

# A Vicious Cycle: A Social–Psychological Account of Extreme Racial Disparities in School Discipline

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## Abstract

Can social–psychological theory provide insight into the extreme racial disparities in school disciplinary action in the United States? Disciplinary problems carry enormous consequences for the quality of students’ experience in school, opportunities to learn, and ultimate life outcomes. This burden falls disproportionately on students of color. Integrating research on stereotyping and on stigma, we theorized that bias and apprehension about bias can build on one another in school settings in a vicious cycle that undermines teacher–student relationships over time and exacerbates inequality. This approach is more comprehensive than accounts in which the predicaments of either teachers or students are considered alone rather than in tandem, it complements nonpsychological approaches, and it gives rise to novel implications for policy and intervention. It also extends prior research on bias and stigmatization to provide a model for understanding the social–psychological bases of inequality more generally.

## Keywords

teacher–student relationships, school discipline, race disparity

“[F]or the most part I truly enjoy being with the students. But the amount of time I spend trying to get them to stop having side conversations, stop hitting each other, stop cursing, stop walking around the classroom for no reason, etc., is frankly absurd. . . . The day-to-day efforts of managing their classroom behavior—getting everyone quiet, focused, back on task every time someone starts talking—takes up an inordinate amount of time that should go to instruction.”—Ilana Garon, a high school teacher (from A View From the Bronx blog: “Crime and No Punishment: Discipline in High School Classrooms,” *Education Week Teacher*, February 27, 2013)

“We’re constantly getting kicked out of class; we’re getting suspended; we’re getting referrals for things that may not be our fault. . . . It’s failing us. We’re here to learn.”—A Black student (from *Roundtable: The Perspectives of Youth Affected by Exclusionary School Discipline*, American Institute for Research, September 9, 2013)

How do classrooms begin with well-meaning teachers and motivated students and end up with extraordinarily high levels of discipline problems and expulsions, especially among Black and Latino students? In one study of more than 70,000 U.S. school districts, Black students were more than three times more likely than White students to be suspended or expelled (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2012). Another national data set showed that in 2007 only 18% of White high school students had ever been suspended, but nearly half (49%) of Black students had been (Aud, KewalRamani, & Frohlich, 2011). Furthermore, the percentage of suspension for Black and Latino children had increased from 1999 to 2007, even as it had dropped for White and Asian students.<sup>1</sup>

In this article, we propose that pervasive negative stereotypes about racially stigmatized children influence

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both teachers and students, undermining teacher–student relationships over time. We theorize that an important aspect of this process involves how misinterpretations and mistrust build on one another from one encounter to the next. In describing this process, we integrate past research from the stereotyping and stigma literatures. Our goal is to provide an initial account of how social–psychological processes may contribute to racial disparities in school discipline, especially in adolescence, when discipline problems spike (Skiba et al., 2011). In doing so, we hope to stimulate further research in this area, to highlight critical processes, and to suggest appropriate remedies.

Exclusionary discipline—suspension or expulsion—directly undermines children’s opportunities to learn. In a national survey of students who dropped out of school, Black students were more likely than students of other racial backgrounds to cite having been expelled or suspended too often as a reason they dropped out (Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996). Failure to complete secondary school—due to exclusionary discipline or otherwise—can have dire consequences for children’s life outcomes including poor future educational attainment (Gottfried, 2010), long-term unemployment (Couch & Fairlie, 2010; Pager, Western, & Sugie, 2009), low lifetime earnings (Ritter & Taylor, 2011), and mental and physical illness (Boynton, O’Hara, Covault, Scott, & Tennen, 2014; Gibbons et al., 2010; for a review, see Pascoe & Richman, 2009).

Perhaps most troubling is the association of school discipline problems and dropout with juvenile detention (Hirschfield, 2009), adult incarceration (Pettit & Western, 2004), and recidivism (Jung, Spjeldnes, & Yamatani, 2010). In fact, researchers and activists alike have come to call this process the “school-to-prison pipeline,” a phenomenon by which large numbers of Black children experience discipline problems in school, ultimately drop out, and enter juvenile detention where they face increased risk of incarceration (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). One longitudinal study of 1,354 children showed that when a child was expelled or suspended, that child was more than two times more likely to be arrested within the same month compared with a child who had not been expelled or suspended (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, & Cauffman, 2014).

What causes extreme levels of discipline problems in school, especially among racially stigmatized youth? Certainly, macrosocial factors, such as poverty and chaotic schooling environments, contribute to discipline issues (Eamon, 2001). In addition, much research has focused independently on the behavior of either teachers or students in contributing to racial disparities. Some research has shown that Black elementary, middle, and high

school students receive disproportionate punishment for the same offense as White students (e.g., Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; see also Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2014). This finding suggests a role for bias on the part of teachers and other school officials in the administration of discipline. Other research points to children’s behavior and critical social and emotional skills (e.g., Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). The development of these skills can be curtailed, for instance, by economic deprivation and its consequences for the child’s environment (e.g., family support, peer groups, or school characteristics; Eamon, 2001). This approach could lead people to believe that the cause of discipline problems—and the means to reduce them—lies in the skills or character traits of “problem” students. It implies that Black students misbehave in school because they lack the skills (e.g., self-control or compassion) to behave in more positive ways.

Certainly, teachers can be biased, and children can misbehave in school. However, we argue that an exclusive focus on either bias in teachers or misbehavior among students is inadequate to understand or remedy this problem. Such approaches tend to focus on the traits of one party or the other (e.g., teachers’ bias or students’ noncognitive skills) without adequate consideration of the situation both teachers and students are in. Yet a basic lesson of social psychology is that people often underestimate the power of situations to dictate behavior (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Additionally, a focus on the deficiencies of either party can fail to recognize the positive motivations and potential of both parties. Most teachers strive to be effective educators (Johnson, Yarrow, Rochkind, & Ott, 2012). Most children, including most racially stigmatized children, value education and want to succeed (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991; Mickelson, 1990; Steele, 1997). To understand school discipline, it is essential to address individuals’ positive desires as well as the sources of negative behavior, what stymies better behavior, and how both teachers and children can become their better selves in interacting with one another in school settings. Finally locating the problem entirely in either teachers or students neglects the relationship they share. Yet we proposed that central to discipline problems is a toxic social–psychological dynamic that can arise between teachers and students over time. A focus on this dynamic can inform targeted interventions to mitigate racially disproportionate disciplinary action.

