

# Tools for Addressing the Disproportionate Discipline of Boys of Color in Schools



RACHEL D. GODSIL

**RISE**  
FOR BOYS AND MEN OF COLOR

**“And so he studies. He reads, and he goes to the library.”**

Description of D’Andre, an honor roll student in 6th grade at Quitman Street Renew School,  
Newark, New Jersey (Nuefeld 2014, p. 2)

## *Introduction*

In the summer before he entered 6th grade, D’Andre, described above, conducted his own home science projects with quarters and matches. In another summer program, a group of black and brown rising 9th graders from Newark, New Jersey, spend five weeks with the New Jersey Law Education Empowerment Program, taking a difficult criminal law course that culminates in a mock trial competition in front of sitting New Jersey judges. Contrary to the images so frequently present in the media, youth of color nationwide are eager to engage in rigorous summer programs. Too few exist, but when they do, programs focusing on areas ranging from law to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, such as the Sunday Academy and the Tribal College Summer Camp for Native American students in North Dakota, are oversubscribed.

Every discussion focusing on boys of color in K–12 school settings should begin with the recognition of their hard work and achievements, rather than a narrative focusing on their challenges. Celebrating examples of the boys’ activities and deficits is not to ignore the reality that as a society, we are generally failing to provide them with sufficient opportunities to thrive in school. Instead, it is an important way to begin to chip away at the pernicious stereotypes of boys of color as failing to measure up, which perpetuate the structures and individual dynamics undermining their opportunities.

What explains our societal failure to support and encourage boys of color in schools? Is it the racial and ethnic hostility that we are seeing in our political discourse? In some instances, likely yes, particularly around funding decisions. But we have little reason to believe that a significant percentage of *teachers* are actively hostile to boys of color. The day-to-day reality is more complex.

Schools across the country are grappling with the paradox that even though most teachers and administrators hold egalitarian

values and want the best for all children, far too many schools show dramatic inequalities in outcomes between white and East Asian American students and black, Latino, and Native American students. The harms that flow from this inconsistency are borne primarily by youth of color and their families. But they can also be perplexing for teachers and administrators who pride themselves on their egalitarian ethos.

Advances in social psychology and neuroscience provide explanations for the disjuncture between our stated aspirations and our practices. Specifically, social science research suggests that three intersecting phenomena are primarily at play in this disconnect: implicit bias, the automatic association of stereotypes and attitudes toward particular groups; racial anxiety, the stress response people often have prior to and during a cross-group interaction; and stereotype threat, the risk of confirming a negative stereotype about one’s group (Godsil et al. 2014). Due in part to these phenomena, even people who have the best conscious intentions far too often fail to align their behavior with their intentions, causing harmful outcomes for students.

## INTRODUCTION

*RISE for Boys and Men of Color is a field advancement effort funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Marguerite Casey Foundation, and members of the Executives' Alliance to Expand Opportunities for Boys and Men of Color.*

Teachers with implicit bias toward black and Latino boys will be apt to treat those students' misbehavior more harshly than white and Asian boys, to judge their work less favorably, and to exhibit colder or more hostile attitudes toward them. Racially anxious teachers often do the opposite: they will turn a blind eye to behavior that is not conducive to learning and assess student-of-color work overly favorably in an effort to avoid behavior that may be construed as biased (Harber et al. 2012). Students of color often experience stereotype threat, putting them at risk of underperforming on important standardized tests, and resulting in a significant underestimation of their academic capacities.

Each of these phenomena has the potential to contribute to contexts in which boys of color experience disproportionate discipline, feel as though little is expected of them academically, and are offered less mentoring and fewer opportunities to strengthen teacher-student relationships. They suffer through classroom or institutional climates that are inimical to their feelings of belonging and the ultimate expression of their academic capacities and potential. In the pages that follow, this report describes the underlying mechanisms of bias, anxiety, and stereotype threat, and the interventions that have been developed to date. Crucial next steps are to take advantage of these insights, translate the interventions into practices, and at last to provide all boys of color with the opportunity to thrive in school.

