

Teacher Discipline of Young African American Boys in an Urban Classroom

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate young African American male students' perceptions of misbehavior and teacher discipline. The study took place in a large southwestern metropolitan area of the United States. All of the participants attended the same K-8 charter school and were selected using high frequency teacher nomination of student misbehavior. Using tenants of sociocultural theory and symbolic interactionism as theoretical frameworks, moment to moment teacher-student micro level interactions during classroom disciplinary moments were analyzed. Data were collected through observations, video recording, and interviews. Results detail student interpretation of teacher discipline and indicate a pattern during classroom discipline. With the research collected, I hope to shed light on teacher discipline of young African American boys in an Urban classroom.

Keywords: Black Boys, Teacher Discipline, School Behavior, Student and Teacher Perspectives

Introduction

The overrepresentation of young African American¹ boys in school discipline is widespread throughout schools in the United States (US). The literature on school behavior and teacher discipline in public schools demonstrates both a lack of cultural understanding and failure of the educational system related to this problem. A recent analysis of teacher discipline in early childhood settings throughout the US determined Black preschoolers represented 47% of students suspended, although they comprised only 19% of student enrollment (Anyon et al. 2014; American Psychological Association, 2016).

Teachers tend to react more harshly towards Black boys (Monroe, 2005), placing a strong emphasis on controlling them at school (Mendez, Knoff & Ferron, 2002; Richart, Brooks & Soler, 2003; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Intense teacher discipline is directed towards Black boys because they are perceived “to engage disproportionately in delinquency” (Payne & Welch, 2010, p. 1024). In general, Black boys are perceived as rule breaking, defiant, threatening, disrespectful, and disobedient (Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010). Despite Black boys being over disciplined, there is no evidence to suggest they misbehave more than other boys (Anyon, et al, 2014; Skiba, 2014; Skiba, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheya & Hughes, 2014). Researchers conclude that when teachers have static and normative perceptions of classroom behavior, they promote classroom disciplinary inequities by singling out Black male students (Fenning & Rose, 2007). This type of undue blame often results in student denial of educational rights, isolation, and is negatively impactful to students (Swadener, 2012).

Very little research considers student perception of teacher discipline. Ramsay assessed perceptions of elementary students and reported students interpreted classroom misbehavior and teacher discipline differently from their teachers (Ramsay, 2020). Similarly, Woolfolk, Hoy and Weinstein (2006) reported differences in student and teacher perspectives of classroom management. This study examines micro-level

teacher and student interactions during classroom disciplinary moments. The purpose of this study is to investigate young African American male students' perceptions of classroom misbehavior and teacher discipline. I hope to gain insight into understanding how perceptions of classroom misbehavior mediate teacher discipline of young African American boys in an urban classroom.

Theoretical Framework

Tenants of sociocultural theory and symbolic interactionism are the theoretical frameworks used to inform data collection and analyze the findings of this study. A fundamental premise of sociocultural theory is that learning is mediated (Lantolf, 2000). Sociocultural theory suggests people learn in relationship with one another through a multitude of exchanges (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986). Recognizing classrooms are interactive spaces for students and teachers, incorporating sociocultural theory allows for understanding teachers' discipline and perceptions of misbehavior.

The utilization of Blumer's Chicago tradition of symbolic interactionism considers that people act on the basis of meanings things have for them (Blumer, 1969). This theory suggests meaning is derived through social interaction, and posits meaning can be modified through an interpretative process occurring through interaction. The integration of these frameworks is critical for this study because the current research on teacher discipline does not typically take into account student perspective of misbehavior or the way in which classroom discipline moments are mediated between a teacher and student

Research Study: Context and Discipline Policy

Intelligently Designed Academy (IDA)ⁱⁱ, is a small kindergarten through 8th grade charter school located in a large metropolitan area in a southwestern city of the United States. With an enrollment of 130 youth, Black and Hispanic students comprised 77% of the student population, White students represented 8%, and American Indian/Alaskan Native students made up about 5% of the population. Over 75% of the student population was eligible for free or reduced lunch programs, compared to a state average of 47%. No data were reported for special education, recent immigrants, or English Language Learners (ELL).