The social–psychological literature suggests several ways teacher–student relationships may worsen over time and contribute to racial disparities in discipline. For instance, basic research on stereotyping shows that the effects of race on social perception are largest when

information is ambiguous (e.g., Duncan, 1976; Sager & Schofield, 1980); in such circumstances, people use stereotypes to fill in the gaps and guide inferences. This may be one reason why disparities in discipline arise primarily for offenses that rely on subjective interpretations. In a study of the office referral records of 4,461 middle school students, Skiba and colleagues (2002) found that while White children were more likely to be referred to the office for objective offenses like smoking or vandalism, Black children were more likely to be referred for subjective offenses like the expression of disrespect or threat. Notably, this perception is consistent with the application of racial stereotypes about Black people: namely, that Blacks (and Black boys in particular) are aggressive and dangerous.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, this perception implies that a negative relationship is forming or has formed between teachers and racially stigmatized students.

Simultaneously, research on social identity threat shows how the risk that one could be viewed or treated negatively as a consequence of a negative stereotype can cast even routine challenges in school in a global, threatening light (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). No student enjoys being criticized or disrespected by a teacher. However, students who could be seen or treated through the lens of a negative or demeaning stereotype also contend with the possibility that events like these could signal that they are seen in biased ways or that people like them do not belong and cannot succeed in school (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999; Crocker et al., 1991; Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002; Steele, 1997; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Yeager et al., 2014). In this context, a teacher's harsh disciplinary response to a subjective incident like a perceived expression of disrespect may seem to confirm in racially stigmatized students a fear of experiencing racial bias and mistreatment in school. This interpretation can undermine trust, motivation, and achievement and, moreover, give rise to avoidant or disruptive behaviors.

In this way, a negative social-psychological dynamic may arise between teachers' perceptions and treatment of racially stigmatized students and students' interpretations of and response to this treatment. As this dynamic unfolds over time, it may give rise to real racial differences in students' behavior, but this analysis implies that these differences result from the effects of bias and negative stereotypes among both teachers and students and may be preventable through upstream intervention.

Stereotyping and threat represent long traditions of research in social psychology on processes that produce and reproduce inequality (e.g., Allport, 1954; E. Aronson & Bridgeman, 1979; Clark & Clark, 1940, 1947; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1954; Steele, 1997; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). With some notable exceptions,

however, this research has proceeded along two largely separate tracks: What makes people perceive and treat others differently as a function of group identity? How does the possibility that one could be seen or treated in a biased way affect people's experience and outcomes? To understand disparities in school discipline, we integrate these literatures in a single model and, moreover, go beyond in-the-lab research to consider how these processes unfold over time to cause stable patterns of behavior.

## Overview

We begin by describing how stereotyping and threat processes can create distinctive psychological predicaments for teachers and for students even in single encounters. Second, we consider how such processes unfold over time across multiple interactions, as teacher-student relationships typically do in school settings. Third, we consider how teachers and students may, counterintuitively, each face a similar predicament as the other. Finally, we discuss promising interventions targeted at critical processes to reduce racially disproportionate disciplinary practices. In examining real-world disciplinary outcomes over time, these interventions provide a strong test of our theoretical approach and, simultaneously, highlight implications for application and for policy reform.

## Stereotyping and Threat Processes Create Distinctive Psychological Predicaments for Teachers and for Students

Both teachers and students are exposed to common societal stereotypes, including the stereotype that Black people are dangerous. We argue that such stereotypes create distinctive predicaments for teachers and students, which fuel harsh responses to misbehavior and, in turn, escalate misbehavior. Table 1 summarizes this model.

## Teachers' Predicament: Will Students Behave or Get in the Way of Teaching?

In general, people become teachers to educate and inspire the next generation. Teachers want to help students reach their potential and become successful adults. Students who are at risk of academic underperformance provide an exceptional opportunity to fulfill this goal. For instance, in a national survey of 890 teachers, four-fold more new teachers (those with <5 years in the profession) were categorized as "idealist" as opposed to "disheartened." Fully 42% of these idealist teachers reported

**Table 1.** Schematic Model of the Psychological Predicaments Faced by Teachers and by Racially Stigmatized Students in School

| Process                 | Teachers  | Racially stigmatized students  |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Basic goal              | To teach and inspire.   | To learn and develop.  |
| Stereotypes             | Racially stigmatized students might be troublemakers.   | Teachers might be biased against students like me.   |
| Worries                 | These students could prevent me from fulfilling my teaching goals.  | I might not belong; I might be treated unfairly.   |
| Construal/ attributions | Misbehavior among racially stigmatized students is enduring and problematic and undermines my teaching goals. | Disciplinary action from teachers is evidence that I don't belong and/or that my teacher is unfair and undermines my learning goals. |
| Behavior                | More frequent and more severe disciplinary action against racially stigmatized students.                      | More frequent and more severe misbehavior.   |

wanting to become a teacher to set underprivileged kids on the path to success (Johnson et al., 2012).

It may be in part because many teachers enter the profession with a strong teaching mission that student misbehavior can be especially frustrating. In the same national study, nearly 75% of disheartened teachers reported that children with discipline issues were a major drawback to teaching (Johnson et al., 2012). If a student disrupts the learning environment, it is the teacher's responsibility to enact discipline to keep the class on track. Indeed, teachers' ability to keep the class under control (as perceived by students) is one of the strongest predictors of teachers' effectiveness in promoting learning (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013). Encouragement from school administrators and local officials (e.g., the school board) to meet academic benchmarks (e.g., test scores) may further reinforce the responsibility teachers feel to respond aggressively to discipline problems (Friedman, 1991). Thus, teachers may reasonably see student misbehavior as a threat to their control of the classroom and their ability to accomplish their teaching goals (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Grossman, Cohen, Ronfeldt, & Brown, 2014). We argue that this feeling of hindrance in teaching, coupled with exposure to common racial stereotypes, can lead teachers to discipline students from racially stigmatized groups more harshly than students from other groups (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; see also Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013; Casteel, 2010; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). This reasoning is consistent with classic research that posits that hindrance to obtaining a desired goal can incite aggression (Berkowitz, 1989).

