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Sent out or sent home: understanding racial disparities across suspension types from critical race theory and quantcrit perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Although in-school suspensions may be viewed as less severe than out-of-school suspensions, both discipline consequences limit students' access to learning opportunities and are negatively associated with a range of educational outcomes. Moreover, if sending students out of class perpetuates the same racial disparities as sending them home, this practice does not realize the equity goals of discipline reforms over the last decade. Our study draws on Critical Race Theory and QuantCrit to understand racial discipline gaps across in-school and out-of-school suspensions using data from students and schools in one large district. Results of multilevel regression models indicate similar racial disparities in both suspension types, suggesting neither approach is equitable. These findings illustrate the limits of race-neutral policies in mitigating exclusionary discipline gaps. Addressing the thorny issues that contribute to racial disparities will likely require greater resources for high quality implementation of school-wide culture change initiatives that are explicitly anti-racist.

Althoughmuch attention has been paid to the overrepresentation of Black, Native American, and Latinx youth among those who receive out-of-school suspensions (OSS) and expulsions, patterns related to in-school suspensions (ISS) have gone relatively unexamined (Noltemeyer, Ward, and Mcloughlin 2015; Trinidad 2021). Through ISS, school staff send students out of their regular classrooms and physically separate them into another room or office within the school building. ISS can range from partial day increments (such as one class period), to multiple days (Fabelo et al. 2011; Trinidad 2021). Ostensibly, ISS accomplishes the goal of keeping young people in school, but this practice still results in lost instructional time, segregates youth from their teachers and peers, and can be stigmatizing (Kennedy-Lewis and Murphy 2016). Both approaches therefore fall in the category of exclusionary discipline, which involves "a student's removal from the typical educational setting.' (Noltemeyer and Mcloughlin 2010, 27). Correlational and longitudinal research suggests that ISS, like

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OSS, is negatively associated with standardized test scores, GPA, school persistence, enrollment in advanced courses, college attendance, and student reports of school connectedness (Cholewa et al. 2018; Hwang 2018; Huang and Anyon 2020; Jabbari and Johnson 2020, 2021; Noltemeyer, Ward, and Mcloughlin 2015). Moreover, while the use of ISS may help schools reduce their reliance on OSS, such practices do not address the equity goals of discipline reforms if they perpetuate the same racial disparities.

The current study considered whether racial discipline gaps were indeed similar across both types of suspensions in a large urban school district. Our aim was to generate evidence that could inform debates about the most promising approaches to promoting racial equity in school discipline. In this manuscript, we first summarize the extant literature on racial disparities in suspensions, and then describe our use of two frameworks, Critical Race Theory and QuantCrit, to frame our research questions. Our results indicate meaningful racial disparities in ISS that essentially replicate those in OSS. We draw on both critical theories to make sense of these patterns and consider the limitations of our study. Finally, we offer implications for future research, policy, and practice that could advance racial justice in school discipline, including qualitative studies of ISS implementation and school change interventions that go beyond mandates to limit OSS.

Prevalence and nature of suspensions by type

During the 2017–2018 school year, 2.5 million students in U.S. public schools received one or more OSS and 2.6 million were assigned ISS, both representing a little more than 5% of the 50.9 million students enrolled at that time (United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights [USDOE] 2020a). The actual numbers of both types of suspensions are likely even higher. For example, reports from Florida and Texas that suggest that schools used ISS with nearly a million students in those two states alone (Fabelo et al. 2011; Gonzalez 2012). Parents, students, and advocacy groups have also reported the growing use of 'off-the-book' suspensions, where schools do not report these practices to caregivers or in data management systems used for monitoring and accountability (PowerU 2017; Malkus 2017).

Though varied in duration, the nature of OSS is relatively straightforward: school staff send students home. In contrast, ISS always involves school staff sending students out of the classroom and remaining in the school building, but its structure and substance can vary widely, even in the same school district (Wiley et al. 2020; Dupper, Theriot, and Craun 2009; Trinidad 2021). The federal government's definition of ISS is when 'a child is temporarily removed from his or her regular classroom for at least half a day, but remains under the direct supervision of school personnel. Direct supervision means school personnel are physically in the same location as students under their supervision'. (USDOE OCR. 2020b, 11). However, schools, districts, and states may organize the time students spend in ISS differently depending on the underlying discipline philosophy and committed resources. Indeed, some scholars and professional organizations have provided 'best practice' guidelines for ISS, such as providing students with academic tutoring, mental health services, behavioral interventions, or conflict resolution programs (Dupper, Theriot, and Craun 2009; Delisio 2018).

