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Meghan M. Mitchell
University of Central Florida

Gaylene Armstrong
University of Nebraska at Omaha, garmstrong@unomaha.edu

Todd A. Armstrong
University of Nebraska at Omaha, toddarmstrong@unomaha.edu

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Disproportionate School Disciplinary Responses: An Exploration of Prisonization and Minority Threat Hypothesis Among Black, Hispanic, and Native American Students

Meghan M. Mitchell[1], Gaylene Armstrong[2], and Todd Armstrong[2]

1University of Central Florida, Orlando, USA
2University of Nebraska Omaha, USA

Abstract

This research tests two potential explanations of school disciplinary responses: minority threat hypothesis and prisonization of schools. Data from the Arizona Safe and Drug-Free Schools (SDFS) survey and Arizona Youth Survey (AYS) are analyzed using ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions. Findings demonstrate that the percentage of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students was not associated with exclusionary responses to school misconduct, but was linked to decreases in mild and restorative disciplinary practices. Findings support the hypothesis that minority threat reduces access to mild and restorative disciplinary responses. Although, further research is needed on the roles of mental health professionals and counselors in school disciplinary procedures to better guide policy and school administrator expectations.

Keywords

school discipline, school misconduct, restorative justice, racial disparities, minority threat hypothesis

Despite declines in both school violence and the use of exclusionary discipline practices in general (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018; Musu-Gillette, Zhang, Wang, Zhang, & Oudekerk, 2017), scholars have demonstrated that exclusionary discipline practices are disproportionately applied to minority racial and ethnic groups (Kupchik & Ellis, 2007; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Wallace, Goodking, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008; Welch, 2017). Specifically, scholars have found that Black and Hispanic students are punished more harshly than their White counterparts across suspensions, expulsions, and school penalties (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011; Shollenberger, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011; Welch & Payne, 2010). While numerous scholars have evaluated disparities in school discipline for Black and Hispanic students, this research has not been extended to Native American students. This is an important limitation given that Native American males experience the fourth highest suspension rates for all students (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

The disproportionate application of exclusionary discipline practices has been explained with the minority threat hypothesis and through the prisonization of schools. Within schools, the minority threat hypothesis holds that changes in disciplinary practices may stem from increases in minority groups size, as powerful groups attempt to maintain their hegemony. Studies have found the minority threat hypothesis to be valuable in explaining increases in punitive disciplinary measures (Welch & Payne, 2010) and decreases in mild and restorative responses to school misconduct (Payne & Welch, 2010, 2015). The increasing prisonization of schools and school policies may also contribute to

the use of exclusionary disciplinary responses. Since the 1990s, schools have increasingly implemented systems of formal punishment including zero tolerance policies (Advancement Project, 2005) and augmented security measures (e.g., security cameras, locked premises, and metal detectors). These procedures make it more common for schools to rely upon formal responses within the juvenile justice system when serious offenses occur either in school or on school grounds (Kupchik & Monahan, 2006; Rocque & Snellings, 2017). Despite these two potential explanations of the variation in use of exclusionary disciplinary responses in schools, scholars have not yet determined whether these theoretical explanations work in tandem or in contrast to account for the use of school discipline.

The contribution of the current study to the existing literature is twofold. First, this study advances prior research by testing the extent to which school disciplinary practices are influenced by both minority threat and the prisonization of schools. Second, this study extends prior work on the minority threat hypothesis by assessing the impact of the presence of students who are Black, Hispanic, or Native American on disciplinary responses, while accounting for contextual variation in minority threat. In doing so, this study uses a sample of schools drawn from the 2004 wave of the Arizona Youth Survey (AYS) and Safe and Drug-Free Schools (SDFS) survey conducted in Arizona. Due to the large representation of Hispanic and Native Americans students within Arizona schools, these data create an ideal opportunity to test the influence of minority threat and school prisonization on discipline responses in schools.

Literature Review

School violence and victimization rates, including violent and nonviolent behaviors, have exhibited a continual decline since the 1990s (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000; Cook, Gottfredson, & Na, 2010; Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Recent national estimates of school crime rates, provided by the U.S. Department of Education, find student threats have remained relatively stable in counts. However, instances of non- fatal victimization at school have decreased from 181 per 1,000 students in 1992 to only 54 per 1,000 students in 2015 (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Similar decreases have been found for fatal victimizations (63 in 2006 to 48 in 2014).

While violence in schools is declining, the overall application of exclusionary discipline practices has also declined (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018; Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). In fact, the most recent estimates from the U.S. Department of Education high- light that schools using serious disciplinary actions have declined from 46% in 2003- 2004 to 37% in 2015-2016 (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018). Despite a decline at the national level, exclusionary school discipline practices continue to be disproportionately applied to minority racial and ethnic groups (Welch, 2017).

Disproportionate Punishment of Minority Students

The disproportionate representation of minority students in school disciplinary responses is found throughout the educational system. From office referrals to suspensions and expulsions, the most substantive impact of school discipline is on Black males (Anyon et al., 2014). Black students are more likely to be referred

for less severe sanctions such as disrespect, excessive noise, and threats, than White student counter- parts (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Students who are Black are also more frequently suspended and expelled from schools (Brooks et al., 2000; Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Fabelo, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011; M. C. Taylor & Foster, 1986; Wallace et al., 2008). Ferguson (2000) found that Blacks account for 25% of the student population, while making up 50% of all school punishments. There is also evidence that Hispanic students are subject to higher rates of exclusionary school discipline than their White and Asian counterparts (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Wallace et al., 2008; Welch & Payne, 2010). Notably, Hispanics are referred to the office at higher rates than Whites (Skiba et al., 2011), resulting in at least a 10% overrepresentation in suspension and expulsion rates (Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000). Research has only begun to evaluate disciplinary implications for students in other minority groups such as Native Americans and Asian or Pacific Islanders. Despite Native American males experiencing the fourth highest suspension rates for all students (Losen & Skiba, 2010), their prevalence in disciplinary infractions has received little to no empirical assessment. Among the few descriptive evaluations, researchers find Native American students are overrepresented in disciplinary infractions (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010; Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Wallace et al., 2008); yet, the causal mechanisms resulting in this involvement have not been determined (Gregory et al., 2010).