Blacks are commonly stereotyped as unintelligent, lazy, hostile, and dangerous (Devine & Elliot, 1995; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). In criminal justice contexts, these associations can alter casual attributions about misbehavior and result in harsher punishment decisions. In one study, police officers and juvenile probation officers reviewed a vignette about a boy alleged to have committed a crime (Graham & Lowery, 2004). Previously, half

of the officers had been exposed subliminally to words related to the social category "Black" (e.g., "homeboy" and "Harlem"); the rest had been exposed to neutral words (e.g., "kindness" and "loneliness"). Officers primed with the Black category saw the child as older and more culpable, expected greater recidivism, and endorsed a harsher punishment (see also Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta, & DiTomasso, 2014; Rattan, Levine, Dweck, & Eberhardt, 2012). The mere thought of Black people led to more negative judgments of a juvenile suspect.

Using different methods, Bridges and Steen (1998) found similar results. They coded probation officers' written narratives about juvenile offenders and their crimes. The officers attributed crimes committed by Black children more to internal causes (e.g., being uncooperative), an especially deleterious attribution (Reyna & Weiner, 2001), but attributed similar crimes committed by White children more to external causes (e.g., being under the negative influence of peers). This shift in attribution in turn influenced decision making: perpetrators seen as misbehaving due to internal causes were punished more harshly.

Teachers too may be more likely to attribute misbehavior among Black students to internal causes (e.g., being a "troublemaker") than misbehavior among White students. In school, the perception that a student is a troublemaker may be especially concerning for teachers because it implies that the student will continue to misbehave, disrupt class, and interfere with other students' learning. From this perspective, a harsh disciplinary response may seem appropriate, even essential. Simultaneously, this perspective may forestall more growth-oriented approaches to discipline—approaches undertaken with the aim of understanding the offending student's experience and perspective and helping the student to improve. Indeed, in a series of experiments, Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) found that K–12 teachers were more likely to label a misbehaving Black middle school student as a troublemaker than they were a misbehaving White middle school student. This difference

led teachers to want to discipline Black students more harshly than White students for the same offenses.

Unlike law enforcement officers, teachers interact with children, not criminal suspects, and do so in the context of long-term relationships. A primary function of this relationship is to introduce children to the broader society and to guide children as they begin to make sense of the world (Carter et al., 2014). Thus, it may be especially threatening to students when teachers confirm fears of bias within the classroom.<sup>3</sup>

### **Students' Predicament: Will Teachers Treat Me Fairly and With Respect?**

Like teachers, Black students are exposed to negative stereotypes that impugn the intellectual ability of their group and that label them as out of control, violent, or dangerous (Steele, 1997). As racially stigmatized children reach adolescence, they become increasingly aware of racial stereotypes (Brown & Bigler, 2005; Cohen & Garcia, 2005; Killen, Henning, Kelly, Crystal, & Ruck, 2007; McKown & Weinstein, 2003) and reasonably begin to worry whether they will be viewed or treated in biased ways (e.g., Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Trawalter, 2005), will be rejected on the basis of race (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002), belong in school (Walton & Cohen, 2007), and will be able to trust teachers (Cohen et al., 1999; Crocker et al., 1991; Yeager et al., 2014). Research has shown that these fears can contribute to academic underperformance (e.g., Steele et al., 2002; Walton & Spencer, 2009). We proposed that they also contribute to classroom misbehavior (see Gregory & Weinstein, 2008).

### ***Construals: Making sense of experiences in school***

The awareness that one could be subject to bias or stereotyping in school can cause even commonplace incidents like interactions with peers or teachers that go poorly to take on a threatening pale. Racially stigmatized students contend with the risk that such events could involve bias, reflect the poor quality of their relationships, or suggest that "people like me" do not belong or cannot succeed in school in general (for reviews, see M. C. Murphy & Taylor, 2012; Steele et al., 2002). Such meanings are simply less relevant for students to whom negative stereotypes do not apply.

For instance, completing a worksheet that implies that one might have few friends in a given major can lead Black and Latino (but not White and Asian) college students to doubt their belonging and that of their group in that field (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Absent explicit clarification, Black (but not White) adolescents and college students may suspect that substantive critical academic

feedback from a teacher reflects a negative judgment or bias, not a good-faith effort to help them improve (Cohen et al., 1999; Crocker et al., 1991; Yeager et al., 2014). Complementing these experiments, findings from diary studies show that routine events like negative interactions with peers and instructors can undermine a general sense of belonging in school among Black college students (Walton & Cohen, 2007; see also J. Aronson & Inzlicht, 2004), especially those high in sensitivity to race-based rejection (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002), and among Latino adolescents (Sherman et al., 2013; see also Chen, Langer, Raphaelson, & Matthews, 2004; London, Downey, Bonica, & Paltin, 2007). The vigilance with which racially stigmatized students make sense of their relationships in school is a normal and, in many ways, adaptive response to the risk of bias and stereotyping. Similar patterns are shown by women entering male-dominated math and science fields (e.g., Cohen & Steele, 2002; Logel et al., 2009; M. C. Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007; Walton, Logel, Peach, Spencer, & Zanna, 2015).

These findings imply that negative disciplinary interactions with teachers may loom large to racially stigmatized students, who already mistrust teachers. One important direction for future research is to further explore the meanings that disciplinary interactions with teachers have for racially stigmatized students and how teachers can discipline students in ways that are not just free of bias but also reassure students of the enduring quality of their relationship and their worth and value in school as a whole (cf. Cohen et al., 1999).

### ***Psychological and behavioral responses***

When students begin to mistrust teachers or doubt their belonging in school, they may behave in ways that further undermine their relationships and outcomes (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). For instance, research on stereotype and social-identity threat shows that over time college students may disidentify from school in the face of negative stereotypes; that is, they begin to no longer care about doing well (Steele, 1997; Woodcock, Hernandez, Estrada, & Schultz, 2012). Additionally, Black college students who view daily adversities as evidence that they do not belong in general are less likely to reach out to instructors or to contribute positively in class (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Walton & Cohen, 2007). Racially stigmatized students who suspect that critical feedback emanates from bias may ignore that feedback and miss opportunities to improve their work (Cohen et al., 1999; Crocker et al., 1991; Yeager et al., 2014). To teachers who have labored to provide such feedback, such a response may be especially frustrating (cf. Ariely, Kamenica, & Prelec, 2008). Ironically, ignoring feedback

that could be due to bias may trigger bias among teachers, motivating teachers to search for inherent flaws in the student that would cause him or her to ignore helpful feedback. It may not motivate teachers to think about the social-psychological dynamics of threat.

