




School Pushout: The Role of Supportive Strategies Versus Punitive Practices for LGBT Youth of Color

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Recently, schools have focused on supportive (e.g., behavioral supports) rather than punitive (e.g., suspension) strategies to reduce school pushout among marginalized youth. We examined the association between suspension and discipline practices for students with intersecting identities (e.g., LGBT youth of color). We used teacher and student data from 1,091 schools that participated in the California School Climate and California Healthy Kids Surveys. Relative to White LGBT youth, LGBT youth of color were at higher risk of being suspended, and youth were differentially affected by punitive policies depending on their race, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity. While supportive strategies were associated with lower risk of suspension, punitive practices were associated with higher risk of suspension, especially for LGBT youth of color.

Key words: discipline – LGBT youth – school climate – school policy – suspension – youth of color

School pushout refers to school practices and policies that hinder students' ability to successfully complete school (Fine, 1986, 1991; Tuck, 2012). School pushout can happen through activities such as high stakes testing and a failure to teach inclusive and culturally relevant curriculum (Luna & Revilla, 2012; Snapp & Licona, 2016; Tuck, 2012). Students can also be pushed out of school when they are suspended or expelled to correct for what educators consider offensive or punishable behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Snapp et al., 2015; Snapp & Licona, 2016; Sterns & Glennie, 2006; Tuck, 2012). However, extant scholarship has documented that exclusionary and punitive discipline (e.g., suspension, expulsion) does not actually reduce student misbehavior (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

In the current study, we consider the association between supportive and punitive discipline strategies, especially for youth disproportionately at risk of suspension: lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans* (LGBT) youth (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2010; Poteat, Scheer, & Chong, 2016) and youth of color (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011; Sullivan, Klingbeil, & Van

Norman, 2013). We also examine disproportionality in suspension based on youth's intersecting identities (i.e., LGBT youth of color), and how disparities in suspension are associated with discipline practices. In the following sections, we provide a brief overview of extant literature related to discipline disparities for marginalized youth, especially in consideration of intersecting identities, and current approaches to discipline in schools. The use of acronyms related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) youth varies to accurately reflect samples from referenced studies.

Disproportionate Discipline Among Marginalized Youth

Youth who misbehave are not treated equally, and some youth are punished for reasons that are not broadly applied to all youth (Piquero, 2008; Skiba et al., 2011). Decades of research has documented disproportionate discipline in schools for marginalized youth including youth of color (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011; Sullivan et al., 2013), LGBTQ youth (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2010; Poteat, Scheer, et al., 2016; Snapp, Hoenig, et al., 2015), disabled youth (Bowman-Perrott, Hsu, Kwok, Benz, & Zhang, 2011; Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006),

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immigrant youth (Peguero, Shekarkhar, Popp, Dixie, & Koo, 2015), and other minoritized groups such as pregnant and parenting youth (Snapp & Licona, 2016). More specifically, youth of color are more often disciplined for vague reasons such as “willful defiance” than their White peers (Warren, 2021), and LGBTQ youth report being disciplined for dress code violations and public displays of affection more than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Chmielewski, Belmonte, Fine, & Stoudt, 2016; Snapp, Hoenig, et al., 2015).

Research has also shown that when youth belong to more than one underrepresented group, multiple systems of oppression may intersect to further marginalize them, and they are therefore more likely to experience higher rates of disparate treatment (Snapp & Licona, 2016). For example, Crenshaw and colleagues examined disproportionate discipline on the basis of race and gender and found that Black girls had dramatically higher rates of suspension as compared to White girls and White boys. Further, White girls have the lowest rates of suspension (Crenshaw, Nanda, & Ocen, 2015). When scholars considered the intersection of race, sexual orientation, and gender identity, they found that LGBTQ youth of color report higher rates of detention, suspension, and expulsion than LGBTQ White youth (Greytak, Kosciw, Villenas, & Giga, 2016). For example, suspension rates are 1.5 times higher for LGBTQ youth of color than their heterosexual cisgender White peers, and rates for in- and out-of-school suspension appear to be highest among LGBTQ girls of color (Chmielewski et al., 2016). This trend is also evident when examining school discipline for students of color with a disability who received harsher discipline than their White nondisabled peers (Krezmien et al., 2006).

Supportive Versus Punitive Discipline Strategies

Because of well-documented discipline disparities, policymakers and researchers have called for the use of supportive strategies that address disciplinary issues and keep students in school (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014; Snapp & Russell, 2016; US Department of Education, 2014). Some of the supportive strategies that schools utilize include structured programs such as positive behavioral intervention supports (PBIS) and restorative justice (RJ). While these strategies are associated with fewer discipline referrals, disparities based on race/ethnicity still remain (Gregory & Clawson, 2016; Vincent, Sprague, & Gau, 2015).

Other supportive strategies outside of established programs (e.g., PBIS and RJ) may also reduce disproportionality in discipline that results in students being suspended or expelled. For example, in the last decade, work by activists in organizations such as the Dignity in Schools Campaign has consistently asked schools to provide students with referrals to behavioral support instead of using exclusionary and punitive discipline (Dignity in Schools, 2021). The requests for mental health services instead of policing were also echoed by community-based organizations such as the Black Organizing Project and activists in Oakland who passed the George Floyd Resolution in 2020, which resulted in eliminating the school police department from Oakland schools (Oakland Unified School District Board of Education, 2020). Scholars have also called for supportive strategies such as culturally responsive mental health services for youth of color in schools (Cokley et al., 2014; Lazarus, Doll, Song, & Radliff, 2021).

