Fall 2020

Student Misbehavior: The Role of Student-Teacher Relationships and Supportive Teachers in Reducing Racial Disparities in School Discipline

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Word count = 7,745 (excluding references and tables/figures)

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ABSTRACT

How do teachers contribute to the growing racial disparities in school discipline? Previous research indicates that teachers influence students' academic and social outcomes, but how do they also influence the rates at which different student racial groups get disciplined? This study uses data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (N = 10051) to examine the relationship between student-teacher relationships, supportive teachers and discipline. I propose the following hypotheses: (1) students who get along well with their teachers will be less likely to be disciplined than students who do not, (2) students who perceive their teachers to be supportive will be less likely to be disciplined than students who do not, and (3) the strength of these relationships will be stronger for students of color than White students. Findings of the multivariate analysis indicate that students with higher levels of agreement that they get along well with and feel supported by their teachers have lower rates of discipline; however, the findings also show that the strength of the relationship between discipline and supportive teachers is stronger for non-Black POC students than White students, whereas the strength of the relationship between discipline and student-teacher relationships is stronger for White students than Black and non-Black POC students. Results indicate that when students perceive teachers as caring and respectful, discipline rates are lower. This study highlights why educators should acknowledge the importance of teachers in the socialization process and encourage positive student-teacher relationships as a way to heighten student attachment to school.

In education, beyond the individual responsibility of doing well, a student's academic success is dependent on having a strong support system and legitimate authority figures, both in school and at home. In schools, teachers, in particular, act as support systems for students by promoting a healthy and nurturing environment in which students learn and grow, teach students how to be productive members of their society, and are the first line of defense when a student becomes distressed or difficult. However, teachers who do not know how to handle students with "defiant" tendencies are more likely to refer that student for further disciplinary action rather than working through the issue with that student; in fact, studies analyzing school records reveal that one of the largest offenses that lead to disciplinary consequences is conflicts that arise between teachers and students (George and Weinstein 2008; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson 2002; Milner and Tenore 2010). Therefore, a promising factor that might reduce disparities in discipline is developing student-perceived trust in the teacher's authority.

Scholars have questioned and debated the effectiveness of using harsh punitive measures like zero-tolerance policies as a way to respond to school discipline problems, specifically because of the disproportionate number of students of color who are criminalized for engaging in minor infractions (Stewart 2003; Raffaele Mendez and Knoff 2003). The process of being punished and excluded from school due to harsh school policies, as well as the perceptions that students of color are criminals or deviant, funnels students of color into a life of crime – this phenomenon is referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline. Disparities in exclusionary discipline, or those that remove or exclude a student from school (i.e., in- and out-of-school suspension or expulsion), are due to increased referrals from teachers (George and Weinstein 2008; Anyon, Atteberry-Ash, Yang, Pauline, Wiley, Cash, Downing, Greer, and Pisciotta 2018; Skiba et al. 2002; Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, and Moore-Thomas 2012). And one of the many reasons why Black students, who are

often viewed as defiant and uncooperative, are disproportionately referred for discipline is because of clashing attitudes and norms with teachers (George and Weinstein 2008). Teachers who hold stereotypical views of their students of color often misinterpret their behavior as disruptive (Downey and Pribesh 2004; Skiba et al. 2002) and studies suggest that perceived teacher bias by students of color is associated with student dropout rates (Skiba et al. 2002; Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, and Pollock 2016; Krane, Ness, Holter-Sorensen, Karlsson, and Binder 2017). While student-level variables (e.g., gender, family structure, delinquency, and attitudes toward school) help to explain the differences in student outcomes, they are not enough to explain the race disparities in student punishment.

At the classroom level, teachers are the first responders when a classroom disruption occurs and have an obligation to confront the situation with an understanding of the ways in which their response impacts their students. It may be assumed that if a teacher establishes a punitive environment within their classroom, then students will not misbehave because they fear the repercussions of their actions (Way 2011). However, severe punishment policies, restrictive school rules, and student perceptions of school rules as strict are all related to higher rates of classroom disruption (Way 2011). If an authoritarian model of discipline does not deter students from misbehaving, then a more liberal and nonrestrictive approach to school discipline is needed to temper misbehavior. Instead of fear being the driving force behind student behavior, the presence of a supportive teacher in the classroom may prevent student misconduct. Students interact with teachers daily, for many hours at a time, and student perceptions of their teachers have the potential of influencing students' misbehavior.

When examining race as a factor, studies have shown that Black students, and other students of color, receive differential treatment from teachers (Hinojosa 2008; Skiba et al. 2002;

Romero 2018; Anyon et al. 2018; Bryan et al. 2012; Anyon, Lechuga, Ortega, Downing, Greer, and Simmons 2017). Black students often report that they receive less support and praise from their teachers when compared to White students (Anyon et al. 2017; Muller 2001). And they feel as though their teachers have lower expectations for their academic success. And since the ever-growing presence of the school-to-prison pipeline threatens the livelihoods and education of students of color, a bond established on trust and respect between teachers and students, particularly students of color, will help to reduce the racial disparities that are present in rates of school discipline.

The current study will examine the relationship between school discipline, the presence of supportive teachers in the classroom and student-teacher relationships. How can positive student-teacher relationships and supportive teachers in the classroom reduce the rates at which students get disciplined? I propose the following hypotheses: 1) students who get along well with their teachers will be disciplined (i.e., get into trouble, receive in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension and probation, or be transferred due to disciplinary problems) less than students who do not; 2) students who perceive their teachers as supportive will be disciplined less than students who do not; and 3) these relationships will be moderated by race in that both relationships will be stronger for students of color than White students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on student-teacher relationships primarily centers around how teachers' expectations affect their students' academic outcomes (Murray and Zvoch 2011; Woolley et al. 2009; Gregory and Thompson 2010; Romero 2018; Gregory and Ripski 2008; Crosnoe et al. 2004). Multiple studies have also assessed school- and individual-level characteristics as a way to understand the climate around discipline (Stewart 2003; Hinojosa 2008; Romero 2018; Way 2011).

Although there is an abundant amount of research that centers around the academic experiences of the student in the classroom, there is little attention as to why students misbehave and whether teachers who resolve classroom misbehavior, specifically among students of color, can help to reduce disparities in discipline. Therefore, this study will examine the classroom-level factors (i.e., strength of student-teacher relationship and the presence of a supportive teacher in the classroom) that transform student behavior.

This section highlights how this study is situated in relation to and informed by previous literature surrounding student misbehavior and school discipline. First, I will analyze the severity of the racial gap in school referrals and discipline, specifically the gap between Black and White students. Second, I will explain how the social control theory aids in our understanding of how students' attachment to school influences behavior. Then, I will discuss the importance of having supportive teachers in the classroom who aim to build positive relationships with their students. Finally, I will describe the factors that inform students' perceptions of their teachers.

