

# Ethnic Discipline Gap: Unseen Dimensions of Racial Disproportionality in School Discipline

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*Research on the school discipline gap reveals growing awareness of the disproportionate impact on students of color; however, dynamics of the racial discipline gap remain underanalyzed. This article uses risk ratios to descriptively establish if ethnic disproportionality in school discipline is present among Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) subgroups. We find that when AAPI data are disaggregated, significant variations in discipline patterns emerge. Pacific Islanders are nearly twice as likely as their White*

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*peers to be disciplined when separated from Asian Americans, and all Pacific Islander subgroups are at equal or higher risk for discipline. We also find a discipline gap between ethnic subgroups. Our findings affirm the need to further refine the analyses of race and school discipline.*

**KEYWORDS:** Asian American, Pacific Islander, race, school discipline

Racial disproportionality in school discipline has been recognized as an indicator of possible inequitable practices in schools (Balfanz & Fox, 2015; Losen, 2011; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Research shows that punitive<sup>1</sup> school discipline practices and policies that rely heavily on exclusionary<sup>2</sup> discipline, such as suspension and expulsion, contribute to lower student achievement and higher dropout rates (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Noguera, 2008). Several studies have shown that punitive discipline practices are also a major impediment to the educational opportunities of minority students, and even a violation of their fundamental civil rights (Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). A recent report by the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education documented wide and persistent racial disparities in school discipline practices throughout the nation, including a pattern of inordinately high suspension rates among Black preschool children (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Despite the attention and sense of urgency that these reports have generated, the problem now known as the “racial discipline gap” (Gregory et al., 2010) continues to plague America’s schools today.

Though the issue has received considerable attention in recent years, racial disparities in school discipline are not new. A 1975 report published by the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) grimly described the problematic relationship between race and school discipline. Appearing in a brochure with black-and-white photos of schoolchildren and educators, the report plainly warned,

Racial discrimination in the discipline process must be investigated and attacked with great urgency. Schools and administrators should examine the patterns of suspensions in their own districts and pay special attention to schools where the proportion of suspensions seriously exceeds the racial proportions in those schools. (p. 72)

Following the recommendation of the CDF report, more research has been conducted on racial discrimination in the discipline process. The groups of interest in most of these studies are Black, Latino, and Native American students—all of whom, research has shown, are more likely to experience disproportionately higher rates of school discipline. The Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (2014), for example, used national data to conclude that Black students are suspended and expelled 3 times more often than White students (p. 3). Although contemporary research on the persistence of this phenomenon, such as the Office for

Civil Rights report, reveals growing awareness of the harmful impact that punitive forms of discipline have on targeted students, the overwhelming majority of which are low-income students of color (Gregory et al., 2010; Orfield & Lee, 2007; Skiba et al., 2011), the dynamics of the racial discipline gap as it pertains to particular subgroups remain underanalyzed.

Most studies and reports on race and school discipline, for example, have relegated Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) to a footnote or have aggregated data into a single category. Such practices ignore the disadvantages that existing research shows may be concentrated within specific ethnic subgroups (Davis & Pfeifer, 2015; Henry, 2015; Miller et al., 2011; Nelson, Leung, & Cobb, 2016; Nittle, 2016; Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2013; Terriquez, Chlala, & Sacha, 2013). When viewed as a monolithic racial category, it is clear that AAPIs do not face disproportionate rates of school discipline as compared to other racial minorities, or even to Whites (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018). However, as we show in this article, this practice overlooks the possibility that disparities may be present among AAPI ethnic subgroups. Given that existing data reveal significant differences in high school graduation rates and median household income among AAPI subgroups (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2013), it is possible that similar patterns may emerge through an analysis of school discipline data.

We take this possibility as motivation for our investigation. Our article seeks to answer the research question: Are there patterns of variance among AAPIs within the racial discipline gap that can establish the presence of an ethnic discipline gap? Although specific to AAPIs, this question and its answer are also significant to other groups for whom the effects of aggregation (CARE, 2013) are of concern. Research has shown that the experiences of several smaller subgroups, such as Native American immigrants from Latin America (Decker, 2011), immigrant-origin Blacks (Daoud, English, Griffin, & George Mwangi, 2018), and others, often go undetected, due to their being included in broader social categories (e.g., Latinos and African Americans). We speculate that as America's schools become increasingly diverse (Kent, 2015), as a result of both immigration and childbirth patterns, new categories related to ethnicity, language, nationality, and immigration status may be necessary to avoid the problems associated with aggregation. Our hope is that such an analysis will make it possible in future research to better identify all the student groups who are likely to be targeted, yet overlooked in research, for punitive discipline. Undoubtedly, such an approach to disaggregation could also prove helpful to educational research on other topics related to the experience of other small subgroups.

Using state-level data from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), which collects data disaggregated by AAPI ethnic subgroup, this study uses risk ratios to descriptively establish if ethnic disproportionality in school discipline is present.

We find that when AAPI data are disaggregated, significant variations in discipline patterns emerge. We also find a discipline gap between ethnic subgroups. This finding affirms the need to further analyze and refine analyses of the relationship between race and school discipline.

### **Disproportionality and School Discipline**

The need to understand patterns of racial disproportionality in school discipline is increasingly urgent. Several studies have found that such patterns are widespread in schools throughout the United States and that the consequences for students of color are highly significant (Brown & Tillio, 2013; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). For example, in a report on the growing expulsion rates in New York City's public schools, the overwhelming majority of which serve low-income students of color, the New York Civil Liberties Union found that schools with higher rates of suspensions often experience a wide variety of hardships and shortages that affect student learning, such as limited access to guidance counselors and advanced placement courses, fewer experienced teachers, and lower state and school exam scores (Miller, et al., 2011). Similarly, the UCLA Civil Rights Project identified a related, and equally troubling, pattern with respect to the loss of time in classrooms experienced by students—mostly Black—who are suspended or expelled. The study found that students who were most likely to be suspended were also more likely to drop out of school (Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

Several other reports have drawn attention to even more ominous implications related to excessive reliance on punitive forms of discipline. A report by the Advancement Project (2010), for example, detailed the link between discipline and the likelihood of being incarcerated—now commonly referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline. Other agencies and research organizations (Davis & Pfeifer, 2015; Henry, 2015; Miller et al., 2011; Nelson et al., 2016; Nittle, 2016; Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2013; Terriquez et al., 2013) have released similar reports calling attention to the damaging implications of racial disproportionality in school discipline practices. Apparent in each of these reports, and the research literature used to support their findings, is the importance of uncovering how racial disproportionality in school discipline may affect particular groups such as Black and Latino males, special education students, and others. There is growing awareness that such practices often have a negative impact on educational outcomes of targeted students and adversely affect their opportunity, to not only succeed academically but also achieve upward mobility beyond their school years.