Complementing research on social-identity threat, research on procedural justice has identified similar consequences of perceptions of bias. If people think that authorities treat them fairly, they tend to cooperate and comply (Tyler, 1990), especially when they are members of marginalized groups (Laurin, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2010; Watson & Angell, 2013; also see McCluskey, Mastroski, & Parks, 1999). However, perceptions of injustice lead to increases in disobedience (Lind, Kulik, Ambrose, & de Vera Park, 1993), protest (Vermunt, Wit, Van den Bos, & Lind, 1996), and noncompliance (K. Murphy & Tyler, 2008; for a review, Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Although most research in this area has investigated law-enforcement or workplace settings, similar processes may play out in school contexts. If students feel they are treated unfairly, they may be unwilling to cooperate with teachers. Laboratory research has shown that college students who have been excluded in a manner that could be due to racial bias subsequently express disrespect toward figures of authority (see McCluskey et al., 1999; Okonofua & Walton, 2015). Such displays may contribute to insubordination, which is, as noted previously, a common reason for disciplinary action for Black youth (Skiba et al., 2002).

Finally, social threats—both global feelings of exclusion and the specific worry that one could be viewed through the lens of a demeaning stereotype—undermine people's self-control (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Inzlicht, McKay, & Aronson, 2006; Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008) and thus increase aggressive behavior (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001), decrease prosocial behavior (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007), and reduce how much college students pay attention in class, follow instructions, and cooperate in classroom activities (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010). Ironically, these too are common reasons for disciplining elementary and middle school students (Skiba et al. 2011).

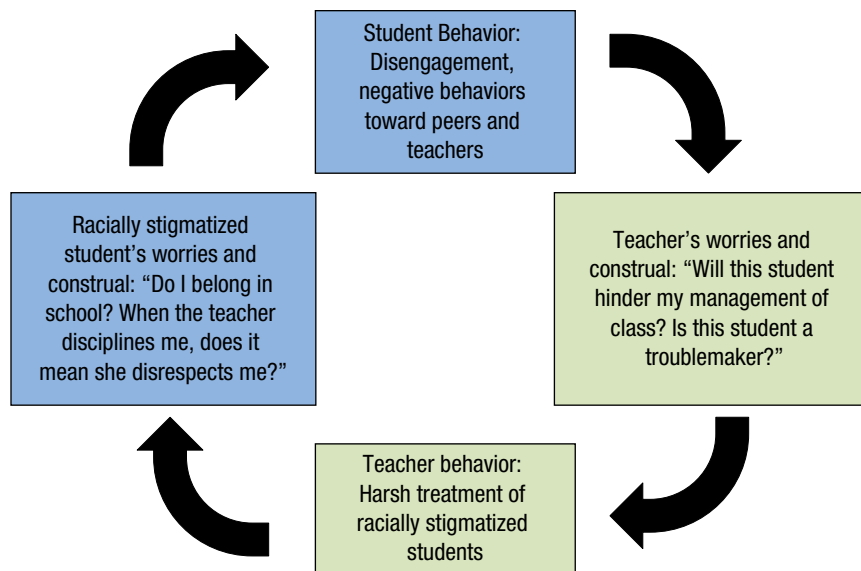
### **Recursive Cycles: How Teacher–Student Relationships Play Out Over Time**

Most research on stereotyping and on social-identity threat has focused on single encounters between people who are otherwise strangers (e.g., Bridges & Steen, 1998; Cohen et al., 1999; Fiske, Lin, & Neuberg, 1999). Yet teachers and students do not interact just once but over time. How do race-related concerns and actions play out in ongoing relationships?

As we have noted, a Black boy—compared with a White boy—may be more likely to worry that his teacher could treat him unfairly and thus could begin to disengage from classroom activities and act out. The teacher may be more likely to see the Black boy's misbehavior, compared with similar misbehavior by a White boy, as a threat to her ability to maintain control of the class. In an ongoing relationship, if the student's misbehavior is repeated over time, the teacher's concern about maintaining control may be heightened, and her initial suspicion that the child's misbehavior is due to his internal flaws (e.g. "This child really is a troublemaker") may be confirmed. The teacher may then begin to discipline the Black boy more harshly. In turn, this response may confirm the Black student's concern that the teacher is biased. As the teacher–student relationship deteriorates further, the Black boy may become even less obedient, and the teacher may become even more irritated and retributive. Over time, as such perceptions and behaviors continue to reverberate, minor incidents may become major incidents, and disciplinary action may become severe (See Fig. 1; for a related process when parents discipline their children, see Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; for related recursive cycles in education, see Cohen, Garcia, Purdie-Vaugns, Apfel, & Brzustoski, 2009; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Walton & Cohen, 2011). What evidence is there for these recursive processes? Are teachers more likely to discipline a racially stigmatized student than another student when that racially stigmatized student has a history of misbehavior? Are racially stigmatized students more likely to worry about belonging and fair treatment and misbehave over time as a consequence?

### ***Teachers' behavior over time***

Research has shown that, in general, a record of misbehavior can significantly impact decisions about punishment (Vidmar & Miller, 1980). In school, teachers can become more retributive in punishing children with a history of misbehavior than children without this history (Reyna & Weiner, 2001). This process is accelerated by racial stereotypes. Teachers construe misbehavior as indicative of a pattern and as a hindrance to their teaching goals more quickly and thus accelerate a punitive response if the offending student is Black rather than White. In one experiment, teachers read about a series of minor misbehaviors on the part of a Black or a White boy (e.g., falling asleep in class; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Teachers showed no racial bias in response to the first incident. However, after a second misbehavior, they escalated their response to the Black student more so than to the White student. They felt more frustrated and irritated by the Black student, and as a consequence, they



**Fig. 1.** Working model of recursive processes that contribute to racially disproportionate discipline.

wanted to discipline him more severely. After just “two strikes,” teachers were more apt to classify a Black student as a troublemaker. They saw his misbehavior as indicative of a problematic pattern.

### ***Students' behavior over time***

As teachers become more retributive in punishing children from racially stigmatized groups over time, students may become especially sensitive and reactive to such mistreatment. Indeed, experiences of personal rejection early in the academic year can lead racially stigmatized children to anxiously expect such rejection (London et al., 2007; see also Brown & Bigler, 2005; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002), which, in turn, can lead to heightened distress, aggressive behavior, and interpersonal difficulties in elementary and middle school (Downey, Lebolt, Rincón, & Freitas, 1998).

