

THE ROLE OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER FAIRNESS AND  
DISCIPLINE ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: AN ANALYSIS  
OF THE 1994 NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY  
OF ADOLESCENT HEALTH

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## **ABSTRACT**

# **THE ROLE OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER FAIRNESS AND DISCIPLINE ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE 1994 NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF ADOLESCENT HEALTH**

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Research on discipline patterns among adolescents show that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be suspended, compared to White students, particularly, male students compared to females (Skiba 2002; Verdugo and Glenn 2006). The aims of this research are to understand perceptions of teacher fairness by race and gender, prevalence of disciplinary measures, and the effects on adolescents' level of academic achievement among adolescents. A quantitative secondary data analysis of the 1994-2008 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a randomly selected study of 6,504 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> graders, was analyzed to examine questions pertaining to race, gender, grade, perceived fairness, behavioral problems (i.e.



suspension, expulsion, getting into trouble) and academic achievement (not ever repeating a grade). The results show race, ethnic and sex differences in students being disciplined. Male students compared to female students were more likely to report higher perceptions of fairness, getting in trouble, discipline and grade repetition. Black students compared to white students are more likely to get in trouble, get disciplined, repeat a grade and report low perceptions of fairness. Hispanic students got in trouble less than White students but they were more likely to be disciplined than White students. In analyzing perceptions of teacher fairness relationship to academic achievement, results indicated no relationship between academic achievement and perceptions of fairness. However, students' race/ethnicity and sex were the strongest predictors in academic achievement. Disproportionality in students' discipline is a problem that can lead to negative outcomes in academic achievement. Further research is needed to explore which variables account for this persistent problem.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

For the past few decades researchers have noted that students' discipline varies by race and sex. Research has indicated that "Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be suspended" than white students (Verdugo and Glenn 2002: 7) and that male students' are disciplined more than their female counterparts (Skiba 2002). Negative effects of discipline have been associated with the overrepresentation of ethnic minority students' involvement in the juvenile detention system, as well as the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the prison system (Trapagnier 2010; Meiners and Winn 2010; Nogura Hurtado and Fergus 2012). Further exploration into inequality in discipline and its effects on academic achievement is needed. The disenfranchisement of ethnic minorities and male youth in the education setting requires further investigation. Thus, an investigation of inequality in discipline and students perceptions of teacher fairness will offer a new perspective in understanding students' perceptions of fairness, for those who have reported problems with discipline and grade repetition. Students' perceptions of fairness may offer new clues to why students who are disciplined more frequently have lower academic achievement rates (Gonzales, Richards and Seeley 2002).

Currently, we know that disciplinary measures are disproportionate in regards to racial ethnic minorities (Skiba 2002; Verdugo and Glenn 2002). Skiba (2002) suggests that “Blacks are more likely to be suspended more than once” and that they are exposed to harsher punishments. Verdugo and Glenn (2002) found that black student’s rates of suspension are at least two times higher than that of whites. We also know that discipline is also disproportionate when considering sex. Skibas’ (2002) research shows that males are disciplined at higher rates than females. Disciplinary measures, however, are not always consistent. Race/ethnicity, gender and grade level have an effect on the type of repercussions students’ face. Disciplinary issues can lead students’ to being suspended, expelled, or otherwise disciplined, which may affect the quality of education students’ receive.

Disciplinary problems and the measures by which they are addressed affect academic achievement (Gonzales, Richards and Seeley 2002). However, currently, we do not know if students’ attitudes regarding fairness contribute to their academic performance. Little research utilizing national data has examined this phenomenon. Research is needed to understand students’ perceptions of fairness, levels of suspension/expulsion, how often a student gets in trouble and lack of academic achievement. The purpose of this study is to analyze sex and race/ethnic differences in students’ disciplinary problems and the relationship between perceptions of fairness on academic achievement. Race/ethnicity and sex have been found to influence students’ suspension and expulsion rates but there is no conclusive nationally representative quantitative research which explains the role of students’ perceptions of teacher fairness and the consequences of suspension and expulsion on students’ academic achievement.

The unrestricted version of the 1994 Longitudinal National Adolescent Health Survey will be used in this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past, racial disproportionality has been a consistent finding in literature (Skiba et al. 2002). Racial disproportionality can be defined as racial disparity between groups (Trapagnier 2010). Racial disproportionality in discipline is decisive in racial ethnic minority students' futures since negative consequences of extensive disciplinary problems can lead to students' suspension or expulsion. Suspension and expulsion can be a way that students' are "pushed out" of the education system, thus affecting academic achievement (Gonzales, Richards and Seeley 2002: 2). Academic performance deteriorates when students are suspended or expelled (Skiba et al. 2011). Sometimes discipline causes students' to fall behind in their school work, and may further encourage students to skip class or drop out (Gonzales, Richards and Seeley 2002). Furthermore, disproportionality can cause students' who are disciplined to be less engaged in "quality school learning experiences," experience alienation, and be subject to "subsequent delinquency" (Skiba et al. 2011: 88). School discipline can be detrimental to students' futures since students' who lack academic achievement have less career options and higher unemployment rates (Sullivan 2008). According to Skiba et al. (2002) students' do not *all* have the same experiences in the education setting, race/ethnicity and sex contribute to the consequences students' face when in the education setting. Black

and Hispanic students' are "more likely than their white peers to receive expulsion" or suspension (Skiba et al. 2011: 85). Institutional stratification may not be purposeful or even consciously perpetuated yet "school personnel...have the effect of perpetuating racial and socioeconomic disadvantage" (Skiba et al. 2002: 323).

### Gender and Academic Achievement

Socializing institutions such as family and education play major roles in shaping youth's social behaviors (Entwisle, Alexander and Olson 2007).

Currently, it has been noted that girls are superseding their male peers in education because of the instillation of gendered norms which boys experience at impressionable ages (Carter 2001). Parents are now known to encourage their "young daughters to aspire to traditionally male occupations" and comment in favor of their daughters competitiveness (Kane 2006: 173). While girls are progressing in their educational attainment and are being *encouraged* to do so, boys remain stagnant in their development (Carter 2001; Kane 2006)

Gender ideology and gender norms affect the way in which parents treat children. Parents tend to monitor boys and girls differently, allowing for their sons to have more social freedom than their daughters (Carter 2001). Boys take more risks through truant behavior or by spending time with their male peers (Carter 2001). The amount of social control that parents exert on their children transfers over to their behavior in schools. Males have reported "getting kick[ed] out of school for engaging in risky and dangerous behaviors" more than their female counterparts. Males reported getting "kicked out" or "engaging in risky and dangerous behaviors" 57 percent of the time compared to females (37 percent) (Carter 2001: 190). Boys' socialization encourages boys to engage in

behavior that leads students to discipline. Prudence Carters (2001) research suggests boys deal with hegemonically masculine roles that they have been socialized to abide by and secondly they are *not* expected to be model students'. Instead boys are expected to be rambunctious, inattentive and somewhat rebellious. Young men are also expected to fight with others and exert their masculinity (Carter 2001). When young men don't ascribe to the hegemonically masculine roles that society has prescribed them, they are prone to experiencing homophobic discourse or to be compared to a "girl" and therefore have their masculinity challenged; they also face the threat of emasculation, which is a popular form of ridicule amongst school aged boys (Carter 2001).