Moreover, studies find Asian students are underrepresented in

disciplinary infractions relative to Black, Hispanic, and Native American students (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2007; Choi, 2007; Costenbader & Markson, 1994; DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010). Ultimately, the cumulative disadvantage for minority students in the school disciplinary process may be associated with an increased likelihood of arrest and overrepresentation of minorities in the school–juvenile justice system pipe- line (Advancement Project, 2005; Giroux, 2003; Rocque & Snellings, 2017).

Minority Threat Hypothesis

A number of scholars have suggested that the minority threat hypothesis may account for higher rates of exclusionary school discipline experienced by non-Whites. The minority threat hypothesis is rooted in conflict theory, which suggests that a capitalistic class uses its authority to maintain power over subordinate individuals and classes (Quinney, 1977; Turk, 1969). Specifically, Chambliss (1968) theorized that conflict within society results from complex social roles in the development of competition among groups, while Blalock (1967) delineated how social mobilization, resources, and percent of minorities in an area affect the perceived level of racial threat within that area. Initially conceptualized as threat related to the prevalence of Blacks within society and the social control exhibited by the White ruling class (Blalock, 1967), scholars have expanded racial threat from solely emphasizing race to a focus on ethnic threat and, most recently, to a general emphasis of minority threat (Passel & Cohn, 2008; Stewart, Martinez, Baumer, & Gertz, 2015; P. Taylor & Cohn, 2012).

Therefore, a straightforward interpretation of minority threat suggests that as threat increases in an area—as demonstrated by increases in minority populations—the powerful group (i.e., the majority) applies social sanctions and punishments to suppress the subordinate class (i.e., the minority).

Minority threat is not constant across geographies or institutions; rather, Blalock (1967) proposed racial threat would be strongest in areas where the powerful class is threatened by the growth of the minority class; however, a tipping point exists. The majority class has the ability to control and suppress the minority group until the minority class reaches a numerical presence where suppression techniques are no longer effective. However, the idea of a tipping point is relatively arbitrary. Experiences of oppression tend to be driven by the lack of social mobility and power as demonstrated by Ousey and Unnever (2012). They revealed that a tipping point does not exist. Instead, greater variation in racial and ethnic populations stigmatizes the minority class, resulting in more punitive attitudes of the majority class (Ousey & Unnever, 2012). This tipping point would then suggest that racial or minority threat is contextualized by geographic location and composition of its residents.

Studies have found that the minority threat hypothesis is associated with a number of criminal justice system outcomes including fear of crime (Chiricos, Hogan, & Gertz, 1997; Jackson, 1989; King & Wheelock, 2007; Liska, Lawrence, & Benson, 1981), sentencing (Feldmeyer & Ulmer, 2011; Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2000), police use of deadly force (Liska & Yu, 1992), and criminal justice system processing (G. S. Armstrong & Rodriguez, 2005; Weitzer, 1996). It is plausible, however, that the effect of racial

threat is not constant throughout the criminal justice system, but rather con- textualized by geographic location and institution-specific circumstances. For example, the dispersion of minority/majority groups varies throughout the United States thereby affecting social dynamics and perceived threat within certain areas across the United States. In addition, the opportunity for mobility and power within society at large is much different than opportunities for mobility and power in restrictive settings such as a school environment, which may alter the influence of minority threat.

Within the school setting, numerous studies have exposed the association between minority threat and school discipline (see Welch, 2017 for review). Welch and Payne (2010) used a nationally representative sample finding that as the percentage of Black students increased, punitive, extremely punitive, and zero tolerance disciplinary measures also increased. In an expansion on their earlier work, Payne and Welch (2010) revealed that disproportionality in punitive school discipline was also correlated with urban areas, which had higher percentages of students who were poor, as well as students who were Hispanic. Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011) found that as the percentage of Black students increased, the gap between suspension rates of Black and White students also increased. Finally, scholars have shown that the percentage of minority students not only associated with increases in punitive sanctions, but also associated with the decreased use of restorative discipline techniques (Payne & Welch, 2010, 2015).

Prisonization of Schools

Concomitant to support for the influence of minority threat on the mix of disciplinary practices employed by schools, scholars have argued that variation in disciplinary practices may also result from the increased criminalization of antisocial behavior in schools. The criminalization of school antisocial behavior has led some researchers to suggest that schools operate under a “new disciplinology” (Rocque & Snellings, 2017) where modern-day school settings are increasingly reflective of prison environments rather than educational institutions (Giroux, 2003). Hirschfield (2008) described the features of school environments that distinguish a positive educational environment from one of prisonization. Key aspects of school prisonization include the presence of physical security measures, decreases in discretion during discipline, a move toward legal terminology in policies governing school discipline, and an increased reliance on exclusionary discipline, including suspensions and expulsions. Such measures are often implemented in response to increased fear of violence (Beger, 2002). Specific physical security measures reflective of prisonization include mandatory identification badges (Kupchik & Monahan, 2006), metal detectors at school entrances (Advancement Project, 2005; Beger, 2002; Kupchik & Monahan, 2006; Mawson, Lapsley, Hoffman, & Guignard, 2002; Noguera, 2003), and surveillance cameras (Advancement Project, 2005; Beger, 2002; Kupchik & Monahan, 2006). Unfortunately, given their proliferation, research has found physical security measures do not tend to result in substantive increases in school safety (Advancement Project, 2005; Brooks et al., 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Rather,

research suggests these measures stigmatize and alienate students (Kupchik & Monahan, 2006; Mawson et al., 2002).