Yet available evidence suggests the typical ISS experience rarely involves supportive services or high-quality educational activities. Ann Ferguson's seminal ethnographic study, Bad Boys (2008), documented 'the punishing room', where 'troublemakers' were sent during the school day. Similarly, Gregory and colleagues (2006) found the on-campus suspension room at Berkley High School was a 'holding tank . . . for simply watching the clock until the period of punishment expired' (134). More recently, students in Florida have described ISS as a place 'like jail' for the 'bad kids' where they 'didn't really do anything' other than 'read a book and watch teachers talk and eat and things' (Gonzalez 2012, n.p.). In another district, youth observed that, 'most students didn't get the support they need' through these in-school discipline approaches (PowerU 2017, 35).

Student and school outcomes by suspension type

Research has consistently documented negative relationships between OSS and a wide range of student and school outcomes (Welsh and Little 2018). Young people with a history of OSS are more likely to have contact with the juvenile justice system and be arrested, incarcerated, or on probation as adults, hold negative perceptions of multiple dimensions of school climate, report lower school engagement, and be pushed out of school before graduation (Huang and Anyon 2020; Rosenbaum 2020; Welsh and Little 2018). At the school-level, greater use of OSS is positively associated with all students' depressive symptoms and negatively related to their views on school climate and safety (Eyllon et al. 2020; Welsh and Little 2018).

Although ISS is also a common practice, research on this consequence is more limited than studies on OSS (Cholewa et al. 2018; Trinidad 2021). Recent evidence suggests that ISS may undermine educational opportunities much like OSS. In one district, students who received ISS were more likely to report negative perceptions of school discipline structure, lower school bonding, and a weaker sense of school safety (Huang and Anyon 2020). A meta-analysis of twelve studies found a consistently negative relationship between ISS and academic achievement (Noltemeyer, Ward, and Mcloughlin 2015). The results of newer studies are similar, finding being assigned to ISS was inversely related to math achievement (Hwang 2018; Jabbari and Johnson 2020), grade point average (Cholewa et al. 2018), high school graduation (Cholewa et al. 2018; Jabbari and Johnson 2020), and college attendance (Jabbari and Johnson 2020). One study also found that students who attend high schools with high rates of ISS – regardless of whether they themselves were suspended or not – had lower math achievement and were less likely to attend college full time (Jabbari and Johnson 2020).

Disparities and disproportionalities

Given consistent findings regarding the negative influence exclusionary discipline can have on students' academic and developmental trajectories, racial disparities in their application represent a civil rights issue of great concern to many educational stakeholders. A large body of research documents the overrepresentation of Black students receiving OSS, with more variable findings among Native American, Multiracial, and Latinx youth (Welsh and Little 2018). There is far less scholarship

on racial disparities in ISS, but national data is available for both types of suspensions. For example, in the 2017–2018 school year, Black students in the U.S. constituted 31.4% of those who received one or more ISS and 38.2% of OSS, despite representing 15.1% of total students enrolled in public schools (USDOE OCR 2020a). Nationally, Latinx students were slightly underrepresented among students assigned to ISS or OSS. They comprised 27.2% of total enrollment, 23.2% of those with one or more ISS, and 21.7% of OSS. However, disparities varied widely by state and district. To illustrate, Latinx students represented 24.8% of all students in Connecticut during the 2017–2018 school year, but made up 34.2% of those with an ISS and 38.7% of OSS.

Racial gaps in OSS have been well documented in qualitative research and quantitative studies, including those that control for a wide range of student- and school-level covariates, including adult- and student-reported behaviors, office referral reasons, special education classification, individual socioeconomic status, school poverty rates, and school racial composition (Anyon et al. 2014; Anyon, Zhang, and Hazel 2016; Gregory et al. 2018; Cruz and Rodl 2018). Moreover, school-level racial disparities in OSS are associated with racial achievement gaps and weaker perceptions of student-teacher connectedness among all students (Pearman et al. 2019; Anyon et al. 2016). Though research on ISS is much more limited, emerging evidence suggests that ISS also disproportionately affects Black students (Blake et al. 2011; Cholewa et al. 2018; Hilberth and Slate 2014; Wiley 2021) and is more common in racially segregated schools with higher proportions of Black students (Cholewa et al. 2018; Trinidad 2021). Of these studies, only Cholewa et al. (2018) and Blake et al. (2011) reported findings for Latinx students, finding no statistically significant differences when compared to White youth. Cholewa et al.'s study was unique in using multivariate regression methods, finding that disparities for Black students persisted after controlling for cumulative GPA, gender, special education status, socioeconomic status at the student-level, along with racial composition, poverty rate, and locale at the school-level (2018).