While little is known about the impact of these supportive strategies on school discipline rates, there is some evidence to suggest that supportive strategies are associated with other positive outcomes for students. For example, providing LGBTQ students with a school counselor and referrals to supportive services are associated with higher rates of school connectedness and fewer reports of homophobic bullying (Day, Snapp, & Russell, 2016). Given the call for schools to utilize supportive strategies to address school pushout and the promising association of these strategies on some youth’s well-being, we expect supportive strategies will be associated with lower rates of discipline among youth of color, LGBT youth, and/or LGBT youth of color.

Theoretical Frameworks

We draw upon two theoretical frameworks that help explain differential or inequitable school discipline and ameliorating factors: *intersectionality theory* and the *differential processing model*. *Intersectionality* theory suggests that multiple identities, such as race and gender interact to influence individuals’ daily experiences (Bowleg, 2012; Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) was among the first to use the term “intersectionality” to illustrate how Black women experienced employment discrimination that was not captured solely by race-based or gender-based discrimination but an intersection of the two. The use of an intersectional lens in school discipline research asks us to consider how

multiple forms of oppression interact to further marginalize youth (Snapp & Licona, 2016). As discussed above, there is substantial evidence to suggest that factors such as gender and race (Crenshaw et al., 2015) and sexual orientation and race (Chmielewski et al., 2016; Greytak et al., 2016) matter when we consider who does, and does not, receive harsh punishments in schools.

While an *intersectional* framework allows us to identify who is at greatest risk of experiencing disproportionate school discipline, the *differential processing model* helps explain how and why differential treatment occurs. The *differential processing model* states that school officials respond to infractions differently dependent upon the person. Further, school officials may process students' actions differently dependent upon who is involved (Piquero, 2008). Historically, this model has been used to explain racial disparities in adult and juvenile punishment systems (for review see Mitchell, 2005). More recently, scholars have applied it to examine disparate discipline based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Poteat, Goodenow, & Heck, 2016; Poteat, Scheer, et al., 2016). Poteat and colleagues' groundbreaking research (Poteat, Goodenow, et al., 2016; Poteat, Scheer, et al., 2016) examined precipitating factors of the minority stress model (i.e., victimization and punishable offenses) and their association with sexual orientation discipline disparities to determine whether differential processing or differential behavior (e.g., having more punishable offenses) was evident for LGBQ youth. While LGBQ youth reported higher rates of suspension and involvement in the juvenile system, differential discipline was not explained by LGBQ youth's engagement in behaviors that violate school rules. When "punishable infractions" were held constant, LGBQ youth still received harsher discipline than their peers (Poteat, Goodenow, et al., 2016).

Current Study

We examine how supportive and punitive practices relate to discipline disparities for: (1) LGBT youth; (2) youth of color; and (3) LGBT youth of color in particular. As established by prior research, and as suggested by the differential processing model, we expect to find disproportionate rates of suspension for LGBT youth (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2010; Poteat, Goodenow, et al., 2016; Poteat, Scheer, et al., 2016) and youth of color (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011; Sullivan et al., 2013), even when accounting

for youth engaging in acts that might violate school rules (Poteat, Goodenow, et al., 2016; Poteat, Scheer, et al., 2016). In line with intersectionality theory and past research, we expect that LGBT youth of color will report higher rates of suspension than their White LGBT peers (Chmielewski et al., 2016). We also expect that disparities in suspension based on race, sexual orientation, and gender identity will be lower in schools with more supportive discipline strategies. Conversely, we expect that disparities will be more severe in schools with more punitive practices (Gregory & Clawson, 2016; Vincent et al., 2015), especially for LGBT youth of color relative to White heterosexual cisgender youth.

METHOD

Sample

The sample for this study includes students in public middle and high schools that participated in the 2013–2015 California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS; base sample $N = 910,886$; 2,641 schools), matched with data from teachers who participated in the companion California School Staff Survey (CSSS). A total of 68,753 teachers from public schools completed the CSSS, with 42,760 of those with responsibilities related to health, prevention, discipline, counseling, and/or safety answering additional questions relevant to the measures used in the current study. The CHKS and CSSS are administered by WestEd biennially with support from the California Department of Education to track health risks and resilience among youth (Austin, Bates, & Duerr, 2015).

Exclusion criteria. The possible study sample size was 545,878 students from 1,156 schools for which we also had teacher data (22,4626 teachers' responses were aggregated to the school-level). We excluded 65 schools that did not administer the CHKS item for sexual orientation and gender identity ($n = 18,124$; 3.32%). We also excluded youth whose response validity were questionable based on meeting two or more criteria related to inconsistent responses (e.g., reporting never using a drug and reporting use in the past 30 days), exaggerated drug use, using a fake drug, and answering dishonestly to all or most of the questions on the survey, as recommended by WestEd ($n = 9,316$; 1.77%) (Austin et al., 2015). The final analytic sample therefore included 1,091 schools with 518,438 students.