School disciplinary policy changes associated with prisonization include the formalization of disciplinary responses to school misconduct through the adaptation of legal terminology during the evaluation of student school antisocial behavior (Tredway, Brill, & Hernandez, 2007). Policy changes reflective of prisonization also include the reduction and/or elimination of discretion during the disciplinary process (Kupchik & Monahan, 2006) and the recategorization of less serious offenses as delinquent or criminal acts (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Raffaele Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). School prisonization is also reflected in school administrators' increased reliance on suspensions and expulsions through formalized disciplinary policies, such as zero tolerance policies. Such policies specify suspensions and expulsions as the designated disciplinary outcome for a range of disciplinary infractions (Advancement Project, 2005). The prisonization of schools is also indicated by changes in school personnel, including the increased presence of police officers, security officers, or school resource officers in the schools during daytime hours (Beger, 2002; Hyman & Perone, 1997; Juvonen, 2001; Kupchik & Monahan, 2006; Robers, Kemp, Rathbun, Morgan, & Snyder, 2014). The presence of these types of staff members may increase exclusionary school disciplinary responses, effectively "widening the net" in incidents that may have been handled informally in the past.

Other School Personnel

Other factors in the school environment that may offset the use of exclusionary sanctions or enhance the utilization of restorative discipline have been given limited con- sideration. For example, counselors and mental health professionals are commonly asked to intervene with defiant students (Atici & Çekici, 2012) and in disciplinary situations (Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, & Pollit, 2013); therefore, referral to mental health or school counselors may create the opportunity to have an intermediate step prior to a more formalized, punitive process (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Benshoff, Poidevant, & Cashwell, 1994). When available, these types of services may have countervailing effects on disproportionate utilization of restorative and exclusionary disciplinary responses. That is, school counselors and mental health professionals potentially enhance restorative school disciplinary responses (Cowan et al., 2013) and counteract disproportionate punishment responses applied to minority students because of their extensive background in cultural competence training. Since the early 1990s, counselors and mental health professionals have been extensively educated and trained on multicultural relations, social diversity, and cultural competence (Smith, Constantine, Dunn, Dinehart, & Montoya, 2006; Sue, 1991); therefore, it is possible that the presence of these staff, as part of the disciplinary process, could also negate or reduce the impact of minority threat on disciplinary practices.

Current Study

This study seeks to expand upon the existing literature by determining the extent to which the prisonization of schools and/or

minority threat hypothesis explains variation in school disciplinary practices. The current study furthers research in this area as it is the first to compare the impact of two competing theoretical perspectives (i.e., prisonization vs. minority threat) on school disciplinary responses. The current work also advances prior research by using a sample with a relatively substantial representation of students who are Hispanic or Native American.

Thus far, tests of the influence of minority threat on school disciplinary practices have largely focused on students who are Black (Gregory et al., 2011; Payne & Welch, 2010, 2015; Welch & Payne, 2010). Only a handful of studies have explored the over-representation of Hispanics in punitive discipline and quantitative studies have largely ignored the influence of Native Americans on school disciplinary practices. Finally, this study advances the existing literature on disproportionality in school disciplinary responses across racial and ethnic groups by examining a wider range of school discipline options. Here we include the use of exclusionary disciplinary responses along with mild and restorative disciplinary responses. While the majority of evaluations in school discipline focus on the implications of exclusionary or restrictive punishments, such as suspensions and expulsions, disaggregating school disciplinary response type is a necessary step to ascertain the extent of variation in interventions applied across student populations, with a specific emphasis on examining disparity of responses between racial and ethnic student groups (Payne & Welch, 2015).

To that end, this study tests the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Schools with higher proportions of students who

are Black, Hispanic, and Native American will be more likely to use exclusionary disciplinary responses to school antisocial behavior than schools with lower proportions of students from those groups.

Hypothesis 2: Schools that implement a higher number of prisonization measures will be more likely to use exclusionary disciplinary responses to school antisocial behavior than schools with lower implementation of prisonization measures.

Hypothesis 3: Schools with higher proportions of students who are Black, Hispanic, and Native American will be less likely to use restorative disciplinary responses to school antisocial behavior than schools with lower proportions of students from those groups.

Hypothesis 4: Schools that implement a higher number of prisonization measures will be less likely to use restorative disciplinary responses to school antisocial behavior than schools with lower implementation of prisonization measures.

Method

The current study tests the influence of minority threat and school prisonization on school disciplinary practices in 259 middle and high schools across Arizona.[1] Data are derived from the 2004 AYS and the 2004 wave of the SDFS. The AYS is a biennial school-based survey of eighth-, 10th-, and 12th-grade students, administered in schools across all 15 counties in Arizona. All schools (e.g., traditional public, private, charter, and reservation schools)[2] are eligible to participate in the survey and AYS researchers demonstrate that this sample is representative of all

students within the state of Arizona. The survey's intent is to better understand and identify the prevalence of problematic behaviors within schools. Data collection is facilitated by teachers and the survey is anonymous to increase survey validity. The SDFS survey was designed to allow schools to draw down federal funds related to substance abuse prevention and school safety improvements. All schools in Arizona are eligible for these funds and, in return, school administrators report state and federally required data, including documented policies, programs, parental contacts, as well as crime and delinquency indica- tors. Data for the SDFS survey is collected online through the Arizona Department of Education's website.