Equally significant to the implications of racial disproportionality is why disproportionality occurs. Some research has focused on answering this very question. For example, a study on the relationship between school structures and suspension rates found that an indifferent and impersonal school culture

contributed to some of the disproportionality in Black and White suspension rates (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011). The authors suggest that a closer examination of mechanisms within schools that produce this disparity is needed. They also hypothesize that teachers play a significant role in influencing these outcomes and call for further research on the role of teachers in the discipline process. A study by Skiba et al. (2002) confirms this hypothesis. Skiba and his colleagues found that in the district where they carried out their research, discipline referrals typically originated in the classroom and were heavily influenced by teacher recommendations, rather than from administrative decisions alone (Skiba et al., 2002). Furthermore, the study finds that “Black students are more likely to be referred to the office for more subjective reasons” (p. 335), such as for excessive noise or disrespect, than their White classmates’ objective referrals (e.g., smoking, vandalism). The subjective nature of such infractions draws attention to disciplinary decisions within classrooms. For example, an ethnographic study examining the sociocultural factors that undergird teachers’ decisions to remove students from classrooms revealed that suspensions are not always initiated by “violence or flagrant violations” (Vavrus & Cole, 2002, p. 109) but are tied to a “singling-out process” (p. 109) that most often occurs in classrooms where the students’ race and gender mismatch that of their teachers. This pattern led the authors to conclude that “this subtle, often unconscious process may be one of the reasons students of color often experience suspension in the absence of violent behavior” (p. 109).

The possibility that implicit bias or other forms “unconscious bias” may play a role in discipline decisions is reinforced in a study on teachers’ views of the racial disproportionality in school discipline. One study found that “most teachers did not consider issues of race and culture when theorizing about why discipline problems occur” (Gregory & Mosely, 2004, p. 26). In fact, the authors find that many teachers offered, “[. . .] theories [that] were ‘colorblind’ such that they could not account for the gap across racial and ethnic groups in the application of discipline sanctions” (p. 26). Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, and Pollock (2017) point out the risk of this so-called unconscious decision making, as it allows “old patterns [to] continue to be reinforced through the ongoing processes of implicit bias, micro-aggressions, and colorblindness” (p. 207). Whether or not the disproportionality in discipline is intentional, it is clear from past research that bias about groups of students, overt or implicit, may play a significant role in racial disproportionality in school discipline.

### **Asian American and Pacific Islander Students and School Discipline**

The role of racial bias in school discipline practices continues to be an issue that requires further investigation, which is also true for AAPI students, although they are often overlooked in this area of research. Due to the

concept of the model minority—the notion that unlike other ethnic minority groups, AAPIs achieve universal and unparalleled academic success because they are docile, hardworking, and smart (Suzuki, 1977)—AAPIs are not the focus of concern in education (and many other matters pertaining to social policy), including in discipline studies.

The model minority hypothesis has been prevalent in educational research and the national media since the 1960s (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007; Petersen, 1966). Despite several studies refuting its primary thesis (Lee, 2015; Lee & Kumashiro, 2005; Pang, Han, & Pang, 2011), the notion of universal success and compliant behavior among AAPI populations persists to this day. Several scholars have suggested that by positioning AAPIs as model minorities, other minorities can be encouraged to believe that if they too adopt a strong work ethic and a compliant attitude (Pang & Cheng, 1998), success and mobility will be more likely.

Of course, the model minority framing often results in AAPIs being treated as a monolithic group, despite the enormous differences among them. In education, although patterns of relative academic success are common among some Asian groups, there is a tendency to assume that rates of achievement are uniform among all AAPIs, regardless of ethnicity, class, nationality, or immigration status. However, closer examination of educational data (when disaggregated data is available) reveals that while some AAPI groups are highly successful (e.g., only 4.8% of Taiwanese and 5.3% of Japanese have earned less than a high school degree), aggregate data do not capture the experiences of smaller segments of the AAPI population (CARE, 2013). For example, nationally, 37.4% of Cambodian and 33.8% of Lao students reported earning less than a high school diploma (CARE, 2013). The prevalence of the model minority stereotype distorts and renders invisible the experiences of these smaller groups. Lack of access to disaggregated data combined with the model minority stereotype has led some researchers and policymakers to assume that analyses of subgroups such as Southeast Asians (e.g., Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, Vietnamese) and Pacific Islanders (e.g., Samoan, Tongan) are not necessary. However, the few studies that are available on these subgroups reveal that they face significant structural barriers that often impede their educational achievement and attainment and, thus, their life circumstances (Empowering Pacific Islander Communities [EPIC], 2014; Kao, 1995; Ngo & Lee, 2007).

The disparities within the AAPI group are particularly significant for Pacific Islanders, who face vastly different challenges than Asian American groups, particularly East Asian ethnic subgroups (EPIC, 2014). Despite this, the 1970 Census adopted “a catchall racial home for groups more commonly described by nationality—Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander” (Prewitt, 2013, p. 101–102). Although by 1997, the Office of Management and Budget mandated that Pacific Islander groups be separated from Asian Americans, it is still not common practice, and the nearly half

a century-old arbitrary construction of the AAPI racial category continues to be used in research.

With respect to discipline, it is routine to disregard the experiences of AAPIs because when aggregated, existing data reveal that they are less likely to be disciplined than other racial groups (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018). However, because so few studies on school discipline feature or include this population, we know relatively little about the experiences of these groups. In one of few studies that examine the relationship between AAPIs and school discipline, findings revealed that while Asian suspensions in San Diego increased overall by 22%, the suspension rates of Indochinese—Hmong, Lao, Khmer, and Vietnamese—grew even more rapidly by 47% (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). Examining this subgroup more closely, the study found that Lao and Vietnamese students, in particular, are overrepresented in suspensions. Duration of suspensions also varied by ethnicity: Hmong students, who were the least likely to be suspended overall, faced longer periods of suspension than other groups (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988).

Other research suggests that differences in discipline rates may be related to how groups are perceived (Skiba et al., 2002; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). One study found that Hmong high school students, for example, are viewed as “either high-achieving ‘model minorities’ or low-achieving ‘delinquents’” (Lee, 2001, p. 505). In the qualitative study carried out by Lee (2001), Hmong students were frequently described as “wearing the baggy clothes, not attending school” (Lee, 2001, p. 510) and were seen as the “bad kids” (p. 510). One educator claimed the Hmong students were not like other Asians because they exhibited “truancy, rising dropout rates, and delinquency” (Lee, 2001, Lee, 2001, p. 506). Despite significant differences in the characterizations of Asian subgroups made by educators, the absence of data disaggregated by ethnicity and the persistence of the model minority stereotypes make it difficult to study the particular experiences of groups like the Hmong and address the educational challenges they face.