Gendered ideologies that parents instill in their children are created by parents and enforced by teachers. Preferential treatment and higher expectations cause girls to be more conscious of their behavior while at school. In general, the "good student" role is a more important part of girls' self-concepts than boys', and so they are more likely to be troubled by feedback that places this valued component of their self-concepts at risk. Boys are not unaffected by such feedback, but they are "much more likely to reject or ignore it than to let it breed self-doubt" (Crosnoe, Riegle-Crumb and Muller 2007: 122). Girls benefit from their ascribed physical features. They are often preferred by teachers when asked to be helpers for the day and to assist with simple tasks. "72% of teachers favored girl helpers while 26% selected more boy helpers and only 2% selected an equal number of boys and girls" (Entwisle, Alexander and Olson 2007: 125). There's a permeation of ideas in our society that girls perform better academically and are overall better students' because of their propensity to sit still and be attentive (Entwisle, Alexander and Olson 2007: 115).

Gender affects teachers' perceptions of maturity, and perceptions of maturity are often times factors that lead to young boy's grade retention. Students' are often times held back to improve academic and social skills before they enter the next grade. Ironically many children are held back *before* their academic performance is ever tested through standardized testing (Cannon and Lipscomb 2011). Currently there is no data which shows whether grade retention leads to any academic improvement and "proficiency rates for students' [who were retained] lag far behind students' who were never retained" (Cannon and Lipscomb 2011:13). We also don't know if these students' ever catch up, although evidence suggests that if they do, it's only short term improvement (Cannon and Lipscomb 2011). Research evidence does suggest, however, that student characteristics such as "age, gender, socioeconomic background, and race and ethnicity... [are] risk factors for early grade retention" (Cannon and Lipscomb 2011:6).

### Race, Gender, and Academic Achievement

Boys are more likely than others to have repeated a grade even when all other social factors are equal (Cannon and Lipscomb 2011). Although, some factors such as race and ethnicity, English learner status, and low socioeconomic status also put boys at higher risk of repeating a grade. Academic achievement is affected by grade retention. Students' who are retained a grade are twice as likely to repeat another grade in the future (Leckrone and Griffith 2006: 54). Discipline is used differently in the lower grades than higher grades in certain states, such as



California (Cannon and Lipscomb 2011). In California discipline is often factored into grade retention in the lower grades (i.e. kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade).

Both race and gender play roles in students' academic achievement rates, and race has been described as critical in students' attitudes in the education setting (Lewis 2001). The current educational system reinforces the racial divide. Amanda Lewis (2001) study describes how racial messages that both teachers and students send to ethnic minority students' can be perceived as hostile. She describes the downplaying of race and multiculturalism by teachers who say that race isn't an issue, yet who self-segregate, as well as single out ethnic minority teachers to "deal with" ethnic minority students (Lewis 2001). Disciplinary measures are sometimes factored into grade retention, and sometimes they call for students to be suspended or expelled from school, or placed in alternative education programs altogether. African Americans are joined by their Hispanic counterparts with "forty school districts over representing Hispanic students' in discretionary DAEP [disciplinary alternative education program] referrals, 224 districts disproportionately suspended them from school and 92 districts overrepresented them in discretionary referrals to ISS for one or more years ...Fifteen school districts referred African American students' at more than twice their representation in the student population, with discretionary referral rates ranging from 21-65 percent" (Fowler 2010: 4). Minority boys are getting caught in a trap. First they are expected to be unsatisfactory students', second they constantly feel the pressure to assert themselves and their masculinity, yet when they fulfill these stereotypes, minority boys are disproportionately sent out of mainstream schools and put in educational programs that

have high dropout rates and whose students' usually end up in the prison system (Fowler 2010).

While current literature point to the fact that minorities and boys performance is lagging and discipline is high, there is no research which examines inequality in discipline and whether it affects achievement rates. Feelings of inequality are a common experience related to the human condition, with most every person being able to relate to a time that they were treated unfairly. Our society is filled with examples of both justices and injustices which are sometimes and sometimes not related to the stratification of our social system.

#### Racial/Ethnic Inequality in the Education System

Schools play a role in the socialization of adolescents, and reflect stratification in the United States. Social stratification is a process whereby people are divided and classified groups by basis of their class and or socioeconomic status. Max Weber claimed that stratification is based on "economics, status, and power." Power in the United States is usually allocated based on sex, race, class, socioeconomic status and level of education (Ritzer 2002: 127). Class stratification is prevalent in the United States and is often times characterized by race, class, and gender.

The education system has replicated stratification in a variety of ways. Stratification in the education system includes housing practices, school funding and academic tracking (Bonilla-Silva 2006). Housing practices help perpetuate racial segregation and is done both at conscious and unconscious levels. Housing segregation affects minority children because it affects their parents when they're

looking for neighborhoods in which to reside. Minorities of lower socioeconomic status must reside in certain neighborhoods due to financial constraint and housing segregation enforced by realtors (Bonilla-Silva 2006). In turn, schools are affected because they are funded through property taxes which are directly affected by race and class (Persell and Hendrie 2005). Due to the way education is funded, schools in certain neighborhoods receive less funding than others. The lack of funding in predominantly minority schools causes low income minority youth to encounter aesthetically unpleasant and ill equipped learning environments, inadequate instructional materials, ineffective teachers, and defiant peer subcultures, such as youth gangs (Conchas 2001:476). Schools with higher rates of low SES and racial ethnic minority students commonly employ uncertified teachers or teachers who teach out of their area of expertise (Persell and Hendrie 2005: 18). One can conclude that children from lower socioeconomic status do not receive the same quality of education compared to those who are financially secure. Housing segregation and school funding put minority youth at an inherent disadvantage for developing social capital and increasing their life chances.

The education system also perpetuates institutional stratification through the use of “tracking”. Tracking practices determine which classes students’ take, and is mostly practiced in schools with a large minority population (Oaks 1985; Persell et al. 1992; Persell 1997; Persell 2005: 18). Tracking has a greater effect on minorities than whites. Racial ethnic characteristics make students’ probability of being tracked higher than those of their white counterparts. Skin tone and certain race related characteristics not only increase student’ s probability of being tracked but they also account for students’

receiving more credibility as well as more time to relay messages to teachers (Persell and Hendie 2005).

Many times racism is not believed to be a byproduct of schooling, but one must note that students' pick up on racial information provided by teachers which both confirm and oppose racist attitudes and stereotypes (Lewis 2001).

Institutional racism in the education system is detrimental to students' self-perceptions, self-esteem and achievement, "schooling is a profoundly social psychological experience, where risks and rewards are predicated not just on innate abilities and skills but also on the self-concepts that young people develop over time and the comparisons that they make to others" (Crosnoe, Riegle-Crumb and Muller 2007: 119). It has yet to be explained why Hispanic students' have higher dropout rates than whites. Hispanics have a dropout rate of more than double their white counterparts (Shoemaker 2009). Minorities also have the highest dropout rates among youth with them being as high as 50 percent in urban areas (Shoemaker 2009). While the drop out and tracking phenomena yet to be explained. The fact of the matter is that tracking is generally directed more at minority youth, which some people might consider unfair.

Macrocosmic social inequalities are reflected in the educational setting (Lewis 2001). Race/ethnicity and gender disproportionality in the education system can be measured by examining variations in student discipline (suspension and expulsion), students' perceptions of teacher fairness, and academic achievement by race/ethnicity and sex. Little research has been conducted on school suspension and expulsion and its relationship to stratification, but the

research that is available suggests that suspension and expulsion decrease students' future life chances by making them less marketable in the work force (Sullivan, Riccio and Reynolds 2008).

