

WILLIAMS, CLARA P. M.A. The Effects of Racial Threat on the Use of Expulsions and Suspensions in North Carolina Public Schools. (2024)
Directed by Dr. Shelly Brown-Jeffy. 33 pp.

The current research study examined the effects of racial threat to understand its influence on the use of expulsions, in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions in North Carolina Public Schools. This study also examined this relationship to see if locale would affect this relationship at all. The data from this study was pulled from two publicly available sources, specifically Civil Rights Data Collection and Common Core of Data. The data examined from these two sources focuses exclusively on data from the 2017-2018 academic school year. Results from the multiple regression models used to estimate the relationship between each response variable and predictor variables offered mix results. The results from the first regression models showed that the proportion of Black students in schools proved to be positively and significantly related to the use of expulsions, in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions. After controlling for locale, the relationship between the proportion of Black students and the use of in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions remained unchanged. The relationship between the proportion of Black students and the use of in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions remained positively and significantly related to one another when locale was and was not being controlled for in these models. While the effects of racial threat remained unchanged, locale still mattered in the explanation of the use of in-school and out-of-school suspensions.

THE EFFECTS OF RACIAL THREAT ON THE USE OF
EXPULSIONS AND SUSPENSIONS IN
NORTH CAROLINA PUBLIC
SCHOOLS

by

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A Thesis

Submitted to

the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Greensboro

2024

Approved by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family and friends who have supported me throughout this process. I could not have done it without you. I would also like to dedicate this work to the memory of my late father, Gregg Williams, late maternal grandfather, Billy “Papa” Wall, and my maternal great-grandmother, Ruby “Grandma Ruby” Wortham. I know you are watching with the angels, but I’ll be sure to save you a seat.

APPROVAL PAGE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Shelly Brown Jeffy. I'm extremely grateful for your guidance and sage advice over the last couple of years. You offered unwavering support throughout this process which I appreciate very much.

I would also like to acknowledge Matt Burke for being a true friend through all my craziness. You have seen me at my best and worst. You have pushed me to be a better person and for that I am eternally grateful.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Michelle Alexander (2020) argued in her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* that mass incarceration is the newest racial caste system in the United States which is implicitly designed to subjugate people of color through the implementation of racialized social control practices. Prior racial caste systems (i.e., slavery and Jim Crow) were explicitly designed to marginalize and disenfranchise people of color (Alexander 2020). However, after the Civil Rights movement, it became unlawful to explicitly use race as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt (Alexander 2020). Thus, crime legislation both at the state and federal levels of government called for tougher criminal law reforms (e.g. Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986) which were implicitly designed, through race-neutral language, to continue the subjugation of communities of color (Alexander 2020, Forman Jr. 2018). For example, despite evidence that suggests that people of all colors use and sell drugs at the same rate, black men are admitted to prison on drug related charges at twenty to fifty times greater than those of white men (Alexander 2020). Systemic racism is evident within the U.S. criminal justice system using race-neutral policies and practices which disproportionately affect communities of color (Alexander 2020, Forman Jr. 2018). Unfortunately, the current punitive trend occurring within the U.S. criminal justice system can also be seen within the U.S. educational system.

During the last 30 years, formal forms of social control (e.g., exclusionary forms of punishment) have intensified in schools across the country (Berger 2002; Wallace Jr. Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman 2008; Payne and Welch 2010; Payne and Welch 2015; Payne and Welch 2018; Welch and Payne 2010; Welch and Payne 2012), despite declining rates of student delinquency, drug use, violent school victimization, and school-related deaths (Berger 2002;

Wallace et. al 2008; Payne and Welch 2010; Payne and Welch 2015; Payne and Welch 2018). This phenomenon is similar to what has been happening in the U.S. criminal justice system (Payne and Welch 2010; Welch and Payne 2010). For instance, the criminal justice system has seen an increase in punitive measures despite falling crime rates (Payne and Welch 2010). One widely held argument for this punitive approach to student misbehavior is that schools have increasingly responded to student misbehavior with a crime-control approach (Payne and Welch 2010; Payne and Welch 2015; Welch and Payne 2012). As a result, schools have incorporated various crime-related tools (e.g., metal detectors, surveillance and security systems, drug sniffing dogs, etc.) to prevent and identify student misbehavior (Ahranjani 2017; Payne and Welch, 2010; Payne and Welch 2015). They have also used exclusionary forms of punishment (i.e., expulsions and suspensions) to remove students much in the same way society banishes criminals by incarcerating them (Welch and Payne 2012). However, the extent to which schools disproportionately use exclusionary punishments is a pause for concern.