Racial Gap in Discipline

In an attempt to handle delinquent behavior among students during the early-1990s, public schools began to implement and enforce harsh disciplinary punishments that mirror zero-tolerance policies in the criminal justice system (Bell 2015; Way 2011). In K-12 education institutions, the implementation of zero tolerance policies sought to prevent a variety of undesired behaviors, and essentially, transformed urban US schools into places that resembled prisons (Bell 2015). These policies disproportionately affect low-income students and students of color, who often have their actions criminalized. But children who experience exclusionary school discipline are more likely to do poorly in school and have either juvenile justice contact or be arrested (Bryan et al. 2012; Anyon et al. 2018). Not only are Black males more likely to be disciplined, suspended, and

expelled, but as a result of this exclusion, they miss class instructions and lessons, thus impacting their grades and chances of future educational attainment (Romero 2018; Gregory and Ripski 2008; Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder Jr. 2004).

Disparities in exclusionary discipline are often the result of teachers referring students who they believe exhibit uncooperative and aggressive tendencies (George and Weinstein 2008). A school discipline referral signifies that the teacher is in need of assistance for dealing with a student issue, specifically in regard to a student's behavior; basically, it implies that a teacher believes that a student acted in a way that was disruptive or in violation of school and classroom rules. More often than not, a referral is the product of a conflict that arose between a teacher and a student. George and Weinstein (2008), drawing on data from the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, found that Black students were three times more likely to be referred and suspended than their non-Black peers. Conducting a study composed of urban high schools, George and Weinstein (2008) found that even though Black students comprised roughly 30% of school enrollment, they occupied 28% of defiance referrals, while White students who made up 37% of school enrollment, comprised 5% of referrals (George and Weinstein 2008). Their study is consistent with the literature around rates of discipline referral and suspension for Black and White students (Hinojosa 2008; Skiba et al. 2002; Romero 2018; Anyon et al. 2018; Bryan et al. 2012; Anyon et al. 2017). Despite this trend, there is little attention to the factors that influence the disparities in both referral rate and school discipline (e.g., suspension or expulsion).

In explaining the racial disparities in rates of discipline, one possibility exists that Black students also exhibit higher rates of disruptive behavior when compared to their White peers. But Skiba et al. (2002) revealed that African American students were not more likely to misbehave than White students, but were still more likely to be referred. They found that White students were

more likely to be referred to the office for smoking, leaving without permission, obscene language, and vandalism, whereas Black students were more likely to be referred for disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering (Skiba et al. 2002). White students were disciplined for engaging in an act that leaves a physical or permanent product (e.g., smoking or vandalism), whereas Black students were punished on more of a subjective judgement (e.g., excessive noise) on the part of the referring agent (Skiba et al. 2002). Black students are often perceived to be disruptive and unmanageable (Downey and Pribesh 2004); so, when a student is punished for "excessive noise" or "loitering," it is the teacher's perception of that student that drives that punishment rather than an objective and indisputable fact that a defiant act occurred (e.g., vandalism).

Beyond the reasons as to why a student was disciplined, there are also specific locations on school grounds in which a student is more likely to be referred. For Black students, that location is the classroom from teachers with whom they were more likely to have contact on a regular basis (Anyon et al. 2017). Discipline referrals from various locations on school property (e.g., the gym, the classroom, cafeteria, and in the hallway) may rely more on negative stereotypes of students of color than individualized knowledge about specific students; in other words, even though students may develop positive relationships with other school personnel, the relationship established between teachers and students may provide more insight into student misbehavior in the classroom. Anyon et al. (2017) found that Black students were equally or less likely than White students to be disciplined in school spaces outside the classroom, meaning that Black students were at the highest risk for referral in the classroom (Anyon et al. 2017). And in English classes, specifically, students' race was a predictor of whether the teacher referred a student; in fact, Black students were 71 percent more likely to be referred than White students (Bryan et al. 2012). Since

referrals are based on teachers' perceptions of student behavior, teachers should focus on fostering positive relationships with their students as a means to combat disparities in school discipline.

Student Attachment to School

The social control theory postulates that an individual's relationships and values encourage them not to break the law and examines how society prevents and sanctions behavior that violates norms. Building on this theory, Travis Hirschi (1969) contends that individuals decide whether to engage in delinquent behavior depending on the strength of their social bonds. He explains that this theory of social bonds is composed of four main elements, all of which can be used to explain why individuals perform delinquent acts: attachment, commitment, involvement and belief (Stewart 2003). Attachment refers to the strength of the ties an individual has with other members of their society, and the level at which other people's expectations and opinions influence the individual's behavior. Commitment refers to an individual's acceptance of conventional behavior. Involvement refers to the participation in activities that are deemed socially valuable. And finally, belief refers to whether the individual endorses the moral validity of social norms and rules (Stewart 2003). The present study will focus on the first element of social bonding, attachment, to explore how social ties in school influence student misbehavior.

School is a source of attachment for students because teachers and administrators act as role models and teach students socially acceptable behavior (Stewart 2003). According to the social control theory, individuals who are attached to basic institutions of socialization, like schools, are more likely to obey rules and avoid punishment (Stewart 2003). Students' level of school attachment is usually operationalized as their relationship with their teachers where students who feel supported by and care about their teachers are more likely to develop affective ties to school (Libbey 2004; Stewart 2003). And these ties are important for student success, especially

for students of color (Wooley et al. 2008). Positive student-teacher relationships (low levels of conflict and high levels of support) and caring teachers help develop students' emotional attachment and sense of stability that heightens engagement in academics and serves as a barrier against risk (Woolley et al. 2009; Cook et al. 2018; Gregory and Thompson 2010; Way 2011). For instance, in one study, students noted that they perceived positive student-teacher relationships based on facial expressions, such as smiling during interactions and conversations with teachers, which made them feel comfortable and secure within the classroom and around school (Krane et al. 2017). This simple fact reflects that even small gestures, like smiling, and seemingly kind teachers are crucial to the development of connections between teachers and their students. Discerning how students form attachments to schools, mainly with their teachers, is important for understanding how these ties affect behavior.

Building Positive Relationships

Schools are socializing institutions that introduce students to accepted norms and attitudes that are important to their society and teach them general skills (e.g., reading, writing and arithmetic). But within those schools, at the classroom-level, teachers are one of the central figures in the school socialization process. Multiple studies have illustrated the connection between the quality of student-teacher relationships and future academic and social outcomes (Cook, Coco, Zhang, Duong, Renshaw, and Frank 2018; Anyon et al. 2018; Stewart 2003; Muller 2001; Woolley, Kol, and Bowen 2009; Romero 2018). A teacher's main job, beyond teaching students the curriculum, is to show compassion to all their students, understand each students' personal learning method, and support the student while they realize their potential – this non-academic responsibility is referred to as authentic care (Valenzuela 1999). The ideal teacher displays passion for learning, is understanding, patient and willing to help, and is a role model. Since they are key

socializing agents, if teachers do not show that they care about certain students, then those students react accordingly.