### Disciplining Students'

Behaviors in school which call for disciplinary measures, are usually defined as cursing, being tardy, truant, fighting (with other students' or teachers), talking back to teachers or other school administrators as well as having weapons or drugs (Gonzales Richards, and Seeley 2002; Verdugo and Glenn 2006; Estevez and Emler 2010). These infractions lead students' to get: referrals to the office, afterschool detention, In School Suspension (commonly known as ISS), out of school suspension (where a student is required to leave school for a set period of time), expulsion (where a student is extracted from the educational institution for a period of time as a disciplinary measure; usually the period of time is longer extended than a suspension) and sometimes alternative school placement (Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, McMorris, and Catalano 2006; Estevez and Emler 2010).

Policies have made it so that students' who exhibit undesirable behavior are more readily punished than in the past. Zero Tolerance in schools allows for students' to be removed from the class room for offenses such as profanity, disrupting class, and persistent violation[s] of a student Code of Conduct. Students receive referrals and the accumulation of referrals predicts being placed in alternative school (Fowler 2010). This legislation has made it easier for schools to administer stringent rules for students'. These policies make it so that all offenses are punished firmly regardless of their nature (Skiba and Person 1999). Zero tolerance policies remain somewhat ambiguous in the

nature since it is unclear what infractions are to be punished utilizing this regulation. For example, in Colorado, the school system allows referral process forms to offer teachers a category labeled “other” which teachers can check when students’ don’t fit into the categories of possessing weapons, using or selling illegal substances, disrupting class, or posing a threat to others. The “other” category can include truancy (Gonzales Richards, and Seeley 2002: 19).

Truancy has been identified as a disciplinary issue of serious concern by various school principles. It has also been considered a warning sign of students’ futures being beset with suspension or expulsion, dropping out or engaging in delinquent activity (Gonzalez, Richards, and Seeley 2002). It has been found that students’ with high degrees of truancy have low academic achievement rates and high rates of expulsion (Colorado Foundation for Families and Children 1999). Truant behavior has been identified as the beginning of a cycle that leads to suspension, expulsion, and delinquency. Truancy is directly linked to expulsion and suspension and expulsion can lead to subsequent antisocial behavior, however there are no studies which explain this phenomenon (Gonzalez, Richards and Seeley 2002). Some theories attempt to explain the phenomena by supposing that students’ are often times exposed to adverse social environments while out of school (Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, McMorris, and Catalano 2006). Not only are students’ most likely exposed to adverse external environments, but many students’ miss school so often that they fall behind in their lessons which can lead to additional detachment from the school setting (Gonzalez, Richards, and Seeley 2002). A variety of different behaviors call for disciplinary measures

which could potentially lead to academic failure. Academic failure and disciplinary measures need to be addressed since research has shown that minorities are often times overrepresented in disciplinary measures and have high rates of truant behavior.

### Race and Discipline

The overrepresentation of ethnic minority students' in "truancy reduction cites" in Colorado, as well as minority students' overrepresentation in alternative schools nationwide has led researchers to investigate the race and ethnic demographic characteristics of communities and the prevalence of alternative schools in certain areas (Gonzalez, Richards and Seeley 2002; Skiba, Micheal, Nardo and Peterson 2002). Researchers have found that there are more alternative schools in school districts with a high ethnic minority population (Vedugo and Glenn 2002: 11). Students' who are sent to alternative schools are often times sent for four reasons "use/distribution of drugs or alcohol, fighting or assault use of a weapon and continual truancy" (Vedugo and Glenn 2002: 16). Not only are minority boys more likely to be in lower tracks, they are also more likely to take part in "disruptive behavior" in school. Some people believe that cultural differences between youth and teachers account for misinterpretation of adolescents behavior, since teachers in the US are predominately white and female, cultural and racial differences may cause teachers to characterize students' behavior as being disruptive (Skiba, Horner, Chung and Rausch, May and Tobin 2011).

In a study by Conchas (2001) he found that minority students' were perceived as trouble makers because they smoked cigarettes, used slang language or may have been associated with youth gangs. These students' received little guidance as far as how to attain their future career goals because they were perceived as not having any; hence, they

were not thoroughly considered by guidance counselors. This group of students' claimed that counselors were often times too busy with paper work, other students', or on their lunch breaks, so they were excluded from receiving individual attention.

Minority students' such as Latino and black students' are overrepresented in their levels of truancy and currently there are no explanations for this over representation (Gonzalez, Richards, and Seeley 2002: 6). However, when focus groups were held at "truancy reduction sites" researchers found that students' who fall behind on lessons are likely to be truant when students' need to catch up on work, when they are bored, when they feel adults at school don't care about them or they believe teachers don't want them present, feeling disrespected by staff and being uncomfortable at school were also some of the reasons students stated that they were truant (Gonzalez, Richards, and Seeley 2002). Race/ethnic minority students are overrepresented in their levels of discipline and most boys are being encouraged to act out. Primarily, minority boys are being the most affected by their social expectations as well as by the discipline being distributed.

#### Sex/Gender and Distributing Discipline

Since boys are expected not to fit the model student role and instead engage in disruptive behavior, it is easy for them to fall between the cracks of the school system. Female students' are less likely to be suspended than male students' with one female to every two males being suspended (Gonzales, Richards and Seeley 2002: 17; Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl McMorris, and Catalano 2006). Boys are also overrepresented in other forms of school



discipline and “are four times more likely than girls to be referred to the office, suspended or subjected to corporal punishment” (Vedugo and Glenn 2002: 11).

Prudence Carter (2001) found that males are more apt to cut class with 35 percent of boys admitting doing so in comparison to only 9 percent of girls. Boys are also more likely to be reprimanded for disruptive behavior, specifically minority boys (Skiba et al. 2002). Yet most boys who tend to be reprimanded are minority.

The expectations that boys are not good students’ pose a serious risk for boy’s academic success and failure (Entwisle, Alexander and Olson 2007). Just as race cannot easily be masked, neither can gender. The expectation that boys engage in more deviant behavior than girls puts them at greater risk of being reprimanded in school. Boys are expected to be a rambunctious bunch while girls are expected to adhere to the good student role, and minorities are often funneled into tracks which will most likely result in their placement in alternative education programs. Although the literature consistently finds that boys get disciplined more frequently than girls there is no research which explores the effects of discipline on academic achievement by sex/gender. Furthermore, there is also no research on whether discipline is fairly distributed to minorities or males or how it affects academic achievement.

#### Disciplines Effect on Academic Achievement

There are limited studies on what the effects of discipline are on academic achievement. While truancy and other behavioral problems have been linked to suspension and expulsion as well as dropping out, which generally implies students’ lack of academic proficiency, few studies look at discipline and its effect on academic achievement. The few studies that exist on this subject matter have, however, revealed

that ninth grade students' generally attain the lowest grade point averages, miss more classes, have the most failing grades, and the most misconduct referrals than any other high school grade (McCallumore, Sparapani 2010). Research also indicates that older students', such as 9<sup>th</sup> graders, are often times more frequently disciplined than elementary and middle school children. Verdugo and Glenn (2002) find that the prevalence of alternative schools in communities rises as grade levels increase, and that there are more alternative schools placed around high schools than other schools such as elementary and middle schools.