Racial disparities in the use of exclusionary forms of punishment have been extensively examined and well-documented in the academic literature (Edwards 2016; Payne and Welch 2010). Research has shown that Black students are subjected to higher rates of exclusionary punishments (e.g., suspension or expulsion) than their White counterparts (Edwards 2016; Peguero et al. 2018; Okonofua, Walton, and Eberhardt 2016; Riddle and Sinclair 2019; Gopalan, 2019). According to the U.S. Department of Education: Office for Civil Rights, Black students, in a study of more than 70,000 school districts in the United States, were three or more times more likely than their white counterparts to be suspended or expelled (Edwards 2016; Okonofua, Walton, and Eberhardt 2016).

A growing body of research has begun to examine the influence of a school's racial composition on the use of exclusionary punishments. Prior research found that the proportion of Black students in a school is positively related to the use of certain exclusionary punishments. (Welch and Payne 2010; Welch and Payne 2012). The current study seeks to add to this body of literature by examining the relationship between racial threat and the use of expulsions, in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions. In addition to examining this relationship, this study seeks to determine if the locale/location (i.e., city, suburb, town, and rural) of schools has any effect on the relationship between the proportion of Black students in a school and the use of expulsions, in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspension.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Punitive Trends in School Discipline

In the early 1990s, former President Bill Clinton, signed into law the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) in order to curb gang activity on campus and reduce student firearm possession (Moreno and Scaletta 2018). Public perception that preceded the enactment of this piece of federal legislation was that schools were experiencing a surge in crime rates and student delinquency (Moreno and Gerardo 2018; Castillo 2013). As a response, the United States Congress passed GFSA which was founded on the philosophical idea purportedly similar to James Wilson and George Kelling's broken windows theory (Moreno and Scaletta 2018).

According to Wilson and Kelling's theory, schools should react to the smallest acts of student misbehavior with strong punitive measures to communicate to other students that certain behaviors will not be tolerated (Moreno and Scaletta 2018). Therefore, GFSA required states who received federal funding for education to adopt get-tough policies which would require schools to expel any student, for at least a year, who is determined to have brought a firearm to school (Dankner 2019; Moreno and Scaletta 2018). These get-tough policies would come to be known as zero tolerance policies which refers to "...school policies that mandate immediate delivery of exclusionary discipline (i.e., removal from campus through suspension, change of placement, or expulsion) to any student possessing contraband (e.g., firearms, illegal drugs), regardless of circumstances (Moreno and Scaletta 2018:93-94)." While the initial goal of zero tolerance policies focused on weapon possession, public schools expanded their policies to include subjective offenses (e.g., swearing, truancy, disrespect, etc.) (Moreno and Scaletta 2018).

Schools are steadily becoming more like prisons as a result of schools using the criminal justice system's crime control model to respond to student misbehavior (Payne and Welch 2010;

Welch and Payne 2012). For example, schools are using School Resource Officers (SROs) to address student misbehavior (Payne and Welch 2015). SROs are sworn law enforcement officers, often drawn from the ranks of local established police departments (Owens 2017). Since SROs are sworn law enforcement officers, they have the power to arrest students for misbehavior (Owens 2017). Students who are arrested for misbehaving accumulate a criminal record which is the entry point to what researchers have defined as the school-to-prison pipeline (Owens 2017).

Furthermore, a little over half of schools and almost all urban schools have implemented surveillance and security programs to monitor students (Beger 2002; Payne and Welch 2010). Schools have installed metal detectors as a part of their security program to prevent students from bringing weapons (e.g., guns, knives, etc.) into the school building(s) (Beger 2002; Payne and Welch 2010). To deter students from bringing other forms of contraband (e.g., alcohol, drugs, etc.) onto campus and ensure that schools remain a drug-free environment, schools often perform randomized locker searches at times with the assistance of a K9 officer (Beger 2002; Payne and Welch 2010). In addition, most public schools require doors leading outside to remain locked and secured (Payne and Welch 2010; Berger 2002). The reason for keeping outside doors locked and secured is to prevent unauthorized individuals from entering the school building (Payne and Welch 2010). It also prevents students from leaving campus during school hours (Payne and Welch 2010).

In addition to these preventive and punitive tactics, schools have readily embraced exclusionary forms of punishment for students who are deemed as rule-breakers (Payne and Welch 2015). The use of exclusionary forms of punishment to respond to student misbehavior is analogous to carceral punishments found in the criminal justice system (Payne and Welch 2010). For instance, in-school suspensions are analogous to solitary confinement; out-of-school

suspensions are likened to incarceration; expulsions are likened to execution; zero tolerance policies function as the school equivalent to mandatory-minimum criminal sentencing statutes (Payne and Welch 2010).

Consequently, the use of exclusionary forms of punishment could potentially have negative consequences for students being subjected to them (Payne and Welch 2010; Payne and Welch 2015; Payne and Welch 2018; Welch and Payne 2012). Prior studies have shown an association between students who receive exclusionary punishments disproportionately and poor academic performance (Gopalan 2019; Gopalan and Nelson 2019; Payne and Welch 2018; Welch and Payne 2012). For instance, students who are suspended or expelled are at an increased risk for grade retention, dropping out, school failure, and negative attitudes towards school (Payne and Welch 2018; Welch and Payne 2012).