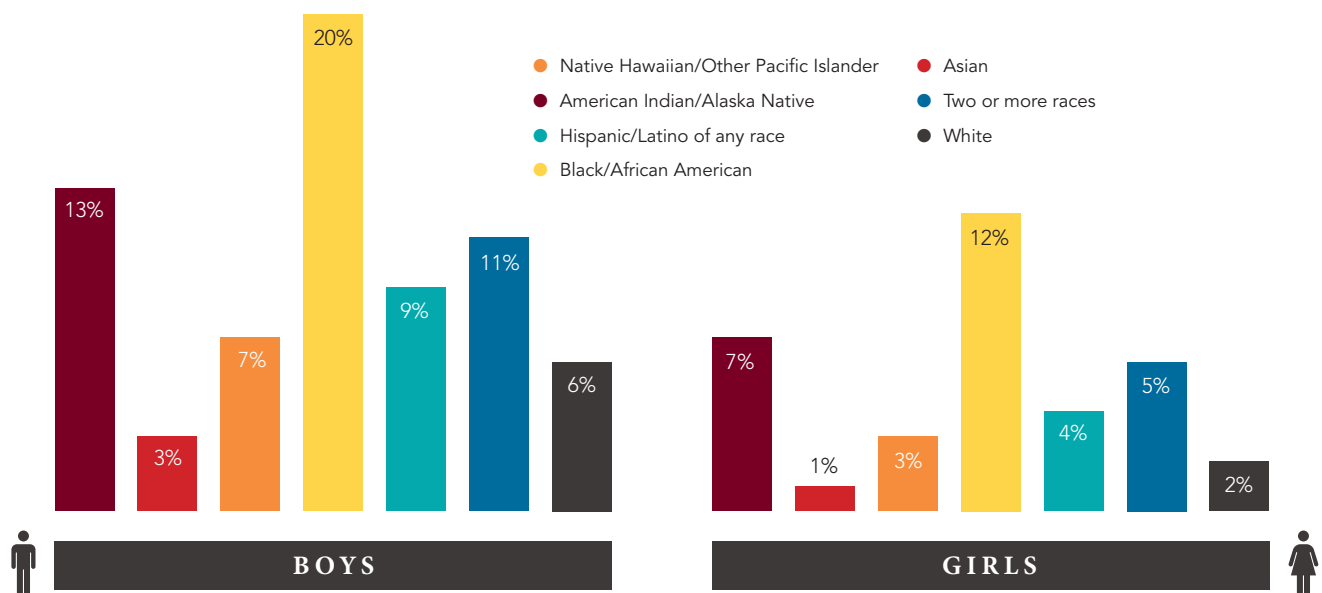


# Background

While the data showing disproportionate disciplinary treatment of boys of color should trigger urgency, it is first important to note that most students of all races do not receive out-of-school suspensions in any given year (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2014). The numbers below are deeply troubling, but as Losen and colleagues (2015) found, schools differ markedly in their disciplinary rates, with few schools suspending at high rates. Illuminating this reality is important to affirm that suspension is not the norm for boys of color. The notion of focusing on the percentage of boys of color who are not suspended as opposed to those who are suspended may seem counterintuitive; the tendency of those who are concerned about racial justice is to highlight disparities to trigger the moral urgency to address them. The dangers of what has come to be called “deficit framing” (Castro 2014), however, is that it runs the risk of confirming underlying stereotypes for some (e.g., “the boys who were suspended must have deserved it”) and a sense of hopelessness for others (Jones et al. 2016).

That being said, the rates at which boys of color do receive out-of-school suspension is exceedingly troubling, particularly because the data are so clear that these disproportionalities are linked to subjective (or ill-defined) criteria for disciplinary action, such as willful defiance, disrespect, and loitering (Losen et al. 2015).

**FIGURE 1. Students receiving out-of-school suspensions by race/ethnicity and gender**



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011–12.



## BACKGROUND

Research by Losen and colleagues (2015) shows significant variation between states as well as wide ranges for different groups of students (see Table 1). For black students, for example, the suspension rate ranges between 5% in North Dakota to 34% in Wisconsin; for Latino students, 4% in North Dakota to 21% in Rhode Island; and for American Indian students, 2% in Ohio and 21% in North Carolina.

It is also important to recognize that while black boys are at greatest risk of suspension across these data, black girls experience the second highest rates at the secondary school level (see Table 2).

**TABLE 1. Highest-Suspending States by Racial/Ethnic Group and English Learners at Secondary Level**

	ALL	BLACK	WHITE	LATINO	AMERICAN INDIAN	ASIAN AMERICAN	HAWAIIAN / PACIFIC ISLANDER	EL
<b>STATE</b>	FL	WI	FL	RI	NC	RI	RI	MT
<b>RATE</b>	19%	34%	14%	21%	21%	7%	15%	19%

**TABLE 2. National Rates by Race, with Gender, at the Secondary Level**

	ALL	BLACK	WHITE	LATINO	AMERICAN INDIAN	ASIAN AMERICAN
<b>MALE</b>	28.4%	15.2%	14.4%	9.4%	9.6%	3.7%
<b>FEMALE</b>	17.9%	8.1%	6.9%	3.8%	4.7%	1.0%

Just as states vary widely in their suspension rates, so too do school districts.

What explains the dramatic distinctions in the disciplinary treatment of some groups—notably black, American Indian, Alaska Native, biracial—compared to others? The research undermines any assumption that suspension rates reflect different levels of suspension-worthy behavior by boys of color compared to white boys. Skiba and colleagues found that discipline and suspension disparities were not based upon more severely problematic behavior by black or Latino youth, such as bringing weapons to school or acting aggressively toward other students. Rather, they found that the greatest racial disparities were in responses to subjective behaviors such as “disrespect or loitering.” Black and Latino students are less likely to be given detention or other moderate consequences. Instead, black students have almost four times the odds, and Latino students twice the odds, of being suspended or even expelled in elementary school for minor infractions (Skiba et al. 2011).