These processes can be exacerbated by racial mistrust. Data collected in two longitudinal field experiments illustrate the interactive consequence of racial mistrust absent intervention for Black children. In one study, adolescents' growing awareness of racial bias in school discipline predicted heightened mistrust of teachers among Black students in seventh grade; in turn, this mistrust predicted more discipline incidents and worse grades in eighth grade (Yeager, Purdie-Vaughns, Yang, & Cohen, in press). In a second study, Black boys in both sixth and seventh grades (absent intervention) evidenced rising levels of discipline incidents, especially subjective incidents that may reflect and perpetuate increasingly negative relationships between teachers and students (Goyer et al., 2016).

By the end of seventh grade, negative attitudes among Black boys had crystalized in the form of beliefs about nonbelonging and worries about being seen stereotypically. Subsequently, Black boys had high levels of discipline incidents from the start of eighth grade through the end of high school.

These studies suggest how the experience of racial stigmatization can give rise to a lack of trust in teachers and an alienation from school that undermines teacher-student relationships and classroom behaviors into the future (see also Yeager et al., 2014).

### **Shared Predicaments**

So far, we have discussed the respective predicaments experienced by teachers and students in school—a desire to teach, yet a worry that misbehaving students will interfere with teaching; a desire to learn, yet a worry about experiencing bias from teachers. These predicaments may lead even well-intentioned and motivated people to interact in ways that produce racial disparities in school discipline. Yet the roles of teacher and student do not necessarily involve such a neat division of psychological processes. Do teachers sometimes feel threatened by racially stigmatized students? Do racially stigmatized students sometimes stereotype teachers? Do these processes also contribute to racial disparities in school discipline?

### ***Threat experienced by teachers***

Just as positive relationships with teachers are important for students, so too are positive relationships with

students important for teachers. Like students, teachers come to school with achievement goals, including the goal to succeed as a teacher and to connect with students to help them grow and learn (Dresel, Fasching, Steuer, Nitsche, & Dickhauser, 2013). When a student acts out or expresses disrespect, a teacher may question whether she can achieve these goals. Further, disproportionately disciplining Black students may raise for teachers the worrisome possibility of their own bias, a prospect to which they may respond defensively (see Carr, Dweck, & Pauker, 2012; Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008; Harber, 1998). Future research should be conducted into the threat teachers experience in disciplining misbehaving racially stigmatized students and how this affects their practices.

### ***Stereotypes held by students***

Like teachers, children hold generalized beliefs about school, including presumably stereotypes about teachers, and these may affect their interactions and relationships over time. The research we have described illustrates how racial stigma may give rise to generalized mistrust of teachers that can contribute to negative interactions (e.g., Cohen & Garcia, 2005; Cohen et al., 1999; Goyer et al., 2016; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Mickelson, 1990; Smith, 2010; Uslaner, 2002; Yeager et al., 2014). The reality of racial stigma may also give rise to stereotypical beliefs in students about teachers (e.g., “Teachers are racist and don’t deserve my respect”). Future research should further examine the role of such stereotypes in students’ perceptions of and behavior toward teachers.

### ***A shared predicament: Pluralistic ignorance***

Even as teachers and students may experience similar stereotyping and threat processes, each may be insensitive to this shared reality. Researchers have found that in the context of peer relationships, Whites and Blacks each want greater contact with one another, but each believes that the other group is uninterested in intergroup contact (Shelton & Richeson, 2005). Both groups attribute their own inaction to a fear of rejection but outgroup members’ inaction to a lack of interest. Likewise, teachers and students may each want to develop positive relationships with one another to fulfill their teaching and learning goals. However, they may have different explanations for the reasons that a teacher disciplines a student or that a student acts out in class. A teacher might feel threatened when a child misbehaves but not consider the threat the child experiences. A racially stigmatized student may act out but not consider the threat a teacher experiences when class is disrupted.

This lack of understanding of the psychological reality of the other may further undermine teacher–student relationships. If a teacher fails to consider the threat a misbehaving racially stigmatized student experiences in class, she may be more likely to label the student as a troublemaker deserving of harsh discipline, not as a child in need of help, guidance, or understanding. Likewise, if a stigmatized student is insensitive to the goals a teacher has and how misbehavior threatens these goals, he may think of the teacher who disciplines him as simply biased and undeserving of respect. What is needed, then, is greater insight into and empathy for the psychological experience of one another—an assumption of basic good intentions and the desire on both sides to build a positive relationship. A high priority for future researchers involves the development and evaluation of interventions that help teachers and students accomplish these aims.

### **Improving Teacher–Student Relationships: Initial Interventions to Mitigate Extreme Levels of School Discipline Problems Among Racially Stigmatized Students**

In identifying the deterioration of teacher–student relationships as a key cause of school discipline problems, our analysis implies that intervening to improve such relationships upstream before a negative cycle has become established may help to reduce disciplinary problems among racially stigmatized youth. In this section, we review initial interventions that aim to do so. These field experiments serve a dual function. First, they provide perhaps the most direct test of our central theoretical claim—that stereotyping and threat processes undermine teacher–student relationships and contribute to high levels of discipline problems among Black and Latino children. These experiments do so by precisely manipulating these processes among real students and teachers interacting in field settings and testing effects on discipline and related outcomes over time. Second, they suggest practical reforms.

Interventions to improve teacher–student relationships generally target either one party or the other. The targeted party need not be the primary cause of racial disparities in school discipline. They simply serve as an avenue of entry to improve a relationship system. In some settings, it may be easier or more effective to intervene with teachers—to help teachers understand and interact with students more effectively and, thereby, to intervene with students as well. In other settings, it may be easier to intervene with students—to help students understand and interact with teachers more effectively and, thereby, to intervene with teachers as well.



When an intervention aimed at either teachers or students reduces disciplinary problems, it shows the causal role that party plays in the dynamic that gives rise to the problem. However, causal importance does not imply blameworthiness: Causal importance is not the same thing as moral responsibility. For instance, regardless of the causal role that students or teachers play, the ultimate blame for racial disparities in school discipline lies with the legacy of racism with which both teachers and students contend (Carter et al., 2014).

Interventions that target teachers or students also generally do not imply that either party should be blind to social reality. Rather, effective interventions illustrate each party's agency to improve the world they inhabit. Interventions that address teachers do not imply that teachers should ignore students' misbehavior or the disproportionate misbehavior of Black students, if this is the case. Rather, they aim to help teachers interact with children in ways that help those children become the kinds of students teachers want their students to be. Likewise, interventions that address Black students do not imply that these students should ignore the possibility of racial bias among teachers. Instead, they aim to help students respond to teachers in terms of the kinds of relationships they hope to form with teachers, not the kinds of relationships they fear (see Carr et al., 2012). The contrast between a nonoptimal reality and prospects for improvement illustrates a central aspect of many "wise" interventions: They depend on *affordances* in systems (Kenthirarajah & Walton, 2015; Walton, 2014). Even in a negative circumstance, there may be the possibility of improvement. The question is how, exactly, teachers and students can interact to form better, more trusting relationships that improve outcomes over time.