Students' transitioning to the ninth grade frequently have a deteriorating academic performance, higher rates of absence, and behavioral problems putting freshman at higher risk than other school aged groups (McCallumore, Sparapani 2010). While we know some about discipline and academic achievement it must be noted, that these studies do not explore whether discipline affects academic achievement (or vice versa) or what the variation is between race/ethnicity and gender. Since older students' are more often times disciplined, 9<sup>th</sup> grade students' levels of discipline and achievement can offer valuable clues to what the dynamics between discipline and achievement are. Few studies examine the differences in discipline practices among grade levels, but the research that exists points to the fact that younger students' are less likely to be disciplined, although young boys are more likely to be disciplined (by way that behavior is often times factored into grade retention in kindergarten through first grade) (Cannon and Lipscomb 2011). Currently, however, we do know that minorities, boys, and 9<sup>th</sup> graders accrue more discipline and have lesser levels of academic success. Yet

there are no consistent explanations as to why this is occurring or if students perceive teachers as treating them fairly.

### Perceptions of Fairness

Understanding students' perceptions of teacher fairness means understanding part of students' educational experience. Since justice and injustice are enmeshed in our stratified society, students' perceptions of fairness may offer a clue as to whether students perceive themselves as being treated fairly. Injustice is claimed when circumstances presented are unpredictably and surprisingly discouraging and depreciating compared to what was expected from knowledge of previous similar situations (Heights 1995). The "justice principle" consists of peoples' shared perceptions of "mutually agreeable exchange or allocations" (Heights 1995: 258). Hence, justice is present when a similar comparison can be taken from anticipated outcomes and real outcomes. There are several studies which look at people's perceptions of fairness, although none are generalizable to adolescent or high school populations.

Utne and Kidds (1980) study demonstrated how feeling powerless over inequity caused people to "respond with resignation", while those who feel empowered may try to "create a just situation" (Heights 1995: 266). Homans, (1974) claimed that aggression is linked to feelings of injustice. Schools are constructed to reproduce social stratification, with racial ethnic minority students' not receiving the same educational opportunities as those who are members of the dominant group (Ogbu 1978). Few studies have examined students' attitudes about perceptions of fairness as a measure of inequality, and while it may seem obvious to some that institutional stratification knows no boundaries, and that

they are a mere part of our social experiences, students' perceptions of teacher fairness may offer us valuable clues as to what average students are perceiving regarding fairness.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine if there are race ethnic differences in the amount of times students' report getting in trouble, being suspended and expelled and repeating grades and the variations of students' perceived teacher fairness by race ethnicity and sex. The research which I propose to present is *imperative* for youth as it starts an investigation on students' perceptions of fairness. It will also contribute to the mapping out of the extent of disproportionality between race/ethnicity and sex and then examine the relationship to academic achievement. There are gaps in the research regarding adolescents' perceptions of teacher fairness and academic achievement. Currently, no research has investigated whether students who perceive unfairness have lower levels of academic achievement.

#### Research Questions

Race/ethnicity and sex have been found to influence students' suspension and expulsion rates but there is no conclusive nationally representative quantitative research which explains the role of students' perceptions of teacher fairness on students' academic achievement. The aims of this research are to understand perceptions of teacher fairness by race and gender, prevalence of disciplinary measures and the effects on adolescents' level of academic achievement. To gather necessary information three research questions

will be posed. The first question is, are there gender and race/ethnic differences among those who are disciplined (i.e. expelled, suspended or in trouble) and those who repeat a grade? The second question is, are there gender and race/ethnic differences in students' perceptions of fairness among students'? The third research question do students who are disciplined have lower perceptions of teacher fairness, and finally, do students' perceptions of fairness affect academic achievement for those who are disciplined?

### Hypotheses

H1: Boys are more likely to get in trouble and be disciplined than girls.

Boys are more likely to repeat a grade than girls.

H2: Racial/ethnic minorities are more likely to get in trouble and to be disciplined than whites. Racial/ethnic minorities' students are more likely to repeat a grade than white students.

H3: Boys will have lower perceived levels of fairness compared to girls.

H4: Racial ethnic minority boys will have lower perceptions of fairness compared to white boys.

H5: Students' who are disciplined will have lower perceptions of teacher fairness.

H6: Perceived lack of fairness more strongly contributes to grade retention for those who are disciplined.

### Data and Methods

A secondary data analysis will be conducted on the 1994-2008 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health created by Kathleen Mullan Harris and J. Richard Udry (1994-2008). This study is conducted nationwide and then randomly selected in order to create an unrestricted version of the survey which is representative of the general student population. This survey provides 6,504 adolescent students' responses to a series of questions. The sample consisted of random sample of students from *all* high schools across the nation providing that the school had more than 30 students, "feeder schools" which sent their graduates from 7<sup>th</sup> grade were also included in the sample. While this sample is nationally representative one limitation is that it does not include responses for dropouts or responses of students who have been suspended or expelled. A second limitation is that the question of perceived fairness could be interpreted to mean a variety of things, and finally, there were no questions regarding students' perceptions or responses to authority.

The three independent variables which will be used in this study are race, sex and grade level. Race will be assessed through students' race, being either Black, white, or Hispanic, and will be measured through questions which ask: *Are you of Hispanic origin? What is your race? White? And what is your race? Black or African American?* A new category of "race" will be created so that all categories are represented in one race variable. Whites will be coded as 1, blacks as 2, Hispanics as 3 and others as 4. Sex will be determined by the interviewer's response to the question of what the respondents "biological sex" was, either being male or female, with 1 being male and 2 being female. For statistical purposes sex was re-coded to reflect males coded 0 and females coded as 1.

Grade level will be determined through the question “*What grade {ARE/WERE} you in?*” with 7 being the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 8 being the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 9 being the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 10 being the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 11 being the 11<sup>th</sup> grade and 12 being the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. This study will focus on high school students’, in effect 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students’ will be excluded from the sample.

The three dependent variables used in this study will be: perceived fairness, discipline and academic achievement. Perceptions of fairness will be measured with the questions “*The teachers at your school treat students fairly*”. Perceptions of fairness are important to gauge, in order to assess if students’ feel like they are victims of inequality. These questions were answered using a Likert scale of 1 to 5: 1 being strongly agree, 2 being agree, 3 being neither agree nor disagree, 4 being disagree and 5 being strongly disagree. This variable was recoded so that strongly agree and agree were both coded as 1, neither agree nor disagree was coded as 2 and disagree and strongly disagree were coded as 3. Discipline will be measured through a series of questions. Trouble will be measured by the question: “*Since school started this year, how often have you been in trouble?*” If the survey was given during the school year the question posed will be “*Since school started this year, how often have you had trouble?*” If the question is posed during a summer session the question posed will be “*During the 1994-1995 school year, how often did you have trouble: Getting along with your teachers?*” The question of trouble will be measured with a Likert scale of 0-4 where 0 is never, 1 just a few times, 2 about once a week, 3 almost every day, 4 every day. Discipline will also be measured through a series of yes or no questions for which 0 is no and 1 is yes. Yes or no questions asking whether the student has ever been suspended or expelled will be used. Suspension rates will be measured with the question “*Have you ever received out of school*



*suspension from school?*” Expulsion rates will be measured through the question: “*Have you ever been expelled from school?*” A dummy variable will be created in order to include any student who has been suspended or expelled and will be coded 0 for never disciplined and 1 disciplined. Finally, academic achievement will be gauged through the yes or no question where 1 is yes and 2 is no “*Have you ever repeated a grade?*” Parents level of education was be measured through the question “*How far did you go in school.*” Parents who completed 8th grade or less are coded as 1, parents who completed more than 8<sup>th</sup> grade but didn’t graduate high school are coded as 2, those who attended business, trade or vocational school instead of high school are coded as 3, high school graduates are coded as 4, those with a GED are coded as 5, those who attended business, trade or vocational school after high school are coded as 6, those who attended college and didn’t graduate are coded as 7, those who graduated from a university are coded as 8, those who had professional training beyond a 4 year college/university are coded as 9, and those who never went to school are coded as 10. The variable was recoded so that 10, 1 and 2 became “less than high school”, 3, 4, 5 and 6 became those who” finished high school, GED or vocational training” 3 became “some college, and 4 became college graduates. Missing data will be excluded from the analysis.