Sample characteristics. The average age of youth was 14.6 years old, and just over half reported their sex as female (50.6%). Regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, a majority of the youth indicated heterosexual (75.1%), 5.4% lesbian, gay or bisexual, and 1.2% transgender (a total of 6.0% students identified as LGB and/or transgender). The racial composition of the sample included: 36.3% multiracial, 25.7% White, 10.3% Asian, 5.0% Black/African American, 4.1% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 2.1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander youth (see Table 1). 16.5% of the youth did not report a race. Hispanic/Latinx ethnicity was assessed independently of race in the CHKS ("Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin" [yes/no]). Fifty-three percent (52.6%) of the sample identified as Hispanic/Latinx. Among students who identified as Hispanic/Latinx, 51.1% identified as multiracial, 13.8% identified as White, and 26.0% did not report a race.

Measures

Suspension. Suspension was a dichotomous item based on youth's responses to the question, "In the past 30 days, did you miss school for any of the following reasons (mark all that apply)... Were suspended" (0 = no; 1 = yes).

Sexual orientation and gender identity. A single item was used to assess youth's sexual and gender identities: "Which of the following best describes you? (Mark all that apply): (1) Heterosexual (straight); (2) Gay or Lesbian or Bisexual; (3) Transgender; (4) Not sure; (5) Decline to respond." Dichotomous measures were created for each category such that youth could select more than one sexual orientation and/or gender identity (e.g., cases were coded 1 if youth marked that they were transgender [0 = nontransgender; 1 = transgender]. We were unable to determine if youth identified as cisgender as they were not specifically asked about their natal sex. We therefore use "nontransgender" to refer to youth who did not identify as transgender. We also created a single item for youth that indicated they were LGB and/or transgender (0 = non-LGBT; 1 = LGBT).

Race. Race was assessed through a single item: "What is your race? (1) American Indian or Alaska Native; (2) Asian; (3) Black or African American; (4) Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; (5) White; (6) mixed (two or more) races." A substantial

proportion of youth did not select any race (17%); we therefore created a category for "no race reported."

LGBT relative to white non-LGBT youth. We created a categorical variable that accounts for intersecting racial, sexual, and gender identities to examine the suspension rates for LGBT youth, and especially LGBT youth of color, relative to White non-LGBT youth. Specifically, the variable includes categories for: (1) White non-LGBT youth (reference group); (2) White LGBT youth; (3) American Indian or Native Hawaiian LGBT youth (combined into a single category due to small cell sizes); (4) Asian LGBT youth; (5) Black LGBT youth; (6) multiracial LGBT youth; and (7) LGBT youth who did not report a race.

Student-level covariates. Models were adjusted to account for demographic factors including age and self-reported sex ("What is your sex?" 0 = female; 1 = male). Additionally, we accounted for delinquent behaviors associated with suspension, including: Past 30-day use of alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs on school property, having been in a physical fight or damaged school property in the past 12 months, being truant because of feeling "very sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed, or angry," or being truant because of not feeling safe at school. We dichotomized each item related to delinquency; 0 = no, 1 = yes). For post hoc analyses, we also created a variable assessing whether or not youth reported engaging in 1 or more deviant behaviors (0 = no deviant; 1 = one or more deviant behaviors).

Discipline practices. Teachers who completed the CSSS were asked a series of questions after the statement: "The following questions are ONLY for staff at this school who have responsibilities for services or instruction related to health, prevention, discipline, counseling, and/or safety." Items for the punitive measure were drawn from scales assessing discipline, safety, and behavior management and, for the supportive measure, were selected from scales assessing four constructs: (1) discipline, safety, and behavior management; (2) student discipline and support; (3) substance use and risk behavior; and (4) youth development and social-emotional health (CSSS, 2015).

Punitive practices were assessed with a 2-item measure ($r = .57$) of teacher reports regarding how strongly they agree with the statement, "This school...": (1) *Punishes first-time violations of alcohol*

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Characteristics and School Factors

	Total Sample (n = 518,438)		LGBT Youth (n = 30,939)		Range
	%/Mean (SD)	n	%/Mean (SD)	n	
Student-level variables					
Heterosexual	75.06%	516,972	—	—	—
LGB	5.38%	516,972	—	—	—
Transgender	1.18%	516,972	—	—	—
LGBT	5.98%	516,972	—	—	—
Race		518,438		30,930	
American Indian/Alaska Native	4.10%	—	4.81%	—	—
Asian	10.27%	—	8.32%	—	—
Black/African American	4.99%	—	7.21%	—	—
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2.08%	—	2.50%	—	—
White	25.69%	—	24.10%	—	—
Multiple races	36.32%	—	40.31%	—	—
No race reported	16.54%	—	12.75%	—	—
Sex (male)	49.44%	495,125	35.54%	29,605	—
Age	14.56 (1.77)	509,558	14.94 (1.70)	30,733	10–18
Used alcohol on school property	4.62%	495,510	13.10%	30,411	—
Used marijuana on school property	4.91%	494,675	14.57%	30,365	—
Used other drugs on school property	2.73%	495,510	10.55%	30,430	—
Been in physical fight on school property	13.39%	486,795	24.25%	30,127	—
Damaged school property	7.95%	487,953	20.25%	30,225	—
Truant (mental health)	9.58%	516,972	24.44%	30,939	—
Truant (felt unsafe at school)	1.62%	516,395	4.73%	30,939	—
Deviant behavior (1 or more)	27.33%	518,419	53.97	30,939	0–7
Supportive practices	2.31 (0.22)	518,438	2.29 (0.21)	30,939	1.40–3.22
Punitive practices	2.48 (0.47)	518,438	2.46 (0.45)	30,939	0–4
FRPM	58.23%	518,332	59.61%	30,936	—
School size	1,667 (832)	518,332	1,778 (809)	30,936	5–4,230