A total of 17 people worked at IDA, including a school administrator, special education specialist, administrative assistant, nutrition specialist, custodian, bus driver, nine teachers, and two teaching assistants. Some classrooms were multi-grade levels; the lower elementary grades consisted of three classrooms: K-1, 1-2, 2-3. The middle grades were multi-grade with 5th and 6th grades combined. The curriculum included writing and language arts, mathematics, science, health, reading/phonics, social studies, art, character education, and physical education.

Overall, students and staff appeared kind towards one another. The school's discipline policy indicated students were responsible for their behaviors and must decide if they wanted to receive positive teacher praise or a consequence for breaking a school rule. In addition, it also specified students were encouraged to understand the intent of staff was to help, to reach out to school personnel regarding their behavior, and interpret adult advice as valuable. The protocol for addressing behavioral disruptions was to send students to the office or call a parent/guardian.

Methodology

This study used grounded theory to explore how African American male students perceive teacher discipline and classroom misbehavior. Grounded theory as a research

methodology was founded on symbolic interactionism, and represents both a method of inquiry and one that produces a product of such inquiry. It is appropriate to use grounded theory because this qualitative case study seeks to understand a phenomenon (i.e., perceptions of misbehavior and teacher discipline) about which little is yet known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Data Collection

To answer the research question, data collection procedures included direct observation, participant observation, video observations, field notes, memos, semi-structured interviews, and stimulated recall interviews. I used stimulated video recall interviews separately with teachers and students where we watched video-recordings of classroom events involving teacher discipline. Classroom recordings were recorded Monday through Thursday for approximately 60-180 minutes a day. During stimulated recall interviews, I asked questions related to the video clip of a classroom disciplinary moment until I exhausted the discussion of the incidents. General contextual information about each segment was also used.

Data were collected through inquiry-guided data collection using multiple sources. The first part of data student nomination phase involved interviews and surveys. Teachers completed a survey, rating the frequency of certain student behaviors (e.g., does not follow directions, talks back to teachers; disagrees with others, refuses to participate, displays aggression, has a bad attitude, or disrupts teaching and learning). This study was limited to young Black male students, so those students who received an attentional or substantial indicator value were included in the study, indicating that teachers perceived these behaviors of a student as problematic. The second part of the student nomination stage involved semi-structured interviews that were open-ended, and allowed for the interview to be conducted at times more like a conversation (Merriam, 1998).

Participants

Students in fourth through sixth grades were included in the sample as a way to examine grade levels not typically included in this research. A total of five students and their two respective teachers were included in the study. These findings are part of a larger study (Neal, 2014). For the purposes of this article, I present findings of the two youngest children in the same class. The themes discussed were common to all students, and the data selected best represented those themes.

Byron. Byron is a ten-year-old African American boy in the fifth grade. He started attending IDA as a fourth grader after he was expelled from an area public school for bringing and discharging a firearm in school. He enjoys dancing and describes himself as talented. Byron lived with his father until he died unexpectedly while Byron was in fourth grade. He now lives with his mother and siblings. Byron reports his favorite part of school is recess, art, and math.

Jonathan. Jonathan is a nine-year-old, African American boy in the fourth grade. He enjoys sports; football and basketball are his favorite. Jonathan also indicates he loves spaghetti. When people tease him at school, he gets sad. This is Jonathan's second year at IDA. He has attended since second grade. He talks about school as "fun because you get to learn and do stuff and they make you learn good." Jonathan lives with his mother and siblings.

Mr. Abraham. Mr. Abraham identifies himself as a single African American male. Currently, he is working to obtain his state teaching license in general education and

has a bachelor's degree in communication and a master's degree in education administration. This is Mr. Abraham's second year at IDA.