Pacific Islanders also face educational barriers similar to Southeast Asian students, such as Hmong and Lao, yet there is very little research on Pacific Islanders and school discipline. Our review of the literature did yield one study that found disproportionate rates of juvenile delinquency and in-school infractions among the population (Nagasawa, Qian, & Wong, 2001). However, due to their small population in national- and state-level data sets, it is difficult to find data specifically on Pacific Islander students and school discipline, let alone data that are disaggregated by subgroup. There are school districts where Pacific Islanders constitute a larger percentage of the student population, but even in these cases, district- and school level-data are typically not disaggregated into further subgroups.

Washington State is an exception. The state does collect data that are disaggregated by ethnicity. In the remainder of this article we draw upon data from that state to analyze how Pacific Islander students fare in terms of

school discipline. Existing studies on school discipline reveal that AAPIs are a group that is not typically the focus of studies on racial inequality. However, their inclusion in data on school discipline in Washington State provides an opportunity to uncover new insights related to the relationship between race/ethnicity and school discipline. Our contention is that by focusing on the disaggregated educational experiences of AAPIs, it will be possible to reveal broader patterns of inequity that require more detailed attention in studies on the racial discipline gap.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To draw attention to how racial categorization can both be used to illuminate and obscure patterns of racial inequality, we draw upon the racial formation theory developed by Omi and Winant (2015) to guide our examination of ethnic difference in school discipline. Racial formation theory was developed in response to the call for a postracial analysis of society that emerged in the post-civil rights era (Wilson, 1980). In response, Omi and Winant offered a way of understanding how racial hierarchies and racial oppression were maintained after legally sanctioned racial discrimination had been outlawed. Their perspective on the highly political character of racial categories provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding how social categories are often used as a tool in the maintenance and perpetuation of unequal practices, such as disproportionate school discipline.

Omi and Winant (2015) define racial formation as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (p. 109). Most important, Omi and Winant argue that racial categories are social and political manifestations of a social order that is designed to maintain White dominance and that treats racial categories as historically contingent. Racial categorization has been used to justify domination and discrimination against subordinate groups. Omi and Winant point out that rather than being static, racial categories are constantly evolving, influenced by changes in law and political circumstances.

In the United States, racial categories and the process of categorization have been used to create and maintain racial hierarchies and to rationalize inequitable structures (Omi & Winant, 2015). Omi and Winant explain that rather than being based upon scientific notions of racial purity, racial categorization has been arbitrary and political. The seemingly indiscriminate, yet calculated, nature of racial categorization and its implications is demonstrated by the waves of new immigrants entering the United States after changes in immigration laws in 1965, at which time nationality and race were used as political categories to establish and rationalize White dominance via immigration quotas and changes in categorization (Prewitt, 2013). At various times in the nation’s history, for example, discrimination against immigrants, now considered White (e.g., Irish, Slavs, Jews, and



Italians), was rationalized based upon assumptions about how easily these groups could—and how much they were willing to—assimilate into American society (Roediger, 2002, 2005).

For Asian immigrants who arrived in the United States during the 19th century, there was no path to Whiteness and equal treatment under the law. From the beginning, Asians were assumed to be “unassimilable.” Asians were brought to the United States for labor on railroads and in agriculture (particularly in Hawaii and the central valley of California and Hawaii), but to limit the growth of their population, there was a deliberate effort to disproportionately admit Asian males into the country (Takaki, 1989). When exclusion laws were adopted in the late 19th century to halt the growth of the Chinese and Japanese populations, it became even clearer that racial categories were being used to maintain White supremacy and the racial hierarchy that had been in place since the founding of the republic. The implications of discrimination toward Asians remained in practice far after the immigration quotas were rescinded, such as in cities like San Francisco, where Asian immigrants were required to attend racially segregated schools (Kuo, 1998).

Unlike White immigrants, immigrants of color (including Asians) were treated as inferior and regarded as ethnically distinct. In other words, while Italians were viewed as separate from Irish or Poles, they were nonetheless included in the broader White category. However, despite the wide diversity among Asian, Black, and Latino immigrants, these groups were treated and perceived as a monolith. Omi and Winant (2015) describe the racial formation process in this way:

Ethnicity theory has not delved in any significant extent into the meaning of [ethnic group] distinctions. There is a racist element in this substitution—in which whites are seen as variegated in terms of group identities, but blacks, Latin@s, Native Americans, and Asian Americans “all look alike.” (p. 44)

Although discrimination against Asian Americans in the latter 20th century is nothing like the treatment experienced prior to changes in immigration laws in 1965, as we show in our analysis of discipline data, treating AAPIs as a monolithic group serves as the foundation on which the model minority stereotype has been sustained (Suzuki, 1977). By grouping all AAPI ethnic groups under a single category without attention to their social circumstances and life outcomes, and applying the model minority stereotype to the group, the experiences of subgroups that need additional support can be obscured.

By drawing attention to ethnic variation in our analysis of the experiences of AAPI subgroups (CARE, 2013), we hope to refute the model minority stereotype and call for additional research on how immigration, socioeconomic status, and schooling experiences contribute to disparities in educational

outcomes. Omi and Winant (2015) describe this type of analysis as a process of “rearticulation” of racial groups and suggest that redefining racial categories is one way to counter the effects of racial inequality:

This process of *rearticulation* produces new subjectivity by making use of information and knowledge already present in the subject’s mind. [ . . . ] we define rearticulation as a *practice of discursive reorganization or reinterpretation of ideological themes and interests already present in subjects’ consciousness, such that these elements obtain new meaning or coherence.* (p. 165)

In the following sections we investigate if and how a disaggregated analysis of discipline patterns among AAPIs can facilitate the process of rearticulation.

Central to rearticulation is the acknowledgement of how power manifests in the racial order. As previously stated, the seemingly arbitrary process of categorization is a social manifestation of White dominance, a way in which White has retained its place at the top of the racial hierarchy by shifting who is considered White and who gains the privileges of that Whiteness. Thus, while we advance rearticulation of race categories in order to “highlight racial differences and particularities” (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 260), this process also “acknowledges the social structures and practices of race and racism: the vast fabric of inclusion and exclusion, advantage and disadvantage, and power and powerlessness that are built into the social system” (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 261).

As critical race theory highlights, it is necessary to challenge “the traditional claims of [ . . . ] objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal opportunity” (Solorzano, 1998, p. 122); thus examining racial categorization is not only a practice in pointing out unseen disparities but also an effort toward challenging the dominant ideology of a racial hierarchy that maintains White dominance. In education, critical race theory has pointed out the contradictory ways educational systems operate, with potential to oppress and marginalize coexisting with potential to emancipate and empower (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997). By rearticulating racial categories through the examination of a mechanism that oppresses and marginalizes—school discipline—we seek to facilitate a greater understanding of contesting systemic racial inequality in education.