Student-teacher relationships are not simply characterized by the quality of interactions between the two people, but also by each individual's perception of the other, such as perceptions of trust and belonging (Cook et al. 2018). If a student does not build a positive relationship with their teacher, and believes that their teacher has low expectations for them, then they will misbehave (Anyon et al. 2018; Anyon et al. 2017; Skiba et al. 2002; Way 2011; Hinojosa 2008; Muller 2001; Romero 2018; Bryan et al. 2012; Stewart 2003; Gregory and Weinstein 2008). Misbehavior can run from simple non-compliance to classroom rules (e.g., not paying attention) to disruptive (and possibly dangerous) behavior (e.g., throwing something at the teacher). Although there are many reasons a student may misbehave (e.g., attention seeking and learning difficulties), teachers can also induce student misbehavior. A teacher who judges the student's behavior fairly can easily earn the respect from their students and build a positive relationship with them. But teachers must first establish authority within the classroom – which has to be accepted by the students – before beginning to build a positive relationship with them. Teachers can legitimize their authority through daily interactions with students, mainly through the regulation of classroom order (Way 2011). And once teachers legitimize their authority, they must then develop relationships with each student, so the students show interest in what the teacher is doing (Milner and Tenore 2010). Since teachers and students spend multiple hours a day interacting with one another, it is therefore important to assess the relationship between the two to better under disparities in school discipline.

Students' Perception of Teachers

Beyond the influences that teachers exert over their students, student perceptions of their teachers also contribute to the overall classroom climate. Students who find themselves performing well and receive praise from their teacher for their efforts will have a positive feeling about school and will be willing to work hard and cooperate with their teachers (Cook et al. 2018). In schools where students perceive positive, caring relations with their teachers, suspension rates are lower (Muller 2001; Anyon et al. 2018). Students are more likely to be invested in school and expend more effort if they perceive that their teachers care about the students, and in turn, less students get referred for further disciplinary action (Muller 2001; Anyon et al. 2018). Perceived trust can also influence whether a student believes in and respects teachers' authority; however, Black students are less likely to believe that their teachers care about their successes, which may have implications in the rate of misbehavior among Black students (Muller 2001; Gregory and Weinstein 2008). And students of color perceive rates for office referral as a conscious and deliberate effort to remove students from classes whom the teachers did not like; in fact, Black students reported that the primary causes of many disciplinary conflicts were due to a lack of respect and interest on the part of the teachers (Skiba et al. 2002). Understanding the relationship between students' evaluation of school discipline, student-teacher relationships, and teacher authority is fundamental to examining how school discipline influences student misbehavior in the classroom.

Krane et al. (2017), in a study exploring students' experiences with student-teacher relationships in upper secondary schools, observed that some students felt as though others were treated unfairly in the classroom and received little recognition from certain teachers. One student describes, "'It affects me in a negative way, it makes me feel that whatever I do, it's not good enough for that teacher…and I never get appreciated.'" (Krane et al. 2017:381). But unequal

treatment in the classroom also affects the entire class, not just the student being disciplined. One student noted that "'the class was scared to death … [the teacher] thought she could discipline them by purposely making the students look bad in front of the class…but it made us all scared.'" (Krane et al. 2017:381). These findings suggest that teachers must regulate their behavior within the classroom, specifically in regard to discipline, because students make judgements based on those interactions. And student perceptions of how teachers use discipline within the classroom and interact with students are essential for understanding the role teachers play in shaping disciplinary outcomes for all students.

THE CURRENT STUDY

This study is an extension of Sandra M. Way's application of the normative approach to school punishment. The normative theory of school discipline maintains that when students view school and classroom rules as unfair, they are more likely to misbehave and question the legitimacy of their teachers. Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Way (2011) examined the relationship between classroom disruption, student perceptions of discipline, teacher perceptions and attributes, individual background of students, school discipline policy and other school characteristics. Her study predicted that student-teacher relationships would moderate the relationship between school discipline and disruptive classroom behavior. Way (2011) found that students who perceived school authority as legitimate and viewed their teachers more positively had lower classroom disruption scores, which indicate that students with positive relationships with their teachers are less likely to misbehave. The results indicate that along with being associated with lower levels of misbehavior, positive perceptions of teachers by students play a role in the relationship between belief in the fairness of school rules and student behavior. The current study adds student-teacher relationships as the main independent variable, and predicts that

students' race will moderate the relationship between student-teacher relationships, supportive teachers and school discipline.

RESEARCH METHODS

Data and Sample

The Education Longitudinal Study (ELS) of 2002 is a national probability sample of 750 public, Catholic and private schools in the 2001-2002 school year. The schools were selected first, then over 15,000 high school sophomores were randomly selected within each school. Non-public schools were sampled at a higher rate to ensure that the sample was large enough to make comparisons with public schools. Similarly, Asian students were sampled at a higher rate to ensure that the sample was large enough to make comparisons with White and Black students. The main purpose of the study was to gather data regarding educational processes and outcomes, student learning, predictors of dropping out, and high school effects on students' access to and success in, post-secondary education and the work force (United States Department of Education).

The ELS surveyed high school sophomores and their parents, teachers, school administrators, and librarians. The response rate of sampled students and parents was 87%, teachers was 92%, and school administrators was 99% (United States Department of Education). The unit of analysis is the individual. The original sample size of the dataset was 16,197 respondents, with 15,362 student respondents. Any values of variables that were coded as "survey component legitimate skip/NA," "nonrespondent," "missing," "not administered; abbreviated interview or breakoff," "multiple responses," or "nonrespondent" were excluded from the sample. The student and teacher race variables, as well as the student-teacher relationship variable, each lost roughly 1000 cases when missing cases were excluded, and the supportive teacher index lost

roughly 600 cases when cases were excluded. Once missing cases were excluded, the size decreased to 10051 respondents. No subset was created.

The student questionnaire collected information about students' background, school experiences and activities, future plans or goals, employment and out-of-school experiences, language background, and psychological orientation toward learning. The teacher questionnaire, which was only given to the English and the mathematics teacher of each sophomore, collected information on a teacher's background and activities, and evaluations of the student. And the school administrator questionnaire collected information regarding school and student characteristics, teaching staff characteristics, school policies and programs, technology, and school governance and climate. For more information on data collection for the ELS:2002, go to https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/els2002/

Dependent variable

Four specific variables from the student questionnaire were combined to create an index (Cronbach's alpha of 0.61) for the dependent variable *discipline*. The questionnaire asked students "how many times did the following things happen to you in the first semester or term of this school year?" and was accompanied by the following phrases: "I got in trouble for not following school rules," "I was put on in-school suspension," "I was suspended or put on probation," and "I was transferred to another school for disciplinary reasons." All variables were originally measured on a scale where 1 = never, 2 = 1-2 times, 3 = 3-6 times, 4 = 7-9 times, and 5 = 10 or more times. After excluding the missing cases and computing the index, the values on the new scale were coded and labeled as 4 = Never, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 = 10 or more times.