Additionally, studies have shown that students who are disciplined and punished are more likely to commit delinquent acts (e.g., participate in fights, carry weapons, smoke, and consume alcohol and/or drugs) in the future, both at school and in the greater community (Payne and Welch 2015; Payne and Welch 2018; Welch and Payne 2012). The literature on the school-to-prison pipeline shows that these students are more likely to be involved in the juvenile and criminal justice system in the future (Payne and Welch 2015; Payne and Welch 2018; Welch and Payne 2012). Thus, they may experience difficulties (e.g., employment opportunities) in the future (Payne and Welch 2015; Payne and Welch 2018; Welch and Payne 2012).

Disparities in School Discipline Practices

Prior research has shown individual-level characteristics (i.e., race, gender, and socioeconomic status) to be associated with greater use of suspensions and expulsions, regardless of school-based misbehavior (Payne and Welch 2018; Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl,

Toumbourou, and Catalano 2014). The most influential student-level characteristic is race (Payne and Welch 2015). Research has shown that Black and Hispanic students are subjected to higher rates of disciplinary actions (e.g., in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and, expulsions) than their White counterparts (Peguero et al. 2018; Okonofua, Walton, and Eberhardt 2016; Riddle and Sinclair, 2019; Hemphill et al. 2014; Wallace et al. 2008). For example, during the 2015-2016 academic school year, an estimated 2.7 million students across the United States received one or more out-of-school suspensions (Gopalan 2019). Black males made up 25 percent of those who received an out-of-school suspension despite only representing 8 percent of students enrolled (Gopalan 2019). Another national study found that while 50 percent of Black students reported being suspended or expelled only 20 percent of White students reported ever being suspended or expelled (Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera 2010). Lastly, during the 2011-2012 school, Black students were 3 times more likely than White students to be suspended from school (Edwards 2016).

Previous studies have identified several reasons to explain racial disparities in punitive disciplinary actions. One possible explanation for why Black students receive harsher forms of punishment is racial bias on behalf of school officials (Welch and Payne 2012; Okonofua, Walton, and Eberhardt 2016; Riddle and Sinclair 2019). For example, Riddle and Sinclair (2019) investigated the relationship between regionally implicit and explicit measures of racial bias (i.e., pro-white/anti-Black) and Black-white disparities in disciplinary outcomes (i.e., in-school suspensions, out-of school suspensions, law enforcement referrals, school-related arrests, and expulsions). The results of their study found that pro-white/anti-Black explicit racial bias was positively associated with black-white disparities in all five disciplinary metrics (Riddle and Sinclair 2019). However, they found the association between pro-white/anti-Black implicit bias

and all five disciplinary metrics to be less pronounced (Riddle and Sinclair 2019). Other possible explanations for racial disparities in disciplinary actions includes fear of crime and criminal victimization, perceptions that black people are disproportionately involved in crime, and the “adultification” of Black youth which suggests that normal youthful acting-out for Black youths can be misinterpreted as violent (Welch and Payne 2012). Despite these possible explanations for racial disparities in school discipline, Russell Skiba, a prominent school discipline researcher, commented that “We really do not know enough about the reasons for African-American ... over-representation in school discipline (Welch and Payne 2012: 157).”

Prior studies have also consistently shown gender to influence the use of exclusionary punishments (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, Peterson 2002). For instance, boys are more likely to be suspended (Mizel, Miles, Pedersen, Tucker, Ewing, and D’Amico, 2016; Wu Pink, Crain, and Moles, 1982). Specifically, one study found that boys were four times more likely to be suspended from school than girls (Skiba et al. 2002).

Lastly, students of low socioeconomic status are more likely to be suspended (Skiba et al. 2002; Wu et al. 1982) and expelled from school (Mizel et al. 2016). Prior studies have operationalized socioeconomic status by parent’s level of education and the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch (Mizel et al. 2016; Skiba et al. 2002). One study found that students whose parents had little education were more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than those whose parents had more education (Mizel et al. 2016). Another study found that students who received free lunch are more frequently suspended from school than students who did not receive free lunch (Skiba et al. 2002; Wu et al. 1982).

CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework used as a guide to help explain this research study is Hubert Blalock's racial threat theory. Blalock's racial threat perspective is a macro-level theoretical framework, rooted in conflict theory, that explains racial disparities in the use of punitive and non-punitive social control practices (Dollar, 2014; Edwards, 2016; King and Wheelock 2007; Payne and Welch 2010; Payne and Welch 2015; Welch and Payne 2010; Welch and Payne 2012). This perspective predicts that formal and/or informal social control measures are greater in spaces where members of the dominant or majority group perceive a growing minority population as a threat to existing social arrangements (Dollar 2014; Edwards 2016; King and Wheelock 2007; Payne and Welch 2010; Payne and Welch 2015; Welch and Payne 2010; Welch and Payne 2012).