### ***Interventions that work through teachers***

A primary goal of interventions to mitigate school discipline is to help teachers build better relationships with students, especially students with whom positive relationships may be a challenge. Although there may be many ways to improve teacher–student relationships (e.g., see Gehlbach et al., in press), our analysis suggested several key insights. First, if teachers are liable to view misbehaving students in stereotypical ways, it may be important to help teachers understand student misbehavior in nonpejorative ways—to provide teachers insight into and empathy for racially stigmatized students' psychological experience in school, including experiences of threat and how threat can cause misbehavior. Second, it may be important to discourage a punitive approach to discipline and, instead, to encourage teachers to use discipline as an opportunity to build and sustain positive

relationships with students, which in turn can promote students' growth and development. Third, if racially stigmatized students' experience of threat causes them to see negative everyday interactions as evidence of a lack of belonging and poor relationships, it may be important to encourage teachers to communicate directly with students their positive, growth-oriented intentions in sensitive disciplinary interactions (cf. Cohen et al., 1999). Moreover, perhaps communicating this message may encourage teachers to act in accordance with it (see Brannon & Walton, 2013; Rokeach, 1971).

We call this approach *empathic discipline*. It prioritizes understanding and valuing students' perspectives and helping students improve in the context of trusting relationships. In one study, Okonofua, Paunesku, and Walton (in press) incorporated these insights in an interactive online exercise for middle school teachers. Articles about discipline and stories from both students and teachers emphasized negative feelings and worries that can contribute to student misbehavior and illustrated how building positive relationships with students in disciplinary encounters can promote students' growth. For example, teachers read about students' worries about mistreatment. One student said, "Whenever I get a new teacher, I think, 'Is she gonna treat me fairly? Does she call on the White students more? Does she expect them to know the right answers and us to get them wrong?'" Teachers also read about ways to nurture positive relationships with students when students misbehave and how doing so can promote students' growth. Another student said

One time, after I got in trouble in seventh grade, I still remember how my teacher took me aside later and listened to my side of the story. She repeated what I said back to me to be sure she understood what I was saying. Then she explained why she still had to give me a detention because I was disrupting class. Even though I still got a detention, I was glad that she didn't just dismiss what I had to say, like other teachers sometimes did. After that, I actually felt better in school because I knew I had someone to talk to.

Teachers also read stories from other teachers, who described how they used disciplinary interactions to build trust and positive relationships with students.

As in past social–psychological interventions (e.g., Walton & Cohen, 2011), teachers were not told that they were receiving an intervention or that the exercise was intended to reduce discipline problems, which teachers could experience as controlling or as stigmatizing. Instead, teachers were told that the researchers were interested in learning more from them about effective discipline practice so they could share their insights with

new teachers. Thus, teachers took on the role of mentors, not recipients of an intervention. After reading and reflecting on the materials, teachers wrote essays describing how they use the kinds of practices described to build positive relationships with students during difficult disciplinary contexts. One participating teacher wrote, “[To build positive relationships], I greet every student at the door with a smile, everyday no matter what has occurred the day before.” Another wrote, “I NEVER hold grudges. I try to remember that they are all the son or daughter of someone who loves them more than anything in the world. They are the light of someone’s life!” This procedure, in which people freely advocate for an idea to a receptive audience (i.e., new teachers; termed *saying is believing*), is a powerful persuasive technique. It makes the experience active, not passive, and promotes deep processing. It also encourages people to commit themselves to an idea and to connect this idea to their own lives and practice (E. Aronson, 1999; Yeager & Walton, 2011).

A total of 31 middle school math teachers teaching 1,682 students were randomized to the intervention exercise or an analogous control exercise, which focused on the use of technology in class. The intervention was completed during the fall semester in a 45-min exercise, with an additional 25-min booster exercise completed in the winter. Results showed that suspension rates over the year were cut by half among students whose math teacher was in the treatment condition (4.6%) compared with those in the control condition (9.6%). Moreover, because in control conditions Black and Latino students were nearly three times more likely than White and Asian students to receive a suspension, most of this reduction was accounted for by racially stigmatized students (from 12.3% to 6.3%; White and Asian students showed the same pattern, so the statistical interaction was not significant.) Moreover, a broader change in teacher–student relationships was indicated by the finding that 2 months after the initial treatment, students with a history of suspension whose math teacher had been in the intervention described their teachers as more respectful than students whose math teacher had not.

### ***Interventions that work at the intersection between teachers and students***

The aim of the previous intervention was to help teachers develop better relationships with their students. A second approach is to intervene directly in communications from teachers to students. For example, Yeager and colleagues (2014) found that a normative decline in trust of teachers over the school year among Black adolescents could be curbed when critical academic feedback

from teachers was represented as reflecting the teacher’s high standards and confidence in the student’s ability to reach that standard (i.e., “wise feedback”; Yeager et al., 2014, p. 810). The intervention was exceedingly simple. Teachers (who were blind to the condition to which individual students had been assigned) wrote two different notes before providing critical feedback on essays written by seventh-grade students. Researchers simply appended one of these handwritten notes to each of the marked-up essays. The control note read, “I’m giving you these comments so that you’ll have feedback on your paper.” The wise-feedback note read, “I’m giving you these comments because I have very high expectations, and I know that you can reach them.” This message increased the percentage of Black students who chose to revise their essay from 17% to 72%, with the greatest effects among Black students with low prior levels of trust in teachers. Moreover, the wise-feedback intervention forestalled a decline in trust over the rest of the school year among Black students low in trust, which, in turn, reduced disciplinary problems among Black students in eighth grade (Yeager et al., in press). This research shows that interventions that encourage nonpejorative construals of critical interactions with teachers—here, the receipt of critical feedback—can interrupt a decline in trust and improve discipline among racially stigmatized students.