Study aims

Although many consider ISS less severe than OSS, both responses to rule-breaking behavior are exclusionary and involve removing students from their classrooms with lost instructional time, which can have negative consequences for students' relationships with teachers and peers, sense of school connectedness, grades, and standardized test scores. Combined with evidence of racial disparities, the use of ISS may also be cause for civil rights concern, and would indicate a need for continued discipline reforms in support of non-exclusionary approaches that are more resource intensive to implement. In the current study, we aim to address these issues by examining racial disparities in ISS and OSS from Critical Race Theory and QuantCrit perspectives using student- and school-level data from one large urban district.

Theoretical and analytic frameworks

Critical race theory

Critical Race Theory focuses on the legal, economic, and social conditions that create and maintain White supremacy and the subjugation of communities of color. Although several principles guide this framework, in this manuscript we focus on two: the persistence of racism and challenge to the dominant ideologies of colorblindness and meritocracy (Crenshaw, Gotanda, and Peller 1995; Delgado and Stefancic 2017). A foundational tenet of CRT is the centrality of race and racism in creating inequities across multiple systems, including education, historically and contemporaneously (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). Far from being uncommon, CRT proposes that racism is endemic and interwoven into all aspects of society. CRT also explicitly critiques liberal notions of neutrality, objectivity, and equal treatment regardless of context (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). These dominant ideologies can impede recognition of, or entirely stand in the way of changing, a purportedly race-neutral policy or practice's disparate impact. Instead, CRT scholars draw attention to the ways systemic biases and the unequal distribution of structural resources intersect to reproduce inequality without the use of explicitly discriminatory laws or practices (Bonilla-Silva 2006).

In the context of school discipline, CRT suggests that racial disparities in the use of exclusionary and punitive practices are the result of an education system that primarily values conformity and compliance to White ways of being and knowing (Watts and Erevelles 2004; Bell 2020). Simson (2013) argues centuries of racial stigma, stereotypes, and biases have been infused into seemingly objective standards for appropriate behavior at school (Simson 2013, 506). Policies and practices used to enforce these 'normative baselines' are also racialized through the subjective 'perception and evaluation' of discipline incidents (Simson 2013, 533). Educators determine the severity of the event and its consequence based on an 'existing framework of social meanings associated with the student's racial category' such as whether the behavior is malleable (e.g. the student is having a bad day) or fixed (e.g. the student is a troublemaker; 2013, 533). Though these perceptions of and standards for rule-breaking are socially constructed, the consequences for students are both material and psychological (Watts and Erevelles 2004; Simson 2013). When school adults label students as deviant or violent for breaching White norms, exclusionary and punitive practices can serve as form of racialized social control that mediates access to educational opportunity (Bell 2020; Morris 2005; Watts and Erevelles 2004).

QuantCrit

In the current study, we used critical quantitative methods, or QuantCrit, to consider racial disparities across different types of suspensions. Researchers have often used CRT to frame qualitative examinations of educational inequities, but scholars have outlined approaches to quantitative research that are consistent with the theory's key tenets. In our case, we primarily drew on the QuantCrit principles outlined by Gillborn, Warmington, and Demack (2018)and Crawford et al. (2018), but our methods are consistent with the

ideas and examples of other critical quantitative researchers such as Covarrubias and Verónica (2013), Jang (2018), López et al. (2018), Sablan (2019), Stage (2007), and Zerquera and Gross (2017).

First, we recognize that racism is a complicated, multifaceted, and multilevel social phenomenon that is difficult to quantify (Danso 2015; Irons 2019). Our study relies on student race as a proxy for lived experience, but this approach can promote deficit discourses about youth that serve White racial interests unless explicitly interrogated (Gillborn et al. 2018; Kirkland 2019). To be clear, the variables used in this study are not biological categories, they are social constructs, and the quantitative relationships in this study are associative, not causal. We interpret racial discipline gaps to be indicators of structural inequities, not 'pre-existing fixed qualit[ies]' of students (Gillborn et al. 2018, 15).

Another principle of QuantCrit is that 'numbers are no more obvious, neutral and factual than any other form of data'. (Gillborn et al. 2018, 6). From this perspective, concerns about objectivity, transparency, and bias are as applicable to quantitative research as they are to qualitative studies (Fielding and Schreier 2001; Kirkland 2019). It is not possible to conduct research that is completely unbiased given that scholars are 'the medium by which information is generated, analyzed [and] interpreted'. (Danso 2015, 576). Instead, we recognize that 'all knowledge is mediated through lived experience' and to suggest otherwise 'replicates false assumptions inherent to objectivity as real and attainable' in ways that can serve to maintain White supremacy (Kirkland 2019, 2–3). We therefore describe positionalities below to make clear how our subjective realities influenced the questions we asked, the literature and frameworks we brought to bear, and our interpretation of the results. In other words, we aim to aid the reader in 'judging the trustworthiness' of our study by being transparent about how our lived experiences have influenced this line of inquiry and analysis (Crawford et al. 2018, 125).

