African American adolescents and their varying relationships with teachers across the school day

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Published findings from this presentation:

African American students are three times as likely as their peers to be suspended or expelled from school (Gregory, NyGreen, & Moran, 2006; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008).

They are more likely to be perceived by teachers as defiant and disrespectful than other groups (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Wentzel, 2002).
Classroom Discipline

- Discipline referrals issued from the classroom reflect the culmination of complex social processes between teachers and students (Vavrus & Cole, 2002).

- Preliminary evidence suggests that discipline referrals for defiance may be contextual and teacher specific (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008).
Assumptions about consistency

- Assumptions about invariant adolescent behavior underlie much of educational research and policy.

- Research in schools typically does not include data from multiple staff or teachers.

- The shift to intra-individual and intra-school variability may be particularly salient to historically under-served students.

- There is a need for a “person-in-context” approach to understanding school discipline and teacher-student relationships.
The call for contextually sensitive research has been made for decades (Barker, 1964).

Yet, the focus on micro-contexts in schools is more recent (LaRusso, Brown, Jones, & Aber, 2010).

Few studies have tracked how individuals and groups of students experience changing classrooms in their school day.
Cooperation, Defiance, and Discipline Referrals
Study summary

With a sample of African American adolescents who shared a history of low achievement, the current study:

1) Compares teacher perceptions of student behavior and discipline referrals in core subject classrooms in high school
   ○ Were students perceived differently across their classrooms in terms of the degree to which their teachers perceived defiance/cooperation and issued discipline referrals?

2) Examines whether students differentiate between their teachers in terms of perceived unfair treatment
   ○ Are students’ varying reports of unfair treatment related to teachers’ varying reports of student behavior?
3) Examines the long term effects of inconsistent teacher-student relationships on grade point averages later in high school.

- Are inconsistent relationships with teachers a risk for later low achievement?
Setting and Participants

Students
- 35 African American students
- Female = 17, Male = 18
- Enrolled in a 9th grade program for low achieving students and followed through high school

Teachers
- 23 core subject 10th grade teachers
  - (i.e., English, science, math, and history)
- Predominately White, Female
- Most teachers rated three students
Measures

• **Defiance** (adapted from Swanson, 1992).
  o “Defies adult request”
  o “Does things deliberately that annoy other people.” (alpha = .93)

• **Student Cooperation** (Wellborn, 1991).
  o “This student concentrates on doing his/her work in my class.” (alpha = .94)

• **End-of-year grades** across multiple school years and office discipline referrals (**ODRs**) for 2007-2008 (mostly 10th grade).
Measures

**Unfair treatment** (Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 1998)

- “This teacher disciplines you more harshly than other kids because of your race.”

- “This teacher treats you more harshly than other students who do better than you in class.”

- “This teacher disciplines you more harshly than other kids of the opposite sex.” (alpha = 0.92)
Data analytic plan

- Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM)
  - Measures were nested in students

- HLM models were examined for each of the three level-1 outcome variables:
  1) teacher-reported defiance
  2) teacher-reported cooperation
  3) teacher-issued office discipline referrals.
The unconditional models predicting 10th grade outcomes showed that:

- 29% of the variance in cooperation ($ICC = 0.29$)
- 21% of the variance in defiance was between students ($ICC = 0.21$)
- 20% of the variance in ODRs was between students ($ICC = 0.20$)

Thus a majority (71-79%) of the variance in cooperation, defiance and ODRs was within-student
An example of a student’s variability across classrooms
Unfair treatment

- Notwithstanding a student’s 9th grade GPA, the more unfairly a student felt treated by a 10th grade teacher, the more likely the student:
  - received an ODR ($\beta_{1j} = .98, p < .05$).
  - was perceived as defiant ($\beta_{1j} = .98, p < .01$).
  - was perceived as less cooperative ($\beta_{1j} = -.91, p < .01$).

- Unfair treatment accounted for between 11%-13% of the within-student variation.
Are inconsistent relationships with teachers a risk factor for later low achievement?

- Computed a *Mean* and *Standard Deviation* for each student using 10\textsuperscript{th} grade teachers’ perceptions of cooperation and defiance.

- Achievement outcomes: GPA from 11\textsuperscript{th} and 12\textsuperscript{th} grade.

- Used multiple regression and held constant *mean* perceptions across teachers. Then, entered *SD* of perceptions.
An example of a student’s variability across classrooms
## Predicting 11th grade GPA

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<td>SD of 10th grade Cooperation</td>
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Proportion of variance in 11th grade GPA explained by 10th grade teacher-reported cooperation = 28%
Predicting 11\textsuperscript{th} grade GPA

- Similar findings for 10\textsuperscript{th} grade teacher perceptions of defiance as predictors of 11\textsuperscript{th} grade GPA

- SD in perceived defiance explained 16\% of the variance in 11\textsuperscript{th} grade GPA ($\beta = -.59$, $p < .05$) while the mean of perceived defiance was held constant.
Predicting 12\textsuperscript{th} grade GPA

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Proportion of variance in 12th grade GPA explained by 10\textsuperscript{th} grade teacher-reported cooperation = 14%
Study Summary

- Found considerable variation across classrooms in terms of how the students were perceived by teachers.
  - Variability in cooperation, defiance and ODRs was mostly within-student.

- Negative perceptions were bidirectional between teachers and students.
  - If a student perceived unfair treatment by a teacher, that same teacher was likely to rate the student as defiant and uncooperative.
  - The student was also more likely to receive discipline referrals from that classroom.

- Inconsistency in teacher-perceptions of behavior across the school day in 10th grade mattered for grade point average in 11th and 12th grade.
Discussion

- School discipline and perceptions of student behavior needs to be considered “in-context.”

- Taking overall aggregates of reported behavior obscures the relational aspects of school disciplinary referrals.

- The quality of the student-teacher dyad matters.
Discussion

- African American students are disproportionately perceived as defiant.

- This study showed that such perceptions are not happening in every classroom.

- Some teachers are better able to elicit trust and cooperation with their African American students (Gregory & Ripski, 2009).

- Other teachers are experienced as unfair. Perhaps, the negative exchanges are fueled by African American students’ resistance to teacher unfairness (e.g., Sheets, 1996).
Implications

• Opportunities to identify successful strategies to manage student behavior.
  ○ Targeted teacher-student interventions:
    ▪ Mentorship model (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004)
    ▪ Professional learning communities model (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008)

• Improving the **consistency** of positive teacher-student relationships may be important for discipline and achievement.
Thanks to the research team

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