EXPLORING ISSUES OF RACE AND EQUITY IN EARLY EDUCATION: A CLOSER LOOK AT TEACHER PERCEPTIONS AND CHILD EXCLUSIONARY DISCIPLINE EXPERIENCES

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Researchers have reached consensus that high-quality preschool experiences can boost children's social and academic readiness for kindergarten, and that high-quality classroom experiences in the early elementary years can help to sustain these preschool gains (Phillips et al., 2017). Children who experience exclusionary discipline may miss out on critical social and academic learning opportunities in the early years of school that support continued academic success. In the United States, Black children are disproportionately at risk for missing out on the potential benefits of early education, as they experience harsh and exclusionary discipline in the form of out-of-school suspensions at over three times the rate of White children from preschool through secondary school (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Racial discipline disparities in education are structurally rooted in and serve to perpetuate broader societal inequities. Therefore, they are unlikely to resolve without intensive interventions across macro-, meso-, and micro-systemic levels (Anyon et al., 2020). Given that racial discipline disparities begin in preschool, intensive interventions that are sensitive to the features of early childhood learning contexts and interactions that contribute to these disparities are essential for beginning to address them. However, in order to develop, strengthen, and accurately assess the effectiveness of such interventions, more information is needed about the processes through which racial disparities in discipline emerge and are perpetuated in the early years of school, and how they relate to children's academic and social outcomes during this important period of development. This proposed dissertation, which seeks to contribute to understanding of these processes and their associated outcomes, is guided by the following theories.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a valuable framework for acknowledging, understanding, and working to counteract the deep historical roots and pervasive influence of racism across institutions and social relationships in modern society (Anyon et al., 2020; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). From a CRT perspective, it is imperative for researchers to explicitly acknowledge the forces of systemic racism when conducting scholarly work that aims to challenge social inequities. Thus, it is important when examining racial discipline disparities within the education system to note and consider the ways in which power and privilege determine access to social and academic learning opportunities, and in particular how values and cultural practices within schools were developed by and continue to favor and benefit individuals who are White over individuals of other races (Anyon et al., 2020).

Guided by this framework, I sought in my first manuscript to understand in greater depth how preschool teachers' perceptions of disruptive behavior might differ across Black and White children, and to determine whether White teachers in particular may view Black children as exhibiting specific subtypes of disruptive behavior more than their White peers, including defiance and opposition, which are subjectively determined based upon teacher experiences, ideas, and values (Baker, 2019). As a growing number of states implement policies to reduce and prohibit the use of suspension and expulsion in preschool and early elementary school (Rafa, 2018), I drew upon tenants of CRT to inform my decision to look more closely at ways that young Black children may be disproportionately excluded from learning opportunities beyond formally documented practices. The following quote by Lustick (2017) provides an example of the logic, guided by CRT, that I intended to examine and bring further attention to by illuminating

children's experiences of soft exclusion and their relation to race as well as the justification for the need to do so in my second and third manuscripts:

> The tradition of sequestering students of color more often and more harshly than their White peers is not to be interrupted by a mere shift in the type of discipline these sequestered children receive. The very beliefs that lead to such sequestration need to be challenged, alongside the biases and institutional forces that more grandly marginalize students of color in schools. It is crucial to understand what it means to implement discipline reform equitably with racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse groups of students (p. 7).

This dissertation is also grounded in bioecological systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and transactional (Sameroff, 2010) theories of development, which emphasize how children develop through dynamic, reciprocal, and iterative social exchanges experienced within and influenced by their environmental contexts. Furthermore, it is informed by Garcia Coll and colleagues' (1996) integrative model for the study of developmental competencies in minority children, which outlines how key factors, including racism, prejudice, discrimination, and oppression, interact with the social ecologies of minoritized children at all levels to contribute to their development in unique and profound ways that must be taken into consideration by researchers. Together with CRT, these theories offer useful frameworks for considering how interactions between individual young children and their teachers – influenced by internal factors and embedded within the broader social contexts of their classrooms, schools, and communities – may play out in ways that perpetuate racial inequities in exclusion from learning opportunities. More specifically, these four theories helped to inform my