Blalock's perspective posits three distinct forms of racial threat: political threat, economic threat, and symbolic threat, also known as criminal threat (Dollar 2014; Edwards 2016; King and Wheelock 2007; Payne and Welch 2010; Payne and Welch 2015; Welch and Payne 2010; Welch and Payne 2012). Political threat emerges from the dominant or majority group's fear of the minority group gaining political dominance over them (Dollar 2014). A prime example of this type of threat can be found in the aftermath that occurred when the United States Supreme Court (SCOTUS) handed down its decision regarding the legendary court case *Brown vs. Board of Education*. SCOTUS ruled in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional and mandated that they be desegregated (Dugan and Chenoweth, 2020). The court's ruling received a ton of backlash, especially from states in the South (Dugan and Chenoweth, 2020). Southern lawmakers who supported segregation created the Southern Manifesto, also known as the "Declaration of Constitutional

Principles,” in order to circumvent desegregation (Henderson and Brown 2016). The emergence of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), a white supremacist organization, is another example since their inception was a response to the presidential proclamation which freed Black slaves in Southern states (Dugan and Chenoweth 2020; Levine 2002).

Economic threat arises when the dominant group perceives minorities as being a threat to economic resources, such as employment opportunities, steady employment, and financial resources (Dollar 2014; King and Wheelock 2007; Leiber and Peck 2020; Welch and Payne 2010). An example of economic threat is when White workers perceive non-white immigrants coming to the United States to “steal” jobs.

Lastly, symbolic threat refers to the concept that the dominant group perceives members of the minority group as essentially linked to crime or other “deviant” behaviors (Dollar 2014; Edwards 2016). An example of this kind of threat is the perception that Black people are disproportionately involved in violence or that they are violence-prone (Welch and Payne 2012).

Traditionally, the effects of racial threat have been extensively examined within criminal justice contexts (Dollar 2014; Welch and Payne 2012). Studies that have examined the effects of racial threat on a variety of state-sanctioned control mechanisms (e.g., arrest rates, police expenditures, etc.) have operationalized racial threat in several ways (Welch and Payne 2012; Payne and Welch 2015; Welch and Payne 2010). In particular, racial threat has been operationalized by the proportion of Black people in particular places, cities, counties, and states with place being the most frequently cited measure (Payne and Welch 2015; Welch and Payne 2010; Welch and Payne 2012).

The findings from studies investigating the effects of racial threat on various state-sanctioned control mechanisms have offered mixed support (Dollar 2014; Lee 2022; Hughes,

Warren, Stewart, Tomaskovic-Devey, and Mears 2017). On the one hand, research studies on criminal justice expenditures (King and Wheelock 2007) and capital punishment show support for racial threat (Payne and Welch, 2015; Welch and Payne, 2010; Welch and Payne 2012; Dollar 2014). For example, Dollar (2014) found that studies on capital punishment consistently found a positive association between the proportion of Black people and the death penalty.

On the other hand, studies on arrest rates and judicial sentencing have offered contradictory evidence to support the effects of racial threat. For instance, some studies found that the proportion of Black people influenced arrest rates (King and Wheelock 2007; Payne and Welch 2015; and Welch and Payne 2010; Welch and Payne 2012) whereas other studies found arrest rates not to be influenced by the size of the Black population (Dollar 2014). An analysis on the effects of racial threat on arrest rates found that neither the proportion of Black people nor the presence of competition was positively associated with the arrest rates of Black people (See Dollar for a review).

Racial Threat in Educational Contexts

Despite contradictory evidence supporting the racial threat hypothesis within criminal justice contexts, studies investigating the effects of racial threat on the use of exclusionary forms of punishment in educational settings have consistently shown positive associations between the proportion of Black students and the use of expulsions and suspensions (Lee 2022). The first study to test—and provide support for—the racial threat hypothesis in schools used a national sample of public schools to examine the relationship between the percentage of Black students and a school's use of punitive (i.e., suspensions and detentions) and extremely punitive (i.e., expulsions and referrals to law enforcement) disciplinary practices, and implement zero tolerance policies (Welch and Payne 2010). Their study found that schools with a greater percentage of

Black students are more likely to use punitive and extremely punitive disciplinary practices and implement zero tolerance policies when responding to student misbehavior (Welch and Payne 2010).