Notes. Heterosexual (0 = nonheterosexual, 1 = heterosexual), LGB (lesbian, gay, and bisexual; 0 = non-LGB; 1 = LGB), and transgender (0 = nontransgender; 1 = transgender) were dichotomous variables and students were able to mark all that apply, so they are not mutually exclusive categories; LGBT was a dichotomous variable for youth who identified as LGB and/or transgender (0 = non-LGBT; 1 = LGBT); FRPM (free and reduced priced meal).

or other drug policies by at least an out-of-school suspension; and (2) Enforces zero tolerance policies (0 = “strongly agree”; 4 = “strongly disagree”). These items were reverse coded so that all evaluations were scaled from most negative to most positive, and were standardized using z-scores before creating the school-level measure by taking the mean of the aggregated index for each school. The school-level variable was grand mean centered to ease interpretation of cross-level interactions (Enders & Tofighi, 2007), ranging from -2.29 (lowest level of punitive practices) to 1.40 (highest level of punitive practices).

Supportive strategies were assessed through a 6-item measure ($\alpha = .82$). Teachers were asked to rate how strongly they agree with the statement, “This school...”: (1) Provides adequate counseling and support services for students (0 = “strongly agree”; 3 = “strongly disagree”). Teachers were also asked

to assess their agreement with the following statements: “This school...”; (2) Considers sanctions for student violations of rules and policies on a case-by-case basis with a wide range of options; (3) Provides effective confidential support and referral services for students needing help because of substance abuse, violence, or other problems (e.g., a Student Assistance Program); and (4) Emphasizes helping students with their social, emotional, and behavioral problems (0 = “strongly agree”; 4 = “strongly disagree”). Finally, teachers were asked, “To what extent does this school”: (5) Foster youth development, resilience, or asset promotion; and (6) Provide conflict resolution or behavior management instruction (0 = “a lot”; 4 = “not at all”). Items were reverse coded and were standardized using z-scores before creating the mean-based scale. The aggregated school-level item ranged from -1.82 (lowest level of supportive practices) to 1.14 (highest level of supportive practices). Punitive and

supportive practices were moderately correlated ($r = .46$).

School-level covariates. We accounted for percent of students eligible for free and reduce priced meals (FRPM) and school size at the school level. These items were obtained through publicly available data collected by the California Department of Education.

Analytic Plan

Multilevel logistic regression models were estimated to account for the nested-structure of data using Stata 14.2. To assess disparities in suspension based on intersecting identities (i.e., sexual, gender, and race), and differential relationships between suspension and intersecting identities depending on school approaches to discipline, we estimated models for: (1) All youth to assess race, sexual orientation, and gender identity independently; (2) assessing LGBT youth, and especially LGBT youth of color, relative to White non-LGBT; (3) and if the association between suspension and discipline practices was moderated by youth's race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Complete case analysis resulted in a loss in 13% of the analytic sample due to missing data. Examining patterns of missingness, data were determined to be Missing at Random. We therefore used multiple imputations (20 imputations seeded at 123) to account for missing data (Enders, 2010).

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses

The prevalence of suspension in the past 30 days for all students was 1.55% (see Table 2). Notably, LGB youth had 2 times higher prevalence of suspension compared to the total sample (3.2%); the prevalence of suspension was over 3 times higher for transgender youth relative to the full sample (4.9%). Overall, 3.2% of youth who identified as LGB and/or transgender (i.e., LGBT) reported being suspended in the past month. Suspension rates among Asian and White youth were relatively low (0.6% and 1.1%, respectively). Native Hawaiian or Pacific Island (1.5%), multiracial (1.8%), and American Indian or Alaska Native (1.9%) youth all had a higher prevalence of suspension relative to Asian and White youth. Black or African American youth (3.8%) were over 3 times as likely to report having been suspended compared to White youth.

Among LGBT youth, Asian or White youth had the lowest prevalence of suspension (2.1% and 2.3%, respectively). LGBT youth of color (except Asian youth) had a disproportionately higher prevalence of suspension: 3.3% of American Indian or Hawaiian LGBT youth and 3.4% of multiracial LGBT youth (over 3 times as high as White non-LGBT youth). Black LGBT youth reported the highest prevalence of suspension relative to all other youth (7.2%), over three times as high as White LGBT youth, and over 7 times as high as White non-LGBT youth.