## BACKGROUND

Suspension, expulsion, and officer referrals are the most extreme forms of disproportionate discipline, but to truly address the treatment of boys of color in schools, we must also monitor and understand the seemingly lower-stakes dynamics between teachers and students that affect their day-to-day experience. A number of prominent researchers posit that teacher attitudes play a crucial role in disproportionate discipline (Fergus 2016; Gregory, Cornell, & Fan 2011). Vavrus and Cole (2002) conducted an ethnographic study of urban schools and found that officer referrals that ultimately led to suspensions were a result of students' "violation of implicit interactional codes," in which a student was seen as calling into question established classroom practices or the teacher's authority (p. 108). In a sense, teachers may view actions of boys of color through a lens clouded by racial stereotypes. These perceptions are challenging to disrupt, but they are far from fixed.

Research indicates that teachers, like the rest of us, are subject to an array of biases and anxieties linked to race and ethnicity, which affect their judgment of students' behavior and their interpersonal dynamics with students (Harber et al. 2012; Okonofua & Eberhardt 2015; Godsil et al. 2014; Fergus 2016 forthcoming). Further, these biases and anxieties trigger and exacerbate stereotype threats in students, essentially confirming negative stereotypes that constrain students' potential. Understanding the mechanisms behind the various forms of differential treatment experienced by boys of color is the first step to disrupting them.





# Implicit Bias

*Implicit bias* is the brain's automatic, instantaneous association of stereotypes and attitudes with particular groups (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner 2002). These biases exist beyond our conscious awareness and are often contrary to our conscious values and ideals.

Even those who pride themselves on their objectivity—lawyers, judges, doctors—have been shown to be affected by implicit biases (Godsil et. al 2014). Distorted stereotypes associating black and Latino boys and men with violence, criminality, and poverty have been and continue to be common in the media (Baretto 2014; Dixon 2008). While mainstream images of American Indians are not common, old stereotypes linked to savagery as well as more current stereotypes of poverty, remain powerful and are rarely balanced by more authentic and accurate

portrayals. Indeed, Chaney and colleagues found that non-American Indian college students held implicit biases toward American Indian (AI) people, and that American Indian mascots “were perceived as essentially equivalent to AI people” (Chaney, Burke, & Burkly 2011, p. 49).

Implicit bias affects our judgments of others. For example, in studies of facial expressions (see image below), white participants with stronger implicit racial bias perceive black faces as angrier than white participants with weaker levels of bias. Similarly, those with stronger implicit bias are apt to consider an expression happy or neutral if displayed by a white person, but neutral or angry if displayed by a black person (Hugenberg & Bodenhausen 2003).



## IMPLICIT BIAS

Research shows that our implicit biases are also reflected in our body language: we stand further away from and engage in less eye contact with people about whom we have bias (Richeson & Shelton 2008). Though these behaviors may seem subtle, they are perceptible to the people we are interacting with. As a result, when we do not focus on our body language, our bias seeps through, and we come across as less friendly to others.

Teachers are not immune to these dynamics. The impact of bias on body language has direct implications for teacher–student dynamics, as students of color may perceive teachers to be less warm and personable. Research shows that teachers ask white students more questions, and give them more encouragement, than students of color. Teachers have been found to hold different academic expectations of students based on the student’s race (Tenenbaum & Ruck 2007). A recent study shows that black students are half as likely as white students to be

assigned to “gifted” programs (Grissom & Redding 2016). As these studies suggest, some teachers may hold implicit biases about their students, such that they believe their students of color to be less capable or less well-behaved. Another significant concern is that teachers experience a common phenomenon called “confirmation bias,” in which we see what we expect to see based upon stereotypes and then draw conclusions that confirm those stereotypes (Nextions 2014). For instance, a teacher may identify more spelling errors in one student’s essay or may assume one student to have initiated a scuffle in the hallway.

While it is a critically important phenomenon to understand, implicit bias is not the only unconscious source of differential treatment of boys of color in schools. Two related phenomena, racial anxiety and stereotype threat, also have implications for disproportionate rates of discipline among this population.







## Racial Anxiety

*Racial anxiety* is the brain's stress response before or during an interracial interaction. (Tropp & Page-Gould 2015). People of any race can experience it, though the source of the anxiety is different. People of color may be anxious that they will be subject to stereotyping, discrimination, or distant treatment, while white people may worry that we will be assumed to be racist or met with distrust. Not surprisingly, if two people are both anxious that an interaction will be negative, it usually ends up being negative. Racial anxiety causes us to avoid eye contact, use less friendly tones of voice, and have shorter interactions (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner 2002). This sets up a negative feedback loop in which both individuals' fears are confirmed by the behavior of the other. For some of us, racial anxiety leads us to avoid these interactions altogether.

Racial anxiety has important implications for the school context. A white teacher may be less likely to engage in direct eye contact with students of color or to convey confidence and warmth in interactions with them. A robust literature has established that the quality of student-teacher relationship is among the strongest predictors of classroom behavior, particularly during adolescence (Okonofua, Paunesku, & Walton 2016; Toldson, McGee, & Lemmons 2015; Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder 2004). Students still

developing their cognitive-control regions on the brain rely upon trusted teachers to guide growth (Kesner 2002). When teachers' treatment of students lacks warmth and confidence, the risk is the teachers will not inspire necessary trust, and students may not respond well to modest disciplinary measures; or a teacher's racial anxiety may inhibit the establishment of structure and boundaries. In either instance, the student may misbehave, confirming a stereotype that the student is a "troublemaker" and making harsher disciplinary responses more likely (Okonofua & Eberhardt 2015).