Statements of positionality

First author: My only exposure to exclusionary school discipline was in high school, when I was assigned one day of ISS for truancy. Upon entering the discipline room, I immediately noticed that I was the only White person there, despite my school being predominantly White. When I mentioned my time in ISS to a teacher, she told me that I did not belong there. Through interdisciplinary studies and youth work in urban schools, I came to understand that the patterns I observed at my high school were not singular, but systemic. These experiences bias me towards understanding racism as the root causes of disparities, to look at institutions and people in power, rather than behavior or actions of young people, as the reasons why we have educational inequities.

Second author: I am a White woman from the Midwest, where I went to one of the largest high schools in Ohio with over 2,000 students, 90% of whom were White and 7% of whom were Black. I remember multiple security guards walking the grounds, busting kids for smoking, arriving late, or leaving early. That Black students were suspended at twice the rate of White students was entirely off my radar, as was the discipline system as a whole. My intellectual exposure to the school-to-prison pipeline began in graduate school and it became deeply personal as I began witnessing the pipeline's attempt to envelope Black youth at the middle school where I conducted my dissertation.

Third author: I am a mixed-race first-generation college student, child of an immigrant, and product of school push out. The schools I attended as a child were poor, mostly or completely non-White, and often ran more like prisons than centers of learning. I learned early in my schooling to keep my mouth shut and head down, mostly from observing my peers who were often disciplined for trivial matters. I remember one school I attended having a policy mandating that shoes be tied in a particular way. In 7th grade, a friend of mine, who was Black, was sent to the office for wearing a red scrunchie. Despite my ability (luck?) in evading the disciplinary gaze of adults in these buildings, I stopped attending school regularly when I was in 9th grade, and no effort was made to intervene. These experiences have resulted in my strong belief that schools have never adopted the ideals of equal education for all, and that educational disparities are not accidental.

Fourth author: As a Latinx male attending overwhelmingly White secondary schools, I quickly recognized the system was not built for me. Early in my 7th grade education, a White student repeatedly called me a 'Spic' in front of my Spanish teacher with no repercussions. I was angry, hurt, confused, and never wanted to go into a classroom again. Thanks to my family, who after three generations showed I could survive the school system, I found I could get through by keeping to myself and spending as little time in the school as possible. My familial knowledge and education provided the space for me to succeed in school despite not engaging. As a young adult volunteering and working in schools, I was able to witness what happens to students that looked like me who didn't have the same privilege. Seeing how the schools targeted these students I was again angry, hurt, and confused. This time however, I was able to turn those emotions into action; learning, growing and pushing back ever since.

Taken together, our experiences reveal inconsistencies and biases in school discipline policies and their implementation, with disproportionately negative consequences for students of color. In addition, we observed the harm and stigma of disciplinary actions, like ISS, that did not always involve sending students home.

Methods

Sample

Our dataset included more than 100,000 K-12 students enrolled in over 200 schools in one urban district in the western region of the United States during the 2018–2019 school year. The student population was approximately 50% Latinx, 25% White, 15% Black, 5% Multiracial, 5% Asian, and 1% Native American and 1% Pacific Islander (numbers have been rounded at district request to ensure confidentiality and therefore add up to more than 100). Students were predominantly low-income (65%) and 10% had one or more dis/abilities.

Measures

Independent variables were student racial categories used by this district: Black, Latinx, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander and Multiracial. Dependent variables were dichotomous indicators of whether or not a student received one or more ISS or OSS.

Covariates were based on available data and prior research indicating their relationship to school discipline outcomes. At the student-level, analyses controlled for gender, gifted and talented program eligibility, special education status, classification as emotionally disabled, identification as homeless, English language learner status, and grade-level. At the school-level, covariates included grade configuration (high, middle, elementary, or other grade span, e.g. K-8), school size, governance model (charter or district-managed), the proportion of student body that was eligible for free and reduced lunch, and the percent that were Black.

Study context

Several years prior to this study, the district began implementing a new discipline policy focused on reducing OSS rates and racial disparities. It described classroom interventions that students should receive prior to an office discipline referral and outlined when OSS was permitted. For example, OSS was not allowed when a teacher perceived a student to be challenging their authority for the first time; it was only allowed if a student continued to be defiant after non-exclusionary interventions had been attempted. The policy also encouraged schools to use alternatives to OSS, such as ISS and behavior contracts, and did not place constraints on assigning these types of consequences. The only guidelines offered for ISS were that students were supervised by a staff member inside the school building and given classwork they would miss. Finally, schools were required to report their discipline data to the district using an electronic records system. The policy did not provide schools with additional resources, such as funding or support staff, to implement these reforms.