understanding of how educators' individual racial biases, in combination with manifestations of institutionalized racism at various levels of social ecology, may relate to their differential perceptions and more exclusionary responses to the behaviors of Black children in early childhood, and in turn, how these more exclusionary responses may influence Black children's beliefs, perceptions, and future behaviors at school. Applying transactional theory, these interactions may occur in a repetitive feedback loop that serves to intensify child disengagement and teacher exclusionary responses over time, ultimately perpetuating gaps in discipline and educational opportunity and leading to increasingly severe consequences for children between preschool and secondary school. This overarching framework guided my decisions to examine teacher perceptions of and responses to young children's behavior, as well as the influence of exclusionary experiences on children's outcomes, with the goal of better understanding and addressing the racial inequities in education that begin at school entry.

Owens and McLahanan (2020) found that 46 to 70 percent of the racial gap in suspensions present between Black and White children by third grade could be explained by differential treatment of Black children. A growing body of research indicates that racial biases held by teachers, whether consciously or unconsciously, may influence their perceptions of and responses to children's misbehavior (Gilliam et al., 2016; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011). Black children tend to be perceived by their teachers as exhibiting more externalizing problem behaviors (e.g., aggression, defiance, disruption, impulsivity) than their White peers, particularly when their teachers are White (Downer et al., 2016; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Wright et al., 2017). A weakness among studies in this area is that they have exclusively relied upon composite scores of

externalizing behaviors, which offer limited information about the specific subtypes or qualities of behavior White teachers may interpret differently between Black and White children. More nuanced information about the subtypes of behavior that may drive differential teacher ratings in early childhood and the contexts in which differential ratings are more likely to occur is needed to facilitate enhanced precision of interventions that aim to help teachers to recognize and reduce the influence of racial bias in their judgements of behavior and subsequent decisions.

In attempts to reduce racial disproportionality and the negative impacts of exclusionary discipline on student social and academic outcomes, a number of states have issued laws banning the use of suspensions and expulsions in preschool and early elementary school (Loomis et al., 2020; Rafa, 2018). However, because these bans fail to address underlying factors that contribute to inequities in exclusionary discipline, children may continue to experience racially disparate exclusions in other forms. Before children are suspended from school, they may experience a range of "soft" exclusionary discipline, a term which describes any practices that reduce or prevent children's access to the social and academic learning opportunities they are meant to be engaged in at school (Wymer et al., 2019). A number of soft exclusionary strategies have been separately documented, including time-outs (Ryan et al., 2007) and sending students to another classroom (Sanders et al., 2020). However, no studies to date have conducted a comprehensive examination of the ways in which young children may be excluded from social and academic learning opportunities beyond formal removals like suspension and expulsion. In order to effectively intervene to improve equity in the early years of school,

understanding the full extent of exclusions a child may experience, and whether racial disparities extend to experiences of soft exclusionary discipline, is vital.

Studies have linked suspensions to a range of poorer social and academic outcomes in adolescence and adulthood (Duxbury & Haynie, 2020; Shollenberger, 2015; Rosenbaum, 2020), but information regarding the associations of suspensions as well as softer forms of exclusion with more immediate outcomes during early childhood is scarce. Following a transactional framework, children who are excluded by their teachers may develop negative beliefs about themselves in the school context (e.g., that their participation is unwanted or unappreciated in the classroom), which leads to them behaving in line with these beliefs by ignoring teacher instructions or disengaging from activities. When children repeat unwanted behaviors, this may reinforce any negative beliefs their teacher has about them (e.g., that they are disrespectful or disinterested in learning) and increase the automaticity with which they respond to the children with exclusion. Finally, experiencing additional exclusions serves to further reinforce the children's negative beliefs and disengagement. Though a number of variations are possible, this example exchange between children and teachers illustrates how experiences of exclusion could lead to increasing disengagement over time if no interventions take place to change child or teacher beliefs or behaviors. Further research is needed to assess the extent to which experiencing exclusionary discipline is associated with children's classroom engagement during early childhood.

