rates in general might also reduce disproportionality in discipline, emerging data may contradict this assumption. Skiba and colleagues (2008) explored patterns of office disciplinary referrals in a nationally-representative sample of 436 elementary and middle schools that had been implementing school-wide PBS for at least one year. Although aggregated results appeared to show that minor infractions in those PBS-implementing schools received less severe punishments and more severe consequences were reserved for more serious infractions, a dramatically different pattern was found when the data were disaggregated. Across the national sample, African American and Latino students were up to five times more likely than white students to receive suspension and expulsion for minor infractions. Similarly, Vincent and Tobin (2010), studying discipline data from 77 schools, found that while implementation of SWPBS reduced overall disciplinary rates, reductions were greatest for White students and African American students remained overrepresented,

particularly in long-term exclusions. Such data make a strong case that explicit adaptations will be required to ensure that all interventions, including PBS, are culturally responsive.

For SEL, there appears to be even less evidence specifically using racial disproportionality as a dependent variable. These kinds of investigations are needed to demonstrate the potential that programs may have to reduce racial/ethnic disparities in discipline. Evidence to support the use of restorative justice to reduce racial/ethnic disparities in discipline has focused primarily on the indigenous Maori population in New Zealand (Drewery, 2004; Wearmouth, McKinney, & Glynn, 2007). Currently, there are some program evaluations and case studies to support the use of restorative justice programs to reduce overall disciplinary rates (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2009; Jennings, Gover, & Hitchcock, 2008; Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, 2006) but not to specifically address disproportionality in U.S. schools.

Our complex history as a nation means that our population is composed of a number of cultural subgroups; it cannot be assumed that educational interventions will operate in the same way for all groups. The need to be responsive to the needs of diverse students has led to calls for culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001) and more recently for culturally responsive classroom management (Brown, 2004; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Such an approach means becoming aware of cultural differences, adapting programs and interventions as appropriate and monitoring intervention effects not only in general, but also in particular for groups that have been historically marginalized.

Race and Culture Specific Interventions

Interventions with an explicit focus upon culture have been recommended by scholars and researchers (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Green et al., 2005; Skiba et al., 2011), including professional development to increase the cultural competence of educators (APA, 2008; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gregory, 1995), interventions and assessment tools that utilize students' cultural values and strengths (Brown, 2004; Green et al., 2005; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003), and the examination of outcome data disaggregated by race/ethnicity to determine the effects of interventions for all groups of students (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Skiba et al., year). Culturally responsive

classroom management (CRCM) and some versions of SWPBS and restorative justice are examples of interventions that include an explicit focus upon culture.

Culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM). A conceptual framework for explicating components of CRCM has been created through synthesis of literature on culturally responsive practices and various qualitative investigations (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Brown, 2004; E. Brown, 2002; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Common elements of culturally responsive approaches to classroom management that have been identified as effective in qualitative observation and interview studies include: (1) a physical setting that communicates awareness of and respect for students' cultural heritage (Brown, 2002; Weinstein, 1992), (2) a combination of high expectations and strong interpersonal support (Bondy et al., 2007, Brown, 2004; Weinstein et al., 2003), (3) cultural relevancy of instruction (Brown, 2004), and (4) high levels of parental engagement (Brown, 2002; Weinstein et al., year). Additionally, Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran (2004) suggested five teacher traits related to CRCM: (a) recognition of one's own ethnocentrism, (b) knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds; (c) understanding of the broader social, economic and political context; (d) ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies; and (e) a commitment to building caring classrooms. Although research and literature on CRCM point to suggestions for improving classroom management and climate through culturally responsive practices, currently there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the efficacy of CRCM in reducing disproportionality in school discipline.

Other culture-specific interventions. While larger-scale research efforts are needed to establish the efficacy of interventions aimed at addressing disproportionality, a few case studies specifically with SWPBS and restorative justice, document how attention to culture can result in more effective intervention efforts. A case study of a New Mexico school with a predominantly Native American student population exemplifies how lesson plans and other SWPBS products can be enhanced by embedding students' language, values, and exemplars of expected behaviors using culturally-relevant leaders and historical figures (Jones, Caravaca, Cizek, Horner, & Vincent, 2006). Through the contrast and consideration of traditional Chinese cultural values and values embedded in SWPBS, an example of how the

effectiveness of SWPBS for a Chinese-American student can be enhanced by embedding culturally responsive practices is described by Wang and colleagues (2007). Lastly, a case study describing the application of restorative justice in a New Zealand school with a predominantly indigenous Maori student population illustrates how the process of understanding and embedding students' and families' cultural values and worldviews into disciplinary systems and processes can facilitate the development of culturally-safe and responsive schools (Wearmouth, McKinney, & Glynn, 2007).