While racial formation theory is useful for understanding why and how existing racial categories misrepresent the experiences of AAPI subgroups, it does not explain the presence of disparities between groups that may be evident when a more detailed analysis is possible. For this reason, we draw on Carter and Welner’s (2013) framing of opportunity gaps to illuminate the discipline gap further. Departing from the conventional academic focus on achievement gaps between groups—captured by disparities in test scores, graduation, and failure, among other outcomes—Carter and Welner advance a theoretical shift to opportunity gaps, which they write, draws “our attention

from outcomes to inputs—to the deficiencies in the foundational components of societies, schools, and communities that produce significant differences in educational—and ultimately socioeconomic—outcomes” (p. 3). Within these systems, an “education debt,” or “forgone schooling resources that we could have (should have) been investing in (primarily) low income kids, which deficit leads to a variety of social problems” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 6), accrues that produces disparities. From this point of view, racial gaps in achievement—between broader racial groups, and between smaller subgroups—are influenced by a long history of exclusion from public education, unequal opportunities to access quality schooling, and uneven investment in students of color, to name but a few (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In this article, we examine another component that produces achievement gaps—school discipline. Determining whether particular groups are disproportionately affected by school discipline practices is essential to ensuring that all students have access to educational opportunities (Losen & Gillespie, 2012), thus equitable opportunity to achieve (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

As we show in this analysis of state-level data, patterns of ethnic differentiation in school discipline can expose gaps in educational opportunities. In illuminating these gaps in opportunity, our hope is that our study will contribute to efforts to rearticulate the boundaries of race in ways that make it possible to better understand discipline disparities and easier to address evidence of discrimination and mistreatment.

## Method

### Study Site

In 2013, Washington State’s legislature enacted a number of changes regarding school punishments resulting in suspension or expulsion. The state mandated that data on discipline be disaggregated to include the collection of nine categories of student behavior (see Jaudon, Came, Stensager, & Sechrist, 2015), seven categories of interventions (see Student Discipline Data Task Force, 2013), and the number of days of suspension or expulsion. The collection of these data allowed for public monitoring of discipline patterns and increased the attention schools placed on their discipline practices. Additionally, the legislature recommended that discipline data be disaggregated by race and by ethnic subgroup, including AAPI subgroups. As one of few states with this level of transparency toward AAPIs, Washington State’s data on discipline provide an opportunity to examine new dimensions of the racial discipline gap.

### Data

Data for this study were provided by the Washington OSPI, which is charged with the collection of all K–12 enrollment and state assessment

*Table 1*  
**Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Asian American  
 and Pacific Islander Ethnic Subgroup Categories**

Asian American	Pacific Islander
Asian Indian	Fijian
Cambodian	Guamanian/Chamorro
Chinese	Mariana Islander
Filipino	Melanesian
Hmong	Micronesian
Indonesian	Native Hawaiian
Japanese	Other Pacific Islander
Korean	Samoan
Lao	Tongan
Other Asian	
Pakistani	
Taiwanese	
Thai	
Vietnamese	

data (Comprehensive Education Data and Research System; for detailed collection procedures, see OSPI, 2017). Included in the data are all students ( $N = 1,050,332$ ) enrolled in any of the K–12 public schools in Washington State in the 2013–14 school year. Of that population, 84,756 or 8.07% are AAPI, who are represented in 14 Asian American and 9 Pacific Islander ethnic subgroup categories (Table 1). These ethnic subgroups were defined by OSPI and were used as categorized and not modified in the study. The racial and ethnic data are collected differently in each district and school using a variety of methods, including intake forms at the start of the academic year, demographic questionnaires, and in some instances where parents/guardians do not submit information, observer identification by a school administrator. Both racial/ethnic and disciplinary data are reported from schools to their respective districts, and from all districts to OSPI.

The data set analyzed in this study draws from state-level data across all K–12 public schools during the 2013–14 academic year. The data reveal discipline patterns for Washington State as a whole, and are not specific to districts/schools/grade levels. The aggregation of discipline data by race and ethnic subgroup does not include other demographic factors, such as gender or socioeconomic status. Furthermore, while data are collected on nine categories that result in suspension or expulsion, the findings in this study are an aggregate of those categories, as the sample becomes too small when examining each disciplinary category by each ethnic subgroup. The data analyzed do not allow for a more nuanced analysis of *why* racial disproportionality may occur; however, they do reveal patterns and allow one to

observe *if* ethnic disproportionality exists. The data also make it possible to determine whether a discipline pattern warrants further investigation. As one of few states to collect disaggregated racial data by ethnic subgroup (e.g., California, Hawaii, Colorado), in addition to tracking disciplinary occurrences, Washington State data offer the opportunity to investigate unseen dimensions of the racial discipline gap.

## Analyses

To examine the racial discipline gap in Washington State, we present three measures: composition index, risk index, and relative risk. The *composition index* describes the proportion of disciplinary occurrences attributed to students of a given racial group. To interpret this, we must compare it to that racial group's proportion of all enrolled students. Overrepresentation is indicated when a group's share of disciplinary occurrences is greater than its share of enrollment, which occurs when Equation (1) is true (where  $i$  indexes racial group).

$$\frac{\text{Occurrences}_i}{\text{Total occurrences}} > \frac{\text{Enrollment}_i}{\text{Total enrollment}} \quad (1)$$

The composition index comparison gives us an intuitive sense of whether each racial group experiences disproportionality; however, it does not allow for across-group comparisons, and it suffers from scaling issues when dealing with very large or small proportions (Gibb & Skiba, 2008). Despite its limitations, this approach is commonly used in racial disproportionality studies (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Gregory et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2011). In alignment with prior research, we also use this statistical method to provide a general landscape of the data.

A second measure, the *risk index* (RI), measures the risk of a disciplinary occurrence within a racial group. In our implementation, shown in Equation (2),  $RI_i$  can be interpreted as the risk of a disciplinary occurrence per 100 students in racial group  $i$  or, more simply, as the number of disciplinary occurrences per 100 students in group  $i$ . The risk index is useful because it allows for a straightforward comparison of discipline rates across groups.

$$RI_i = \frac{\text{Occurrences}_i}{\text{Enrollment}_i / 100} \quad (2)$$

The third measure, known as *relative risk*, is the ratio of the risk indices for two racial groups. Equation (3) shows the calculation of this ratio, where  $RR_{ij}$  can be interpreted as the number of times more likely racial group  $i$  is to experience a disciplinary occurrence compared to racial group  $j$ .

$$RR_{ij} = \frac{RI_i}{RI_j} \quad (3)$$

This method is preferred because it allows us to compare the risk of disciplinary occurrences of each race to a reference group (Bollmer, Bethel,

Garrison-Mogren, & Brauen, 2007). We implement this using the Poisson regression in Equation (4),

$$\log(y_i) = \log(n_i) + \alpha_0 + \beta_i r_i, \tag{4}$$

where, as indexed by racial group,  $y_i$  is the number of occurrences of discipline,  $n_i$  is the number of students in hundreds,  $\log(n_i)$  is an offset, and  $r_i$  is an indicator variable for race. Mirroring many studies on school discipline (Anyon et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2011), we omit the White indicator variable for race, setting White as the comparison group. In this formulation,  $\exp(\beta_i)$  gives the relative risk of discipline of race  $i$  compared to White students. White students serve as the comparison because it reflects common practice in disciplinary studies. Although we do not believe this must always be the case, as a study that aims to establish the presence of the ethnic discipline gap, we follow the methodological approach validated by past research.