For the current study, measures taken from the 2004 SDFS were merged with measures of racial and ethnic composition derived from the 2004 AYS. Analysis were conducted at the school level, as the indicators of school disciplinary practices and school prisonization provided by the SDFS are provided at the school level. Individual indicators of race/ethnicity included in the AYS were used to create school-level measures of racial and ethnic composition for each school. AYS data also supported the inclusion of control variables that are important to specify the influence of minority threat and school prisonization on school disciplinary practices. These control variables included school delinquency rate and school size. AYS and SDFS data were supplemented by data from the 2000 U.S. Census. Census data were used to create a measure of concentrated disadvantage within the zip code where the school is located.

Measures

School disciplinary responses. School disciplinary responses were measured with a scale indicating the use of exclusionary discipline and a scale indicating the use of mild and restorative school discipline (see Table 1). The measure of *exclusionary school discipline* captured the potential use of four possible disciplinary responses: removal of a student for at least 1 year, referral of a student to law enforcement, suspension or removal of a student for less than 1 year, and transfer of a student for at least 1 year. In the SDFS, administrators were asked to indicate whether a specific disciplinary response was used (coded as “1”) or not used (coded as “0”) within their school. The responses to each indicator of exclusionary school discipline practices were summed to create a score reflective of the increased use of exclusionary school discipline practices.[3] On average, most schools used two of these exclusionary discipline responses, with a range from zero to four. The measure of *mild and restorative school discipline* was based on administrator responses to indicators of the use of four possible disciplinary responses: referral of a student to a school counselor, assignment of a student to a program designed to reduce disciplinary problems, student required participation in community service, and assignment of student to community service. Disciplinary responses were coded as used (as “1”) or not used (as “0”) within their school. As with the measure of exclusionary discipline practices, the measure of mild and restorative practices was based on the sum of responses to each item.[4]

Minority threat.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix (N = 259).

	Mean/	Pearson correlations	
		Exclusionary	Mild and

	percentage	*SD*	Range	discipline	restorative
School discipline scales					
Exclusionary school discipline[a]	2.43	1.06	0-4		
Mild and restorative school discipline[a]	2.85	1.11	0-4		
Minority threat					
Percent Black students	1%	0.03	0%-25%	−0.26**	−0.29**
Percent Hispanic students	37%	0.32	0%-100%	0.11	−0.06
Percent Native American students	12%	0.27	0%-100%	−0.16*	−0.10
Prisonization of schools					
Zero tolerance policies[a]	6.49	1.63	0-7	0.06	0.05
Probation officer	0.23		0-1	0.23**	0.14*
Law enforcement	0.54		0-1	0.35**	0.20*
Metal detectors	0.04		0-1	0.02	0.08
Security cameras	0.29		0-1	0.45**	0.25**
School characteristics					
School counselor and mental health professional	0.79		0-1	0.36**	0.35**
Percent male	0.51	0.08	1%-86%	0.03	−0.04
School delinquency (rate per 1,000 students)[a]	129.02	148.90	0-1,000	0.07	−0.04
School size	262.79	148.50	3-1,696	0.45*	0.25**
Concentrated disadvantage[a,b]	62.89	30.59	11.66-166.86	−0.12	−0.05

[a]Scale based on multiple indicators.
[b]Factor loadings greater than 0.82; α = 0.86.
*$p \leqslant 0.05$. **$p \leqslant 0.001$.

Minority threat was measured as the percentage of students in a school who were *Black, Hispanic*, or *Native American*. Although minority threat typically relies on the percentage of Black students within a school, this research expands upon the indicator of minority threat by also identifying the percent Hispanic and Native American students. The representation of Hispanic and Native American students in Arizona schools greatly exceeds the national representation for these groups of students. For example, Native Americans comprise 12% of students in Arizona schools, 5% of Arizona's population, and 1% of the nation's population. Hispanics are also overrepresented in Arizona schools, comprising almost 24% of

the student body, as compared with 17% of the U.S. population.

School prisonization.

Measures of school prisonization included measures reflecting school disciplinary practices, school personnel, and security measures. Changes in school policy reflective of prisonization were indicated by the number of *zero tolerance policies* in place at each school (guns, drugs, violence, etc.). The average school had six zero tolerance policies, with a range between zero and seven policies. Indica- tors of prisonization also included the prevalence of nonteaching, criminal justice– oriented school personnel. The presence of school resource officers and other criminal justice officials has been found to “prisonize” the school experience, making referrals to law enforcement simplified and more prevalent (Giroux, 2003; Kupchik, 2010; Wacquant, 2001). The presence of criminal justice–oriented school personnel was assessed with two measures. The first was a dichotomous indicator of *probation officer presence* (coded as “1” for present, “0” no officer at school). Twenty-three percent of schools housed a probation officer. The second measure of criminal justice–oriented school personnel was a dichotomous measure of the *presence of full- and/or part-time law enforcement officers*, where 54% of schools had an officer. The prisonization of the school environment was also quantified with dichotomous indicators of the presence of *metal detectors* and *security cameras* (coded as “1” for present, “0” for not present). Physical security measures (e.g., metal detectors and security cameras) create an institutionalized feeling within the school and make students feel less safe (Hirschfield, 2008). On average, only 4% of schools had metal detectors, whereas almost

30% used security cameras.