V. Unanswered Questions and Recommendations

A number of significant issues remain unanswered in describing disproportionality in suspension and expulsion. Clearly, research has consistently found that the serious disparities have been for African American students. Especially given inconsistencies in findings for Latino students, and insufficient research on disciplinary outcomes for American Indian students, further investigation exploring the outcomes and consequences of suspension and expulsion for other racial and ethnic groups is warranted. The proliferation of large quantitative studies examining extant databases in recent years has been remarkable. Yet these studies offer a rather general picture of the causes of and possible solutions for disproportionality. In order to gain a richer understanding and develop education-specific theory, more intensive ethnographic and qualitative research will be necessary, in order to observe micro-level processes at the school and classroom level that may contribute to racial and ethnic disparities.

It is somewhat remarkable that, in light of nearly forty years of documentation of racial and ethnic disparities in exclusionary school discipline, there has been so little attention paid to developing and implementing interventions to address the discipline gap. Leaders in the field have noted that culturally responsive approaches to pedagogy and management must be comprehensive and broad based (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Weinstein et al., 2004), and this is certainly true with respect to school discipline in particular. Skiba et al. (2011) made a set of recommendations for addressing disproportionality through practice, research and policy; we believe there are four particular processes that must be attended to in order to engender meaningful change in disciplinary disproportionality, and so

reorganize those recommendations across those dimensions: *disaggregation of data*, *representation of stakeholders and perspectives*, and *culturally responsive intervention*.

Disaggregation of data. Examination of disaggregated data, allowing for the clear identification of current levels of racial and ethnic disparity in disciplinary outcomes, is a critical first step that provides both a baseline and a benchmark for attempts at remediation. Specific recommendations regarding disaggregation include:

- *At the school level*, data on discipline by race should be reported regularly (monthly) to faculty.
- *At the district and state level*, disaggregated data on discipline should be made available and easily accessible to stakeholder groups.
- *At the federal level*, as is currently the case for disproportionality in special education, federal monitoring practices should regularly require disaggregated reporting of discipline patterns.

Adequate representation of all stakeholders' perspectives. Over the course of our nation's history, the experience of race and ethnicity has differed dramatically depending on one's skin color, and those differential experiences continue today, as represented in white privilege (McIntosh, 1990) and racial micro-aggressions (Howard, 2008; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino et al., 2007). In addition, the difficulty that educators, especially white educators, have in openly talking about race and racism has been well documented (Henze, Lucas, & Scott, 1998; King, 1991; Tatum, 1997). Failure to adequately consider the perspectives of those most affected by racial and ethnic disparities may short-circuit full consideration of race-based data and make effective remediation difficult or impossible (Wise, 2002).

- *At the school level*, the diversity and representativeness of local teams examining disproportionality data should be considered, and outside facilitation may be necessary in order to encourage frank conversation about the awkward topic of race (Singleton & Linton, 2006).
- *At the district and state level*, policies addressing disciplinary inequity and promoting the consideration of equity issues at the LEA level should be established.

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- *At the federal level*, research funding is needed to move beyond mere description of disproportionality to clear documentation of causal mechanisms, and functional, and where necessary, *race-specific* interventions for reducing disparate outcomes.

Culturally responsive interventions. As noted, strikingly few evidence-based interventions have been developed for the specific purpose of reducing race-based disproportionality. Whether universal interventions are sufficient for reducing racial disparities is an empirical question; it cannot be assumed that even the most effective behavioral interventions will affect all populations in the same way.

- *At the school level*, continued monitoring of disaggregated data will allow school teams to assess the extent to which interventions are working equally well for all groups. Additionally, providing regular opportunities for professional development designed to increase cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills will assist staff in implementing culturally responsive practices to benefit all groups of students.
- *At the district and state level*, technical assistance and personnel development options made available to expand school disciplinary repertoires and minimize the disproportionate application of disciplinary strategies.
- *At the federal level*, resources are needed to document the technical assistance and implementation strategies that will allow state- and district-wide responses to disproportionate use of discipline.

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