Independent variables

To begin, *student-teacher relationship* is the main variable that will be examined. Students were asked "how much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your current school and teachers?" which was accompanied by the following phrase: "Students get along well with teachers." The students were then asked to select either "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree," which were coded as 1, 2, 3 and 4, respectively. To make sure that higher values mean more agreement, the variable was reverse coded so that 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree.

Next, the variable *supportive teacher* will further examine the relationship between a student and their teacher. This index (Cronbach's alpha of 0.64) was created by combining three variables from the student questionnaire: "teachers are interested in students," "teachers praise efforts," and "in class often feel 'put down' by my teachers." Again, these variables were measured using a "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" scale. The variables "teachers are interested in students" and "teachers praise efforts" were reverse coded to allow for consistency across the variables used for the index. These variables were originally coded as 1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree and were recoded so that 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. With the index computed, the values were coded and labeled as 3 = strongly disagree, 4, 5, 6 = disagree, 7, 8, 9 = agree, 10, 11 and 12 = strongly agree.

And lastly, *student's race/ethnicity-composite* will be measured to access the racial disparities in discipline. Student respondents had the option of selecting the following: "American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic," "Asian, Hawaii or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic," "Black or African American, non-Hispanic," "Hispanic, no race specified," "Hispanic, race specified," "More than one race, non-Hispanic," and "White, non-Hispanic." This variable was collapsed into three categories: White, Black, and non-Black POC. *White* will be used as the

reference group with *Black* (1 = Black and 0 = Not Black) and *POC* (1 = non-Black POC and 0 = not a non-Black POC) as dummy variables.

Control variables

Based on the literature surrounding discipline in schools, a teachers' race and the demographics of a school are known to be leading factors that influence the types of discipline a school will implement; therefore, these factors will be held constant. Since only math and English teachers received questionnaires, the teacher race variables assess *math teachers' race/ethnicity-composite* and *English teachers' race/ethnicity-composite*. The teachers were presented with the same options as the students. Both variables were collapsed into three categories: White, Black, and non-Black POC. *White* will be used as the reference group with *Black* (1 = Black and 0 = Not Black) and *POC* (1 = non-Black POC and 0 = not a non-Black POC) as dummy variables. 'ET' and 'MT' were added to the ends of each race variable to denote English teacher and math teacher, respectively (e.g., *BLACKET* for English teacher is Black).

Also, school demographics, such as *school urbanicity* and *school geographic region* will be held constant. Administrators had the option of selecting "urban," "suburban," and "rural" for *school urbanicity* and "Northeast," "Midwest," "South," and "West" for *school geographic region*. For *school urbanicity, urban* will be held as the reference group with *suburban* (1 = suburban and 0 = Not suburban) and *rural* (1 = rural and 0 = Not rural) as dummy variables. For *school geographic region*, *Northeast* will be held as the reference group with *Midwest* (1 = Midwest and 0 = Not Midwest), *South* (1 = South and 0 = Not South), and *West* (1 = West and 0 = Not West) as dummy variables.

FINDINGS

Univariate Results

For the dependent variable, Figure 5 illustrates the distribution for the discipline index. Figure 5 shows that 54% of student respondents have never been disciplined. This graph also shows that 97% of students were disciplined at most 1-2 times. According to Table 1, the standard deviation is a little less than two, meaning that the majority of respondents were close to the mean (almost five).

[Insert Figure 5 here]

Table 1 portrays the means, medians, and standard deviations of the independent, dependent and control variables. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the student-teacher relationship variable. Figure 1 shows that nearly 3% of respondents strongly disagree that students get along well with teachers, about 20% disagree, 70% agree, and nearly 7% strongly agree. According to Table 1, the standard deviation was less than one, meaning that the majority of respondents were close to the mean (about 3 meaning "agree"). Figure 2 shows the distribution of the supportive teacher index where less than 1% of respondents strongly disagree that students feel supported by teachers, about 4% disagree, 29% agree, and 5% strongly agree. According to Table 1, the standard deviation was a little less than two, meaning that the majority of respondents were close to the mean (about 9 meaning "agree") on the supportive teacher index.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Figure 3 depicts the distribution of the student race/ethnicity variable. Figure 3 shows that nearly 12% of the student sample were Black students, 26% of the student sample were non-Black POC students, and 62% of the student sample were White students.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

Bivariate Results

Table 2 illustrates an analysis of discipline and all independent and control variables. None of the relationships between discipline and the independent and control variables are above *.7* meaning there is no issue of multicollinearity. The relationship between the dependent variable and the main independent variable, student-teacher relationships, has a negative and moderate correlation of *-.235* that is statistically significant at the $p<.001$ level. This means that the more a student agrees that they get along well with their teachers, the less likely they are to be disciplined. The relationship between the dependent variable and the supportive teacher index also has a negative and moderate correlation of *-.222* that is statistically significant at the $p<.001$ level. This means that the more a student believes that they feel supported by their teachers, the less likely they are to be disciplined. As for the student race variables, the relationship between the dependent variable and Black students is not statistically significant meaning that Black students are no more or less likely to be disciplined than White students. Similarly, the relationship between the dependent variable and non-Black POC students is not statistically significant meaning that non-Black POC students are no more or less likely to be disciplined than White students.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Between the independent variables, the relationship between student-teacher relationships and the supportive teacher index is a positive and weak to moderate correlation of *.394* that is statistically significant at the $p<.001$ level. This means that the more a student agrees that they get along well with teachers, the more likely they are to perceive their teachers as supportive. The relationship between Black students and student-teacher relationships is a negative and weak correlation of *-.107* that is statistically significant at the $p<.001$ level. This means that Black students are less likely to get along well with their teachers than White students. The relationship

between Black students and the supportive teacher index is not statistically significant meaning that Black students are no more or less likely to perceive their teachers as supportive than White students. The relationships between both non-Black POC students and student-teacher relationships and non-Black POC students and the supportive teacher index are not statistically significant meaning that non-Black POC students are no more or less likely to get along well with their teachers or perceive their teachers as supportive than White students.