Racial anxiety may also be triggered in students of color if students feel as though teachers are disciplining them unfairly. This dynamic may be similar to the so-called legitimacy consequences that have been identified in the interactions between police and black citizens (Tyler et al. 2004). The all-too-reasonable perception among many black citizens that they are unfairly racially profiled can lead them to view police officers as likely to be racially biased and to lack legitimacy. Tense interactions between police and black citizens can be understood as marked by racial anxiety on both sides. The disciplinary data raises similar concerns about how boys of color may feel about teachers in relation to discipline.

# Stereotype Threat

*Stereotype threat* is the brain's impaired cognitive functioning when a negative stereotype about our identity group is activated (Steele 2012). In those circumstances, even without conscious awareness, we have a psychological stress response to the situation. The result is usually underperformance on the task, and often, confirmation of the stereotype people are unconsciously worried about. Stereotype threat is frequently triggered in high pressure situations or when the outcome is of high value; thus, it is particularly significant in the school context. In fact, the concept was borne out of a education setting (Steele & Aronson 1995).

Stereotype threat has been shown to lead to the underperformance, across several subjects, of students of color, as they unconsciously grapple with the stereotypes about their abilities (Walton & Spencer 2009). In a rare study assessing stereotype threat among American Indian students, researchers found that American Indian college students exposed to images of American Indian sports mascots had lower achievement expectancies (Fryberg et al. 2008). In fact, researchers conclude that due to stereotype threat, conventional measures of academic performance significantly underestimate the ability of stereotyped groups. In concrete terms, this translates to a difference of 62 points on the SAT (Walton & Spencer 2009). Stereotype threat has been shown to be a critical factor in disparities in students' academic achievement.

Of note, stereotype threat among staff can affect students' outcomes as well. White staff members are often subconsciously battling the stereotype that white people are racist. Research shows that white teachers give less critical feedback to black students because they fear that negative comments will be perceived as race-based (Harber 2012). Less criticism may not seem as harmful as other more active forms of bias, but students can often tell when they are not being held to a high standard, and that perception can foster distrust of the teacher, lead to a feeling of alienation, and result in disengagement with school. While we may perceive praise as good and helpful, false praise

undermines, rather than encourages, a student's growth. When given skewed feedback, students of color are uninformed about the actual quality of their work and are deprived of the necessary tools to learn and improve. Students are also often aware when praise is unwarranted (1998) and view critical feedback as a sign of care when it is conveyed supportively and shows the teacher's belief that the student can do better (Cohen, Steele, & Ross 1999; Cohen & Steele 2002; Yeager et al. 2014).

As noted in the discussion of racial anxiety, a trusting relationship and a feeling of respect are critical to the teacher–student relationship and closely related to how students respond to discipline (Toldson, McGee, & Lemmons 2015). For black and Latino male students, academic disengagement has been found to be the strongest predictor of disciplinary referrals, while aggressive behavior and school crime were stronger predictors for white male students (Toldson, McGee, & Lemmons 2015). As a result, a classroom or school that triggers stereotype threat and leads to disengagement in students is more likely to induce misbehavior in students of color than a climate in which students feel like they are academically capable (Steele 1992).

Research is currently underway to determine whether teachers and staff of color face stereotype threat about their job performance—a phenomenon that may be exacerbated when school leadership is predominantly white or when the external assessments of schools are linked to a set of preconceptions about the race and ethnicity of the students. This experience of threat may lead to more punitive responses of teachers of color to students and may help explain the disproportionate disciplinary outcomes found even in school districts in which the administrators and teachers mirror the demographics of the students.