Identity-Related Disparities in Suspension

First, we conducted multilevel logistic regressions with the full sample to identify disparities in suspension based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and race (see Table 3, Model A). Then, we examined race-based disparities in suspension among LGBT youth relative to White non-LGBT youth (Table 3, Model B). Finally, we examined whether the relationship between suspension and discipline practices were moderated by youth's racial, sexual, and gender identities (Table 3, Model C).

In fully adjusted models with the full sample (Model A), LGB youth had 1.23 higher odds of suspension (95% CI [1.23–1.41]) compared to non-LGB youth; trans youth did not differ from nontrans youth in their odds for being suspended. Regarding race (see Table 3; Model A), relative to White youth, youth of color had higher odds of suspension, except for Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, who did not differ statistically from White youth, and Asian youth who had lower odds of suspension. Youth who did not report a race also had higher odds of suspension compared to White youth. In the model comparing LGBT youth to White non-LGBT youth (Table 3; Model B), Black LGBT youth, multiracial LGBT youth, and LGBT youth who did not report a race had higher odds of suspension.

Covariates. Regarding student-level covariates, males were more likely to be suspended than females (Model A), as were youth who consumed alcohol (Model B), used marijuana (Model A) or used other drugs (Models A and B) on school property. Youth who got in a physical fight, damaged school property, were truant due to mental health or feeling unsafe at school also had higher odds of suspension (Models A and B). Additionally, regarding school-level covariates, the odds of

TABLE 2
Prevalence of Suspension Stratified by Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Race

	<i>All Youth</i>		<i>Among Youth Who Engaged in 1 or More Deviant Behaviors</i>	
	%	n	%	n
Total sample	1.55	516,972	4.17	141,318
Heterosexual	1.42	388,034	4.08	102,223
LGB	3.21	27,808	5.27	14,734
Transgender	4.87	6,076	4.42	3,607
LGBT	3.24	30,939	5.21	16,702
Race				
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.86	21,171	4.15	7,197
Asian	0.63	53,178	2.58	9,539
Black/African American	3.81	25,853	7.73	9,190
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1.48	10,791	3.53	3,398
White	1.12	132,406	3.22	33,230
Multiple races (two or more)	1.83	187,960	4.51	57,437
No race reported	1.42	85,613	4.00	21,327
LGBT stratified by race				
White, non-LGBT	1.05	124,949	3.14	29,352
White, LGBT	2.29	7,457	3.84	3,878
American Indian or Native Hawaiian, LGBT	3.32	2,262	4.92	1,341
Asian, LGBT	2.14	2,573	4.52	1,107
Black/African American, LGBT	7.17	2,230	10.45	1,368
Multiple races (two or more), LGBT	3.41	12,472	5.31	6,974
No race reported, LGBT	2.92	3,945	4.57	2,034

Notes. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender); the sample size (*n*) indicates the number of students associated with each variable. For example, there are 27,798 LGB students in the sample, 3.24% of whom had been suspended.

suspension were higher in schools where a higher percentage of students were eligible for free and reduced priced meals, and lower in larger schools (Models A and B).

Suspension Rates in Schools with Supportive and Punitive Practices

Teacher reports of schools' approaches to discipline were associated with student reports of suspension (Table 3; Model A). Specifically, the likelihood of suspension was lower in schools that teachers reported as having more supportive strategies, and higher in schools with more punitive practices. Similar to the full sample, odds of suspension were lower in schools with more supportive practices and higher in schools with more punitive practices in the model comparing LGBT youth to White non-LGBT youth (Model B).

Moderated Models

In models examining if the association between suspension and discipline practices was

moderated by students' race, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Table 3; Model C), relative to White non-LGBT youth, we found a stronger association between suspension and punitive practices among White LGBT, American Indian/Native Hawaiian LGBT, multiracial LGBT, and LGBT youth who did not report a race. To decompose this interaction, we conducted post hoc analyses that accounted for racial, sexual, and gender minority youth having higher rates of engaging in deviant behavior that might result in suspension. Specifically, we estimated three models that were restricted to youth who reported engaging in one or more deviant behaviors: (1) schools with low punitive practices (more than one standard deviation below the mean of punitive practices); (2) schools with average punitive practices (between one standard deviation below and above the mean); and (3) schools with high punitive practices (more than one standard deviation above the mean). These models were adjusted for sex, age, supportive policies, percent of students eligible for free and reduced priced meals, and school size.

TABLE 3

Multilevel Logistic Regressions for Suspension for Full Sample and Restricted to Comparing White Non-LGBT Youth to LGBT Youth