Since then, OSS rates have consistently been on the decline, but the use of ISS steadily increased and now surpasses OSS. Prior to discipline reform, nearly half of students with an office discipline referral in the district received one or more OSS (48%) and less than a third were assigned to ISS (28%). In the year that was the focus of this study, those numbers had almost flipped, with more disciplined students receiving ISS (48%) than OSS (38%). Qualitative observations we conducted in seven schools indicated wide variation in ISS implementation (Wiley et al. 2020). In a few schools, students in ISS de-escalated and processed conflict with a social worker, but in others, students were disparaged and required to sit silently under the supervision of a security guard (Wiley et al. 2020).

Analysis

To construct our dataset, we merged student and school data with school identification number as the matching variable. Descriptively, we calculated disparities by comparing the suspension rates of students of color to White students in the district to determine relative risk. We also calculated disproportionalities by comparing the percentage of each racial group in the general population to their proportion among those suspended, which indicates over- or under-representation. The concepts are related in that disproportionalities happen when there are disparities in suspensions. In other words, to

reduce the overrepresentation of Black students among those suspended, Black students would need to be assigned suspensions at the same or lower rate than students from other racial categories.

We then used Stata 13 software to create multilevel logistic regression models that estimated the relationships between student race and discipline outcomes as odds ratios (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2008). These hierarchical models accounted for the nested structure of the dataset with students (level 1) clustered within schools (level 2). Our analyses controlled for all available student sociodemographic and school composition variables.

Results

Descriptive statistics

More than 3,500 students received one or more ISS, and nearly 2,800 were suspended out-of-school. Below we provide descriptive statistics to illustrate racial discipline gaps in two ways.

Racial disparities

Table 1 illustrates pronounced disparities across both types of suspensions, especially for Black students. Six percent of Black students in the district received one or more ISS, in contrast to less than 2% of White youth. That means Black students' risk of being sent out was nearly four times as high as their White peers. Only 1% of White youth received one or more OSS, so Black students' risk of being sent home was almost five times higher.

Racial disproportionalities

The disproportionalities illustrated in Table 2 reflect the same disparate patterns that were evident in Table 1, but here we used two sample tests of proportion, which take into account the size of each population, to determine whether the differences were

Table 1. Racial disparities in suspensions by type.

	All Students (n = 105,451)			
	In-School Suspension (n = 3,529)		Out of School Suspension (n = 2,797)	
	Rate	Relative Risk Ratio (compared to White students)	Rate	Relative Risk Ratio (compared to White students)
Latinx	3.6%	2.2	2.7%	2.3
Black	6.0%	3.6	5.8%	4.9
Native American	2.6%	1.6	4.1%	3.5
Asian	1.4%	0.8	0.7%	0.6
Multiracial	3.3%	2.0	2.4%	2.1
Pacific Islander	2.6%	1.5	2.3%	2.0
White	1.7%	1.0	1.2%	1.0

[a]The rate is the proportion of students from one racial group who have been suspended. It is computed by dividing the number of students suspended from one group by the total number of students from that group
[b]The risk ratio and is computed by taking a ratio of the rates per 100 between two groups

statistically significant. Black students were significantly overrepresented among students with one or more of either type of suspension. Latinx students were overrepresented among those with one or more ISS, whereas Native American youth were overrepresented among those with one or more OSS. For example, Black students comprised 13.4% of the general student population, but represented 23.9% of students with one or more ISS and 28.9% with one or more OSS. Students who were Asian and White were issued suspensions of either kind at significantly lower rates than their enrollment. As illustration, Asian students made up 3.2% of all students, 1.4% of students with one or more ISS, and 0.8% of students with one or more OSS.

Multilevel models

All students

Results from multilevel logistic regression models (Table 3) using data from all students in the district indicate statistically significant racial disparities in both ISS and OSS, though they varied in magnitude depending on the type of suspension and the inclusion of other covariates.

In-school suspensions

Model 1 illustrates the relationship between student racial categories and assignment of one or more ISS without including any covariates, but accounting for students being nested in schools. Black (OR 3.0, p < .001), Latinx (1.5, p < .001), and Multiracial students (OR 1.9, p < .001) had significantly higher odds of one or more ISS than White students, whereas Asian students (OR .6, p < .01) had significantly lower odds. In Model 2, accounting for other covariates, Black (OR 2.7, p < .001), Latinx (OR 1.5, p < .001), and Multiracial students (OR 1.8, p < .001) still had significantly higher odds of one or more ISS than White youth. Several student-level factors increased students odds of receiving one or more ISS; youth in special education (OR 1.3, p < .001), boys (OR 2.0, p < .001), students experiencing homelessness (1.5, p < .001), students designated with an emotional dis/ability (OR 3.6, p < .0001), and students in higher grades (OR 1.2, p < .001) also had significantly higher odds of experiencing one or more ISS than their peers. On the other hand, English language learners (0.8, p < .001) and students in the gifted and talented program (0.6, p < .001) had lower odds of one or more ISS than their peers. At

Table 2. Racial disproportionality in suspensions by type.