# Interventions to Combat Implicit Bias, Racial Anxiety, and Stereotype Threat

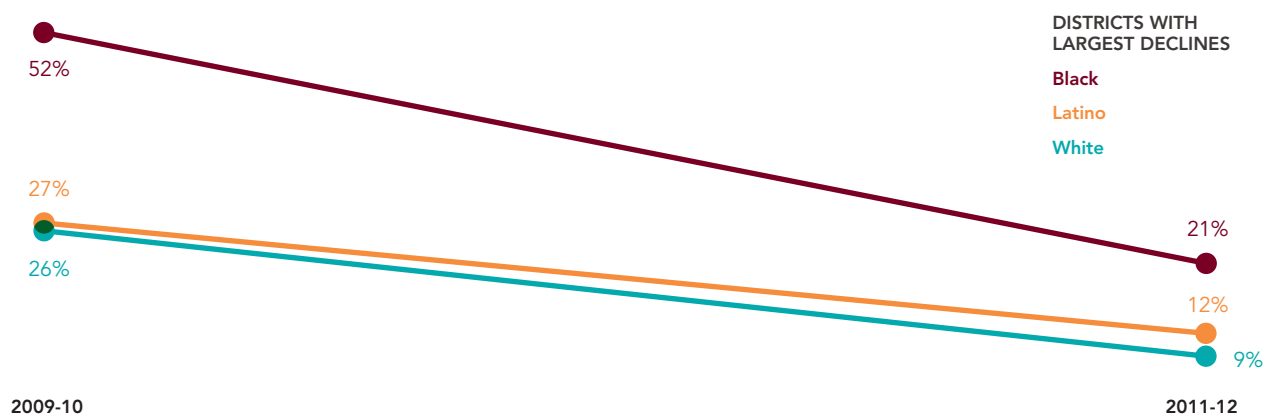
Education researchers have identified a set of practices to address the overuse of discipline. The most effective practices in the immediate are to end harsh disciplinary policies that suspend students for minor infractions: breaking the dress code, using a cell phone in class, or truancy (Losen 2015). What is the logic behind suspending a student from school for failing to attend school? As Losen has argued, eliminating these policies is cost-free and the administrative time and energy spent on administering such policies can be redirected toward facilitating strong teacher–student and teacher–parent relationships (Losen 2015; Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson 2015). To foster a supportive environment, resources should be directed toward increasing social and emotional learning initiatives, numbers of school counselors, and support services for students with special needs (Finn & Servoss 2015; Osher et al. 2015).

Other practices that have shown success in reducing disciplinary exclusion include School-wide Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (SW PBIS) (Sprague & Horner 2006; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson 2010) and restorative justice practices (Gonzales 2015; Skiba et al. 2011).

As the data in Figure 1 show, the array of policy and practice changes have had a positive impact in reducing overall suspensions, but there is still significant work to be done to address the disproportionate discipline of boys of color. Restorative justice programs, often referred to as restorative practice in school settings, are based on respect, responsibility, relationship-building, and relationship-repairing, focusing on mediation and agreement rather than punishment by exclusion. These programs have shown promise in both reducing overall suspensions as well as the racial gap in discipline (Gonzales 2015).

However, disproportionate discipline continues to be a challenge. We can use insights from social psychology to explain the disjuncture between intentions and behaviors, and to supplement existing strategies. Evidence-based interventions that have arisen from this research can be used to provide schools and teachers with the tools to grapple with the role that race and ethnic differences play in creating obstacles to fair discipline and academic achievement.

**FIGURE 2. Average Per-District Decline by Subgroup, 2009-10 to 2011-12, across the 28 Districts with the Greatest Declines**





## 1 *Tackling the Bias Lens and “Deficit Culture” Perception of Students of Color*

The research discussed in this report makes a powerful case that all of us, including teachers, are at risk of viewing student behavior through a biased lens. Fortunately, researchers have identified interventions that address implicit biases. The interventions fall into two categories: bias reduction and bias override. Bias reduction is the fundamental goal because the biased lens itself is altered; however, a complete amelioration of our biases is unlikely to happen in the near term. Thus, pursuing bias override simultaneously is crucial.

The most effective bias reduction strategies are a series of steps Devine and colleagues (2012) have described as “breaking the prejudice habit.” In a longitudinal study, participants who engaged in these strategies showed significant reductions in implicit racial bias, which were maintained over eight weeks of follow-up (Devine et al.).

- Stereotype Behavior Replacement:** Recognize when a response is based on a stereotype, label the response as stereotypical, reflect on why the response occurred, and consider how this biased response could be avoided in the future. Replace the biased response with one that is consistent with egalitarian values.
- Counter-Stereotypic Imaging:** Imagine, in detail, counter-stereotyping others. These individuals can be real, fictional, or imagined. The strategy makes these images more readily available and useful for countering stereotypes.
- Individuation:** Gather specific information about individuals in order to prevent making stereotypic inferences. This strategy helps us evaluate others based on personal, rather than group-based, attributes.
- Perspective Taking:** Imagine oneself to be a member of a stereotyped group. This increases empathy toward the group and reduces automatic group-based evaluations.
- Increase Opportunities for Contact:** Seek opportunities to encounter and engage in positive interactions with people from other groups. Contact decreases bias by altering mental representations of the group and improving evaluations of the group.

These strategies can easily be tailored to the school setting. Of course, teachers and staff can engage in each of these strategies individually on a daily basis. Schools can also display posters in classrooms or hallways that counter stereotypes, select reading materials that reflect a wide range of experiences of people of different races, and encourage diverse teams within staff initiatives and student projects.