Other school personnel.

Analyses also included a measure of the presence of other school personnel with a potential role in the school disciplinary process. As discussed earlier, employment of mental health–related school personnel may increase the likelihood of nonpunitive responses to school misconduct (Cowan et al., 2013). To account for the presence of restorative school staff, a dichotomous indicator of the presence of school counselors or mental health professionals was included in analyses (coded as “1” for present, “0” for not present). On average, 80% of schools had a school counselor or mental health professional.

Control variables.

Table 1 also presents descriptive statistics for each control variable included in this study. School-related control variables included the percentage of male students and school delinquency rate. Existing literature suggests that male students engage in a higher level of school delinquency than female students (Kaufman et al., 2010; Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Skiba et al., 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). The impact of school delinquency rates on disciplinary practices was accounted for with an 18-item *school delinquency rate* scale calculated per 1,000 students. Items ranged from violent acts (e.g., rape or physical attacks) to property- and drug-related delinquency (e.g., possession of tobacco and motor vehicle theft). The average school delinquency

rate was 129 acts per 1,000 students, ranging from zero to 1,000. Analyses also control for *school size*. Average school size was 262 students with a range from three to almost 1,700 students.

The final control measure included a measure of disadvantage. Community disadvantage was measured with a *concentrated disadvantage*[5] scale that was created using census data indicators at the school zip code level. Prior literature indicates that community economic conditions are highly correlated to increases in both school misconduct (T. A. Armstrong, Armstrong, & Katz, 2015) and school discipline (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba et al., 2002; Thornton & Trent, 1988). The concentrated disadvantage scale was based on census data indicators for the percentage of poverty, public assistance, unemployment, and single-headed households within the school's zip code. Varimax factor rotation demonstrated that all indicators loaded at .82 or higher with strong internal validity ($\alpha = .86$). Scale scores ranged from 11.66 to 166.86, with a higher scale score indicating a higher level of concentrated disadvantage of the residents in the school's surrounding community.

Analytic strategy.

For the purpose of this analysis, bivariate correlations were initially assessed to determine statistically significant associations between variables. Next, multivariate ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models were used to examine whether increases in school prisonization or minority threat were associated with increased availability and use of specific school disciplinary responses while control- ling for a number of

covariates.

Results

Bivariate correlations are presented in Table 1. Correlation coefficients representing the association between minority threat and school discipline show schools with a higher percentage of Black students were less likely to use exclusionary school discipline, along with mild and restorative school discipline. Schools with a higher percent- age of Native American students were less likely to use exclusionary school discipline, but not mild and restorative school discipline. No significant correlations existed between the percentage of Hispanic students and the use of school disciplinary responses. Correlation coefficients representing the association between prisonization and school discipline show that the presence of a probation officer and law enforcement officer was associated with a significant increase of both outcomes, whereas the presence of security cameras were only associated with an increase in exclusionary discipline. Neither zero tolerance policies nor the presence of metal detectors were significantly correlated with exclusionary or mild and restorative discipline. The presence of school counselors and mental health professionals and school size were both important correlates of school disciplinary practices. As school size increased and counselors and mental health professionals became available, the use of both exclusionary, and mild and restorative school disciplinary responses significantly increased. Other statistically significant associations among covariates are indicated in Table 1.

Table 2. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Results for Exclusionary School Discipline.

	Model 1 $N = 229$			Model 2 $N = 231$			Model 3 $N = 229$		
	b	*SE*	β	*b*	*SE*	β	*b*	*SE*	β
Percent Black	−3.593	3.919	−0.084				−2.623	2.048	−0.079
Percent Hispanic	0.181	0.280	0.058				0.170	0.225	0.050
Percent Native	−1.391**	0.436	−0.318				−0.536	0.301	−0.132
Zero tolerance policies				0.056	0.040	0.079	0.055	0.040	0.078
Probation officer				0.150	0.149	0.060	0.090	0.151	0.036
Law enforcement				0.118	0.143	0.056	0.058	0.144	0.027
Metal detectors				0.116	0.294	0.023	0.024	0.294	0.005
Security cameras				0.145	0.146	0.063	0.165	0.146	0.072
Percent male	−1.003	1.109	−0.075	0.783	0.755	0.060	0.371	0.830	0.026
School delinquency scale rate[a]	0.001*	0.001	0.189	0.017**	0.008	0.124	0.021*	0.008	0.153
School size	0.001*	0.001	0.184	0.001**	0.001	0.347	0.001**	0.001	0.339
School counselor and mental health professional	0.754**	0.239	0.281	0.558**	0.168	0.213	0.544**	0.176	0.207
Concentrated disadvantage	0.000	0.003	−0.004	−0.113	0.002	−0.113	−0.003	0.002	−0.078
Constant	1.960**	0.705		0.899	0.529		1.120	0.581	
F-statistic	6.931**			9.784**			8.074**		
R-Squared	0.280			0.276			0.287		

[a]Rate per 1,000 students.
$^{*}p \leqslant 0.05$. $^{**}p \leqslant 0.01$.