Since the initial study investigating the relationship between racial threat and the use of exclusionary punishments (see Welch and Payne 2010), studies investigating this relationship have found similar findings that support racial threat. For instance, Welch and Payne (2012) sought to investigate how school-level characteristics influenced the use of specific exclusionary punishments. Specifically, they sought to investigate whether school-based racial threat was significantly related to the use of expulsions, suspensions, and in-school suspensions (Welch and Payne 2012). They also sought to investigate whether school-based racial threat was positively related to the use of mandatory exclusionary punishments for possession of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, knives, and guns (Welch and Payne, 2012). The results of their study found schools with a greater percentage of Black students were significantly and positively related to the use of expulsions, suspensions, and in-school suspensions. It is important to note that the percentage of students who received free/reduced lunch and the percentage of Hispanic students increased the odds for schools with predominantly Black students to use expulsions to respond to misbehavior (Welch and Payne 2012). While Welch and Payne (2012) tentatively confirmed their hypotheses examining racial threat and exclusionary punishments, they were able to partially confirm their hypotheses regarding whether school-based racial threat influenced the use of exclusionary punishments resulting from zero tolerance policies. They found that schools with a greater percentage of Black students reported more automatic expulsions or suspensions of students who were caught in possession of drugs and knives (Welch and Payne 2012).

Likewise, racial threat may also help explain why schools with a greater percentage of Black students are less likely to use restorative justice discipline practices to respond to misbehavior (Payne and Welch 2015; Welch and Payne 2010). Payne and Welch (2015) conducted a study to understand the relationship between the proportion of Black students in schools and the use of student conferences, peer mediation, restitution, community service, or a mixture of the four previous restorative justice policies, or an overall restorative justice model of discipline. This study is the first study to investigate the relationship between racial threat and specific restorative justice techniques (Payne and Welch 2015). Their study found racial threat was negatively associated with a school's use of specific restorative justice discipline techniques or an overall restorative justice model of discipline (Payne and Welch 2015).

Previous studies investigating the effects of racial threat on the use of exclusionary forms of punishment in educational settings controlled for various school-level characteristics (Payne and Welch 2012). One of the school-level characteristics is the characteristics of the school's surrounding community as community-level influences were found to have an important impact on school crime and disorder (Payne and Welch 2015; Welsh, Stokes, and Greene 2000). The results of these studies found the relationship between the proportion of Black students in schools and the use of certain exclusionary forms of punishment to exist without the influence of school-level characteristics (Welch and Payne 2012). In one study, Welch and Payne (2012) controlled for urbanicity which included "...urban level (city-level type), urbanicity (the proportion of people living within an urban area), and population size (total population)." In their study, Welch and Payne (2012) hypothesized and found that the proportion of Black students was positively and significantly related to the use of expulsions, the use of suspensions, and the use of in-school suspensions. They also found urbanicity to have no effect on these relationships

(Welch and Payne 2012). They found similar results in their study which examined the percentage of Black students and the use of punitive and extremely punitive policies in addition to the implementation of zero tolerance policies (Welch and Payne 2010).

In another study, Welch and Payne (2018) examined the percentage of Latino/a students and the use of disciplinary practices ranging from mild to harsh in schools. They hypothesized that schools with a greater percentage of Latino/a students would be more likely to use expulsions, in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions in response to student misbehavior over milder forms of punishment, specifically probation, detention, community service, and privilege (Welch and Payne 2018). Welch and Payne (2018) controlled for several variables which prior research suggested could influence the use of certain disciplinary responses. They controlled for the geographic location of each school in their sample by separating this variable into four categories (i.e., urban, urban fringe, town, and rural) (Welch and Payne 2018). Geographic location also included a control for urbanicity to match each school to their corresponding location due to limitations within their data set (Welch and Payne 2018). They found that the percentage of Latino/a students was positively and statistically related to the use of out-of-school suspensions while also being negatively and significantly related to the use of probation, detention, and community service (Welch and Payne 2018). Their results also found that urban fringe, town, and rural, when compared to urban, was not statistically significant to any of the disciplinary practices.

CHAPTER IV: THE CURRENT STUDY

The current study hypothesizes that racial threat will structure the use of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions to address student misbehavior in North Carolina Public Schools. Given the findings of prior research on racial threat and exclusionary punishment, schools with a greater proportion of Black students are expected to respond to student misbehavior with exclusionary forms of punishment (i.e., expulsion and suspension) (see Payne and Welch 2010; Hughes et al. 2017; Welch and Payne 2012). Thus, this study seeks to examine the following hypotheses: The proportion of Black students in schools is positively related to the use of (1) expulsions, (2) in-school suspensions, and (3) out-of-school suspensions.

Furthermore, previous studies found a school's geographic location (see Welch and Payne 2018) and urbanicity (see Welch and Payne 2012) to have no effect on the relationship between racial threat and the use of exclusionary forms of punishment. Given these findings this study will examine the relationship between the proportion of Black students in schools and the use of expulsions, in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspension in North Carolina Public Schools to determine what kind of effect a school's locale/location has on this relationship. To do this, I plan to explore these key research questions:

- Does the locale/location (i.e., city, suburb, town, and rural) of the school affect the relationship between the proportion of black students and the use of expulsions?
- Does the locale/location (i.e., city, suburb, town, and rural) of the school affect the relationship between the proportion of black students and the use of in-school suspensions?