In addition, researchers have identified that promoting empathy is key to reducing school discipline. Okonofua and colleagues recently conducted an experimental study of a brief online intervention that encouraged teachers to adopt an empathic mindset about discipline (Okonofua, Paunesku, & Walton 2016). The intervention was evaluated at five middle schools in three school districts. The results are remarkable: yearlong student suspension rates were halved, from 9.6% to 4.8%. The intervention also bolstered teachers’ respect for the most at-risk students—those who were previously suspended (Okonofua, Paunesku, & Walton 2016). The authors describe the potential for such interventions to address punitive discipline:

The intervention simply encouraged teachers to view discipline as an opportunity to facilitate mutual understanding and better relationships and empowered teachers to do so in a manner effective for them and their students. The findings suggest that, at least in the school contexts examined here, punitive mindsets about discipline serve as a critical barrier to better teacher-student relationships. Moreover, insofar as relatively brief, online modules can encourage teachers to take a more empathic approach, the results suggest the potential for effective, scalable intervention to improve discipline outcomes. (p. 5224)

## 2 *Overcoming the Relational Challenge of Racial Anxiety*

As discussed, racial anxiety can significantly impact cross-race relationships between teachers and students, and thus contribute to disproportionate disciplinary outcomes. Social science research supports the use of the following strategies to prevent and mitigate racial anxiety:

- Acknowledging Anxiety:** Recognizing the role of racial anxiety in relationships is critical as a first step to allowing the anxiety to dissipate. In a recent study, researchers identified a set of actions that reduce racial anxiety: 1) acknowledging the anxiety triggered by interracial interaction, and 2) alerting participants to the fact that choosing to engage in an interracial interaction helps reduce future feelings of anxiety (Schultz et al. 2015). When participants chose to interact with someone of a different race, these interactions were rated as more positive, with the white participant exhibiting warmer nonverbal behavior.
- Scripts:** Scripts, or predetermined language, are useful for easing an initial interracial interaction, as they shift our attention from what we should say to forming a genuine connection. White people may particularly benefit from this intervention. Studies of interracial interactions demonstrate that providing white people who may otherwise experience racial anxiety with social scripts can reduce racial anxieties (Avery 2009). Social scripts are specific and structured guidelines about what behaviors are appropriate, acceptable, and expected during interracial interactions. By providing this explicit guidance about what constitutes nonprejudiced behavior, the scripts can largely allay the anxiety elicited by the concern that they will be perceived as racist.

### Positive priming

People to think about prior positive cross-group contact before a new cross-group interaction can help to facilitate a positive intergroup experience in that new interaction (Avery 2009).

### Overcome colorblind default

Emphasizing group differences once relationships have been developed can help to build cross-group intimacy and understanding (Godsil et al. 2014).



## 3

*Reducing Stereotype Threat—a Key Impediment to Academic Achievement*

Interventions to reduce stereotype threat among students have been widely studied and effectively implemented in schools, particularly in middle and high school (Erman & Walton 2014). Three key examples are

- **Social Belonging:** Efforts to make students of color feel more welcome and comfortable may make their identity less salient, which then prevents stereotype threat from being triggered. In one study, researchers provided students with survey results showing that upper-year students of all races felt out of place when they began high school but that the feeling abated over time. This small intervention had the effect of protecting students of color from assuming that they did not belong due to their race and helped them develop resilience in the face of adversity (Walton & Cohen 2007).
- **Value Affirmation:** This intervention, like the social belonging intervention, helps students maintain or increase their resilience. Students experiencing stereotype threat often lose track of “their broader identities and values – those qualities that can make them feel positively about themselves and which can increase their resilience and help them cope with adversity” (Erman & Walton 2014). Thus, affirming students’ values and abilities maintains a positive self-image and increases resilience—both of which are protective against stereotype threat.

- **Wise Feedback:** Feedback provided across race may be interpreted as racially motivated. If the feedback is merely critical, it may be the product of bias; if feedback is merely positive, it may be the product of racial condescension. To minimize uncertainty about the motivation for the feedback, research suggests giving feedback that communicates both high expectations and a confidence that an individual can meet those expectations (Yeager et al. 2014) (Cohen, Steele & Ross 1999).

Each of these interventions can be useful in maintaining student engagement and efficacy in academics, which has been shown to be linked with lower levels of disciplinary referrals (Toldson, McGee, & Lemmons 2015). In addition, when students of color are in contexts where they are encouraged to be their best selves, their behavior will run counter to negative stereotypes and, ideally, help reduce teacher implicit bias and its consequences.







# Conclusion

Boys of color are far too often seen as “problems” to be fixed rather than unique individuals to be nurtured and celebrated. School discipline—particularly out-of-school suspension or, even worse, referral to the criminal justice system—is the ultimate punitive exclusion. Insights from social psychology provide a powerful tool to explaining why even well-intentioned teachers and administrators may be acting directly contrary to the goals we share to create environments for our boys to flourish. Research demonstrates how implicit bias, racial anxiety, and stereotype threat get in the way of these goals, but we have the evidence to suggest the efficacy of tailored interventions in combating these phenomena. Hopefully, administrators and teachers alike can implement these interventions, along with other policy and practice changes, to create school environments that fulfill our ideals and allow boys of color to achieve their full potential.