The  $p$  values associated with relative risk are indicated via asterisks in the tables in the following sections of this article. Under strong assumptions, these asterisks represent evidence for rejecting the null hypothesis that the indicated race is disciplined at the same rate as White students. We calculated these  $p$  values from the Huber-White standard errors associated with Equation (4). The Huber-White estimator helps control for mild violations of the Poisson distribution assumption that the variance equals the mean (Cameron & Trivedi, 2013). That said, we have almost certainly violated the independence assumption—students may be written up multiple times for the same incident, and incidents may lead to other incidents within a school. This violation can bias  $p$  values downward, inflating the evidence for rejecting the null hypothesis. For this reason, we do not discuss the  $p$  values in terms of hypothesis rejection. We recommend focusing on the magnitude of the relative risk, which is large in many cases, and using the  $p$  value asterisk as supplemental, descriptive evidence, provided by an imperfect statistical test.

## Results

We begin by offering a general landscape of school discipline patterns in Washington State, highlighting the gaps between racial groups in both composition index and risk index. Table 2 follows the general practice of national research by aggregating AAIs into one category. Using the composition index method, we compare “% of Enrollment” to “% of Occurrences” and see that every race besides White and AAPI make up a higher proportion of disciplinary occurrences than their share of the population.

While comparing composition indices provides intuitive evidence for whether any one race is experiencing disproportionate discipline, the measure can be misleading when comparing across groups. For example, even

*Table 2*  
**Asian American and Pacific Islander Aggregated: Descriptive Statistics and Poisson Results**

Category	Enrollment	Occurrences	% of Enrollment	% of Occurrences	Risk Index	Relative Risk
Asian American and Pacific Islander	84,756	2,202	8.07	4.07	2.60	0.62**
Native American	16,346	1,539	1.56	2.84	9.42	2.24**
Black	48,251	6,814	4.59	12.58	14.12	3.35**
Latino	214,114	13,522	20.39	24.97	6.32	1.50**
Two or more	66,755	3,958	6.36	7.31	5.93	1.41**
White	620,053	26,106	59.03	48.22	4.21	Reference
Not provided	57	3	0.01	0.01	5.26	1.25**
Total	1,050,332	54,144	—	—	5.15	—

*Note.* Reference group for relative risk is White students.

\*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

though Native American students have a smaller difference between their proportion of discipline and their proportion of the population ( $2.84\% - 1.56\% = 1.28\%$ ) than Latino students ( $24.97\% - 20.39\% = 4.58\%$ ), this does not mean that Native American students were less likely to be disciplined than Latino students. The sizes of the difference in the proportions are not comparable because smaller groups will naturally have smaller differences. To compare across any two groups, we look to the risk index, or column “RI,” which presents the number of disciplinary occurrences per 100 students for each race. Now we see that Native American students experience 9.42 disciplinary occurrences per 100 students, compared to 6.32 for Latinos, meaning Native American students are disciplined more often per student than Latino students, despite a smaller composition index difference.

Table 2 also shows that Black, Latino, and Native American students are disproportionately more likely to be recipients of school discipline compared to White students. Black students were  $14.12/4.21 = 3.35$  times more likely than their White peers to experience exclusionary discipline. Native American students were  $9.42/4.21 = 2.24$  times more likely and Latino students were  $6.32/4.21 = 1.50$  times more likely than White students to be disciplined. AAPIs, when aggregated, do not disproportionately experience discipline, having the lowest risk of discipline of any racial group.

To demonstrate the importance of disaggregating racial group data, we offer Table 3, with Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders disaggregated from the broader AAPI category, and then further disaggregated into ethnic subgroups. Although Asian Americans are not disproportionately targeted when compared to White students—*p* < .01—Pacific Islanders were nearly 2 times more likely than White students to be disciplined (*p* < .01). Aggregating AAPIs hides the discipline gap experienced by Pacific Islander students because there are more Asian American students, leading to the numerical domination of the aggregate measure. This result illustrates the problem with aggregating AAPIs into one category: The disproportionate rates of Pacific Islander student discipline compared to White students is undetectable.

Table 3 also disaggregates AAPI into ethnic subgroups. When compared to White students, every Asian American subgroup experiences a significantly lower risk of discipline. When comparisons are made between Asian American subgroups, however, disproportionality emerges. The comparisons drawn here are between Southeast Asian subgroups (e.g., Cambodian, Lao) and East Asian subgroups (e.g., Chinese, Taiwanese) because they reflect the stark contrast that exists in the Asian American category, as the educational outcomes of East Asians more reflect the commonly accepted narrative of Asian American success that obscures the disparities of Southeast Asians (CARE, 2013). In this case, Cambodian students have 2.74 disciplinary occurrences per 100 students. Compared to



Table 3  
**Asian American and Pacific Islander Disaggregated by Subgroups: Descriptive Statistics and Poisson Results**

Category	Enrollment	Occurrences	% of Enrollment	% of Occurrences	Risk Index	Relative Risk
Asian	75,103	1,413	7.15	2.61	1.88	0.45**
Asian Indian	7,622	78	0.73	0.14	1.02	0.24**
Cambodian	2,299	63	0.22	0.12	2.74	0.65**
Chinese	9,005	75	0.86	0.14	0.83	0.20**
Filipino	9,027	200	0.86	0.37	2.22	0.53**
Hmong	433	8	0.04	0.01	1.85	0.44*
Indonesian	313	3	0.03	0.01	0.96	0.23*
Japanese	1,779	31	0.17	0.06	1.74	0.41**
Korean	5,644	92	0.54	0.17	1.63	0.39**
Lao	942	27	0.09	0.05	2.87	0.68*
Other Asian	23,905	669	2.28	1.24	2.80	0.67**
Pakistani	711	12	0.07	0.02	1.69	0.40**
Taiwanese	736	4	0.07	0.01	0.54	0.13**
Thai	563	10	0.05	0.02	1.78	0.42**
Vietnamese	9,004	151	0.86	0.28	1.68	0.40**
Pacific Islander	9,653	789	0.92	1.46	8.17	1.94**
Fijian	305	17	0.03	0.03	5.57	1.32
Guamanian/Chamorro	1,320	53	0.13	0.10	4.02	0.95
Mariana Islander	125	13	0.01	0.02	10.40	2.47**
Melanesian	18	3	0.00	0.01	16.67	3.96*
Micronesian	967	120	0.09	0.22	12.41	2.95**
Native Hawaiian	511	33	0.05	0.06	6.46	1.53*
Other Pacific Islander	3,627	318	0.35	0.59	8.77	2.08**
Samoa	2,575	232	0.25	0.43	9.01	2.14**
Tongan	244	19	0.02	0.04	7.79	1.85**