- Does the locale/location (i.e., city, suburb, town, and rural) of the school affect the relationship between the proportion of black students and the use of out-of-school suspensions?

Data Sources and Sample

This study's data came from two distinct publicly available sources and focuses on data from the 2017-2018 academic school year. The first source employs school-level data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office of Civil Rights (OCR). The CRDC is a biennial mandated census to ensure equal educational opportunity in all U.S. public schools and school districts (ED n.d.). This data collection contains a plethora of information on student enrollment in particular subject areas, retention rates, discipline rates, school support, etc.

The second source employs data from the Common Core of Data (CCD) collection. The CCD contains annual school-level and district-level information for private schools and public schools and the local educational agency's (LEA) in the United States. For example, the CCD provides information on, but is not limited to, a school's total enrollment, the number of students who participate in a special program (i.e., free and/or reduced lunch), and information on a school's student to teacher ratio. The data from these sources was matched according to school name. Each school's school-level data used in my analyses from the CRDC data set was paired to its corresponding school-level data from the CCD data set.

This analysis will focus on public schools located in North Carolina. North Carolina's sample consists of 2,661 public schools. However, certain categories of schools will be excluded from the analyses. Alternative schools will be excluded from analyses since they include a large number of students with discipline problems (Payne and Welch, 2010; Payne and Welch, 2012;

Payne and Welch, 2015; Payne and Welch, 2018; Welch and Payne, 2010; Welch and Payne, 2012). Lastly, charter, special education and virtual schools were excluded from my analyses to focus on exclusively traditional schools. Thus, the final sample will include 2,362 primary and secondary traditional public schools.

Dependent Variables

These analyses will operationalize three forms of exclusionary discipline (i.e., expulsions, in-school suspension(s), and out-of-school suspension(s)) from the CRDC. Expulsions refer to the number of instances where a student was removed from their regular school for disciplinary reasons by LEA for the remainder of the academic school year (U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights n.d.). In-school suspension(s) refer to the number of instances where a student was temporarily removed from their regular classroom for a period for misbehavior (U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights n.d.). However, these students continue to remain under direct supervision of school personnel (U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights n.d.). Lastly, out-of-school suspension(s) refer to the number of instances where a student was removed from their regular classroom for a period to serve out their suspension elsewhere (e.g., home) (U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights n.d.).

Independent Variables

The effects of school-based racial threat have been examined in terms of the proportion of Black students in schools (Payne and Welch, 2015; Welch and Payne, 2010; Welch and Payne, 2012). Thus, racial threat will be operationalized by the proportion of Black students in schools consistent with prior studies. The information for this variable will be taken from the CRDC.

A school's locale is based on the physical address of the school. A school's locale can be classified by one of four basic types (i.e., city, suburb, town, and rural) which each contain three different subtypes. However, for the purposes of this study, I focused exclusively on the four basic types. Here, the four basic types of locale are defined as follows according to the CCD: a city is defined as a territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city; a suburb is defined as a territory outside of a principal city and inside an urbanized area; a town is defined as a territory inside an urban cluster with a population; and a rural area is defined as a territory that is anywhere from +/- 25 miles from an urbanized area and +/- 10 miles from an urban cluster. Three dummy variables for schools located in suburban areas, towns, and rural areas will be created for this categorical variable with city serving as the reference category (Gevertt, n.d.). Each dummy variable will be operationally defined as to whether (yes = 1, no = 0) a school is located in that specific locale. The data for this variable will be pulled from the CCD.

Certain variables will be controlled for in my analyses. A sizable body of research has provided consistent evidence to show boys and economically disadvantaged students disproportionately affected by exclusionary punishments (Skiba et al. 2002; Mizel et al. 2016; Wu et al. 1982). Therefore, I intend to control for the proportion of boys and the proportion of students who received free and reduced lunch. The information for these control variables will be pulled from the CRDC and the CCD, respectively.