# Endnotes

- Avery, D.R., Richeson, J.A., Hebl, M.R., Ambady, N. (2009). It does not have to be uncomfortable: The role of behavioral scripts in Black-White interactions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94(6): 1382-93.
- Banaji, M. R., & Greenwald, A. G. (2013). *Blindspot: Hidden biases of good people*. Delacorte Press.
- Baretto, M. (2014). Experiencing and coping with social stigma. In M. Mikulincer, P. R. Shaver, J. F., Dovidio, & J. A. Simpson (Eds.), *APA handbook of personality and social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 473–506). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Castro, E. L. (2014). “Underprepared” and “at-risk”: Disrupting deficit discourses in undergraduate STEM recruitment and retention programming. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 51(4), 407–419.
- Chaney, J., Burke, A., & Burkley, E. (2011). Do American Indian Mascots= American Indian People? Examining Implicit Bias towards American Indian People and American Indian Mascots. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research: The Journal of the National Center*, 18(1), 42-62.
- Cohen, G. L. & Steele, C. M. (2002). A barrier of mistrust: How stereotypes affect cross-race mentoring. In J. Aronson (Ed.), *Improving academic achievement: Impact of psychological factors on education* (pp. 205-331). Oxford, England: Academic Press.
- Cohen, G. L., Steele, C. M., & Ross, L. D. (1999). The mentor's dilemma: Providing critical feedback across the racial divide. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 25(10), 1302–1318.
- Correll, J., Park, B., Judd, C. M., & Wittenbrink, B. (2002). The police officer's dilemma: using ethnicity to disambiguate potentially threatening individuals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(6), 1314.
- Correll, J., Park, B., Judd, C.M., Wittenbrink, B. (2007). The influence of stereotypes on decisions to shoot. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 37, 1102-1117.
- Crosnoe, R., Johnson, M. K. & Elder, G. H. (2004). Intergenerational bonding in school: the behavioral and contextual correlates of student-teacher relationships. *Sociology of Education*, 77, 60-81.
- Devine, P. G., Forscher, P. S., Austin, A. J., & Cox, W. T. (2012). Long-term reduction in implicit race bias: A prejudice habit-breaking intervention. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(6), 1267–1278.
- Dixon, T. L. (2008). Crime news and racialized beliefs: Understanding the relationship between local news viewing and perceptions of African Americans and crime. *Journal of Communication*, 58(1), 106-125.
- Dovidio, J. F., Kawakami, K., & Gaertner, S. L. (2002). Implicit and explicit prejudice and interracial interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(1), 62–68.
- Erman, S., & Walton, G. M. (2014). Stereotype Threat and Antidiscrimination Law: Affirmative Steps to Promote Meritocracy and Racial Equality in Education. *S. Cal. L. Rev.*, 88, 307.
- Fergus, E. (2016). *Working Together to Achieve Equity in School Discipline (and School Climate and Culture)*. Retrieved from <http://relnw.educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/events/resources/fergus-nwpbis-slides-030415.pdf>
- Finn, J.D., & Servoss, T.J. (2015). Security measures and discipline in American high schools. In Losen, D.J. (Ed.). *Closing the School Discipline Gap: Equitable Remedies for Excessive Exclusion*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Oyserman, D., & Stone, J. M. (2008). Of warrior chiefs and Indian princesses: The psychological consequences of American Indian mascots. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 30(3), 208-218.
- Godsil, R. D., Tropp, L. R., Goff, P. A., & powell, j. (2014). The Science of Equality, Volume. 1: Addressing Implicit Bias, Racial Anxiety, and Stereotype Threat in Education and Healthcare. *Perception Institute*. Retrieved from: [http://perception.org/app/uploads/2014/11/Science-of-Equality-111214\\_web.pdf](http://perception.org/app/uploads/2014/11/Science-of-Equality-111214_web.pdf)
- González, T. (2015). Socializing schools: Addressing racial disparities in discipline through restorative justice. In D. J. Losen (Ed.), *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gregory, A., Cornell, D., Fan, X. (2011) The relationship of school structure and support to suspension rates for black and white high school students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 20(10): 1-31.
- Grisso, J. A., & Redding, C. (2016). Discretion and Disproportionality. *AERA Open*, 2(1), 1–25.
- Harber, K. D. (1998). Feedback to minorities: Evidence of a positive bias. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(3), 622.
- Harber, K. D., Gorman, J. L., Gengaro, F. P., Butisingh, S., Tsang, W., & Ouellette, R. (2012). Students' race and teachers' social support affect the positive feedback bias in public schools. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(4), 1149–1161.
- Horner, R.H., Sugai, G., Anderson, C.M. (2010). Examining the evidence base for school-wide positive behavior support. *For Exceptional Children*, 42(8), 2-16.
- Hugenberg, K., & Bodenhausen, G. V. (2003). Facing prejudice implicit prejudice and the perception of facial threat. *Psychological Science*, 14(6), 640–643.
- Jones, P. R., Taylor, D. M., Van Allen, K. A., Dampier-Moore, J., Perrin, A., Mullings, R. A., & Chapman, T. O. (2016). “I’m Not Telling”: The Effects of Racial Disparities Communications on Task Persistence Among Blacks, *Journal of Health Communication: International Perspectives*, 21(2), 257-265.
- Kesner, J. E. (2002). The personal side of teaching: Perceptions of teacher-child relationships. *Journal of Early Education and Family Review*, 9(5), 29-40.