Note. Reference group for relative risk is White students.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Chinese students, at a rate of 0.83 per 100 students, Cambodian students are  $2.74/0.83 = 3.30$  times more likely to be disciplined. In an even more discernable example, Taiwanese students have the lowest rate of discipline, at 0.54 occurrences per 100 students, while Lao students experienced the highest rate, at 2.87 occurrences per 100 students. This means that Lao students are  $2.87/0.54 = 5.31$  times more likely to be disciplined than Taiwanese students. This gap is greater than the gap in risk between Black and White students, but would be unobserved if all Asian American students were aggregated.

Unlike Asian American ethnic subgroups, no Pacific Islander subgroups have a significantly lower risk of discipline than White students. Fijian and Guamanian/Chamorro students do not experience significantly different risks of discipline than White students, while all other Pacific Islander subgroups are at significantly ( $p < .05$ ) higher risk than White students. If we were to use the relative risk of the aggregated Pacific Islander category compared to White students (1.94) to represent all Pacific Islander subgroups, we would, for example, underestimate the risk to Micronesian students (2.95) by 33%. Furthermore, the most and least disciplined Pacific Islander subgroups are Melanesian and Guamanian/Chamorro students, with 16.67 and 4.02 occurrences per 100 students, respectively. This means Melanesian students are  $16.67/4.02 = 4.15$  times more likely to be disciplined than Guamanian/Chamorro students. This is, again, larger than the White-Black discipline gap that draws most of the scholarly attention but is hidden by the aggregate measure.

## Discussion

The purpose of this article is to determine if an ethnic discipline gap may be present among AAPIs and Washington State's data make it possible to investigate heterogeneity within the broader AAPI racial category. The results of our analysis reveal that there is disproportionality in school discipline among AAPIs that has previously been unnoticed. By establishing the presence of a discipline gap correlated with ethnicity among AAPI subgroups, we can call for further research to contextualize and explore the factors that may be contributing to these inequitable educational outcomes. AAPIs constitute a recently created political category that many of its members do not necessarily identify with. For this reason, racial formation theory (Omi & Winant, 2015) serves as a useful framework to guide and interrogate AAPIs as a racial category.

The findings confirm past studies that have established the presence of racial discipline disparities between Black, Latino, and Native American students, as compared to their White peers (Gregory et al., 2010; Gregory et al., 2011). Like Skiba et al. (2011), our results show that Black students are 3.35 times as likely to experience school discipline as White students in the

measurement of risk ratios. Latino and Native American students are 1.50 and 2.24 times as likely to be disciplined, respectively. In this respect, Washington State mirrors the patterns of racial disproportionality in school discipline that has been identified in other studies.

Our findings make it possible to generate new insights and knowledge about the racial discipline gap, especially as it pertains to the experiences of AAPIs who are rearticulated as a category when Pacific Islander students are separated from the more populous Asian American grouping. Omi and Winant (2015) describe rearticulation as a process through which subgroups are reorganized into new racial categories that correspond to changes in their political status. When aggregated into a single AAPI category (the well-established category), the experiences of Pacific Islanders, our findings reveal, are entirely overlooked despite the fact that they are nearly twice as likely as their White peers to be disciplined. Once separated, however, it becomes clearer that although typically grouped with Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders have educational experiences that mirror those of Black, Latino, and Native American students. In Washington State, Pacific Islander students have high school graduation rates (64.6%) that are close to their Black (67.8%) and Latino (67.3%) peers (Cam & Ireland, 2015). Similarly, their high school dropout rates are also similar to those of Black, Latino, and Native American students (Cam & Ireland, 2015). As Skiba et al. (2014) point out, students attending schools with higher rates of achievement tend to be less suspected and less suspended. Pacific Islanders in Washington State attend schools that are more likely to be segregated—(over 60% of the Pacific Islander population in Washington State live in just two counties) and are more likely to be considered low-performing in terms of high school achievement (Takeuchi et al., 2008). Our analysis revealed that the patterns of disproportionality in school discipline among Pacific Islanders are similar to that of other historically underserved populations.

Though limited to correlations, the results for our study show that when it comes to discipline—and possibly other aspects of their educational experiences and outcomes (CARE, 2015)—it is critical to separate Pacific Islanders from Asian Americans. Our findings challenge assumptions about the relationship between race and school discipline by revealing the variations in the experiences of Pacific Islanders. It also makes it possible to begin dismantling the pervasive model minority stereotype that is applied to individuals falling within the AAPI grouping. The data reveal that Pacific Islanders have very different experiences than Asian Americans. There is a need for further research to identify the nature of the educational barriers (EPIC, 2014; Takeuchi et al., 2008) that might explain the causes of racial disproportionality in school discipline among Pacific Islander students.

The presence of subgroup variation within school discipline data further complicates the relationship between racial group membership and school discipline. By examining within-group variation, we are able to establish

that disproportionality is also occurring within the broader Pacific Islander group. For example, by comparing risk indices, we see that Micronesian students are  $12.41/9.01 = 1.38$  times more likely to be disciplined than Samoan students, while Samoan students are  $9.01/4.02 = 2.24$  times more likely than Guamanian/Chamorro students. Taking from Gregory et al.'s (2010) contention that disparities in discipline and achievement are "two sides of the same coin," future studies on this topic should explore the relationships between discipline, achievement, subgroup membership, and when possible, the influence of socioeconomic factors. For example, the fact that Guamanian/Chamorro experience lower rates of discipline, as compared to Samoans, might be due in part to higher reported incomes among Guamanian/Chamorro who also have lower rates of being foreign-born, and experience lower rates of poverty than their Samoan peers (CARE, 2015; Takeuchi et al., 2008). As for the disproportionate rates of discipline among Micronesian students, very little research has been conducted on their schooling experiences that might illuminate the factors responsible for the greater likelihood that they are subjected to school discipline. Although the hardships confronting Micronesians who have been displaced from the islands by U.S. military policies have been described by journalists (Letman, 2013; Wiener, 2016), little is known empirically about their educational experiences and outcomes. In Washington State schools, we do know that Micronesians have the highest proportion of their population (51.8%) who are enrolled in programs to develop English language proficiency (CARE, 2015) among all AAPIs. However, we know very little about what role language barriers may play in influencing patterns of school discipline. Past research on teachers' views on and interactions with students of color, as it relates to school discipline, suggest that language and cultural differences between instructor and student may explain the racial disproportionality in school discipline (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). These studies have not included an examination of Pacific Islander students. Our findings suggest this would be a fruitful direction for future research. By identifying the factors that may serve as barriers to academic achievement (Kao & Thompson, 2003), it may be possible to devise strategies that are particularly relevant to addressing discipline within smaller subgroups.