### Sample Demographics

A descriptive analysis was conducted for the sample from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. The sample consisted of 51.8 percent female and 48.4 percent males. 59.2 percent of students’ were white, 24.3 percent are black, 11.4 percent are Hispanics and 5.0 percent are other. The dispersion of students was evenly spread out with 15.4 percent 7<sup>th</sup> graders, 15.7 percent 8th graders, 17.5 percent

9<sup>th</sup> graders, 18.1 percent 10<sup>th</sup> graders, 17.7 percent 11<sup>th</sup> graders 15.7 percent 12<sup>th</sup> graders.

Parental education of students' show that was 12.7 percent of the parents of the sample had less than a high school education, 35.3 percent had completed high school, gotten a GED or vocational training, 16.9 percent had some college education, and 21.4 percent of the parents were college graduates (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Sample Demographics**

	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>
N= 6,504		
<b>Sex</b>		
Male (0)	48.4	3147
Female (1)	51.6	3356
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White (1)	59.2	3852
Black (2)	24.3	1583
Hispanic (3)	11.4	743
Other (4)	5.0	326
<b>Grade Level</b>		
7 <sup>th</sup> (7)	15.4	979
8 <sup>th</sup> (8)	15.7	992
9 <sup>th</sup> (9)	17.5	1107
10 <sup>th</sup> (10)	18.1	1144
11 <sup>th</sup> (11)	17.7	1122
12 <sup>th</sup> (12)	15.7	993
<b>Parents' education</b>		
Less than high school(1)	12.7	827
HS/GED/voc (2)	35.3	2294
Some college (3)	16.9	1102
College grad (4)	21.4	1390

In order to assess race and ethnicity by sex a chi square test was conducted. The test determined that the student population had more females than males across race/ethnic categories. There are more white (51.5 percent) females compared to (48.5 percent) of males. Black females consist of 52.2 percent of the black student population compare to (47.8 percent) of males. Hispanic females consist of 51.8 percent of the Hispanic population compared to males (48.2 percent). The other population had females

consisting of 50.2 percent of the other category and 49.8 percent of males in the other category (See table 2 below).

**Table 2: Chi Square test of sex and race/ethnicity**

	<b>White</b>	<b>black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>other</b>	<b>sig .05</b>
<b>Male (0)</b>	1870 (48.5)	757 (47.8)	358 (48.2)	162 (49.8)	.912
<b>Female (1)</b>	1982 (51.5)	826 (52.2)	385 (51.8)	163 (50.2)	

\* is .05 \*\* is .01 and \*\*\* is .001.

Parentheses indicate percent.

To get an understanding of the student populations' grade division by race/ethnicity a Chi square was conducted. Grade distributions by race were evenly distributed between white, Black Hispanic and other (see table 3 below).

**Table 3: Chi Square test of grade and race/ethnicity**

	<b>White</b>	<b>black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>other</b>	<b>sig .05</b>
<b>7th grade (7)</b>	577 (15.3)	251 (16.3)	100 (13.9)	51 (16.3)	.397
<b>8th grade (8)</b>	599 (15.9)	239 (15.6)	108 (15.1)	46 (14.7)	
<b>9th grade (9)</b>	643 (17.1)	284 (18.5)	137 (19.1)	43 (13.7)	
<b>10th grade (10)</b>	661 (17.5)	279 (18.2)	147 (20.5)	57 (18.2)	
<b>11th grade (11)</b>	678 (18.0)	258 (16.8)	125 (17.4)	61 (19.5)	
<b>12th grade (12)</b>	613 (16.3)	225 (14.6)	100 (13.9)	55 (17.6)	

\* is .05 \*\* is .01 and \*\*\* is .001.

Parentheses indicate percent.

In order to gather how parental education level varied by students' race ethnicity a Chi square test was conducted. Regarding Hispanic students, 42.8 percent of parents reported having less than a high school education; followed by others 17.8 percent,

Blacks (15.8 percent), and whites (9.1 percent). However, in regards to parents' who had high school diplomas, GED's or vocational training, white students had the highest rate (45.0 percent) compared to Blacks (37.1 percent), Hispanics (30.8 percent), and others (28.9 percent). Over half of Hispanic students' parents had a high school education, GED or less, whereas a large number of black and white students' parents reported having attended college or graduating from college. In regards to students' parents who have had some college education white and black students had the highest rates each with 20.6 percent, compared to Hispanics (14.6 percent) and others (13.8 percent). College graduates were most likely to be the parents' of others (39.5 percent), blacks with (26.5 percent), whites with (25.3 percent) and Hispanics with (11.8 percent) (See table 4 below).

**Table 4: Chi Square test of parental education and race/ethnicity**

	<b>White</b>	<b>black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>other</b>	<b>sig .05</b>
<b>Less than HS (1)</b>	311 (9.1)	207 (15.8)	264 (42.8)	45 (17.8)	<b>.000***</b>
<b>HS/GED/voc (2)</b>	1544 (45.0)	487 (37.1)	190 (30.8)	73 (28.9)	
<b>Some College (3)</b>	707 (20.6)	270 (20.6)	90 (14.6)	35 (13.8)	
<b>College Grad (4)</b>	869 (25.3)	348 (26.5)	73 (11.8)	100 (39.5)	

\* is .05 \*\* is .01 and \*\*\* is .001.

Parentheses indicate percent

Attitudes of teacher fairness, trouble with teachers, discipline and academic experiences are described in Table 5 (page 28). The variable for trouble with teachers shows that very few (2.9 percent) got in trouble everyday a few more but still relatively few got in trouble once a week (5.4 percent). A few more students reported getting in trouble once a week (9.0 percent), but the majority of students reported getting in trouble

a few times (42.1 percent) followed by students who said they never got in trouble (38.6 percent). When students were asked about their perceptions of teacher fairness most students (57.7 percent) said they thought the teachers at their school treated student fairly, fewer (21.9 percent) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement about teacher fairness, and even fewer (20.4 percent) disagreed with the statement. When asked if students' had ever been suspended most students' reported no, (72.2 percent) and few (27.8 percent) said yes. When asked if students' had been expelled a majority (94.5 percent) reported "no" and very few (4.6 percent) reported "yes". A majority of the students in the sample had never been suspended or expelled but 28.3 percent reported that they had. When asked if students' had repeated a grade most (78.3 percent) said "no" and fewer (21.5 percent) said "yes".