Analysis

The data analysis procedures utilized for this study consisted of high frequency nomination, grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), including the constant comparison method of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), whole-to-part (Erickson, 2006), and video analysis (Ridder, 2007). Given the strengths and weaknesses of different methods, like other researchers, I combine methods in complementary ways as a strategy for investigating the phenomena (Mercer, Littleton, & Wegerif, 2009).

All interviews and stimulated recall video recordings were transcribed. After individual transcripts were completed, I analyzed the texts using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The conceptual labels identified from open coding were sorted and compiled. Using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) suggestions for axial coding, categories from the data were arranged. This secondary analysis was used as a way to produce a conceptual model of student misbehaviors. I systematically analyzed data for thematic patterns. By conducting a descriptive analysis, categories were created to describe the interactions of each participant as a way to derive meaning for how students and their teacher perceived teacher discipline and classroom misbehavior.

I also used Erickson's whole-to-part (inductive) procedures with a focus on interaction for discovering meaning (Erickson 2006), as well as a modified version of Ridder's procedure for video analysis (Ridder, 2007.) The use of video was incorporated as an extension of direct observations and allowed for a more detailed analysis (Gobo, 2008). The first four weeks of video data were used to create a portrait of classrooms' routines. Field notes and video-recordings were closely analyzed for critical classroom behavioral events between the teacher and student. Responses were coded several times to identify representations of misbehavior.

Next, I indexed video segments of conflicts from the ten weeks of data collection and created a library of incidents per student. I used triangulation with field notes to identify episodes of conflict. Once this was done, I coded episodes of misbehavior to characterize strategies used by teachers and students to negotiate their moment-to-moment decisions during instances of classroom conflict. I also developed categories from these preliminary codes to identify teachers' and students' thinking regarding their involvement in these incidents specific to teacher discipline. Finally, incorporating triangulation, I looked for evidence across data sources to confirm findings to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

Findings

In this section, I present data regarding how Byron, Jonathan, and their teacher Mr. Abraham perceive classroom misbehavior and teacher discipline. Understanding that teachers and students either relate to their environment or have a relationship with their environment, Farberman suggests they make sense of classroom behaviors by evaluating them through their interactions with others (Farberman, 1985). In this same way teachers and students interpret classroom discipline and occurrences of teacher discipline differently.

Conceptualizing Classroom Misbehavior

Students and teachers co-constructed classroom disciplinary moments. Shown in Table 1 is the mental organizational and coding system Mr. Abraham and students developed as they made sense of classroom misbehavior and teacher discipline. Misbehavior

began during phase 1 with a student *launching* a teacher disciplinary moment by externalizing some type of behavior. Phase 2, *interpretation*, involved coding student behavior as intentional. Phase 3, *coding*, consisted of students placing blame on Mr. Abraham for their choice to display behavior. In other words, students blamed their teacher, Mr. Abraham for their own behavior. During phase 4, *public recognition*, Mr. Abraham acknowledged a student’s behavior which was interpreted by the student to signify trouble. In contrast, Mr. Abraham coded his interactions with students as signifying an intervention or warning to stop the misbehavior. In phase 5, *sanction*, students coded teacher interaction as punishment, whereas Mr. Abraham perceived the interaction to signify a consequence. The sixth and final phase, *closure*, always involved an immediate reaction.

Table 1

Conceptualization of Classroom Misbehavior

Phase	Coding Indicators	
	Students	Mr. Abraham
1 Launching	Observable Student Behavior	Observable Student Behavior
2 Interpretation	Student Intentionality	Student Intentionality
3 Coding	Fault	Fault
4 Public Recognition	Trouble	Intervention
5 Sanction	Punishment	Consequence
6 Closure	Immediate Reaction	Immediate Reaction

Phases 1 and 2: Launching and Interpretation. The launching or the initiation of a classroom disciplinary moment began with a student exhibiting an observable behavior that came into question by Mr. Abraham. Observable student behaviors were described as common classroom constructs, such as: verbalizations (e.g., yelling, calling out); swaying in a desk; leaving an area without permission; putting a pencil down on a desk; raising a hand; talking; word choice; making faces; throwing objects; or touching another student. Both Mr. Abraham and students agreed such misbehavior was observable.