	All Students (n = 105,451)	In-School Suspension (n = 3,529)	Out-of-School Suspension (n = 2,797)
		%	
Latinx	53.3	57.4***	54.1
Black	13.4	23.9***	28.9***
Native American	0.7	.6	1.1*
Asian	3.2	1.4***	0.8***
Multiracial	4.1	4.1	3.7
Pacific Islander	0.4	0.3	0.4
White	24.9	12.4***	10.9***

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 based on a two-sample test of proportions, compared to each group's representation among all students

Table 3. Multilevel logistic regression model of factors related to suspensions.

	All Students (n = 105,471)			
	ISS		OSS	
	Odds Ratio			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Student-Level				
Race (ref. group = White)				
Latinx	1.5***	1.5***	1.6***	1.8***
Black	3.0***	2.7***	4.1***	3.5***
Native American	1.2	1	2.6***	2.0***
Asian	0.6**	0.7*	0.5***	0.6*
Multiracial	1.9***	1.8***	1.9***	1.8***
Pacific Islander	1.0	1	1.5	1.6
Gender (ref. group = female)		2.0***		1.6***
Homeless		1.5***		1.5***
English Language Learner		0.8***		0.7***
Gifted and talented		0.6***		0.7***
Special Education		1.3***		1.8***
Emotional dis/ability		3.6***		5.9***
Grade		1.2***		1.2***
School-Level				
Student Composition				
% Black		0.5		3.9*
% Eligible for Free & Reduced Price Meals		2.4		3.1***
Grade Level (ref. group = elementary)				
High School		.7		1.7*
Middle school		3.8***		4.3***
Other Grade Spans (e.g. K-8)		1.5		1.4
Governance Model				
(ref group = district-run schools)				
Charter School		1.8*		1.4
School Size		1.2***		1.0
Log likelihood	−12,588	− 12,153	−11,338	−10,768
Between School Variation	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.2

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

the school-level, students enrolled in middle schools (OR 3.8, p < .001), charter-run schools (OR 1.8, p < .05), and larger schools (OR 1.2, p < .001) were more likely their counterparts to have one or more ISS.

Out-of-school suspensions

In model 3, without accounting for other covariates, Black (OR 4.1, p < .001), Latinx (1.6, p < .001), Multiracial (OR 1.9, p < .001), Native American (OR 2.6, p < . 001) had significantly higher odds of one or more OSS than White students, whereas Asian students (OR.6, p < .01) had significantly lower odds. After including other variables in model 4, Black (OR 3.5, p < .001), Latinx (1.8, p < .001), Multiracial students (OR 1.8, p < .001), and Native American (OR 2.0, p < .001) had significantly higher odds of one or more ISS than White students, and Asian (OR 0.6, p < .05) had significantly lower odds. With respect to other categories included in model 4, students in special education (OR 1.8, p < .001), boys (OR 1.6, p < .001), students experiencing homelessness (1.5, p < .001), students designated with an emotional dis/ability (OR 5.9, p < .001), and students in higher grades (OR 1.2, p < .001) also had significantly higher odds of experiencing one or more OSS than their peers. In contrast, English language

learners (0.7, p < .001) and students in the gifted and talented program (0.7, p < .001) had lower odds of one or more OSS than their peers. At the school-level, students enrolled in high schools (OR 1.7, p < .05), middle schools (OR 4.3, p < .001), schools with a greater percentage of Black students (OR 3.9, p < .05), and schools with a greater concentration of low-income students (OR 3.0, p < .001) were more likely their counterparts to have one or more OSS.

Discussion

Results indicated racial discipline gaps in both types of suspensions that varied in magnitude and statistical significance depending on the quantitative method employed. Descriptively, Latinx, Black, Native American, Multiracial and Pacific Islander youth were more likely to be assigned either type of suspension compared to White students, and Asian youth were less likely (Table 1). We then considered the representation of each racial group in the district as a whole and among those suspended using two sample tests of proportion that take into account the size of each population. Black students were significantly overrepresented among those assigned both types of suspensions, whereas White and Asian youth were significantly underrepresented (Table 2). Latinx students were significantly overrepresented in ISS but not OSS. These descriptive results are especially valuable as representations of discipline inequities because they do not control for factors in our dataset that are also the product of racism, such as school segregation.