	<i>Model A: Full Sample</i> (n = 507,766)		<i>Model B: LGBT Youth</i> <i>Relative to Non-LGBT</i> <i>Youth (n = 154,473)</i>		<i>Model C: Moderated</i> <i>Model (n = 154,473)</i>	
	AOR	95% CI	AOR	95% CI	AOR	95% CI
Individual-level interaction						
Race						
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.19	1.05–1.34	—	—	—	—
Asian	0.64	0.56–0.73	—	—	—	—
Black/African American	2.15	1.96–2.35	—	—	—	—
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1.03	0.87–1.22	—	—	—	—
Multiple races	1.33	1.24–1.42	—	—	—	—
No race reported	1.23	1.13–1.34	—	—	—	—
LGB	1.21	1.11–1.31	—	—	—	—
Trans	1.05	0.91–1.22	—	—	—	—
LGBT stratified by race						
White LGBT	—	—	1.17	0.98–1.40	1.13	0.95–1.36
AI/HN LGBT	—	—	1.29	0.99–1.69	1.28	0.98–1.68
Asian LGBT	—	—	1.14	0.84–1.55	1.11	0.81–1.52
Black LGBT	—	—	2.64	2.16–3.23	2.54	2.06–3.12
Multiracial LGBT	—	—	1.59	1.40–1.82	1.56	1.37–1.78
No race reported, LGBT	—	—	1.57	1.26–1.95	1.56	1.25–1.95
Sex (male)	1.58	1.50–1.66	0.99	0.96–1.02	1.64	1.49–1.81
Age (centered)	1.00	0.98–1.01	1.00	0.85–1.18	0.99	0.96–1.02
Alcohol use school property	1.07	0.97–1.19	2.53	2.18–2.95	1.00	0.85–1.19
Marijuana use school property	2.50	2.29–2.72	1.04	0.87–1.25	2.53	2.18–2.95
Other drug use school property	1.07	0.96–1.19	4.51	4.08–4.98	1.05	0.88–1.25
Physical fight on school property	4.80	4.55–5.06	1.35	1.20–1.51	4.52	4.09–5.00
Damage school property	1.52	1.43–1.62	2.39	2.15–2.65	1.34	1.20–1.51
Truant (mental health)	2.31	2.17–2.45	3.71	3.22–4.28	2.39	2.15–2.65
Truant (felt unsafe at school)	3.67	3.37–4.00	3.92	3.27–4.71	3.72	3.23–4.29
School-level interaction						
Supportive practices (scale)	0.74	0.65–0.85	0.70	0.58–0.86	0.75	0.59–0.94
Punitive practices (scale)	1.18	1.06–1.32	1.22	1.05–1.43	1.07	0.89–1.28
FRPM (centered)	2.09	1.74–2.51	2.18	1.70–2.79	2.18	1.71–2.79
School size (centered)	0.82	0.77–0.87	0.81	0.74–0.88	0.81	0.74–0.88
Cross-level interaction						
White, LGBT × punitive	—	—	—	—	1.69	1.04–2.75
AI/HN, LGBT × punitive	—	—	—	—	3.07	1.43–6.59
Asian, LGBT × punitive	—	—	—	—	1.00	0.50–1.99
Black, LGBT × punitive	—	—	—	—	0.76	0.47–1.22
Multiracial, LGBT × punitive	—	—	—	—	1.43	1.02–1.99
No race reported, LGBT × punitive	—	—	—	—	2.55	1.41–4.63

Notes. Race (reference group = White); LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender; reference group = non-LGBT); LGBT stratified by race (reference group = White non-LGBT); AI/HN (American Indian or Hawaiian Native); FRPM (free and reduced-price meals); Supportive (supportive discipline practices); Punitive (punitive discipline practices); bolded text indicates significant findings ($p \leq .05$).

In these three models, we examined if White LGBT youth and LGBT youth of color had higher odds of suspension relative to White LGBT youth. Among youth who had engaged in at least one deviant behavior in low punitive schools, Black LGBT youth and multiracial LGBT youth higher odds than non-LGBT White youth of being suspended (see Figure 1). In average punitive schools, White, American Indian or Native Hawaiian,

Asian, Black, and multiracial LGBT youth had higher odds than White non-LGBT youth of being suspended. LGBT youth who did not report a race also had higher odds of suspension. Notably, in these same schools, Black LGBT youth had 2.27 higher odds of being suspended than Black non-LGBT youth. In high punitive schools, White, American Indian or Native Hawaiian, Black, multiracial, and LGBT youth who did not report a race