Mr. Abraham and the students believed intentionality was an aspect of their conceptualizations of misbehavior. Mr. Abraham believed students willfully sought to disrupt class. He believed students have a clear element of intentionality when exhibiting behaviors. Mr. Abraham indicated:

If I ask a student to put the book away and I get, sort of, an adverse response, it becomes a disruption, because it's taking away from the instruction at the time. A disruption is something that is disturbing to the entire class. This becomes a choice a student has made.

Mr. Abraham also believed students were purposely *seeking attention* and convinced students wanted to disturb the entire class by interfering with teaching and learning. He felt personally attacked by students when they “misbehaved.” Mr. Abraham indicated:

Students make the choice to disrupt the class. They need to take responsibility for their actions. At the moment of correction, they often deny their involvement, even when you say, "I saw you." Students should take correction without attitude.

In contrast, students did not consider they were always deliberate in their behavior, acting with intent to disrupt teaching and learning or causing undue hardship on teacher, self, or other students. The findings of this study suggest students' planning was both conscious and unconscious, but not necessarily with a negative intention (as described by teachers). During interviews, Byron shared:

I know Mr. Abraham sometimes doesn't like me. That is what he wants. I think he gets up in the morning and decides who is gonna get it. It is usually me.

Phase 3: Coding. Mr. Abraham and students blamed each other as an aspect of classroom misbehaviors. In most cases, students believed Mr. Abraham purposely singled them out and purposely wanted them to experience some type of hardship. In a way, students were navigating these situations in a moral space in which teachers' actions were judged as fair or unfair. When being accused of misbehavior, students proclaimed their *innocence* and often refuted Mr. Abraham's claim. Students saw themselves as victims and subject to teacher wrath. During interviews students shared:

Byron: Sometimes I get in trouble and I'm sitting at my desk.
Jonathan: I see other kids do stuff, but he just gets me in trouble.

Commonly observed were students pushing back through enacting stances of denial through postural tension, physical gestures, or verbal responses. This could demonstrate students' lack of power, and also sets the stage for feelings of frustration for the students because students' perceptions lacked personal accountability. On the other hand, students' responses indicated considerable agency, though generally interpreted as resistance, and ultimately interpreted by Mr. Abraham as misbehavior.

In contrast, Mr. Abraham presumed students were culpable and blamed them for their actions. Mr. Abraham remarked:

Some of them just can't help it. No matter how hard I try, support them, punish them, reward them, some of them still don't get it. It's like they just want to act up in class.

Because interaction is a major analytic concept in the analysis of schooling, it can be used to show how, during the process, some behaviors evolved into misbehavior and others did not. It seems; therefore, the sequential progression from externalized behavior to judgments about intentionality and conclusions of fault positioned some students as able and others on the margins (Erickson, 1979; Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004; Mehan, 1979; McDermott, 1976; McDermott & Gospodinoff, 1979; Philips, 1972).

Phase 4: Public recognition. During the public recognition phase, Mr. Abraham would do something to signal students he was aware of their misbehavior. Students perceived Mr. Abraham's acknowledgement and public recognition of their behavior to indicate they were in trouble. On the contrary, Mr. Abraham thought his public acknowledgement of student behavior signified a positive intervention.

When Mr. Abraham observed behavior he interpreted as misbehavior, he would write a student's name on the board, call their name out loud, glare, look in a student's

direction, smirk, or make a snide remark toward the student. Mr. Abraham saw his behavior as an intervention or warning to students to behave differently. Students, however, interpreted Mr. Abraham's behavior as teacher discipline.

Jonathan: He always gets me in trouble. I see him either writing my name or saying, 'Jonathan.' That is when I know I'm in trouble. When he says my name.

Byron: I'm always in trouble. I think I am just bad. Mr. Abraham always puts my name on the board or writes it down. So do the monitors, even when I don't do nothing.