**Table 5: Descriptions of the Attitudes of Teacher Fairness, Discipline and Academic Experiences**

	<u>%</u>	<u>f</u>
N= 6,504		
<b>Trouble with Teachers</b>		
Never (0)	38.6	2508
Just a few times (1)	42.1	2738
About once a week (2)	9.0	583
Almost every day (3)	5.4	350
Every day (4)	2.9	189
<b>Teacher's fairness</b>		
Agree (1)	57.7	3675
Neither agree/disagree (2)	21.9	1396
Disagree (3)	20.4	1297
<b>Suspension</b>		
No (0)	72.2	4687
Yes (1)	27.8	1801
<b>Expulsion</b>		
No (0)	94.5	6187
Yes (1)	4.6	299
<b>Disciplined</b>		
Not Disciplined (0)	71.7	4662
Disciplined (1)	28.3	1842
<b>Repeated grade</b>		
No (0)	78.3	5093
Yes (1)	21.5	1397

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

Bivariate tests were conducted to examine the following key variables, sex and race/ethnicity and the relation to trouble, expulsion, suspension, fairness, and academic achievement. T-test was employed to analyze sex and students trouble with teachers and discipline, similarly Chi square was conducted to analyze sex, students' suspension and expulsion rates and discipline. To test racial differences in regards to students' trouble with teachers ANOVA test was conducted. Race/ethnic differences in discipline were measured by using both Chi Square and ANOVA analysis. Perceptions of fairness and the variation by sex were measured through the employment of a T-test. Race/ethnic differences in perceptions of fairness were measured through the use of ANOVA. In order to test whether students who are disciplined have lower perceptions of teacher fairness a T-test was conducted. Finally, two tests of logistic regression were employed to examine the relationship between sex, race, age, parent education, and perception of fairness and academic achievement. Two models were tested; the first model (model A) included of sex, race, age, and parent education and the second model (model B) incorporated perceptions of fairness. The two models were produced to test

whether students' perceptions of fairness were a predictive factor of academic achievement.

**Research Question 1: Are there gender and race/ethnic differences among those who are disciplined (i.e. Expelled, suspended or in trouble) and those who have repeated a grade?**

To investigate the question of whether there are gender differences in the amount of trouble students get into, and the amount discipline students' receive, a T-Test was conducted. When testing to see whether males or females were more likely to get in trouble, males reported getting into trouble more than females ( $P = .000$ ). Males reported getting into trouble more often and they were more likely to report being disciplined (either being suspended or expelled) than females ( $P = .000$ ) (see table 6 below).

**Table 6: T-Test of sex, trouble, discipline and fairness**

<b>T –Test</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>	<b>sd</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Sig</b>
<b>Trouble with Teachers</b>				
Male	1.02	1.028	3091	<b>.000***</b>
Female	.78	.920	3277	
<b>Discipline</b>				
Male	.3829	.48617	3147	<b>.000***</b>
Female	.1898	.39221	3356	
<b>Teachers Fairness</b>				
Male	1.60	.796	3090	<b>.024*</b>
Female	1.65	1.092	3277	

\* is .05 \*\* is .01 and \*\*\* is .001

Chi square was also used to test if there were gender differences between those who have been disciplined (suspended or expelled) and those who have repeated a grade (see Table 7 page 31). Chi Square provides more details regarding rates of discipline, suspension, expulsion, and grade repetition. A gender gap in discipline was observed. Males were more likely to be expelled (2.5 percent) than females (6.8 percent) of females. Over a third 37.4 percent of males reported being suspended compared to only

18.7 percent of females. When combining both suspension and expulsion, over a third, 38.3 percent of males said they had either been suspended or expelled, compared to 19 percent of females. Males (26.1 percent) are more likely to report to have repeated a grade compared to females (17.2 percent).

**Table 7: Percent of grade repetition, expulsion, suspension and discipline by sex**

Chi Square Test:	Male	Female	Sig .05
Disciplined			
No (0)	1942 (61.7)	2719 (81.0)	.000***
Yes (1)	1205 (38.3)	637 (19.0)	
Suspended			
No (0)	1963 (62.6)	2724 (81.3)	.000***
Yes (1)	1175 (37.4)	626 (18.7)	
Expelled			
No (0)	2924 (93.2)	3263 (97.5)	.000***
Yes (1)	214 (6.8)	85 (2.5)	
Repeated Grade			
No (0)	2320 (73.9)	2773 (82.8)	.000***
Yes (1)	820 (26.1)	577 (17.2)	

\* is .05 \*\* .01 and \*\*\* is .001

Parentheses indicate percent

A Chi square analysis was conducted to test whether racial/ethnic minorities were more likely to get disciplined or repeat a grade compared to whites, (see table 8 pages 32-



33). The test showed that black students and Hispanic students were more likely to have been expelled compared to white students; 8.0 percent and 6.8 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively. Black students lead their Hispanic, white and other counterparts with (40.1 percent) of black students' reporting having been suspended from school followed by (31.9 percent) Hispanics, (22.4 percent) whites, and (21.6 percent) others. When Suspension and expulsion are combined in the variable of discipline, Black students lead their peers with 41.1 percent of students reporting to have been suspended or expelled, followed by (32.2 percent) Hispanics, (22.9 percent) whites, and (21.5 percent) others. In regards to grade repetition, once again Black students reported having repeated a grade more often than their peers. Black students reported repeating a grade (28.3 percent) followed by Hispanics (26.9 percent), Whites (18.1 percent), and others (16.9 percent).

**Table 8: Race/ethnicity grade repetition, expulsion, suspension and discipline**

<b>Chi Square Test:</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>other</b>	<b>sig .05</b>
<b>Discipline</b>					
No (0)	2969 (77.1)	933 (58.9)	504 (67.8)	256 (78.5)	<b>.000***</b>
Yes (1)	883 (22.9)	650 <b>(41.1)</b>	239 (32.2)	70 (21.5)	
<b>Suspended</b>					
No (0)	2986 (77.6)	947 (59.9)	503 (61.8)	251 (98.4)	<b>.000***</b>
Yes (1)	86.2 (22.4)	634 <b>(40.1)</b>	236 (31.9)	69 (21.6)	
<b>Expelled</b>					
No (0)	3734 (97.1)	1454 (92.0)	689 (93.2)	310 (96.9)	<b>.000***</b>
Yes (1)	113 (2.9)	126 <b>(8.0)</b>	50 (6.8)	10 (3.1)	

\* is .05 \*\* is .01 and \*\*\* is .001.

Parentheses indicate percent.

**Table 8: Race/ethnicity grade repetition, expulsion, suspension and discipline**  
**(continued)**

<b>Chi Square Test:</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>other</b>	<b>sig .05</b>
<b>Repeated Grade</b>					
No (0)	3151 (81.9)	1135 (71.7)	542 (73.1)	265 (83.1)	<b>.000***</b>
Yes (1)	697 (18.1)	447 <b>(28.3)</b>	199 (26.9)	54 (16.9)	

\* is .05 \*\* is .01 and \*\*\* is .001.

Parentheses indicate percent.

In order to evaluate race/ethnicity more thoroughly ANOVA was conducted. This test showed that Black students were also more likely to get in trouble with teachers with a mean of .99 followed by white students with a mean of .88 and Hispanic and other students following their white counterparts with Hispanics having a mean of .83 and others having a .77. Blacks were more likely to be disciplined (be expelled or suspended) than any other group with Blacks carrying a mean of .4106, followed by Hispanics with .3217, whites with .2292 and others with .2147. Even while Whites reported to get in trouble with teachers more than their Hispanic counterparts whites were less likely than Hispanic students to be disciplined (see table 9 below).