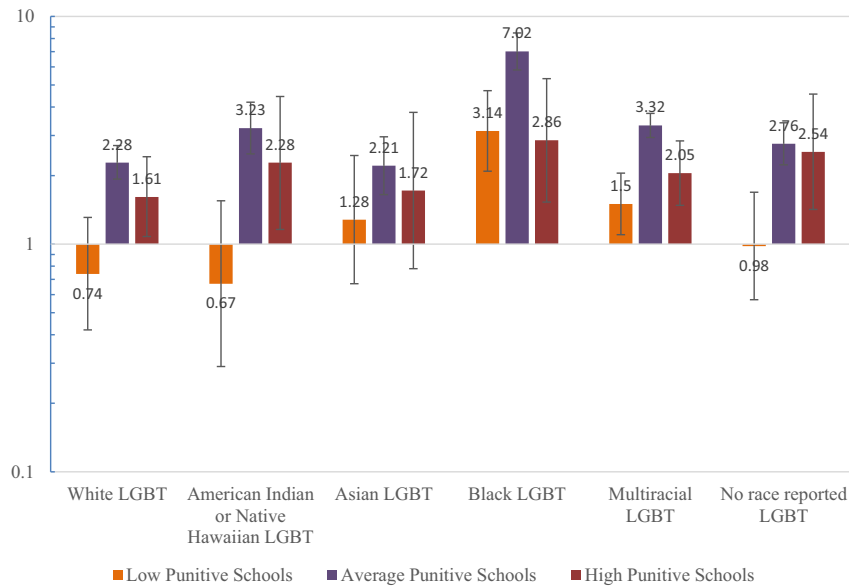


FIGURE 1 Adjusted odds ratio of suspension, relative to White non-LGBT youth, among youth who reported engaging in at least one deviant behavior across low, average, and high punitive schools. *Note.* Error bars that cross over 1 indicate group does not significantly differ from reference group (White non-LGBT youth); low punitive schools = schools with punitive policies more than 1 standard deviation below the mean; average punitive schools = schools with punitive policies within 1 standard deviation above or below the mean; high punitive schools = schools with punitive practices more than 1 standard deviation above the mean; model adjusted for sex and age (student-level), and supportive practices, percentage of students eligible for free and reduced priced meals, and school size (school-level).

had higher odds than White non-LGBT youth of being suspended.

In summary, we observed the lowest disparities in suspension in schools with less punitive policies, and the highest disparities in schools with average punitive policies. Disparities in high punitive schools were less severe than in average punitive policy schools, but higher than in low punitive schools for most LGBT youth of color. It is important to note that the cell sizes for youth of color get progressively smaller in schools with higher punitive policies (especially in schools two standard deviations or more above the mean), which may partially explain discrepancies between significant categories in the interaction term and what we observe based on the post hoc analyses.

We also conducted additional analyses to determine whether there were other school-level factors that may contextualize these findings. Specifically, we examined if schools with different levels of punitive policies also varied in terms of percent of students eligible for free and reduced priced meals (FRPM) or in school size. We found that, relative to average punitive schools, both low punitive ($b = .18$, $p < .001$) and high punitive ($b = .08$, $p < .001$) schools had a higher percentage of students eligible for FRPM. This suggests that average

punitive schools have students that are more economically advantaged on average. Additionally, high punitive schools had higher levels of enrollment than average punitive schools ($b = .30$, $p < .001$). Average punitive schools did not differ in size from low punitive schools.

DISCUSSION

This study adds to extant research that reveals disproportionate discipline among youth of color (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011) and emergent literature that documents disparities among LGBTQ youth (Chmielewski et al., 2016; Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2010; Poteat, Goodenow, et al., 2016; Poteat, Scheer, et al., 2016). Although trans youth were not at higher risk of suspension relative to nontrans youth, this could be because of the large proportion of trans youth that also identified as LGB. That is, disparities in suspension for trans youth may be explained by other demographic factors, such as also identifying as a sexual minority. When we examined disproportionality on the basis of race and sexual orientation combined with gender identity, we found that LGBT youth of color—especially Black LGBT youth—are most likely to be suspended. These findings highlight

the importance of applying an intersectional framework to the study of school discipline as suggested by previous scholars in the field (Chmielewski et al., 2016; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Greytak et al., 2016).

Furthermore, disparities remain when controlling for behaviors that violate school rules (e.g., truancy, getting in a fight, alcohol use on school grounds). Similar to Poteat's (2016) work on differential processing and disproportionate discipline for LGBQ youth, our work provides more evidence for the differential processing model in that even when "deviant" or punishable offenses are controlled, disparities are still evident. While we did not look at aspects of minority stress such as victimization, which is associated with punishable offenses (Poteat, Goodenow, et al., 2016; Poteat, Scheer, et al., 2016), our findings suggest that students' (mis)behavior may be processed differently by school staff dependent upon who enacted the behavior (Piquero, 2008).

Beyond discipline disparities, we find that more supportive strategies are associated with lower odds of suspension and more punitive practices are associated with higher odds of suspension, a finding that also aligns with past research (Day et al., 2016; Gregory et al., 2014). This finding applies to the full sample as well as for LGBT youth. Supportive strategies (e.g., having a school counselor) can not only help students who are struggling, but school counselors may be able to identify behavioral issues and work with teachers to effectively intervene before those issues escalate into a punishable offense (Hernández & Seem, 2004).

While supportive strategies do ameliorate school pushout, punitive practices are associated with disproportionately high rates of pushout for diverse youth. When controlling for supportive strategies, even schools that use *low* punitive practices have disparities that especially impact Black and multiracial LGBT youth. Disparities become pronounced for even more youth when schools utilize *average* punitive practices. Disproportionate discipline based on the intersection of race and sexual orientation/gender identity appears lessened in *high* punitive schools; nonetheless, racial disparities are still present. Thus, while supportive strategies are associated with lower odds of suspension for everyone, the use of even *low* or especially *average* punitive practices is associated with unequal treatment among youth in our sample. This implies that supportive strategies may be especially important to implement in average punitive schools, which had the highest rates of disproportionate

discipline and lower percentages of students eligible for free and reduced priced meals (relative to low and high punitive schools). Scholars have found that middle-class and predominantly White schools are more likely to utilize soft criminalization in schools (e.g., searches, locker sweeps, surveillance) and calls to police (Simon, 2007). Additionally, higher SES schools were more likely to use school sanctions (e.g., suspension/expulsion) and report students to police than low SES schools (Irwin, Davidson, & Hall-Sanchez, 2013). This suggests that these schools may benefit most from intervention efforts to address systemic bias, as well as efforts to reform policies and practices that disproportionately affect marginalized students.