### ***Interventions that work through students***

Interventions with students also can mitigate racially disproportionate discipline. Without ignoring the potential for bias, such interventions offer students a less threatening way to make sense of commonplace social interactions in school. For example, Goyer and colleagues (2016) tested an intervention focused on students’ sense of belonging and relationships with teachers in the transition to middle school. In this “social-belonging intervention,” stories from seventh-grade students and writing exercises were used to convey to sixth-grade students that most students worry at first about whether they belong in middle school and whether teachers will be supportive but, with time, come to feel at home and learn that teachers are “on their side.” This message represents negative social experiences early in middle school as normal and temporary, not as evidence of a general lack of belonging (see also Walton & Cohen, 2011). Remarkably, this intervention, delivered in two class sessions at the beginning of sixth grade, reduced disciplinary incidents among Black boys over the next 7 years, from Grade 6 through Grade 12. Whereas Black boys in the control condition averaged 2.92 discipline incidents per year over this period, the highest of any group, those in the treatment condition averaged 1.04 incidents per year. How did a

brief intervention in 6th grade reduce disciplinary problems by 64% through the end of high school? Analyses point to the importance of recursive dynamics between students and teachers. In sixth and seventh grades, the primary effect of the intervention was to mitigate a within-year increase in subjective incidents (e.g., “inappropriate behavior” or “insubordination”) among Black boys each year. This pattern indicates an improved relationship between teachers and students. Moreover, by the end of seventh grade, the intervention forestalled a drop in Black boys’ sense of belonging in school and an increase in worries about being seen stereotypically. In 8th grade, Black boys in the control condition continued to report low levels of belonging and high concern about stereotypes and, moreover, for the first time, showed high levels of subjective discipline incidents from the fall term. The intervention reduced these incidents, and this reduction persisted through the end of high school.

### ***Comparison to a common alternative approach***

The interventions we have discussed address social-psychological barriers to positive teacher–student relationships. This approach complements common approaches to addressing discipline in several important respects.

Some of the most well-known interventions to reduce school discipline problems are based on the positive behavioral intervention and supports (PBIS) approach, a family of interventions currently implemented in over 7,000 schools across the United States. PBIS shows promise for reducing discipline problems in elementary school (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013; Sailor, Dunlap, Sugai, & Horner, 2009); however, the interventions are less focused than the precise social–psychological interventions we have described and are rarely tested with adolescents. Moreover, PBIS places the cause of school discipline problems in students. Thus, PBIS calls for training students to behave better (e.g., positive reinforcement tokens for good behavior) while neglecting a specific focus on students’ relationships with teachers (Sugai & Horner, 2006).

PBIS has a three-tier model. The first tier involves changing school rules and physical arrangements to prevent initial occurrences of misbehavior. The second tier is aimed at students who still engage in problem behaviors and calls for various group-based interventions such as clubs to help students develop social skills. The third tier calls for individualized interventions for students who exhibit patterns of misbehavior. These require significant resources and time. They may involve an individual student’s family, educators, and service providers in the collection and analysis of data on the student’s needs, guidance by “behavior coaches” with training in applied

behavior analysis and design, and planned interventions specific to the individual student (Sailor et al., 2009). Although this heavy footprint in some cases may be necessary, the deployment of these resources can disrupt the overall education process and still not address directly the critical teacher–student relationship (Reinke et al., 2013). Targeted social–psychological interventions represent a complementary approach.

As noted previously, PBIS has not been tested as extensively with adolescents as with younger children. Yet it is in adolescence that behavioral problems spike (Skiba et al., 2011). Moreover, processes that influence behavior in adolescence differ significantly from those that matter earlier. For example, awareness of racial bias increases significantly in adolescence (e.g., Apfelbaum, Pauker, Ambady, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Brown & Bigler, 2005; Goyer et al., 2016; Yeager et al., in press) as does sensitivity to issues of autonomy. Perhaps this is one reason why anti-bullying interventions that focus on rules and social skills can be effective in elementary school (Fossum, Handegard, Martinussen, & Mørch, 2008) but fail in middle and high school (see Yeager, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2013). Rather than emphasizing deficiencies in students and attempting to teach social skills or prescriptive rules, the interventions described here aim to remedy psychological barriers to positive teacher–student relationships. This lighter-touch approach is noncontrolling: It empowers teachers and students to be agents in their own improvement, which may be essential for adolescents. Indeed, a related approach to bullying has been shown to be effective among adolescents when a coping-skills intervention was not (Yeager et al., 2013). An important question for future research is identifying when and with whom PBIS and precise social–psychological approaches are each effective and, perhaps, how they interact and can be effectively integrated.

## **Unanswered Questions and Implications for Policy**

### ***Pressing questions for research***

The consequences of extreme racial disparities in school discipline for children’s life outcomes underscore the urgency of deepening our understanding of the bias and threat processes that contribute to these disparities, including how they arise, interact, become recursive, and may be interrupted. Such research may address a number of important questions. For instance, are there critical periods when teachers’ attitudes, students’ trust in school, and teacher–student relationships are more malleable? Given their potential to alter recursive dynamics that unfold over time, interventions may be most effective when delivered early in the school year or in an academic

transition (Cook, Purdie-Vaughns, Garcia, & Cohen, 2012; Goyer et al., 2016; Raudenbush, 1984).

A related area for future research involves more fully examining the psychology and social perceptions of adolescents. Given adolescents' growing awareness of racial stereotypes and bias (Brown & Bigler, 2005; Cohen & Garcia, 2005; Goyer et al., 2016; Killen et al., 2007; Yeager et al., 2014), how and when do interactions with specific teachers give rise to generalized feeling of trust or mistrust of other teachers and the school? To what extent do poor relationships with teachers predict poor relationships across school transitions, for instance, from one grade to the next or from middle school to high school (Goyer et al., 2016; cf. Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Schiller, 1999)? If predictive, is this poor relationship caused by students' generalized views of teachers or school, by established behavioral patterns, or by how new teachers' views of students are shaped by students' reputations among prior teachers?

In the future, researchers should also focus more fully on examining racial bias in school contexts. Do teachers exhibit more bias in viewing middle and high school students than they do in viewing younger students? If so, why? Are teachers more likely to apply racial stereotypes to older students than to younger students (see Goff et al., 2014)? Do teachers feel less responsibility for helping individual students who misbehave when those students are taught by multiple teachers or when classes are larger? Does this deindividuation allow for more stereotypical judgments? Do teachers internalize a negative working model of racially stigmatized students and thus allow a negative experience with one student to affect their perception and treatment of another?