**Table 9: Means and standard deviations of race, perceptions of fairness, trouble and academic achievement**

<b>ANOVA Test</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Sig .05</b>
<b>Perceived fairness</b>	1.60 (.791)	1.74 (.831)	1.55 (.777)	1.56 (.769)	<b>.000***</b>
<b>Trouble</b>	.88 (.964)	.99 (1.03)	.83 (.983)	.77 (.887)	<b>.000***</b>
<b>Discipline</b>	.2292 (.420)	.4106 (.492)	.3217 (.467)	.2147 (.411)	<b>.000***</b>

\* is .05 \*\* .01 and \*\*\* is .001.

Standard deviations in parenthesis

**Research Question 2: Are there gender and race/ethnic differences in students' perceptions of fairness among students'?**

In order to assess if boys would have lower perceived levels of fairness compared to girls, a T- test was conducted (Table 6 page 30). Significant relationships between perceived fairness and sex were found. Males reported believing that teachers treated students' more fairly than their female counterparts at a significant level of .024. To evaluate whether racial ethnic minority boys have lower perceptions of fairness compared to white boys ANOVA test was employed. Hispanic students' were more likely to agree with the statement "teachers treat students fairly" with a mean of 1.55 followed by others (1.56), whites (1.60) and blacks were least likely to agree with the statement with a mean of 1.74. Hypothesis 4 was both confirmed and denied. While Blacks had lowest levels of perceived fairness, Hispanic students had the highest levels of perceived fairness.

**Research Question 3: The third research question do students who are disciplined have lower perceptions of teacher fairness?**

T-test was used to examine whether students' who are disciplined will have lower perceptions of teacher fairness. The results indicated that there were significant differences in perceptions of fairness and discipline. Those who have been disciplined tend to disagree with the statement of teachers treating them fairly at a significant level of .000 (see Table 10 below)

**Table 10: T-Test of Discipline, Fairness, and Trouble**

<b>T –Test</b>	$\bar{x}$	<b>sd</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Sig .05</b>
<b>Teachers Fairness***</b>				
Not Disciplined	1.55	.764	4585	<b>.000***</b>
Disciplined	1.83	.856	1782	
<b>Trouble with Teachers***</b>				
Not Disciplined	.74	.863	4585	<b>.000***</b>
Disciplined	1.29	1.141	1793	

\* is .05 \*\* .01 and \*\*\* is .001.

**Research Question 4: Do perceptions of fairness affect academic achievement for students' who are disciplined?**

To gauge if discipline and a perceived lack of fairness more strongly contributes to repeating a grade for minorities and males than for whites and females who were disciplined, logistic regression was applied. Logistic regression was run in order to predict academic achievement (repeating a grade or not) amongst those who had been disciplined. Two models were used, one which did not include perceptions of fairness (Model A) and one which did (Model B). Sex and Race (black) had any significant values with sex accounting for .023 significance and black accounting for .005 level of significance. They were the strongest predictors when it came to repeating a grade. When perceptions of fairness were incorporated in model B sex dropped to a .005 level of significance and black dropped to a .003. However, perceptions of fairness cannot be used to predict academic achievement (See table 11 below).

**Table 11: Logistic regression analysis predicting academic achievement amongst students who were disciplined**

<b><u>Academic achievement</u></b>	<b><u>Model A</u></b>	<b><u>Model B</u></b>
	Exp(B)	Exp(B)
<b>Sex</b>	<b>.768*</b>	<b>.715**</b>
<b>Black</b>	<b>1.400*</b>	<b>1.435***</b>
<b>Hispanic</b>	.764	.830
<b>Other</b>	.965	.976
<b>Parents' education</b>	<b>.644***</b>	<b>.652***</b>
<b>Perceptions of fairness</b>		.968

\* is .05 \*\* .01 and \*\*\* is .001.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

Previous literature has pointed to disproportional amounts of males and minorities being disciplined, as well as having lower academic achievement rates (Skiba et al. 2002; 2011). The current study finds that rates of discipline amongst males and minorities were higher than that of females, and white students' which is consistent with previous literature. However, the current study adds to existing literature in that it takes into account the amount of trouble that students' reported they were getting into and it addresses whether students' perceive teachers as treating them fairly.

Research also indicates that expulsion and suspension decrease students life chances. This study confirms previous studies, Black and male students experience suspension and expulsion at disproportional rates compared to Hispanic and white students. Students who are "suspended or expelled for a discretionary violation [were] twice as likely to repeat his or her grade compared to a student with the same characteristics, attending a similar school, who had not been suspended or expelled" (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin et al. 2011: xi). Blacks and males are getting disciplined at disproportionate rates, and the likelihood that their education will suffer is high, hence their life chances are low. The current study confirms previous literature and finds that

blacks and Hispanics are disciplined at higher rates than whites; it also finds that males get disciplined more often than females.

The current study not only confirms previous literature but adds to it with its measuring of students' reports of getting in trouble as well as their perceptions of teacher fairness. This study concluded that Blacks reported getting in more trouble than whites or Latinos, and whites reported to get in trouble more than Latinos. While black students' reported getting into more trouble than any other group they were also more likely to be disciplined than any other group. However, when looking at the Hispanic population, Hispanic students reported getting in trouble less than white students yet they were disciplined more often than white students. Furthermore, when perceptions of fairness were measured results revealed that Hispanics perceived teachers to treat them more fairly than whites, blacks or others, and blacks perceived themselves as being treated less fairly than any other group.

Males reported getting treated more fairly than their female peers; however they were also more likely to report getting in trouble and being disciplined. How can students who are being punished at disproportional rates (males and race/ethnic) minorities perceive teacher fairness to be higher than those who are not? If Latinos perceive fairness to be greater than their white counterparts, then why do tests reveal that Latinos get in trouble less than whites, yet get disciplined more often than whites? How can Latinos perceive themselves as getting treated fairly, yet whites do not, and whites get in more trouble, but have less discipline? One theory behind this phenomenon is that there is a "dominant stratification ideology" which emphasizes peoples own responsibility for their fortune, so the more one adheres to the ideology the more likely

they are to perceive inequality as just (Heights 1995: 263). For example, boys expect to be treated poorly at school and so do Latinos. Another study conducted by Lerner (1980) found that people are also less likely to respond to injustice if they believe in a “just world”, here, victims will take responsibility for their hardship. While these are important points to consider, the disproportionate amount of males, blacks and Latinos that are getting disciplined needs further exploration.

The current study found that there was no significant relationship between grade repetition and perceived fairness. While perceived fairness was not a predictor in grade repetition, sex and race were. Perceptions of fairness may have been a weak variable in this study due to the fact that students who perceived teachers to treat them unfairly may not have been included in the study due to absence, which could have been a consequence of suspension or expulsion. Since those who were suspended or expelled from the classroom at the time of the study were not able to participate in the survey, the number of those who perceive teachers as treating them unfairly could have been skewed. A second limitation of this study was that the data set used had a sample with an underrepresentation of Hispanic students. This discrepancy could have led to unrepresentative numbers in the Latino population.