Most of the control variables do not have statistically significant relationships with discipline, but South, English teacher is Black, and math teacher is Black are variables that do. The relationship between discipline and South is a positive and very weak correlation of *.030* that is statistically significant at the $p<.001$ level. This means that those who live in the South are slightly more likely to be disciplined. The relationship between discipline and English teacher is Black is a positive and very weak correlation of *.050* that is statistically significant at the $p<.001$ level. Similarly, the relationship between discipline and Math teacher is Black is a positive and very weak correlation of *.028* that is statistically significant at the $p<.001$ level. There is no statistically significant relationship between the dependent variable and the geographic region of school variables (Midwest and West), the school urbanicity variables (suburban and rural), English teacher is a non-Black POC and Math teacher is a non-Black POC.

Multivariate analysis

Table 3 presents the results of a regression analysis of the independent and control variables on discipline. The regression equation is statistically significant at the $p<.001$ level. According to the regression, 8 percent of the variation in discipline can be explained by student-teacher relationships, supportive teachers, school urbanicity, geographic region of the school, and (English/math) teacher's race. Controlling for all factors, for student-teacher relationships, those

who have higher levels of agreement that they get along well with their teachers score .165 of a standard deviation lower on a scale of 17 for discipline. Controlling for all factors, for supportive teachers, those who have higher levels of agreement that they feel supported by their teachers score .157 of a standard deviation lower on a scale of 17 for discipline. Controlling for all factors, those who are Black score .055 of a standard deviation higher on a scale of 17 for discipline. Non-Black POC and all control variables were not statistically significant at the $p<.001$ level. The results of the multivariate analysis confirm the results of the bivariate analysis.

In the model of White respondents (n = 6264), 8.2 percent of the variation in discipline can be explained by the factors listed. The regression equation is statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level. Controlling for all factors, for student-teacher relationships, those who have higher levels of agreement that they get along well with their teachers score .179 of a standard deviation lower on a scale of 17 for discipline. Controlling for all factors, for supportive teachers, those who have higher levels of agreement that they feel supported by their teachers score .157 of a standard deviation lower on a scale of 17 for discipline. None of the control variables were statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level.

In the model of Black respondents (n = 1174), 4.1 percent of the variation in discipline can be explained by the factors listed. The regression equation is statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level. Controlling for all factors, for student-teacher relationships, those who have higher levels of agreement that they get along well with their teachers score .098 of a standard deviation lower on a scale of 17 for discipline. Controlling for all factors, for supportive teachers, those who have higher levels of agreement that they feel supported by their teachers score .128 lower of a standard deviation on a scale of 17 for discipline. None of the control variables were statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level.

In the model of non-Black POC respondents (n = 2613), 8.5 percent of the variation in discipline can be explained by the factors listed. The regression equation is statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level. Controlling for all factors, for student-teacher relationships, those who have higher levels of agreement that they get along well with their teachers score .175 of a standard deviation lower on a scale of 17 for discipline. Controlling for all factors, for supportive teachers, those who have higher levels of agreement that they feel supported by their teachers score .177 of a standard deviation lower on a scale of 17 for discipline. None of the control variables were statistically significant at the $p<.01$ level.

The statistical analysis supports the first and second hypotheses that students who get along well with their teachers and perceive them as supportive are disciplined less than students who do not; however, the analysis partially provides support for the third hypothesis that the strength of these relationships will be stronger for students of color. Controlling for all factors, the strength of the relationship between student-teacher relationships and discipline is slightly stronger for White students ($\beta = -.179$) than non-Black POC students ($\beta = -.175$). The relationship was not statistically significant for Black students. And controlling for all factors, the strength of the relationship between supportive teachers and discipline is stronger for non-Black POC students ($\beta = -.177$) than White students ($\beta = -.157$) and Black students ($\beta = -.128$).

DISCUSSION

The results, at the bivariate and multivariate level, support the first and second hypotheses. I hypothesized that (1) students who get along well with their teachers will be disciplined less than students who do not, (2) students who feel supported by their teachers will be disciplined less than students who do not, and (3) the relationships outlined in hypotheses one and two will be moderated by race in that the relationships will be stronger for students of color than for White

students. Bivariate results indicate that rates of discipline for all students are negatively correlated with student-teacher relationships and supportive teachers; in other words, for students, positive relationships with teachers and the presence of supportive teachers in the classroom can affect rates of discipline. And the relationship between the two independent variables, student-teacher relationships and supportive teachers, was statistically significant at the $p<.001$ level and weak to moderate, meaning that those who believed that they get along well with their teachers were also more likely to perceive their teachers as supportive. This finding makes sense considering the fact that those who have positive relationships with their teachers are also likely to feel supported by their teachers.

Surprisingly, at the bivariate level, there is not a relationship between the dependent variable and both of the student of color measures (i.e., Black and non-Black POC), meaning that students of color are no more or less likely to be disciplined than White students. The correlation between the main independent variable -- student-teacher relationships -- and the Black race dummy variable is negative and weak, meaning that Black students are less likely to get along well with their teachers. However, although this relationship exists at the bivariate level, it disappears in the multivariate analysis. In the multivariate analysis, there is no statistically significant relationship between student-teacher relationships and discipline for Black students. In the White and non-Black POC models, the link between student-teacher relationships and discipline is significant in that students who agree that they get along well with their teachers receive less discipline. In all models, the relationship between discipline and supportive teachers is statistically significant, meaning that students who perceive their teachers as supportive are disciplined less.

Like Hirschi (1969) noted, attachment to school is developed through positive relationships with supportive teachers and predicts lower levels of punishment. The results of the study imply

that if students develop strong ties with their teachers, meaning that they feel supported by and get along well with them, then they are less likely to misbehave. Attachment influences students' school success and is associated with lower levels of delinquency (Stewart 2003); but, for attachment to be a regulatory factor in a student's school life, teachers must connect with and care for their students while showing them respect and trust. Teachers who provide aesthetic care to their students, which includes providing moral support, advice and guidance in making important school-related decisions and being sensitive to academic needs, can earn the trust and cooperation of their students (Valenzuela 1999). But beyond providing academic care to students, teachers also need to demonstrate that they authentically care for their students, which includes developing students' emotional competence and being compassionate and sensitive to students' personal needs (Valenzuela 1999). This study focused more on the second type of care (authentic care), but studying how both types of care interact to foster student-teacher relationships will provide a clearer picture as to how teachers can build positive relationships with their students.

The findings of this study, in conjunction with Hirschi's (1969) theory of social control, provide a theoretical framework that stresses the importance of heightening student attachment to school through supportive student-teacher relationships. Literature surrounding school discipline supports a key finding of the study: when students perceive their teachers as supportive, rates of discipline are reduced for all students (Muller 2001; Gregory and Weinstein 2008; Skiba et al. 2002; Anyon et al. 2018). However, the effects are different for each student racial group. The findings of the study are also consistent with the results of Way's study of 2011, both highlighting why it is fundamental to understand how student perceptions of authority can help us understand rates of discipline.