Our findings illustrate the benefits of supportive strategies that may reduce rates of suspension for all youth, including LGBT youth and LGBT youth of color, and align with past research on the effectiveness of alternative approaches to discipline, such as RJ (Gregory & Clawson, 2016). While the use of secondary data limited our ability to test specific intervention strategies such as RJ and PBIS, there are aspects of our measure of supportive strategies that are generalizable to other alternatives discipline practices. For example, considering sanctions on a case-by-case basis, providing referrals to support services, and providing conflict resolution are all probable strategies within the RJ model (although RJ has no set definition or standard set of practices; Fronius, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016). In respect to PBIS, our measure of supportive strategies mimics the proactive aspect that is part of Tier 2 of PBIS, which increases the level of supports students receive, including behavioral support for social, emotional, and behavioral skills. However, given the ineffectiveness of PBIS at improving discipline disparities based on race, we affirm the use of a Culturally Responsive version of PBIS that considers issues of structural racism and inequity (Bal, King Thorius, & Kozleski, 2012). What is most promising about the supportive strategies illustrated in this study is that they do not have to fit within a certain program and as a result may be easier to implement than some of the well-established alternative discipline models.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Although this study gives us more information about the discipline experiences of LGBT youth of color using statewide teacher- and student-level

data, there are some limitations to consider. Besides the obvious limitations of cross-sectional, self-report data, we also have no clear measure of the implementation of supportive and punitive practices, and the two practices were moderately correlated in this study. While teachers reported on both types of practices, it is less clear how each are implemented in relation to the other. Future research should ascertain the degree of implementation as well as control for other similar practices utilized in schools. Gregory et al.'s work (2010) on authoritative discipline and the use of structure and support may be a next step in further exploration on how supportive and punitive practices may impact disproportionate discipline. Also, though our use of secondary data included a large sample of racially diverse youth as well as a measure of sexual orientation and gender identity, the items in the teacher survey limited our ability to directly examine established alternative discipline models such as PBIS and RJ. Therefore, future research could explore specific discipline programs, policies, and practices. Additionally, school pushout, as noted in the introduction, can occur through multiple avenues besides discipline. Additional research could examine some of the other forms of school pushout that may hinder learning and student achievement in ways that are less known (Tuck, 2012).

Additionally, while we drew upon intersectionality (Bowleg, 2012; Crenshaw, 1989) to examine youth with intersecting minority statuses (i.e., racial and sexual/gender minority youth), we did not include Hispanic/Latinx identity in our analyses due to the complexity of simultaneously accounting for race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity (e.g., many students reported a specific racial identity as well as whether or not they were of Hispanic/Latinx origin). Notably, preliminary analyses indicate that Latinx youth in our sample were also at higher risk of suspension relative to White students. Future studies should closely attend to Latinx populations, especially given their higher risk of school pushout and the complexities of intersecting racial, ethnic, and LGBTQ identities within this population. Some of our analytical strategies also do not parse out the unique experiences within each possible racial and LGBT identity combination. Further research is needed to understand how other social position variables unaccounted for within this study may intersect to explain differential discipline and different ways of experiencing support and punishment in schools.

Implications

While supportive strategies are certainly an improvement over punitive ones, these strategies target youth themselves and therefore do not necessarily address underlying institutional(ized) issues, such as racism, homophobia, or transphobia. Because this study and others (Poteat, Goode-now, et al., 2016; Poteat, Scheer, et al., 2016) continuously find support for the differential processing model which indicates that LGBTQ youth of color, for example, do not engage in more punishable acts than their peers, the focus should now turn toward the ones who punish: school staff.

While evidence for differential processing does not illustrate direct evidence of bias on behalf of staff, there is a well-established body of literature that suggests that racial stereotypes do have implications for how teachers interpret student behavior and enact consequences and that mismatch of teacher–student race increases disproportionality (see Welsh & Little, 2018 for a review). While scholars may presume implicit bias is present among school staff, there is very little research that directly assesses it. Gullo's (2017) research found that school administrators' implicit bias is positively associated with harsh and punitive discipline, specifically toward racial minority students. To that end, scholars could also examine effective programs to reduce racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of systemic oppression. To date, most of the interventions aimed to reduce racial bias, for example, are relatively ineffective and short lived (see Lai et al., 2016 for a review of interventions). Instead, scholars suggest a multifaceted approach to engage educators at multiple stages of their career and to provide training to examine their own potential biases and to disrupt microaggressions through microinterventions (see Sue et al., 2019).

Schools could also utilize other strategies known to cultivate safer and more positive school climates for LGBTQ youth, such as inclusive curricula (Snapp, McGuire, et al., 2015) and supportive clubs like Gender and Sexuality Alliances (Poteat, 2017), which may also be effective mechanisms for addressing disproportionate discipline (Snapp & Russell, 2016). Finally, given the decades of research on the ineffectiveness of harsh and punitive school discipline (Delpit, 1993; Massey, Scott, & Dornbusch, 1975), we hope this study will provide further rationale for schools to consider ways to support students that are no longer viewed as “alternative” but normative.

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