The variation within the Pacific Islander group, however, must be taken with a grain of salt, because although Micronesians are more likely to be disciplined than Samoans, all Pacific Islander subgroups, with the exception of Guamanian/Chamorro and Fijian, have significantly higher rates of discipline than the White racial group. As such, while the ethnic variation of school discipline within the group may be helpful in directing resources to those who are the most targeted and marginalized, the collective experience of Pacific Islanders must be considered within the context of their educational pathways. For example, rates of incarceration for Pacific Islanders have increased 144% between 2002 and 2010 (EPIC, 2014), far outpacing the national

average. Given the increased attention that the topic now referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline” has received as a result of several studies that have been published (Advancement Project, 2010; Losen & Gillespie, 2012), there is a need to investigate whether disproportionate patterns of school discipline among Pacific Islanders may be in part responsible for the increase in incarceration rates.

The need to carefully consider the factors that may be contributing to gaps in school discipline is reinforced when examining Asian Americans, who have very different experiences from Pacific Islanders and are less likely than Whites to be disciplined in this sample. It is interesting that Southeast Asians in this data set are not facing rates of discipline that are disproportionate to White students given the other patterns of educational disadvantage they face that mirror those groups who are disproportionately targeted (e.g., Black, Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander). We speculate that a combination of school segregation and the model minority hypothesis may at least partially explain why that is the case. Across the nation, schools are becoming increasingly segregated by race and class (Stancil, 2018). In the greater Seattle area, where the largest population of Southeast Asians reside in Washington State (Hune & Takeuchi, 2008), similar patterns are evident (Kohn, 1996). As the cost of living in the greater Seattle area has risen, families of color and their children—including Southeast Asians who make up the lowest earning subgroups among Asian Americans (CARE, 2013)—have been pushed further out of the city (Riley, 2016). In fact, the only racial group excepting multiracial that has grown in the Seattle Public Schools district is White (Seattle Public Schools, 2018). Southeast Asians are more likely to be enrolled in schools with higher concentrations of Black, Latino, and Pacific Islander students. The model minority stereotype might play out in these settings differently than in schools with a majority White population.

This possibility suggests that context within broader categories can be revealing. For example, although all Asian American subgroups are at a lower risk for discipline than White students, we find that, comparing the risk index (Table 3, RI column), Southeast Asian ethnic subgroups are all more likely than the Chinese ethnic group to be targeted for discipline. Again, we compare Southeast Asian subgroups (e.g., Cambodian, Lao) and East Asian subgroups (e.g., Chinese, Taiwanese) because they reflect the stark contrast that exists in the Asian American category, with East Asian outcomes reflecting the more commonly accepted conceptions of Asian American success than the outcomes of Southeast Asians (CARE, 2013). In the case of Cambodians and Lao, they are to  $2.74/0.83 = 3.30$  and  $2.87/0.83 = 3.46$  times more likely, respectively, to be disciplined compared than Chinese students. These gaps are similar to the gap between Black and White students (3.35 times) that has drawn much of the attention of discipline research. Like Pacific Islander students, Southeast Asians face

educational barriers such as higher rates of enrollment in the free and reduced-price lunch program, and higher rates of truancy (CARE, 2015), which may contribute to their lower rates of high school achievement (CARE, 2015). These gaps in opportunity (Carter & Welner, 2013) may also be a factor influencing the higher rates of school discipline that they experience.

The disparities between subgroups also call into question who the comparison group should be in discipline studies. While the facts demonstrate that all Asian American subgroups are at a lower risk and all Pacific Islander groups are at equal or higher risk than White students may suggest that there is no reason to disaggregate AAPIs into further subgroups, we disagree on the grounds that AAPIs only appear homogenous in disciplinary risk when compared to White students. While using White students as the comparison group is the most commonly accepted scholarly practice, it is not to say that it is the most correct method, nor is it universally appropriate across all discipline studies. Take, for example, a school that only has one White student. If that student is suspended or expelled, then every other racial group would be less likely to be disciplined. Although this example is an extreme case to make our point, it highlights a real possibility—as schools are increasingly segregated (Stancil, 2018), it is reasonable to be more flexible in analyses in order to identify what dynamics in a school may cause disproportionality, and to set the comparison group accordingly.

As Emirbayer and Desmond (2015) suggest in their theorizations on the racial order,

Whiteness [. . .] has established itself as the unspoken norm of the racial order, to an extent infiltrating *all* minds. The *nomos* of social relations, it has become the *nomos* of social reflection itself, which is why whites and nonwhites alike often find themselves similarly influenced by racialized modes of thought. (p. 36)

Accordingly, Emirbayer and Desmond (2015) observe, “In the innermost logic of their analyses, unreflexive scholars fail to treat whites as a racial group; they take whiteness for granted, viewing it simply as ‘normal’” (p. 35). Taking their call for reflexivity as a point of departure, our study urges future scholars to consider the contexts of discipline studies and to be uninhibited about testing the grounds of comparison groups. Although in our study, Whites were the largest population with the lowest rates of discipline, the comparisons across ethnic subgroups within the AAPI categories challenge the racial order and, we hope, will prompt further investigation toward this end.

Finally, although we focus our attention on AAPIs in this article, we suspect that these unseen gaps caused by the lack of specificity in the data may affect other groups. As our findings demonstrate, a deeper analysis of within-group experiences with school discipline proves to be a valuable approach

for unmasking outcomes and patterns that may be hidden within existing data. For Pacific Islanders, a detailed, disaggregated approach is the only method that could uncover the disproportional targeting they face in school discipline. This is a student population who would be entirely missed for intervention plans and resource allocation if the practice of aggregating with Asian Americans is continued. Furthermore, the presence of an ethnic discipline gap suggests that other contextual factors are worth considering within broad categories, which is as true for other racial groups as it is for AAPIs. Within the Black, Latino, and Native American communities, for example, it would be equally valuable to know which subsectors are most likely to experience disproportionality. For instance, Latinos are a large multiracial grouping and other studies have shown tremendous differences in school performance based on race, nationality, immigration status, and socioeconomic status among groups labeled Latino (Lutz, 2007; Suárez-Orozco, 1987; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009).