Statistical Analysis. IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 29 was used for statistical analysis. First, a descriptive analysis (i.e., mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum) of the dependent and independent variable(s) was conducted (see Table 1). After running descriptive statistics, multiple regression models were used to estimate the relationship between each response variable and predictor variables previously identified. It

is important to note that the variables included in the tables below are referring to the proportion of each variable with the exception of the dummy variables for locale. Significance value, Sig., was used to determine whether the relationship between each predictor value(s) and the dependent variable was statistically significant. If the relationship proved to be significant, the unstandardized coefficients, B, were assessed to determine the kind of relationship between predictor variable(s) and the dependent variable in each regression model. Lastly, the R-squared was used to determine the percentage of variance in the dependent variable(s) caused by the independent variable(s) in each regression model.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Measures	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Exclusionary Punishments					
Expulsions	0	0	0.00	0.000	2362
In-School Suspensions	0	53	7.02	8.610	2362
Out-of-School Suspensions	0	44	6.91	6.659	2362
Racial Threat					
K-12 Student Enrollment: Black	0	97	25.84	22.336	2362
Locale					
Schools located in City Locales	0	1	0.25	0.433	591
Schools located in Suburban Locales	0	1	0.19	0.396	460
Schools located in Town Locales	0	1	0.12	0.330	293
Schools located in Rural Locales	0	1	0.43	0.495	1018
Control Variables					
K-12 Student Enrollment: Male	0	100	51.02	4.817	2362
Students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch	1	100	64.39	29.469	2362

CHAPTER V: RESULTS

Table 2 presents the results of the multiple linear regression estimates for the second and third hypotheses examining the relationship between the proportion of Black students and the use of in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions. Table 2 also provides the results for both control variables, specifically the proportion of male students and students eligible for free and reduced lunch, in these models. Due to the limited number of expulsions reported in the data set, I was unable to run a regression analysis to examine the relationship between the proportion of Black students in schools and the use of expulsions due to the proportion of expulsions being so low. As predicted in Hypothesis 2, the proportion of Black students enrolled in schools was positively and significantly related to the use of in-school suspensions ($B = 0.054$, $p = <0.001$). According to this, for every one unit increase in the proportion of Black students, the use of in-school suspensions increased by 0.054 when holding everything else constant. In this model, the only control variable that was both positively and significantly related to the use of in-school suspensions was the proportion of male students ($B = 0.189$, $p = <0.001$). The R-square of this model showed that 3.9 percent of the variance in the use of in-school suspensions was explained by the proportion of Black students, male students, and students eligible for free and reduced lunch.

Lastly, as predicted in Hypothesis 3, the proportion of Black students in schools was positively and significantly related to the use of out-of-school suspensions ($B = 0.130$, $p = <0.001$). Here, for every one unit increase in the proportion of Black students enrolled, the use of out-of-school suspensions increased by 0.130 when holding everything else constant. The proportion of male students and students eligible for free and reduced lunch were also positively and statistically significant related to the use of out-of-school suspensions. In this model, the R-

square value indicates 30.8 percent of the variance in the use of out-of-school suspensions can be predicted from the predictor variables.

Table 2: Multiple Linear Regression Results for the Effects of Racial Threat on the Use of Expulsions, In-School Suspensions, and Out-of-School Suspensions

	In-School		Out-of-School	
	Suspensions		Suspensions	
	<u>B</u>	<u>Sig.</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
K-12 Student Enrollment: Black	0.054	<0.001*	0.130	<0.001*
K-12 Student Enrollment: Male	0.189	<0.001*	0.209	<0.001*
Students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch	0.013	0.072	0.035	<0.001*
R²	0.039		0.308	

Note. *P<0.05

Table 3 presents the results for the multiple linear regression estimates examining the effects of locale on the relationship between the proportion of Black students and the use of in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions. Additionally, Table 3 presents the results for both control variables, specifically the proportion of male students and students eligible for free and reduced lunch. Again, due to the limited number of expulsions reported in the data set, I was

unable to run a regression analysis to examine the effects of locale on the relationship between the proportion of Black students and the use of expulsions due to the proportion of expulsions being so low.

Moreover, when examining the effects of locale on the relationship between the proportion of Black students and the use of in-school suspensions in schools, the proportion of Black students remained positively and significantly related to the use of in-school suspensions ($B = 0.072$, $p = <0.001$) even after controlling for locale and additional control variables. Here, for every one unit increase in the proportion of Black students enrolled, the use of in-school suspensions increased by 0.072 after holding everything else constant. The addition of locale in this model also had no effect on the control variables. The proportion of male students remained positively and significantly related to the use of in-school suspensions ($B = 0.184$, $p = <0.001$), while the proportion of students eligible for free and reduced lunch remained statistically insignificant ($B = 0.002$, $p = 0.734$).

When compared to a city locale, town and rural locales were positively and statistically significant to the use of in-school suspensions when compared to city locale ($B = 2.390$, $p = <0.001$; $B = 2.113$, $p = <0.001$). However, a suburban locale, when compared to a city locale, was found to be not significant ($B = 0.823$, $p = 0.140$). The R-square value showed that 4.9 percent of the variance in the use of in-school suspensions was explained by the six predictor variables in this regression model.