OLS regression models were used to determine the influence of minority threat and prisonization on school disciplinary responses while controlling for other potential influences on school discipline (see Table 2). There were no issues with multicollinearity of variables as demonstrated by coefficient estimates. In addition, all VIF and tolerance statistics were between 1.0 and 1.7, which is within the disciplinary standards. Three separate models were estimated for each type of school disciplinary response. The first model tested the hypothesis that as minority threat increases within schools—indicated by higher percentages of Black, Hispanic, or Native American students—the use of exclusionary school discipline in response to school antisocial behavior would also increase. Results presented in Table 2 failed to support Hypothesis 1. In contrast to expectations, percent Black, Hispanic, and Native was not related to increases in the use of exclusionary school discipline. These findings were in contrast to both prior research and expectations that an increase in minority threat would result in an increased likelihood of exclusionary school discipline use. Yet, as school size (b = 0.001, $p \leqslant 0.01$) and delinquency (b = 0.021, $p \leqslant 0.01$) increased, the likelihood of exclusionary punishment also increased. Moreover, schools with counselors and mental health professionals were more likely to rely on exclusionary school discipline responses (b = 0.600, $p \leqslant 0.01$). This model accounted for 28% of the variance in exclusionary school disciplinary responses, a significant improvement over an intercept-only model (F = 6.931, $p \leqslant 0.01$).

The second model tested the hypothesis that the implementation of prisonization measures would be associated with the increased use of exclusionary school disciplinary responses to school antisocial behavior. The second model accounted for 28% of the variance in the outcome variable ($F = 9.784$, $p \leqslant 0.01$). Results for this model did not support Hypothesis 2. Prisonization measures were not significantly related to outcomes. However, the presence of a school counselor and mental health professional had a strong association with increases in exclusionary school discipline ($b = 0.558$, $p \leqslant 0.01$). And as school size ($b = 0.001$, $p \leqslant 0.01$) and school delinquency ($b = 0.017$, $p \leqslant 0.01$) increased, the likelihood of exclusionary discipline increased.

Model 3 tested the simultaneous influence of both minority threat and prisonization on exclusionary discipline responses. Results show no support for the influence of school prisonization on disciplinary practices, as none of the predictors are significant. Similarly, no support was found for the influence of minority threat on exclusionary discipline. Interestingly, the presence of a school counselor or mental health professional remained a robust predictor of increases in the likelihood of exclusionary school discipline ($b = 0.544$, $p \leqslant 0.01$). School size ($b = 0.001$, $p \leqslant 0.01$) and school delinquency rates ($b = .021$, $p \leqslant 0.05$) were also associated with increases in exclusionary school disciplinary practices. This model accounted for 29% of the variance and was statistically significant ($F = 8.074$, $p \leqslant 0.01$).

The results of regression models testing the effect of minority threat and prisonization on restorative and mild school

discipline are presented in Table 3. In support of Hypothesis 3, Model 1 shows increases in the percentage of students who are Black ($b = -7.348$, $p \leqslant 0.01$), Hispanic ($b = -0.560$, $p \leqslant 0.05$), and Native American ($b = -0.737$, $p \leqslant 0.05$) were associated with statistically significant decreases in mild and restorative responses to school misconduct. Similarly, the presence of school counselors and mental health professionals coincided with a statistically significant increase in the utilization of mild and restorative school discipline (b = 0.802, $p \leqslant 0.01$). This finding makes intuitive sense as mild and restorative school discipline responses often include referral of students to a school counselor and/or referral of students to a pro- gram designed to reduce delinquency. Overall, this model represented 19% of the variance in this outcome ($F = 7.681$, $p \leqslant 0.01$).

Model 2 evaluated the association between school prisonization and the use of mild or restorative school disciplinary responses predicted by Hypothesis 4. Prisonization factors were not associated with the likelihood of mild or restorative disciplinary responses. Rather, school size ($b = 0.001$, $p \leqslant 0.01$) and the presence of school counselors and mental health professionals ($b = 0.795$, $p \leqslant 0.05$) were the only significant predictors of this outcome accounting for 13% of the total variance ($F = 4.448$, $p \leqslant 0.01$).

The final model tested the joint influence of school prisonization and minority threat in accounting for variation in mild and restorative school disciplinary practices. This model accounted for 19% of the variance ($F = 5.119$, $p \leqslant .01$) in mild and restorative school disciplinary responses to misconduct. In this

model, minority threat measures had a robust association with mild or restorative disciplinary outcomes. As the percent of students who are Black, Hispanic, and Native American increased, mild and restorative discipline responses substantially decreased for Blacks (*b* = −7.580, $p \leqslant 0.01$), Hispanics (*b* = −0.588, $p \leqslant 0.01$), and Native Americans (b = −0.677, $p \leqslant 0.05$). Prisonization factors were not significantly associated with the use of mild or restorative disciplinary practices. One control variable, the presence of counselor and mental health professionals (*b* = 0.809, $p \leqslant 0.01$), resulted in an increase in restorative and mild discipline responses. Implications of these results are discussed below.

Table 3. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Results for Restorative and Mild School Discipline.

	Model 1 N = 229			Model 2 N = 231			Model 3 N = 229		
	b	*SE*	β	*b*	*SE*	β	*b*	*SE*	β
Percent Black	−7.348**	2.271	−0.212				−7.580**	2.285	−0.219
Percent Hispanic	−0.560*	0.248	−0.158				−0.588*	0.251	−0.166
Percent Native	−0.737*	0.331	−0.174				−0.677*	0.336	−0.160
Zero tolerance policies				0.058	0.046	0.079	0.057	0.045	0.077
Probation officer				0.058	0.171	0.022	0.088	0.168	0.033
Law enforcement				−0.022	0.164	−0.010	−0.094	0.161	−0.042
Metal detectors				0.483	0.337	0.093	0.482	0.328	0.093
Security cameras				−0.155	0.167	−0.064	−0.115	0.163	−0.048
Percent male	0.406	0.914	0.028	0.886	0.865	0.065	0.525	0.926	0.036
School delinquency scale rate[a]	−0.000	0.000	−0.006	−0.000	0.000	−0.024	−0.000	0.000	−0.012
School size	0.000	0.000	0.089	0.001**	0.000	0.194	0.000	0.000	0.121
School counselor and mental health professional	0.802**	0.187	0.291	0.795**	0.193	0.291	0.809**	0.196	0.294
Concentrated disadvantage	0.000	0.003	0.013	−0.001	0.002	−0.026	0.000	0.003	0.012
Constant	2.277**	0.564		1.309*	0.607		1.863**	0.648	
F-statistic	7.681**			4.448**			5.119**		
R-Squared	0.190			0.130			0.190		