This explains how Mr. Abraham saw his use of writing a student's name on a sheet of paper or putting a checkmark next to a student's name on the board differently from Byron. Mr. Abraham noticed students would often "push back" after he publicly recognized their behavior as problematic. This indicated that sometimes teachers and students were misaligned in their understanding of classroom misbehavior. In fact, bringing attention to certain behaviors and not others demonstrated the situated nature of misbehavior and how it changes during interaction. Mr. Abraham also discussed his ideals about classroom order and the perceptions he had of student misbehavior:

When I call out students' names, something disturbing has happened; there has been a disruption into the instruction, and I want to single out that particular person, and ascertain where the source of the disruption is coming from. This is an impulse of mine to just bring them (students) back into the flow of things [by] signaling them out. Three strikes and they're out! In fact, any disruption, even if for a brief time, becomes a major concern of mine.

The detrimental effects of schools' exclusionary disciplinary policies (e.g., zero tolerance) -- Mr. Abraham's "three strikes and they're out" comment -- is reminiscent of such school initiatives and policies. Such actions deny students their educational rights.

Phase 5: Sanction. During the sanction phase, students thought they were being punished; whereas Mr. Abraham thought his responses were natural consequences to a student's misbehavior. Mr. Abraham regards culpability as an attribute of misbehavior. He presumes student guilt is a central feature when students violated a classroom rule. Even when Byron adhered to classroom rules, Mr. Abraham interpreted his behavior as misbehavior.

At times Byron was enthusiastic about learning and could be seen singing or humming quietly to himself at his desk or subtly swaying rhythmically as if he were listening to music. When Byron slowly raised his hand or used a slight waving jester, or calmly spoke, Mr. Abraham perceived that behavior as a disruption. Mr. Abraham shared:

I think everything he [Byron] does, he wants attention, whether it is good or negative, and unfortunately, he's learned how to do a lot of the negative to get attention. The natural consequence is he gets ignored or removed from the classroom.

Although exhibiting behavior consistent with the posted classroom rules, Mr. Abraham characterized Byron's hand raising and calling out in class as negative attention-seeking and troublesome behavior. This is because Byron signifies to Mr. Abraham problematic behavior. No matter what Byron does in class, even when following the rules, his actions are interpreted by Mr. Abraham as misbehavior.

Phase 6: Closure. When misbehavior reached the end of a classroom disciplinary moment, students and Mr. Abraham alike had an immediate reaction. Sometimes reactions were visible, and other times they were not (a child having an upset stomach or a headache). Students and Mr. Abraham both would sometimes have emotional reactions to indicate the closure of a teacher disciplinary moment.

Teacher Discipline

One day during the study, Mr. Abraham recalled a teacher disciplinary moment with Byron during a mathematics lesson. While sitting on a stool in front of the class with his back turned toward the students, Mr. Abraham heard talking. Mr. Abraham immediately grabbed a sheet of paper and pen without leaving the stool. With his back still partially toward the students, and his body turning to face them, Mr. Abraham firmly said, “Byron!”

Byron facing the board and sitting erect in his desk, wearing his backpack over his shirt, writing with his right hand, lifts his pencil from the paper, mouthed, “It wasn’t me,” as he gestured with his left hand open toward the student sitting to his left. He lightly pounded his right fist on the desk, leaned back in his seat, and looked away. Still holding his pencil in the air, he slouched in his chair as he pulled his right hand to his face and looked down in disappointment.

As Mr. Abraham continued teaching, he wrote an equation on the board. Another student blurted out, “I think you wrote it too high.” Byron squinted, and then quickly cuts both his eyes sharply to the left in the student’s direction. Quickly Mr. Abraham retorted, “sshh!” Now with pursed lips, Byron pushed his tightly balled fist deeply into his face. With a look of great sorrow and despair, Byron placed the pencil on his desk, brought his fist back to his face, positioned his head downward and closed his eyes. Rubbing his closed eyes with his opened right hand, Byron shook his head left to right. While Byron reacted, Mr. Abraham continued teaching, and listened to a student’s answers to a question. Mr. Abraham seemed unaffected by Byron’s dismay.