Limitations and Future Research

In line with all types of research, this study was not without limitations. For starters, there are many ways to measure the dependent variable, discipline. In this study, roughly 97% of the respondents indicated that they had been disciplined at most 1-2 times, meaning that there was little statistical power for those who were disciplined more than 1-2 times. One of the measures used to build the discipline index ("how many got into trouble") was vague, meaning that it was up to the students to interpret what it means to get in trouble. Future studies should not only seek to find respondents that ranged in the number of times disciplined, including focusing the study on schools with higher rates of discipline, but also should specify what it means to "get into trouble" (or whatever measure they decide to use).

Another limitation of this study was the sample size for Black and non-Black POC students. When combined, the sample size for Black and non-Black POC students was barely half the size of the White student sample. The sample size of the population could be a reflection of the demographics that existed in American high schools in 2002, but schools today are becoming increasingly diverse and the number of Black and non-Black POC students will soon outnumber the number of White students; therefore, future studies should seek to keep up with the changing demographics of schools and have sample sizes that reflect that fact. Lastly, past literature notes that the population of students of color in a school significantly influences not only the types of discipline enacted, but also the rates at which students of color are disciplined. Controlling for this factor in the future might account for more variation in the dependent variable for Black students.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the roles that student-teacher relationships and supportive teachers play in influencing student misbehavior. Controlling for school urbanicity, geographic region, and the race of the English and math teachers, I tested the relationship between discipline and student-

teacher relationships, as well as the relationship between discipline and supportive teachers, using a sample of 10051 respondents from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002. The first hypothesis noted that students who get along well with their teachers will be less likely to be disciplined. The second hypothesis predicted that students who perceive their teachers as supportive are less likely to be disciplined. And the third hypothesis expected that the relationships outlined in the first and second hypotheses would be stronger for students of color than White students.

The findings provide support for the first two hypotheses, but partial support for the third hypothesis. The first and second hypotheses were supported by the multivariate analysis showing that higher levels of agreement that students get along well with teachers and feel supported by them are both associated with lower rates of discipline. For the third hypothesis, the results indicate that the relationship between discipline and student-teacher relationships is stronger for White students, and the relationship between discipline and supportive teachers is stronger for non-Black POC students. The findings support Hirschi's social control theory of attachment (1969), as well as Way's normative approach to school punishment (2011), that positive relationships (low levels of conflict and high levels of support) with teachers bolster student's motivation to learn about their academic and social surroundings and influence the quality of students' behavioral and emotional engagement in school.

It is worth nothing that this study used a sample of tenth graders to examine how the importance of student-teacher relationships and supportive teachers influence discipline rates; however, once students reach secondary schooling, their needs tend to be broader and they spend less time with a single teacher. Therefore, teachers need to actively show support for their students by praising each student's efforts, being interested in both the academic and social lives of their

students (i.e., providing both aesthetic and authentic care), and establishing a classroom climate that seeks to help rather than punish. And because schools do not monolithically cater to one type of student, teachers need to be aware of how their interactions with different types of students (e.g., students of color) inform the kinds of relationships they will establish.

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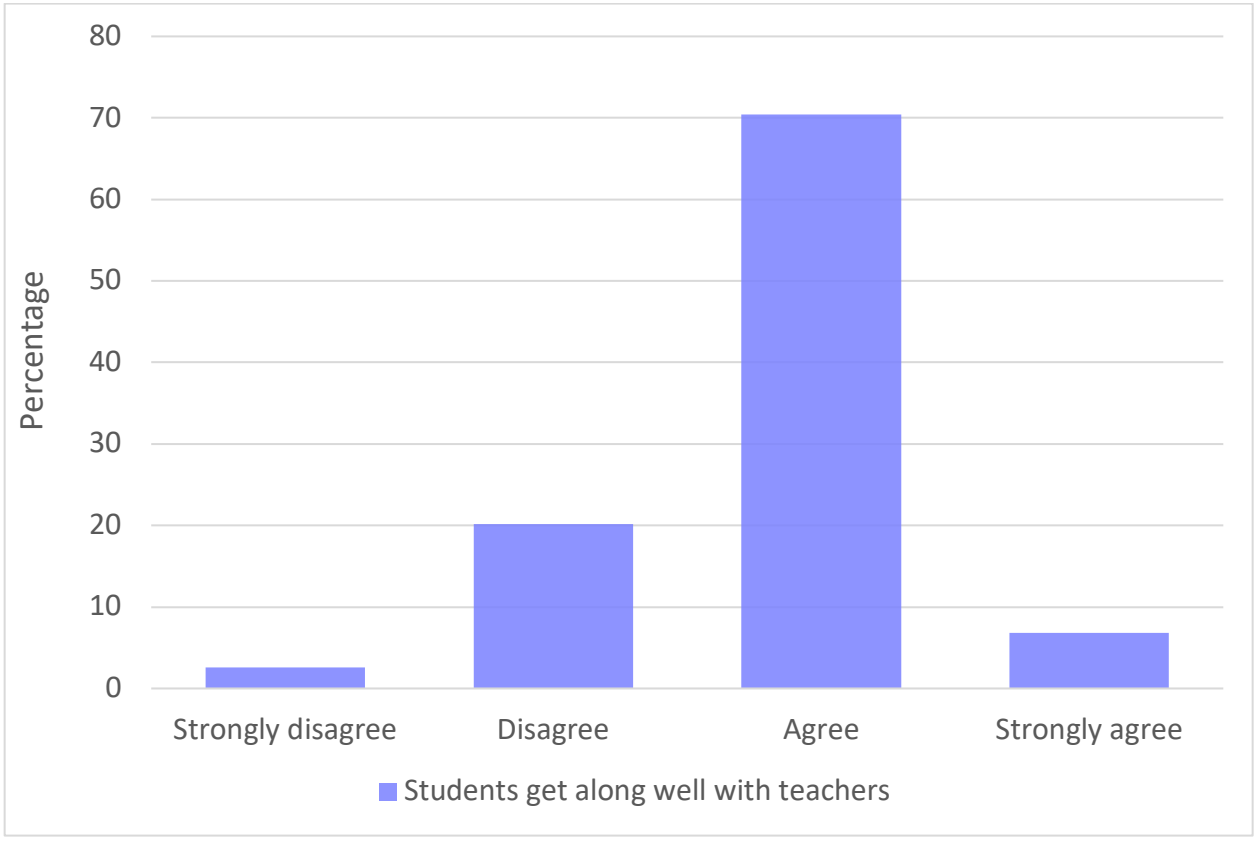