Finally, we estimated the odds of students experiencing one or more ISS or OSS using multilevel logistic regression models that controlled for factors like gender, special education status, and English language learner classification. In our statistical models, we also accounted for students being grouped within schools with different racial compositions, grade-levels, and governance types (Table 3). Results indicate that youth who were Black, Latinx, or Multiracial had significantly greater odds of receiving one or more ISS and OSS than their White counterparts, and Asian students had lower odds. Native American students had significantly greater odds of one or more OSS but not ISS. Differences between Pacific Islander students and White youth were not statistically significant, though they had higher odds of being assigned OSS.

Before discussing these findings in detail, we want to emphasize the principle of QuantCrit that 'where race is associated with an unequal outcome it is likely to indicate the operation of racism' rather than 'race as a cause in its own' (Gillborn et al. 2018, 14). In other words, we do not interpret these patterns as indicators of problems located in students, explained by differences in which groups 'lack something (e.g. motivation, grit, resilience, etc.)' (Dixson and Rousseau Anderson 2018; Kirkland 2019; Simson 2013). Instead, we draw on CRT to suggest that racial disparities in school discipline are the result of complex and interlocking systemic inequities, such as discipline conduct codes that privilege White norms, high stakes and standardized assessments that do not assess contextually relevant skills or strengths, a dearth of teacher preparation programs that are explicitly anti-racist or prepare instructors to use non-punitive discipline approaches, culturally unresponsive curriculum, lack of diversity among school adults, and the disproportionate presence of security guards and police in schools serving predominantly Black and Latinx students (Anyon et al. 2018; Little and Welsh 2019; Welsh and Little 2018)

With that in mind, the racial discipline gaps evident in this study, especially for Black students, are consistent with extensive research on OSS. They also parallel the results of a smaller number of quantitative studies of ISS. Cholewa et al. (2018), Hilberth and Slate (2014), Trinidad (2021) all found that Black students of both genders were more likely to receive ISS than their White peers. In Blake et al.'s (2011) study, the likelihood of ISS for Black girls in one midwestern district was higher than that of Latinx and White girls. Both Cholewa et al. (2018) and Jabbari and Johnson (2020) reported that the proportion of Black students in the school was positively associated with higher rates of ISS. Our research makes a unique contribution to this literature by examining both types of suspensions, using multilevel statistical models that account for students being clustered within schools, reporting disaggregated results for a wider range of racial groups, and drawing on theory to guide our questions and interpretation of results.

From the perspective of CRT and QuantCrit, we suggest that our findings illustrate how purportedly race-neutral discipline policies are insufficient tools for reducing or eradicating racial disparities in exclusionary practices. In this district, school staff can assign ISS for low-level discipline incidents, including developmentally typical behavior like classroom disruption, dress code violations, tardiness, profanity, cell phone use, pushing, and shoving. OSS may be warranted for mid-level offenses that include behaviors like repeated disrespect or defiance. These nonviolent, subjective behaviors are especially prone to racial bias. For example, a student bringing a knife to school lends itself to a more objective determination of misconduct than does a student who is being defiant. The former is based on a tangible good, while the latter is related to cultural constructions of appropriate versus deviant behavior (Bell 2020; Ferguson 2000; Irby 2014). Thus, our findings indicate that differential selection into the discipline system is the primary driver of racial disparities in ISS, whereas for Black students, both differential selection and treatment in the assignment of OSS appear to be at play (Gregory, Skiba and Noguera 2010).

If both types of suspension limit access to educational opportunities for Black, Latinx, Native American, and Multiracial students, they likely contribute to disparate academic outcomes. Indeed, a meta-analysis of 34 quantitative studies from 1986–2012 found that students assigned to either type of suspension were consistently less likely to make gains on standardized achievement tests or graduate high school (Noltemeyer, Ward, and Mcloughlin 2015). More recently, Hwang (2018) examined the longitudinal associations between suspensions and standardized test scores over a three-year period in one California district. Results indicated that multiple ISS or OSS were both negatively associated with students' Math scores, controlling for quarter, school, teacher, and grade fixed effects (Hwang 2018). Cholewa et al. (2018) analyzed a nationally representative sample of high school students, finding students who received ISS had significantly lower subsequent academic achievement and were nearly five times less likely to graduate than their peers who did not. Similarly, using a longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample of high school students, Jabbari and Johnson (2021) found that students who received either type of suspension were subsequently less likely to take advanced math classes or graduate.