In reference to the teacher disciplinary moment, Mr. Abraham explained:

I think what is going on here, as I can recall, is I wrote the name down as opposed to dealing with what was the issue at the moment because it becomes an attention getter where he (Byron) needs to take up too much time to correct him and hoping by writing his name down, that pulls him back. And in a sense, I think it does pull him back because they know that later on they end up losing.

This classroom disciplinary moment between Byron and Mr. Abraham started 13 minutes into the lesson and lasted 90 seconds. After one minute of withdrawal, Byron does re-engage. During the stimulated recall interview, Mr. Abraham continues about Byron, mentioning his interpretation of Byron’s display of emotional distress during this lesson as attention getting:

See that? Okay, hold on, hold on. Okay, that [referencing Byron’s face] and I interpret that as just getting attention. I mean this almost-want-to-cry face or his frown. That’s him wanting attention. Byron has had a lot of difficulty last year and the beginning of this year. So, I have been in a way encouraging him trying, to bring out the positive. He likes the positive attention. This is kind of, I think, an act showing a disappointment in what I just did by writing his name down. I think it is just an act. If I read this right, a little further on it

almost looks like he has got a little smirk on his face. That he has the attention that he gets to be the limelight for the moment. He is very much a manipulator. He is very cool in that way. I think the tapping of the hand, the slouching, the eyebrow movement; it's all part of wanting to get more attention. He is trying to "draw me in."

Mr. Abraham elaborates:

What I mean by draw me in is, into the contest. Into this battle he wants to have about whether his name should go on the paper or "what did I do kind" of thing and why is my name on the list. I think that it [is] a constant thing for him not accepting responsibility for his actions. So, he kind of masks it or hides behind this that he has done nothing wrong. I think that it is all just an act. It is an act to hide behind his inability to accept responsibility for his actions.

Byron's viewpoint was different; he indicated:

Mr. Abraham thinks I was talking, but I wasn't. It was the new kid that was talking to me. He was, but he wouldn't like be talking like, like, he was asking me a question like "What are we supposed to do?" I don't get it. So, Mr. Abraham went and put a check by my name.

When describing his thoughts and feelings, Byron shared:

I started getting mad. But I wasn't that mad. I was just a little mad. Then I was getting madder. Everybody knows when I get mad, I slouch down and then I put my hand like on the desk right there, and I go like this. I sometimes I'll put my pencil down, and I'll, and I'll do the same thing, but I'll go like this. When this stuff happens, that tells me that I don't want to be in there. I stayed because if I would have walked out of the classroom, I would have got suspended, because Mr. Abraham didn't give me orders to walk out of the classroom.

This situation is significant because it shows the different meanings of classroom symbols. The check on the board, the use of writing a student's name on a piece of paper, or calling out a student, symbolically represented distinctly different notions for teachers and students. Byron interpreted these symbols to signify trouble. It also reflected a moral assessment of "fair versus unfair." Mr. Abraham, however, thought calling out Byron's name and placing a check on the board next to his name, and writing his name on a piece of paper served as a warning -- that is, an intervention. This too is another example of how a teacher's and students' conceptualizations and interpretations can lead to a misalignment of perceptions which leads to classroom disciplinary moments.

Mr. Abraham says, "I was putting him (Byron) on notice." Specifically, Mr. Abraham made it known to Byron that if his misbehavior continued, stronger reprimands would be issued. There is a clear conflict in perception between Byron and Mr. Abraham.

Mr. Abraham is clear that Byron's behavior (e.g., frowning, withdrawal, appearing emotionally distressed) signified attention seeking and his being disingenuous. In most cases, Mr. Abraham interpreted Byron's behavior as a disruption. As a result, Mr. Abraham generally perceived Byron's behavior as disruptive, even when he adhered to classroom rules.