- Losen, D. J., Ee, J., Hodson, C., & Martinez, T.E. (2015). Disturbing inequities: Exploring the relationship between racial disparities in special education identification and discipline. In D. J. Losen (Ed.), *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion* (pp. 89-106). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Losen, D. J., & Martinez, T. E. (2013). Out of School and Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools. *The Center for Civil Rights Remedies*. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED541735>
- Neufeld, S. (2014, November 20). At Newark school striving for turnaround, a 12-year-old's fragile success. *The Hechinger Report*. Retrieved from: <http://hechingerreport.org/newark-school-striving-turnaround-12-year-olds-fragile-success/>
- Nextions. (2014). *Written in black & white: Exploring confirmation bias in racialized perceptions of writing skills*. (Yellow Paper Series). Retrieved from <http://www.nextions.com/nextions-library/articles-research-studies>
- Okonofua, J. A., & Eberhardt, J. L. (2015). Two strikes race and the disciplining of young students. *Psychological science*, 26(5), 617-624.
- Okonofua, J. A., Paunesku, D., & Walton, G. M. (2016). Brief intervention to encourage empathic discipline cuts suspension rates in half among adolescents. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(19), 5221-5226.
- Osher, D., Amos, L., Wehmah, J., & Coleman, V. (2015). Comprehensive community initiatives in education reform: The case of Say Yes to Education. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 40, 47-56.
- Payne, B. K. (2001). Prejudice and perception: The role of automatic and controlled processes in misperceiving a weapon. *Journal of Personality Social Psychology*, 81, 181-192.
- Payne, B.K., Jacoby, L. L., & Lambert, A.J. (2005). Attitudes as accessibility bias: Dissociating automatic and controlled components. In R. Hassin, J. Bargh, & J. Uleman (Eds.), *The new unconscious*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Schultz, J.R., Gaither, S.E., Urry, H.L., & Maddox, K.B. (2015). Reframing anxiety to encourage interracial interactions. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, 1(4), 392-400.
- Shelton, J. N., & Richeson, J. A. (2006). Interracial interactions: A relational approach. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 38, 121-181.
- Skiba, R. J., Horner, R. H., Chung, C., Rausch, M. K., May, S. L., & Tobin, T. (2011). Race is not neutral: A national investigation of African American and Latino disproportionality in school discipline. *School Psychology Review*, 40(1), 85-107.
- Sprague, J. R. & Horner, R. H. (2006). Schoolwide positive behavior supports. In S. R. Jimerson & M. J. Furlong (Eds.), *The handbook of school violence and school safety: From research to practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Steele, C. M. (1992, April). Race and the schooling of black Americans. *The Atlantic Monthly*.
- Steele, C. M. (2012). Extending and applying stereotype threat research: A brief essay. *Stereotype Threat: Theory, Process, and Application*, 297.
- Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(5), 797.
- Steinberg, M.P., Allensworth, E., & Johnson, D.W. (2015). What conditions support safety in urban schools? The influence of school organizational practices on student and teacher reports of safety in Chicago. In Losen, D.J. (Ed.) *Closing the School Discipline Gap: Equitable Remedies for Excessive Exclusion*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Tenenbaum, H. R., & Ruck, M. D. (2007). Are teachers' expectations different for racial minority than for European American students? A meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99(2), 253-273.
- Todd, A. R., Thiem, K. C., & Neel, R. (2016). Does Seeing Faces of Young Black Boys Facilitate the Identification of Threatening Stimuli? *Psychological Science*, 1, 10.
- Toldson, I.A., McGee, T., & Lemmons, B.P. (2015). Reducing suspensions by improving academic engagement among school-age Black males. In D.J. Losen (Ed.), *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion* (pp. 107-117). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Tropp, L., & Page-Gould, E. (2015). Contact between groups. In *APA handbook of personality and social psychology, Volume 2: Group processes* (pp. 535-560). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Tyler, T.R. & Wakslak, C. (2004). Profiling and the legitimacy of the police. *Criminology*, 42, 13-42.
- U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. (2014, March 21). Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (School Discipline). Retrieved from <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf>
- Vavrus, F., & Cole, K. (2002). "I didn't do nothing": The discursive construction of suspension. *Urban Review*, 34, 87-111.
- Walter, G.M. & Cohen, G.L. (2007). A question of belonging: Race, social fit, and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(1), 82-96.
- Walton, G. M., & Spencer, S. J. (2009). Latent Ability: Grades and Test Scores Systematically Underestimate the Intellectual Ability of Negatively Stereotyped Students. *Psychological Science*, 20(9), 1132-1139.
- Yeager, D. S., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Garcia, J., Apfel, N., Brzustoski, P., Master, A., & Cohen, G. L. (2014). Breaking the cycle of mistrust: Wise interventions to provide critical feedback across the racial divide. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 143(2), 804-825.



RISE is a joint initiative co-led by Equal Measure and the  
University of Southern California Race and Equity Center.

**RISE for Boys and Men of Color**

[www.risebmoc.org](http://www.risebmoc.org)