Figure 1. Bar Graph of Students Get Along Well with Teachers

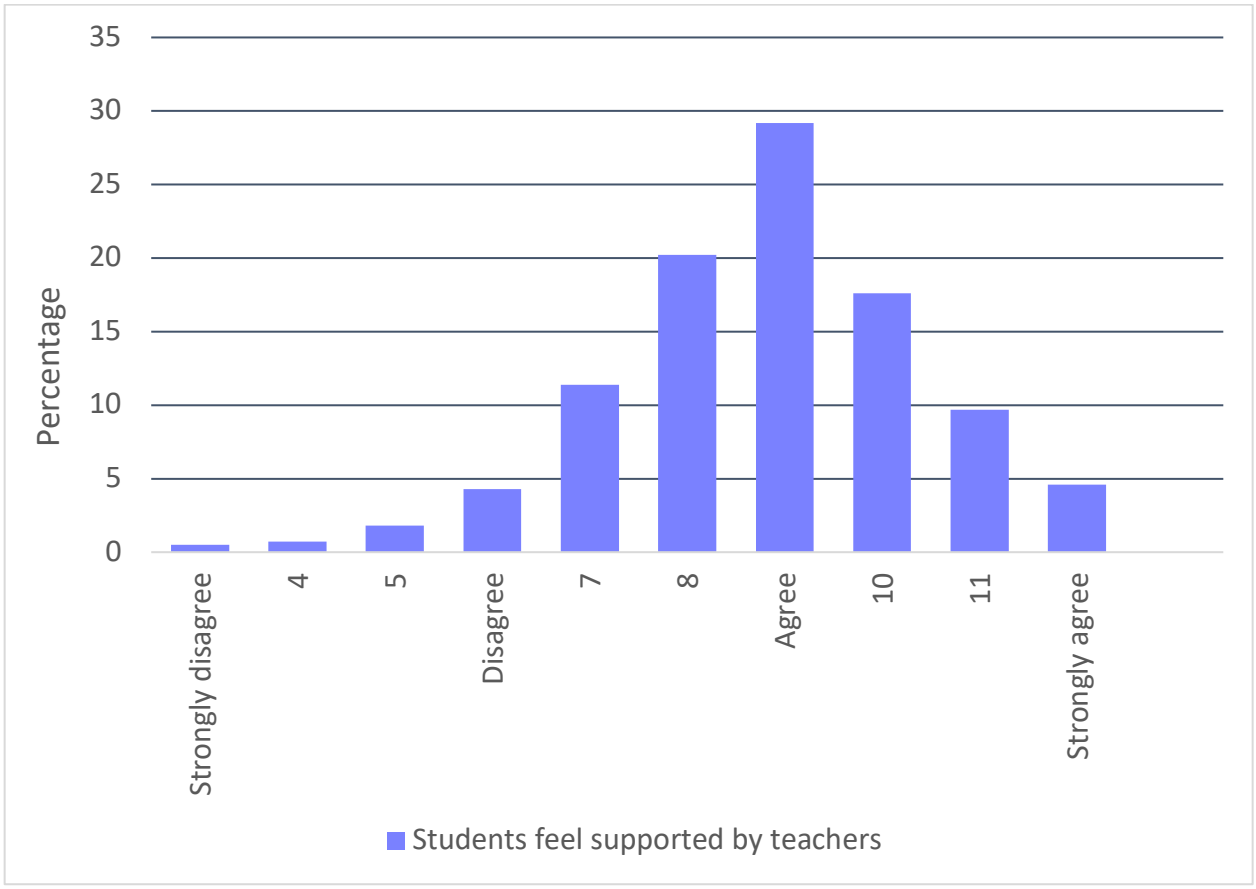

Figure 2. Bar Graph of Students Feel Supported by Teachers

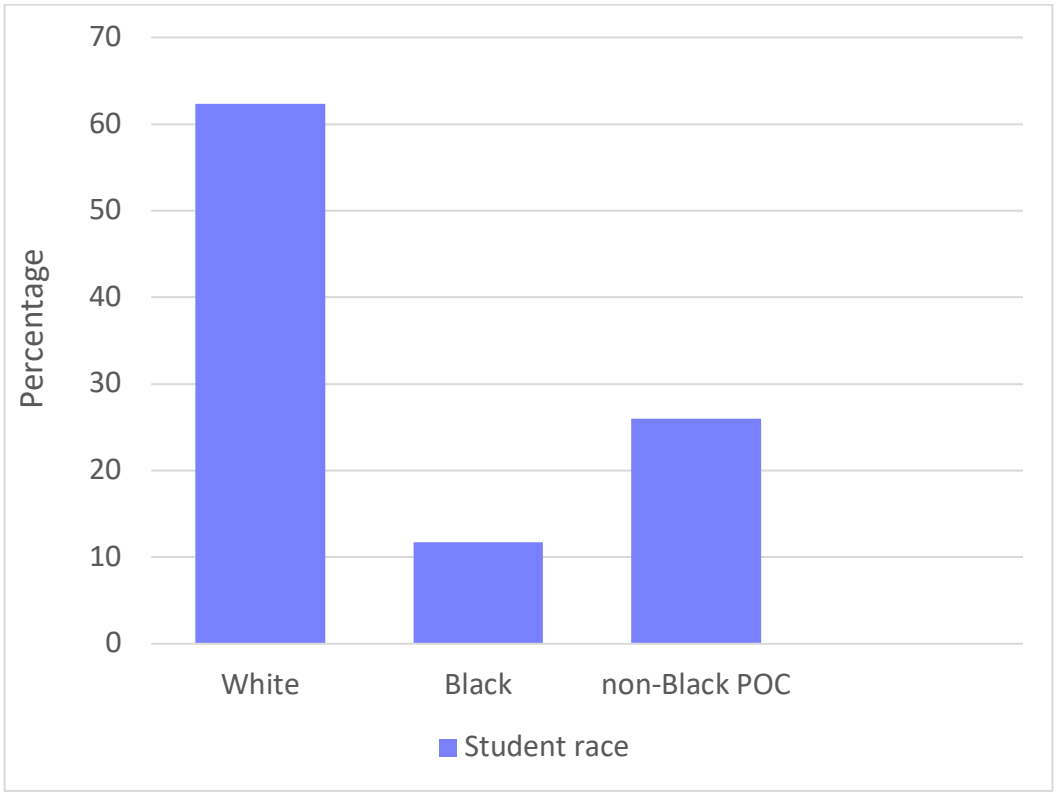

Figure 3. Bar Graph of Student Race

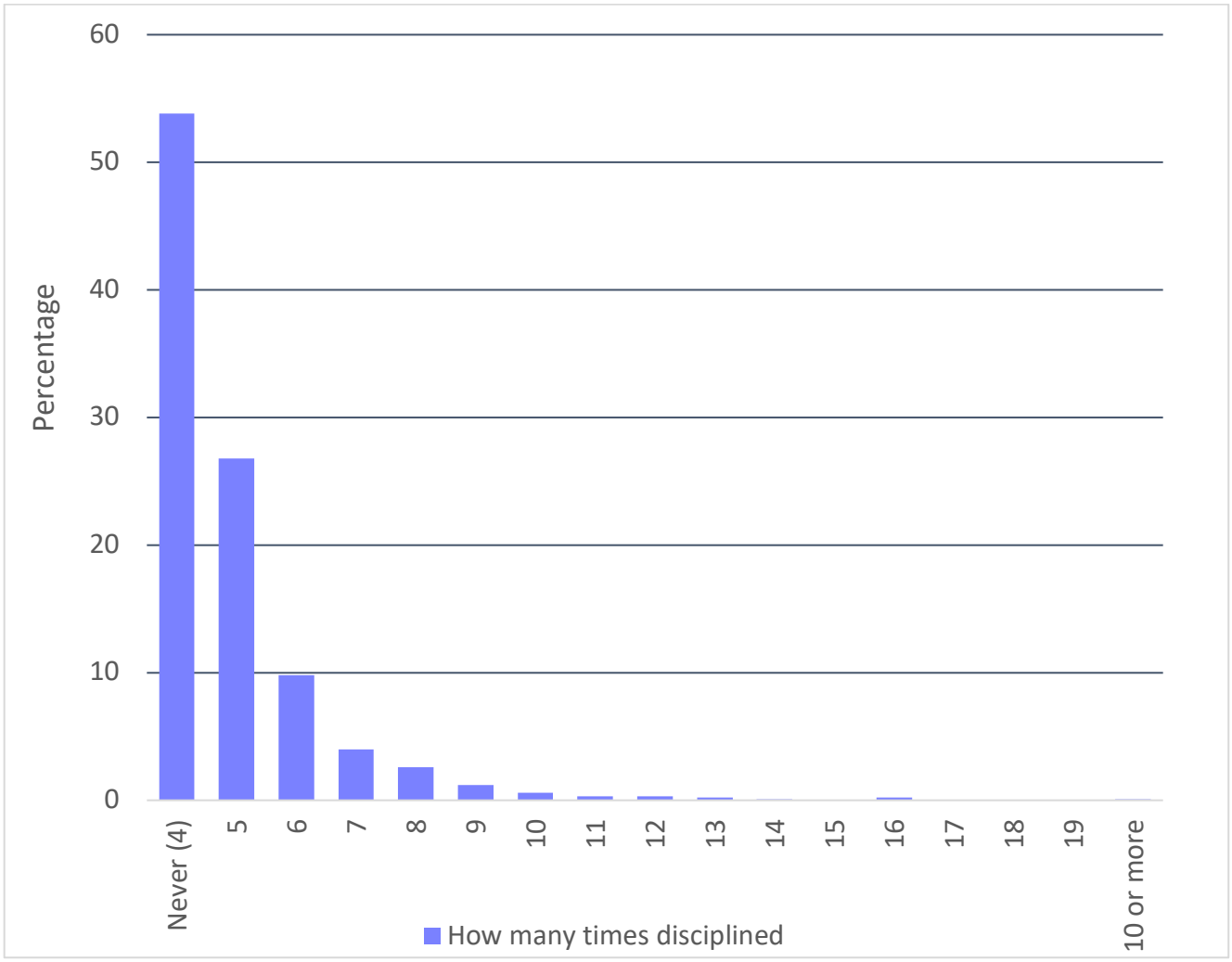

Figure 4. Bar Graph of How Many Times Disciplined

Table 1. Mean, Median, and Standard Deviation for Independent, Control and Dependent Variables (n = 10051)

Variable	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Student-teacher relationship	2.81	3.00	0.58
Supportive teacher	8.81	9.00	1.63
Student is Black	0.12	0.00	0.32
Student is a non-Black POC	0.26	0.00	0.44
Midwest	0.27	0.00	0.45
South	0.38	0.00	0.48
West	0.17	0.00	0.38
Suburban	0.50	0.00	0.50
Rural	0.20	0.00	0.40
English teacher is Black	0.05	0.00	0.22
English teacher is a non-Black POC	0.06	0.00	0.24
Math teacher is Black	0.05	0.00	0.21
Math teacher is a non-Black POC	0.08	0.00	0.28
Discipline	4.90	4.00	1.52

Tables 2. Correlations (r) between discipline and 13 variables (listwise deletion, two-tailed test, n = 10051)

Variables	Student-teacher relationship	Supportive teacher	Student is Black	Student is a non-Black POC	Midwest	So**u**th	West	Suburban	Rural	English teacher is Black	English teacher is a non-Black POC	Math teacher is Black	Math teacher is a non-Black POC
Discipline	-.235*	-.222*	.076	0.014	-0.003	.031*	-.027	-0.010	-0.007	.050*	-0.001	.028*	0.000
Student-teacher relationship		.394*	-.107*	-.018	.019	-.036*	.021	-.008	-.009	-.086*	-.003	-.049*	-0.017