Mazzotta and Myers remind us of the importance of recognizing that people are social objects during interactions and that societal symbols become affixed to individuals (Mazzotta & Myers, 2008). In this sense, Mr. Abraham's perceived Byron as a symbol that represents misbehavior signifying that Byron's behavior (all ways) was as Charles defines, "behavior that is considered inappropriate for a setting or situation for which it occurs" (Charles, 1999, p.2). To that end, Mr. Abraham's behavior toward Byron tended to be punitive.

The question to ask is, can we tell what mediates Mr. Abram's differential responses toward students, beyond the fact that it was personal? During an interview, Mr. Abraham shared the idea that female students were more likely to follow directions and rules. His reasoning was, "Well, I think it from my personal experience. My daughter was very easy to raise, only because I guess she loved daddy." He also thought gender can evoke different student responses. He shared:

I think it does, because a lot of the background—if you look at the background, the father's not in the thing. I think it works adversely with the boys, though; but with the girls, there's a tendency to almost see us as some sort of a surrogate kind of male significant adult in their lives.

Mr. Abraham goes on to say:

Because of my work in urban African American schools, I have noticed in certain ethnic backgrounds, where you see it in the African-American families, the father is absent. You see, it is like, I mean, it's so classic. To put it that way, in terms of, it's almost a resentment to the male authority. From the boy's point of view, in that is [Black male authority] so absent in their lives. When an African-American male comes in, you'd think that would be a positive thing, see a positive role model; but they're so used to negative role models, abandonment by those African-American fathers and other significant male figures in their lives. Since I'm just speculating, I'm sure there's no history on this; but, they actually resent that authority figure.

Furthermore, when asked if he could describe what types of students, or which students come to mind about being more likely to break the rules or not follow them, he responded:

Well, of course, Byron is the first one on my list, a young African-American boy that is in that fifth grade. Hardly comes in to class organized. Hardly pays attention, easily distracted; and through a lot of negative behavior, gets the kind of attention I think he's missing somewhere else.

In response I ask, "Does anybody else come to mind?" Mr. Abraham says, "Just boys." I then responded, "Are you saying you believe that Byron is more likely to break the rules because he's male, because he's Black, and lives in an urban area? Could it just be because of his personality? Given your perspective, what do you think is unique to him being less likely to adhere to classroom rules?"

Mr. Abraham says:

I think it's the very thing that he resents, is the lack of a strong male figure in his life. I had his (Byron) sister over the summer, and I also had her when I substituted before getting my contract here.

Unfortunately, she's not here this year, but she was really a delight. She's just the opposite of him, and they're from the same home. She's smart, she's well organized, she comes in and participates, she's a strong leader. She's a very classic definition as, you know, I would put these other girls in the fourth through sixth grade. They're from the same household, just totally different people.

Mr. Abraham's personal life experiences, being a single father raising two children, thinking his daughter was an easy to raise child; provides a glimpse into Mr. Abraham's positionality and beliefs toward students in his class, particularly Byron. Sadly, Byron reminded Mr. Abraham of the negative stigmatization of African American males and the Black family. This is the misnomer that African American males are anti-intellectual (Howard, 2014), raised by a single mother, living in poverty, having an uninvolved father, and causing problems at schools (Ferguson, 2001; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003).

Conclusions

How do teachers and students conceptualize misbehavior? Mr. Abraham and students derived meanings differently during their interactions and developed varied conceptualizations of misbehavior during the process of classroom disciplinary moments. Teachers' and students' conceptualizations were influenced by their preconceived notions of misbehavior, personal beliefs and cultural practices, and derived understandings from social interactions.

Mr. Abraham's and students' conceptualizations of misbehavior were highly contextualized and thought of as a singular verbal or non-verbal behavior that occurred during moment-to-moment interactions. During interviews, teachers and students were able to articulate similar notions of misbehavior. They considered that misbehavior entailed talking, not doing work, walking around the classroom, being loud, and other unacceptable behaviors. However, Mr. Abraham's and students' conceptualizations of misbehavior *changed* during moment-to-moment interactions.