If racial bias undermines teacher–student relationships and gives rise to extreme disciplinary problems, how can bias and stereotyping in teachers' disciplinary practices be reduced? A classic means of reducing bias and improving intergroup attitudes is through positive intergroup contact (Pettigrew, 1998; for examples, see Brannon & Walton, 2013; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008). Our emphasis on interventions to build better relationships between teachers and racially stigmatized students is consistent with this tradition. However, to date, changes in teacher bias have not been assessed in most intervention studies (e.g., Goyer et al., 2016; Okonofua et al., in press; but see Carnes et al., 2015). An important question involves whether this approach reduces bias among teachers and how bias reduction contributes to improved outcomes for students. In addition, past research has generally focused on equal-status contact; indeed, this is considered an important predictor of the benefits of intergroup contact (Pettigrew, 1998). Researchers know little about bias reduction in relationships that

are hierarchically structured (Richeson & Ambady, 2003), such as between teachers and students. Moreover, how do interventions that target teacher–student relationships compare with debiasing techniques that arise from basic research on social cognition (e.g., exposure to counter-stereotypical exemplars, Carnes et al., 2015; Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012)? Although these cognitive techniques directly target automatic biases, which can predict inequality in school (e.g., racial achievement gaps; Van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010), they do not directly address the teacher–student relationships. Are there circumstances in which one approach may be more effective than the other? Can they be effectively combined? Addressing these questions and others may suggest further novel intervention strategies and reforms. Such research ideally would reflect a mix of experimental, longitudinal, and field-experimental methods that would allow investigators to identify how key causal processes play out over time (see Garcia & Cohen, 2012; Paluck & Cialdini, 2014; Walton, 2014).

Finally, this article has focused on the teacher–student relationship. However, just as each perspective (teacher and student) does not play out in isolation, neither does this relationship. The larger system of relationships relevant to schooling deserves mention. Students have relationships with their peers and parents. Teachers have relationships with students' parents as well as with students themselves. Any or all of these relationships could influence a student's behavior and educational outcomes (Sternberg, 2004). For example, could the fact that a student's peers are misbehaving encourage that student to misbehave as well (Cohen & Prinstein, 2006)? Might parents' knowledge of racial disparities in school discipline affect their trust in the school and the teachers within it? How and when might parents' views transfer to their children (see Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunner, 2014)? Are teacher–parent relationships undermined by stereotypes, threat, and mistrust in ways similar to teacher–student relationships?

Although we have focused specifically on teacher–student relationships in this article, that focus may not be as narrow as it seems. Interventions aimed at improving teacher–student relationships may indirectly affect peer–student relationships, parent–student relationships, and teacher–parent relationships as well. When students observe a teacher treating another student with care and respect, those observing students may feel less threatened and worry less about being treated unfairly—and perhaps they will be less likely to misbehave. Teachers can thus establish a climate of respect (or disrespect) in the classroom. In this way, improving teacher–student relationships may serve to improve other important relationships throughout the system.

## Implications for policy

Teacher–student relationships also exist in the context of schools that are operated by districts, which are managed by states, and so forth. All of these actors have policies that may influence the relationships teachers and students have with each other. When such policies do not recognize the centrality of teacher–student relationships, they may inadvertently undermine these relationships and critical education outcomes.

For example, there has been a recent move to eliminate the authority of California public schools to suspend (Grades K–3) or expel (Grades K–12) students for “willful defiance” (Pupil Discipline: Suspensions and Expulsions: Willful Defiance Amendment, 2015; for similar policy in the District of Columbia, see Pre-K Student Discipline Amendment Act, 2015). Willful defiance, also known as “disruption” and “noncompliance,” includes such behaviors as disrupting school activities and talking back to teachers, administrators, or other school personnel. It is one of the most common reasons for disciplining students in California and elsewhere (Public Counsel, 2014; also see Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002). By preventing schools from administering exclusionary discipline for minor or ambiguous misbehaviors (e.g., sleeping in a class), this policy may help reduce suspension rates in California schools and especially among racially stigmatized youth, who tend to receive the most extreme disciplinary reactions for minor or ambiguous misbehavior (Skiba et al., 2002).

Although the policy aims to reduce racial inequities, it may not go far enough. The policy restricts when teachers may end their relationship with a student, but it does not offer guidance on how to maintain a positive relationship in the face of challenges. For example, it does not address teachers’ exposure to the association between Black children and the “troublemaker” label, a source of disproportionate discipline (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015), or offer teachers a model for how to discipline students in ways that sustain and build positive relationships (e.g., Okonofua et al., in press). Students may thus continue to feel they cannot trust teachers (Cohen et al., 1999) and continue to behave in defiant ways (Tyler, 1990). Teachers then may feel even more troubled when students, especially Black students, are defiant. It is when policies seek to foster and protect teacher–student relationships—in addition to reduce suspensions—that bias and its effects may be best addressed.

## Conclusion

Extreme racial disparities in school discipline in the United States are an enormous problem. They usher large numbers of racially stigmatized children out of the

education system and into the criminal justice system with dire consequences for their lives. We argue that this problem arises not solely from either teachers or students but from both acting together and perceiving and misperceiving one another. In general, both teachers and students enter school with good intentions and the desire to teach or learn and to develop positive relationships with one another. However, this relationship can go awry when a social climate permeated by negative stereotypes gives rise to stereotyping, threat, and mistrust. It is our hope that a sharper focus on the social–psychological dynamics of teacher–student relationships and how these relationships unfold over time may provide new approaches to mitigate extreme levels of discipline citations among racially stigmatized children.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interest with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

## Notes

1. Although Latino students are disciplined at high rates, our review focuses primarily on Black students, who are disciplined at the most disproportionate rates and who have received the most attention in the research. Understanding the common and novel factors that contribute to high rates of discipline among Latino students is an important direction for future research.
2. Black boys generally experience the highest rates of discipline incidents among racial-gender subgroups (U. S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2012). In the future, experimental research should investigate how race and gender stereotypes interact in discipline contexts.
3. Are Black teachers less likely to exhibit racial bias in discipline than White teachers? Although in some cases racial biases are less evident among Blacks than among Whites (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002), both groups are exposed to cultural stereotypes about African Americans (e.g., on television; Weisbuch, Pauker, & Ambady, 2009). Moreover, insofar as this bias arises, in part, from the role of the teacher and the goal to maintain order in class, White and Black teachers may experience a similar predicament. Analogously, Blacks and Whites can exhibit similar biases in the role of police officer (Correll, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2002). In the future, experimental research should investigate how teacher race affects stereotyping in discipline contexts.

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