While this model proved to be a better fit with the addition of locale than the previous model without it, the addition of locale did not offer a better explanation for the relationship between the proportion of Black students and the use of in-school suspensions. Here, locale does matter in explaining the use of in-school suspensions. However, it did not remove the effect of

racial threat, because the proportion of Black students remained positively and significantly related to the use of in-school suspensions in both models. The addition of locale also had no changing effect on the control variables controlled for in this regression model.

When examining the effects of locale on the relationship between the proportion of Black students and the use of out-of-school suspensions, the proportion of Black students remained positively and significantly related to the use of out-of-school suspensions ($B = 0.153$, $p = <0.001$) even after controlling for locale and additional control variables. Here, for every one unit increase in the proportion of black students enrolled, the use of out-of-school suspensions increased by 0.153 after holding everything else constant. The addition of locale also had no effect on the proportion of male students and students eligible for free and reduced lunch. The proportion of male students and students eligible for free and reduced lunch and the use of out-of-school suspensions remained positively and significantly related to the use of out-of-school suspensions ($B = 0.202$, $p = <0.001$; $B = 0.023$, $p = <0.001$).

In this model, locale proved to be positively and significantly related to the use of out-of-school suspensions. Suburb, town, and rural locales, when compared to a city locale, were positively and significantly related to the use of out-of-school suspensions, ($B = 1.438$, $p = 0.001$), ($B = 2.877$, $p = 0.001$), and ($B = 2.587$, $p = 0.001$) respectively.

Lastly, the R-square value showed that 33.1 percent of the variance in the use of in-school suspensions was explained by the six predictor variables in this regression model. The inclusion of locale made this model a better fit than the model which did not control for locale whose R square was 30.8 percent. However, locale in this model did not better explain the relationship between the use of out-of-school suspensions and the proportion of Black students. Here, locale is important in explaining the use of out-of-school suspensions, but it didn't change

the racial threat effect as evidenced by the statistical significance and the positive relationship between the proportion of Black students and the use of out-of-school suspensions remaining the same.

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Results for the Effects of Locale on the Relationship between Racial Threat and the Use of Expulsions, In-School Suspensions, and Out-of-School Suspensions

	In-School Suspensions		Out-of-School Suspensions	
	<u>B</u>	<u>Sig.</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
K-12 Student Enrollment: Black	0.072	<0.001*	0.153	<0.001*
K-12 Student Enrollment: Male	0.184	<0.001*	0.202	<0.001*
Students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch	0.002	0.734	0.023	<0.001*
Schools located in Suburban Locales	0.823	0.140	1.438	<0.001*
Schools located in Town Locales	2.390	<0.001*	2.877	<0.001*
Schools located in Rural Locales	2.113	<0.001*	2.587	<0.001*
R²	0.049		0.331	

Note. *P<0.05

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

This research study provides additional support for Blalock's racial threat hypothesis. Due to the limited number of expulsions reported, I was unable to examine the relationship between the proportion of Black students in schools and the use of expulsions, thankfully. However, the results from the regression analyses examining the proportion of Black students and the use of in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions proved to be positively and significantly related which is consistent with previous studies (see Welch and Payne 2010, Welch and Payne 2012).

After controlling for locale, the relationship between the proportion of Black students and the use of in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions remained unchanged. The relationship between the proportion of Black students and the use of in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions remained positively and significantly related to one another when locale was and was not being controlled for in these models. While the effects of racial threat remained unchanged, locale still mattered in the explanation of the use of in-school and out-of-school suspensions because the R square increased in the second model that controlled for locale see Table 3. The R square in the model examining the proportion of Black students and the use of in-school suspensions was 3.9 percent. However, once locale was controlled for in the next model examining this relationship, the R square increased to 4.9 percent. The same thing can be seen between both models looking at out-of-school suspensions. The R square in the model examining the proportion of Black students and the use of out-of-school suspensions was 30.8 percent. However, once locale was controlled for in the next model, the R square increased to 33.1 percent. In conclusion, this study found in-school suspensions and out-of-school suspensions to be influenced by the proportion of Black students in North Carolina Public

Schools. While my research study supports racial threat, we do not have enough information about those responsible for handing out these exclusionary forms of punishment in schools. However, we do know that racial threat exists because of the race-neutral policies within the educational system which is essentially a microcosm of our society.

I believe it is also important to note that research shows the disproportionate use of these exclusionary punishments has proven to have negative effects on minority students. Morris and Perry (2016) found the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline practices to fuel the racial achievement gap. Prior research showed that students on average have lower academic achievement if they have previously been sanctioned (Gopalan, 2019). Other research studies have shown that exclusionary discipline policies (e.g., out-of-school suspensions and expulsions) further exacerbate a student's achievement level due to a great deal of time spent away from the classroom (Gopalan, 2019). Therefore, due to the negative consequences associated with the disproportionate use of exclusionary punishments, it is important to address these issues and make policy recommendations to keep more students inside rather than outside the classroom.

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