This is an important distinction with significant implications for future research on discipline inequities. Many researchers rely on study participants' reports of their conceptualizations about key constructs, such as misbehavior. This study suggests it is critical to document not only people's *conceptions* of these notions, but also to collect evidence on the actual practices in which disciplinary moments emerge in everyday classroom life. That is, this study offers empirical support for a *situated analysis* of discipline inequities.

Meanings emerged not only from individual behaviors of teachers and students, but also as a product of coordinated processes of interaction (Goodwin, 1986). Investigating what people do and say provides insight into how misbehavior becomes interactively constituted between teachers and students in the classroom. Teachers' and students' conceptualizations of misbehavior was a foundational aspect for understanding classroom disciplinary moments. As classroom disciplinary moments progressed, teachers and students made mental, emotional and physical shifts (i.e., movements). These shifts were guided by teachers' and students' individual perceptions, but also influenced interpersonal interactions.

Teachers' and students' perspectives during interaction ultimately shaped one's thinking that allowed behavior to seem the same or viewed as changed. Consistent with a symbolic interactionist perspective, these shifts showed how teachers' and students' perceptions mediated the meaning that was derived during their interpersonal interactions (Blumer, 1969). Moreover, a changed viewpoint, (e.g., Mr. Abraham or

students exhibiting a new behavioral response to one another) was often dependent upon and modified through interactions (Blumer, 1969).

Although classroom misbehavior and disciplinary moments are situated, and teachers' and students' sense making to a degree are dependent upon the limitations of their own mental parameters, through interaction, predefined conceptions of misbehavior can change. Interactions are a powerful influence on conceptual change (Dole & Sinatra, 1998; Gregory & Thompson, 2014; Piaget, 1932; Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993; Sinatra, 2005). It is through one's ability to change their perception that teachers and students can refine classroom misbehavior and that disciplinary moments can be negotiable.

Discussion

Few current studies on discipline account for student voice. As such, there is a need to understand classroom behavior through different vantage points. Years ago, Skiba, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheya and Hughes reported that disciplinary moments began in the classroom between teachers and students (Skiba, Chung, Trachok, Baker, Sheya & Hughes, 2002). Knowing teachers' and students' conceptualizations of misbehavior can shed light into understanding teacher discipline of African American male students.

Because research suggests that teacher-student relationships are a foundational aspect for reducing behavioral referrals (Hamre, Pianta, Downer, & Mashburn, 2007), and teachers' perceptions of students vary (Gregory & Thompson, 2010), there needs to be closer attention into examining the sociocultural context of classrooms. Teachers and students understanding of the sociocultural knowledge and considerations of cultural factors can improve social, behavioral, and academic learning opportunities (Boykin & Bailey, 2000; Neal, McCray, Web-Johnson & Bridgest, 2003). Next steps for better understanding teacher discipline and classroom misbehavior should consider examining the contextualization of culture in classrooms.

New research should also examine in more detail the situated nature of classroom misbehaviors and the effects of sociocultural influences on a) teachers' and students' conceptualizations, b) interpretations, and c) negotiations of classroom disciplinary moments. Future studies in school discipline should investigate classroom disciplinary moments between teachers and students at an interactional level. Such a focus would allow researchers to gain insight into teachers' and students' sense making of classroom disciplinary moments.

In closing, by attempting to understand and advocate for the rights of students, material and social circumstances "must be understood in the context of concrete daily realities, across various environments" that "emphasize human and ecological values rather than commercial [ideals]" (Swadener & O'Brien, 2009, p. 121). In this way, we can begin reconceptualizing the field of education with respect to school discipline. Through conscientious minds as "a teacher, researcher, teacher educator, professor, [we must] remind [ourselves] that [our] work goes beyond [ourselves] and that [our] decisions today will affect [students'] lives tomorrow" (Mathur, 2007, p. 23).

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- ⁱ The terms African American and Black are used interchangeably to indicate people of African descent.
- ⁱⁱ All institutional and personal names are pseudonyms.