Limitations and directions for future research

From a QuantCrit perspective, several limitations to our research design suggest our analysis, findings, and discussion should be met with caution. Our ability to make meaning of the results is constrained because our research team did not include students who have experienced ISS or OSS in this district at the time when this data was collected. Our interpretation reflects gaps in our understanding that we may not be aware of due to our positionalities. Quant Crit also encourages researchers to critically evaluate the units of analysis. All of the variables we used in our statistical models were drawn from administrative data that are based on adults' perceptions and decisions, not students. In particular, the racial grouping ascribed to students by caregivers or school officials may not be consistent with their self-perceived racial identity or the way they believe others see them (López et al. 2018). Moreover, racial groups are not a monolith. For example, Hannon et al. (2013) study found that Black students' odds of suspension vary by their perceived skin tone, suggesting that colorism also contributes to racialized discipline outcomes. Finally, the questions that guided this study emerged out of reports from advocacy groups (PowerU 2017), but its utility in the struggle for racial justice is limited because the research was not explicitly tied to a social movement.

School discipline studies such as ours are often critiqued for not including indicators of individual family income or student behavior. Student-level poverty information was not available to us, but it is indeed likely that such data would moderate the relationship between student racial categories and ISS or OSS, given that race and class converge in this district (and most others) more so than any of the other variables included in this study (Carter et al. 2017). That said, a growing body of research has shown that controlling for socioeconomic status only partially moderate racial disparities in suspensions (e.g. Anyon et al. 2014; Anyon, Zhang, and Hazel 2016; Cholewa et al. 2018; Gregory et al. 2018). Moreover, QuantCrit requires that we consider how 'racist logics' shape the units of analysis to protect the power of privileged groups (Gillborn et al. 2018, 13). The notion that racial disparities are only worthy of concern if adults' perceptions of student behavior are accounted for reflects one such way of thinking. It is teachers and administrators, who are predominantly White and middle class, and not parents, students, or independent observers who determine what behaviors are problematic in schools and when they warrant disciplinary action. Experimental evidence indicates that school adults tend to view the same behavior as more troubling and severe when exhibited by Black students and respond with harsher punishment (Okonofua and Eberhardt 2015). This finding is also suggested by longitudinal and correlational studies using national and local datasets (Anyon et al. 2014; Gregory et al. 2018; Huang 2018; Huang and Anyon 2020; Huang and Cornell 2020).

As is often the case in research, this study raises more questions than answers, especially about ISS, as fewer studies have considered the practice of sending students out of the classroom and what they do when outside of the typical educational setting can take many forms. First, it would be helpful to understand the malleable factors that influence educators' decisions to use different disciplinary

consequences. Further, studies that consider whether patterns of ISS use differ depending on the way ISS is implemented and what actually happens to students in these spaces are needed.

Conclusion

In contrast to OSS, ISS keeps disciplined students inside their school building, and for this reason, many stakeholders may perceive it as a superior strategy for managing student behaviors that adults find challenging. However, we, like other scholars, argue that any approach that removes students from their regular classrooms and results in missed instructional time constitutes a form of school exclusion. Our findings suggest that instead of achieving the aims of recent discipline reform movements, schools may simply be replacing OSS with ISS to avoid addressing the thorny issues that give rise to racial disparities in exclusionary discipline, including racially biased discipline policies, culturally unresponsive instruction, the preponderance of school staff who do not share students' lived experiences, weak relationships between students and staff, hostile school climates, and the involvement of law enforcement in responding to developmentally typical student behaviors (Little and Welsh 2019; Welsh and Little 2018). Moreover, links between both types of suspensions and negative student outcomes suggest these practices are affecting students who need more support in schools, not less. In short, although ISS may be 'better' than OSS, any discipline practice that primarily relies on students sending students out may be only a marginal improvement from sending them home. Instead of ISS, we need policies that provide sufficient resources for high quality implementation of school-wide culture change initiatives that address the technical, normative, and political dimensions of school discipline (Wiley et al. 2018). Explicitly anti-racist and healing-centered practices are promising approaches towards this end and warrant further investigation (Carter et al. 2017; Ginwright 2018).

my dissertation work, when I met several Black youth who shared their knowledge and wisdom on racism in schools. These young people are in large part the reason why this work has become so important to me.

Third Author: My intellectual family tree is rooted with the first people who taught me true humility, my peers and the staff at the homeless shelter I resided in as a young person. [De-identified], and all of the others who never let me off the hook, and always had my back. These people taught me how to listen, and how to be authentic in my voice. The tree was strengthened with guidance from professors like Glenn T. Morris who crossed the line at some point from instructor to comrade, and who introduced me to the work of Derrek Bell and critical race theory. In my PhD program, I was fortunate to have the guidance of Dr. Frank Tuitt, who gently pushed me to think deeper not only about the world around me, but also about my own values and goals as a scholar. The tree constantly blooms with all the things I have learned from the young people I worked with, as well as all the students I have had the opportunity to instruct.

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