Although discipline studies have not examined the possibility of an ethnic discipline gap within the Latino, Black or Native American populations, recent scholarship highlights the increasingly urgent need to investigate within-racial group variation given the widening heterogeneity across all races (CARE, 2015; Dowling, 2014; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013a, 2013b). In a report by the Institute for Immigration, Globalization, and Education, demographic data on the racial heterogeneity of each racial minority group is highlighted, concluding that “aggregated data can provide a misleading statistical portrait of heterogeneous racial groups” that “conceals significant disparities in opportunities and outcomes for some particular student sub-groups” (Nguyen et al., 2017). This same concern rings true for discipline studies. As students become increasingly diverse, the examination of the racial discipline gap must acknowledge this complexity—ethnicity is one example through which to do so. As research on the racial disproportionality of school discipline begins to further integrate analyses of context within these broader categories, such as through ethnicity, language, or immigration status, the relationship between race and school discipline will continually be rearticulated, providing a clearer scope of the unseen gaps and, thus, how to address them.

In the process of addressing these gaps, it is necessary to keep in mind that their existence is the product of disparities in opportunities (e.g., access to schools with equitable practices, unbiased classroom environments). Whether for AAPI students, or other small subgroups of students by ethnicity, nationality, language, immigration status, or other characteristics, the disproportionality of discipline must be viewed in a contextual manner accounting for when broader categories do not capture disparities, and strategies to address those disparities must be devised accordingly.

## Implications and Directions for Future Research

Research on the racial discipline gap can only be as fruitful as it is revealing. Although past scholarship has importantly established the racial disproportionality of school discipline for Black, Latino, and Native American students, there is more to be uncovered. As schools in the United States serve an increasingly diverse student population, the need to understand the relationship between race/ethnicity and school discipline is possible only if we can illuminate and analyze the heterogeneity. By using data that have been disaggregated by ethnicity, it becomes possible to capture and illuminate inequitable practices. The implication of not considering within-group variation continues the practice of overlooking whole populations of students, who are unfairly ignored, such as Pacific Islanders. Given the link between school discipline and reduced academic achievement, higher likelihood of dropout, and increased possibility of being in the criminal system (Gregory et al., 2010; Noguera, 2008; Losen & Gillespie, 2012), the risk of leaving the disproportionate targeting of some subgroups unnoticed could have hugely adverse repercussions.

In terms of practice, the recognition of the ethnic variation in school discipline provides a more targeted opportunity for addressing the racial discipline gap in that it offers districts and schools more detailed information that can be helpful when developing intervention plans. For example, while Washington State has mandated access to culturally sensitive and responsive engagement plans for families of disciplined students, it would be difficult to provide these supports without further insight into student experiences and the nature of the disciplinary actions they are subjected to. Using data on the ethnic discipline gap can also inform the state's efforts to develop and deliver more comprehensive discipline-related training to school board directors, superintendents, and other school and district staff on groups that may previously have been overlooked.

While these findings are relevant and timely for Washington State, particularly as it prepares to implement the recently passed House Bill 1541, which has a number of discipline stipulations including the aforementioned reengagement plans and trainings (Washington State House Appropriations, 2016), our contribution also has significance beyond the borders of the state. The establishment of the ethnic discipline gap offers a signal to states, districts, schools, and researchers interested in addressing concerns with school discipline to reexamine broader categories that could be masking racial disproportionality experienced by some subgroups. By simultaneously unmasking the hidden aspects of the racial discipline gap and focusing on where and for which groups disproportionality is most likely to occur, there is an opportunity to better understand the disposition of the gap.

For future research, we offer three recommendations. First, we urge scholars to conduct similar studies using disaggregated data—whether by ethnicity, social class, or other markers of identity—on other racial groups to further



contextualize the racial discipline gap. For example, there is considerable diversity among Black and Latino students based on socioeconomic and immigration status. Systems that allow for greater disaggregation of data will make it possible for educational scholarship to get closer to understanding where missed opportunities for intervention may exist. This also calls on school districts and states to collect disaggregated data to be analyzed, which is a practice we urge all states to implement in their data policies.

Second, there is need for examination of school discipline in a variety of school contexts, including school type and geographic location (e.g., urban, suburban, rural), in order to better understand how school and community contexts influence the racial disproportionality of school discipline. Discipline patterns in highly segregated and impoverished communities may be very different from the patterns observed in suburban and rural communities. Furthermore, just as researchers are studying school contexts to *identify* racial disproportionality in school discipline, it is equally important to use these opportunities to examine school practices that *address* concerns with school discipline (see Bal, Afacan, & Cakir, 2018). Modeling after Anyon et al.'s (2016) investigation of restorative interventions as a response to school discipline, research on both incidents and responses is critical to understanding how to best address the gap.

Third, we encourage research that examines how race may be implicated on both sides of discipline, focused on those perceived as perpetrators of discipline infractions as well as those who may be victims of incidents such as bullying—the victim and the perpetrator. In considering this matter, scholars may explore how schools have defined and reported on these roles and, perhaps, furthered (or disguised) inequitable practices. This may require a reflection of the history of race and racism in schools, and how that foundation manifests in school disciplinary policies today (Carter et al., 2017). Through a more critical examination of how perceptions, stereotypes, and biases play a role in defining victims and perpetrators, research may better understand how to address racial disparities in school discipline.

### **Limitations**

Although the data set used in this study has strengths that allow for the examination of ethnic gaps in school discipline, it is not without its limitations. First, there are additional details that would have bolstered our efforts to determine where disproportionality in discipline occurs that is not captured by these data. This includes data on specific grades, school levels, or district- and school-specific information. Although the data set is a census of students, it is only a bird's-eye view of the state and disallows us from commenting on school contexts, in particular. Second, given that the data are an aggregate of all the state's disciplinary cases, it is not possible to control for variables such as gender or socioeconomic status that would allow

for an investigation of subsectors, other than ethnicity, of each targeted racial group.

Another limitation is our inhibited explanation for the “Other Asian” group, which is a large population and nearly as likely as White students to experience discipline. Although we report this group’s findings in the results, there are no further contextual data that allow us to comment on who this group includes, why students would have selected this category, or why they have disciplinary results similar to White students. This is a category, like others, that requires further examination.

Finally, despite our efforts to rearticulate the relationship of the AAPI categories with school discipline through the examination of ethnic subgroups, we were ultimately bounded by the administrative ethnic categories collected in Washington State by OSPI. While Washington State represents one of the most comprehensive collection approaches for AAPI data, our analysis is confined to those 16 Asian American and 9 Pacific Islander preselected ethnic subgroup categories.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Punitive discipline refers to any type of discipline that results in some form of punishment.

<sup>2</sup>Exclusionary discipline refers to any type of discipline that removes or excludes students from their educational setting; this is the form of discipline that is included in this study, in particular.

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