[a]Rate per 1,000 students.
$^{*}p \leqslant 0.05$. $^{**}p \leqslant 0.01$.

Discussion

Despite declining rates of fatal and nonfatal victimizations and

declines in the use of exclusionary school discipline (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018), school discipline continues to have a disproportionate impact on minority youth (Welch, 2017). Neither referral for or receipt of disciplinary actions is applied equally across racial and ethnic student groups; rather, minority students are most negatively affected by harsh policies at all stages of school discipline (e.g., referral, punishment, suspensions, and arrest; Giroux, 2003). Minority students are referred for disciplinary infractions at almost twice their representation within the student population (Nichols, 2004). Consequently, students who are Black (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Mendez & Knoff, 2003), Hispanic (Gordon et al., 2000; Gregory et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2011), and Native American (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010; Krezmien et al., 2006; Wallace et al., 2008) are overrepresented in school discipline statistics.

Given the disproportionate impact of punitive school discipline on minority youth, it is critical to understand the factors influencing responses to school misconduct. While important advances have been made, the exact factors influencing the punitive and disproportionate use of school discipline are still somewhat unclear. Some researchers have emphasized the prisonization of the schools (Hirschfield, 2008; Rocque & Snellings, 2017), whereas others have found that minority threat is the driving force behind school disciplinary practices (Welch & Payne, 2010). This current study sought to build on this earlier work by determining the extent to which both prisonization and minority threat predict the type of school disciplinary response. Below, we highlight key findings and offer suggestions for future research.

First, the current analysis shows that an increase in the percentage of minority students is associated with decreases in mild and restorative school discipline. In other words, as the prevalence of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students increases, schools are less likely to use mild and restorative disciplinary responses such as referrals to intervention programs. These findings add to the previously supported literature that demonstrates racial threat decreases the likelihood of restorative interventions for Black students (Payne & Welch, 2010, 2015). Restorative interventions in schools are modeled after the initial restorative justice practices used throughout the criminal jus- tice system where a focus is placed on restoring harm for victims, offenders, and com- munities (Braithwaite, 1989; Drewery, 2004; Macready, 2009; Morrison, 2003). When restorative disciplinary responses are employed, students are less likely to receive office referrals (Farrar, 2015) or be expelled (Schiff, 2013), and victims and offenders report greater satisfaction with the process (Latimer, Dowden, & Muise, 2005). Furthermore, racial disparities in the use of discipline can be reduced (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016). Thus, the disparate application of mild and restorative disciplinary practices serve to perpetuate race-based education inequity. Given the behavioral and social benefits rendered through restorative justice, school administrators should assess current practices for behavioral interventions to ensure that all students regardless of race are given equal opportunity to receive mild and restorative disciplinary responses.

The second key finding was the lack of association between minority threat and increases in exclusionary school discipline. We

anticipated increases in the percentage of minority groups in Arizona schools would be associated with increases in exclusionary disciplinary practices. This was not the case. Changes in the percentage of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students were not associated with exclusionary responses to school misconduct. Our results may be partially explained by the distribution of race and ethnicity in Arizona schools. Shifts in punitiveness associated with the presence of minority groups are contingent on the perception of threat within an area (Blalock, 1967). Because Blacks comprise a very small percentage of students in the majority of these schools, they may not be perceived as threatening and, in turn, the use of exclusionary disciplinary practices is not relied upon. Whereas, as Hispanics and Native American students represent a larger percentage of students, they may not be subjected to majority suppression strategies.

Our third key finding is that aspects of prisonization including changes to the school environment and the presence of criminal justice system personnel were not linked to variation in school disciplinary practices. Results provided no support for the hypothesis that increases in prisonization will result in an increase in exclusionary school discipline and no support for a link between prisonization and mild and restorative school disciplinary practices. Prior scholars have demonstrated that an increased reliance on school resource officers (Wacquant, 2001), security practices (e.g., mandatory identification badges, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras), and zero tolerance policies does not increase perceptions of school safety (Advancement Project, 2005; Brooks

et al., 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999) and instead creates a direct link from schools to the juvenile justice system (Ferguson, 2000; Kupchik & Monahan, 2006). However, some scholars have found that the presence of police officers within schools does not actually criminalize students (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016; Theriot, 2009); instead, the referral rates of officers within schools are nondistinguishable to officers outside of schools (May, Barranco, Stokes, Robertson, & Haynes, 2018). In relation to school prisonization practices, our findings suggest that exclusionary disciplinary practices are not a necessary function of the school prisonization process.