While quantitative research consistently finds disproportionality, researchers’ continue to theorize about what is causing this phenomenon. Some think that there are cultural and racial differences between the majority white, female teachers and their students, which makes male and race/ethnic minority students’ misunderstood by their teachers, hence making them seem deviant and receive punishment (Skiba, Horner, Chung and Rausch, May and Tobin 2011). Others think that withdrawing minority

students' from school gives minorities a benefit through giving them the opportunity to engage in vocational/trade school, which they may not have had access to unless they were pulled out of the regular education setting (Verdugo and Glenn 2002). Qualitative research suggests that student feel teachers are negligent (Conchas 2011) and disrespectful) and that this may be causing truant behavior which is often times punishable through suspension, and if it is chronic and persistent enough, eventual expulsion (Colorado Foundation for Families and Children 1999). Some researchers assert trends show that males misbehave more often, males are not model students', teaching is a female dominated profession leaving boys misunderstood, and that since teaching is a female dominated profession teachers' favor female students'. There are also several theories to explain why ethnic minority males are disciplined more often. Some include that minority students' misbehave more often and that teaching is a white female dominated profession leaving teachers' to misunderstand minority male students'. Some other researchers think that socioeconomic differences may be to blame for the disproportionality that exists; however, although the current study did not look at socioeconomic status, it did measure parents' levels of education, which could be used as a measure of SES. The analysis showed that both white and black students' parents had very similar rates of having either college educations or college degrees, yet the disproportionality in discipline between the races still existed.

One theoretical framework that has not been offered to explain what is going on in quantitative studies, such as this is, is the theory institutional racism and the concept of silent racism. This theory will be employed to understand what could potentially be going on in the educational setting. Institutional racism is present when social oppression



“becomes so embedded in the everyday workings of social life that it is not easily identified as oppression and does not require conscious prejudice or overt acts of discrimination” (Johnson 2002: 292). Institutions such as the education system, therefore, become perfect grounds for silent racism to exist, since these institutions support white privilege (Trapagnier 2010). Within the education setting youth are prone to experiencing silent racism, which is not intended, but nonetheless affects them. Silent racism is characterized by “the unspoken negative thoughts, emotions and assumptions about black Americans that dwell in the minds of white Americans, including well-meaning whites that care about racial equity” (Trapagnier 2010: 15).

The education system provides white students with an advantage that is not granted to black and Hispanic students (Trapagnier 2010). This can be seen in literature that points to the fact that schools with “33 percent or more” minority students are more likely to have students in alternative education programs, furthermore, alternative schools are placed in predominantly lower socioeconomic status areas (Verdugo and Glenn 2002: 16). Impoverished areas have lower educational funding, and usually put minority youth at a disadvantage. Silent racism manifests itself in behaviors which are proven to be detrimental to minority students because it persists and goes unquestioned by the dominant group. Since there is not much a child can do to conceal their ethnicity, they are unable to avoid becoming victims of silent racism and everyday racism. Everyday racism “refers to routine actions that go unquestioned by the dominant group which in some way discriminate against members of a racial or ethnic category” (Trapagnier 2010: 20). Racial inequality in the US is prevalent in the education system as well as the

criminal justice system, by means of “putting people of color at a disadvantage while simultaneously giving white people unwarranted advantage” (Trepagnier 2010: 65).

Discriminatory actions that result from racism cause students’ to develop negative self-concepts and impair a student’s scholastic ability. It is important for students to feel that they are in a safe place where their interests are important, where they are respected, and allowed to flourish. In a study conducted by Gilberto Conchas (2006) he found that students who were nurtured and respected changed their negative attitude toward schooling for more positive ones that resulted in greater achievement. Qualitative studies on truancy conducted in Colorado found that students felt teachers weren’t treating them with respect, and they explained that that contributed to truant behavior (Colorado Foundation for Families and Children 1999). While teachers may not be acting out of malice, they are certainly affecting their pupils’ achievement rates, whether it be through suspension and expulsion, or by making student uncomfortable in the education setting in turn causing them to be truant.

### Implications

While this study had certain limitations, it was consistent with previous literature which has acknowledged disproportionality. The current study suggests that there are gender and racial disproportions in regards to academic achievement and discipline. While there is no panacea for social ills, certain measures can be taken in order to buffer some of the inequality that is perpetuated by the education system. One way to help buffer the relationship between students and teachers is to require teachers to take diversity training while in the education setting. Another way is to have students

take some courses in multicultural relations as well as gender studies when they are in college as part of the criteria for getting their degrees in education.

### Conclusion

This study has examined students' perceptions of teacher fairness, rates of discipline, academic achievement rates and variations by race/ethnicity and sex. The results of this study were consistent with previous literature which has examined academic achievement and variations in sex and race, and once again proven that males and ethnic minority students' have lower academic achievement rates than females. "Schools are arguably one of the central institutions involved in the drawing and redrawing of racial lines" (Lewis 2001:783). In rejecting to confront discrimination and inequality, we avoid addressing the assault on children in their everyday lives. The education system reproduces racial stratification and it perpetuates the racial divide with its participation in racism on both macro and micro levels. At the macro level it produces and reproduces institutional racism and at the micro level its teachers perpetuate racism through their inadvertent participation in silent racism which the student body absorbs, mimics and uses to alienate and oppress their fellow peers (Lewis 2001; Sue et al. 2007; Trapagnier 2010). Not only is it institutional racism that hinders youth's opportunities to excel, silent racism contributes to the inequality in schools, by its teachers and administrators unconsciously oppressing minority students' (Sue 2010). While males and ethnic minority students' are at risk of having a limited education, they also have more likelihood of being tangled in the juvenile justice system. Suspension and expulsion has been shown to increase the likelihood of an adolescent "being involved in the juvenile justice system" (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin et al. 2011: xii). In a study of Texas students

“between the 7-12 grade, nearly 15 percent...had contact with the juvenile justice system” that accounts to “more than one in every seven students” (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin et al. 2011: 61). Regarding suspensions and expulsions, “less than 3 percent” of disciplinary action was caused by severe disruptions “such as assault or bringing a gun to school” (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin et al. 2011: 61). Blacks have a greater involvement in the juvenile justice system than Hispanics or whites, which comes to no surprise considering they are suspended and expelled more often and at disproportional rates. The Texas study also concluded that suspension and expulsion almost triples the probability of a student having contact with the juvenile justice system within “the subsequent academic year” (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin et al. 2011: 70).

Minority students’ are more likely to be disciplined and more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system. The lack of educational possibilities can lead to further problems in adulthood if students are further trapped within the confines of the legal system, “one in nine black males between the ages of 20-34 are behind bars” (Meiners and Winn 2010: 270). Being detained decreases educational opportunities by making the attainment of GED’s (general equivalency diplomas) difficult, and detention also results in getting denied “access to Pell grants” (Meiners and Winn 2010: 27). There is an “overrepresentation of youth of color in our nations juvenile justice system and in school based disciplinary actions” this overrepresentation has been described through school to prison pipeline metaphors (Meiners and Winn 2010: 27; Fowler 2010). These metaphors imply that minority students, are being funneled out of school and into the criminal justice system and that blacks and Latinos are at risk of “under education and potential incarceration” (Meiners and Winn 2010: 273). Since suspension and expulsion

can lead to trouble in the juvenile justice system and can further lead to trouble in the prison system, school discipline strongly impacts students' futures.

In conclusion, current literature is lacking a quantitative view on students' perceptions of teacher fairness, discipline and academic achievement. Few studies before this have utilized national longitudinal data when looking at discipline, academic achievement and students' perceptions of teacher fairness in the United States. It is necessary to measure the variations between these variables in order to better understand youth in the context of the current education system. More research is necessary to contribute to our understanding of disproportionality in race and gender in the education system. Furthermore, research is necessary to understand students' perceptions of teacher fairness. This research should take students' absence from school into consideration when looking at discipline and perceptions of fairness. Using this technique would allow so that so that most students get an equal opportunity to answer national surveys. While this may be difficult to do when taking into account how difficult it is to collect national data, further research could simply take students who have been disciplined into account when looking at students' perceptions of teacher fairness.

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## **VITA**

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