Supportive teacher			-.008	.001	-.022	-.012	.008	-.021	-.039*	-.026	.009	-0.011	0.010
Student is Black				-.216*	-.066*	.175*	-.119*	-.057*	-.055*	.272*	.000	.239*	-0.012
Student is a non-Black POC					-.131*	-.087*	.300*	-.001	-.137*	-.019	.201*	.020	.216*
Midwest						-.479*	-.280*	.004	.021	-.028	-.069*	-.095*	-.080*
South							-.354*	-.105*	.072*	.147*	.027	.150*	-0.003
West								.042*	-.098*	-.094*	.120*	-.048*	.194*
Suburban									-.493*	-.043*	-.026	-.062*	-.030
Rural										-.058*	-.055*	-.051*	-.067*
English teacher is Black											-.059*	.298*	0.001
English teacher is a non-Black POC												.025	.233*
Math teacher is Black													-.068*

*p<.001

Table 3. Regression of Discipline on All Variables

Variables	Discipline	White	Black	POC
	β	β	β	β
Student-teacher relationship	-.165**	-.179*	-.098	-.175*
Supportive teacher	-.157**	-.157*	-.128*	-.177*
Student is Black	.055**	---	---	---
Student is a non-Black POC	.030	---	---	---
Midwest	.002	-.020	.087	.019
South	.008	-.006	.046	.023
West	-.021	-.037	.014	1.003
Suburban	-.019	-.029	-.013	0.000
Rural	-.019	-.031	.003	-.004
English teacher is Black	.013	.007	.029	.003
English teacher is a non-Black POC	-.004	-.017	-.006	.009
Math teacher is Black	-.003	.008	.005	-.018
Math teacher is a non-Black POC	-.004	-.001	-.007	-.011
Constant	7.402**	7.405*	6.819*	7.946*
R^2	.080	.082	.041	.085
F	67.046**	50.447*	4.561*	22.031*
n	10051	6264	1174	2613

*p<.01
**p<.001