Our fourth key finding is that school mental health professionals and counselors appear to play an important role in school disciplinary responses. The presence of these staff members within a school was associated with an increased likelihood of both exclusionary and mild and restorative interventions. These findings are somewhat counterintuitive as school counselors are primarily tasked with supporting students, teachers, and parents while providing services, leadership, and collaboration (Amatea & Clark, 2005; American School Counselor Association, 2003; Flaherty et al., 1998; Glosoff & Koprowicz, 1990; Gysbers & Henderson, 1988); although, some research has shown that counselors are now expected to discipline students through behavioral interventions (Benshoff et al., 1994; Fitch, Newby, Ballestero, & Marshall, 2001) and work collaboratively with other school staff in handling problematic behaviors (Atici & Çekici, 2012; Cowan et al., 2013). Potentially, the changing role of school counselors, from merely supportive entities to disciplinarians, could result in the increases in

exclusionary discipline practices found in the current research. Future research should consider alternative means of observing and documenting such informal interventions, especially within schools that employ counselors and/or mental health professionals.

The weight given to the results of the current work is conditioned by certain methodological aspects of this study. First, the data used for this research are dated. Though dated, they provide a unique sample of Native American and Hispanic students, who are generally left out of school discipline analyses. We feel these data paint a rich picture surrounding their school experiences. In addition, prior scholars evaluating exclusionary and restorative disciplinary practices (e.g., Welch & Payne, 2010, 2015) have done so using data that were 10 to 15 years old (i.e., National Study of Delinquency Prevention in Schools), and some could argue that because of policy discussions surrounding border security and immigration laws, racial threat may exert an even higher exclusionary response in school discipline currently than it did in 2004, which reinforces the need for further evaluation of exclusionary school discipline and how it may be contextualized by other correlates. Second, prior work on racial threat and school discipline has measured the application of exclusionary and restorative discipline at the individual level. To assess the impact of both racial threat and prisonization, and to extend analyses to schools with substantive proportions of Native Americans, the current study assessed the application of the mix of exclusionary and restorative discipline practices at the school level. Differences in the measurement of the application of disciplinary practices may

contribute to differences in results between the current study and prior work. Future investigations may assess the impact of level of measurement on the pattern of association between prisonization, minority threat, and disciplinary practices by employing data that include both individual- and school-level indicators of disciplinary practices. The results of the current work may also be shaped by regional variation in factors influencing the application of exclusionary and restorative discipline. Analyses were based on data from schools appearing in the AYS and in the SDFS; as such, all schools in these analyses were from Arizona and associations appearing in our results may be unique to the social-political context of the Southwest United States. While the methodological considerations outlined are balanced by the advantages of the data used in the current study including the capacity to extend the study of minority threat to Native Americans, these considerations do underscore the need for replication.

Conclusion

This research adds to the limited existing literature that evaluates the causal mechanisms accounting for the mix of disciplinary responses used within schools. Our findings demonstrate that minority threat was not associated with increases in exclusionary discipline; instead, minority threat was consistently linked to a decrease in the avail- ability of mild and restorative responses to school misconduct. Prisonization factors, however, have no impact on mild and restorative or exclusionary disciplinary response outcomes. These findings highlight the need for future research to simultaneously evaluate all disciplinary

outcomes, ranging from exclusionary to restorative, and for researchers to determine the impact of both minority threat and prisonization on variation in school disciplinary practices. Such a comprehensive approach will help to pro- vide a firm research base upon which policies ensuring an equitable distribution of school disciplinary practices can be built.

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Notes

1. Due to missing data on type of school, separate analyses for middle schools and high schools were not feasible.
2. Twenty-one of the 258 schools had a student population where 45% or more of the students identified as Native American. Of those schools, 18 had a student body population that was 90% or more Native American. In comparison with the entire sample, these schools constituted a statistical minority. To see if the 18 schools had undue influence on our models, we reestimated the models without

those schools and the effects that were significant in the complete model remained.

3. We separately estimated regression models for each outcome and found no substantive differences between the individual and combined models. For exclusionary school discipline, all of the combined model effects were found in separately estimated models with the exception of a significant association between the presence of school cameras and removal for at least 1 year (b = 0.95; $p = 0.01$) as a discipline outcome. Based on minimal differences between the combined and separately estimated models, the combined models are retained for the analysis.

4. Separately estimated models for mild and restorative school discipline were estimated. The significant effects in the combined models were consistent with the significant effects in the separately estimated models with the exception of metal detectors ($b = 1.58$; $p = 0.04$) and school size ($b = 0.00$; $p = 0.02$) with required participation in community service. Therefore, the combined models are retained for the analysis.

5. The authors also attempted to include a measure of school poverty—via percent free and reduced-price lunches—into the models. Multicollinearity issues were present, so percent free and reduced-price lunch was excluded from the analysis.

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Author Biographies

Meghan M. Mitchell is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Central Florida. She received her BS and MS from North Dakota State University and PhD in Criminal Justice from Sam Houston State University. Her current work examines the areas of corrections, subcultures, reentry, and inequalities. She has published in the *Journal of Criminal Justice, Deviant Behavior, Criminal Justice Policy Review, Trends in Organized Crime,* and the *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice*. Her dissertation research on the convict code was supported by a BJS-Graduate Research Fellowship and the Charles Koch Foundation, and Meghan was the project manager for the LoneStar project–an NIJ funded study examining gangs and reentry experiences.

Gaylene Armstrong, is Director and Professor in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her research examines criminal justice policy with specialization in corrections and system involved youth.

Todd Armstrong is a Professor in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska Omaha. He is interested in the nature and origins of criminal propensity, program and policy evaluation and school based problem behavior prevention. Some of his research has appeared in *Criminology,* the *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency,*

Justice Quarterly, Crime and Delinquency, and *Criminal Justice and Behavior*.