This dissertation is comprised of three independent studies that each address gaps in the literature around racial discipline inequities in early childhood. Paper 1 investigated differing teacher perceptions of specific subtypes of disruptive behavior

between Black and White children at preschool entry. Paper 2 gathered comprehensive and nuanced qualitative information about practices beyond suspension and expulsion that exclude young children from learning opportunities. Finally, Paper 3 examined whether racial discipline inequities extended to soft exclusionary discipline in preschool, as well as how experiences of soft exclusion were associated with children's classroom engagement across the preschool year. Together, these studies contribute important considerations for research, policy, and practice efforts to eliminate racial inequities in early education.

Paper 1 (Teacher Perceptions of Externalizing Behavior Subtypes in Preschool: Considering Racial Factors).

This study expanded upon prior literature around racial differences in teacher ratings of child externalizing behavior by examining associations of child race, teacher-child race match and mismatch, and peer racial congruence with specific subdomains of teacher-rated externalizing behavior symptoms including inattention, hyperactivity/impulsivity, and oppositionality/defiance. Within a sample of 147 lead teachers and 1,195 children from state, federal, and privately-funded preschool programs in the southeastern United States, we found that Black children were rated as demonstrating more frequent symptoms of inattention than White children across teachers. White teachers rated Black children as demonstrating more frequent symptoms of inattention and oppositionality/defiance than White children. Black teachers' ratings did not differ significantly between Black and White children; however, when compared to White teachers, Black teachers rated Black children as demonstrating significantly fewer externalizing symptoms across domains. Finally, the proportion of same-race peers

in a child's classroom was associated with lower teacher ratings of inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity across all children. These findings offer important considerations and justification for the need to examine the role of racial bias in teacher perceptions of child behavior and the associations of teacher perceptions with teacher-child relational processes and child outcomes in greater depth.

Paper 2 (Identifying Soft Exclusionary Discipline Practices in Early Childhood Education Settings).

To provide a foundation for further research to measure and determine the implications of experiencing soft exclusions, this study took a descriptive, qualitative approach to documenting the types of soft exclusion experienced by children in grades preschool through 3. A sample of 24 teachers, administrators, and educational specialists participated in interviews in which they were asked to share about their progression of behavior management strategies leading up to suspension. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed by a team of coders, who identified 10 unique types of soft exclusionary experiences across three overarching areas: physical exclusion, social exclusion, and informal push-out. Findings from this study provide implications for the development of valid measures to examine the use of soft exclusions at scale, as well as considerations for interventions that aim to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline.

Paper 3 (Soft Exclusionary Discipline in Preschool: Examining Associations with Child Race, Teacher-Child Race Match, and Child Engagement).

Building off of Paper 2, this study examined teacher-reported frequencies of soft exclusionary discipline practices with individual children in a sample of 767 children and 103 teachers from publicly-funded preschool programs serving low-income families. To explore whether broader inequities in school discipline extended to soft exclusions, we

explored their associations with child race and teacher-child race match. In addition, we explored whether soft exclusions were associated with the quality of children's engagement with teachers and learning activities across the school year as assessed by teacher ratings and direct observations. Findings demonstrated no significant differences in soft exclusionary discipline between Black and White children, regardless of race match or mismatch with their teachers. Soft exclusionary discipline was associated with decreases in the quality of children's engagement across the year, as assessed by both teacher-report and direct observations. These findings highlight a need for further research to understand how contextual factors, including systemic racism, intersect to influence children's learning experiences in early education settings, and to improve the availability and efficacy of interventions that support children's engagement.

Contributions of this Three-Paper Dissertation to the Current Literature

Together, the findings of these studies increase current knowledge related to inequities in children's early learning experiences, and bring greater awareness to a set of practices beyond suspension and expulsion that may lead to children missing out on valuable social and academic learning opportunities in substantial ways despite still being in school. This increased awareness and knowledge has implications for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers alike. By offering new ways of looking at exclusion in early childhood, these studies may help to inform teacher and school-level decisions around responses to perceived child misbehavior.

Our findings also provide important considerations for broader policies that aim to reduce inequities by shedding light on the potential depth and breadth of racial disparities in early learning experiences that current school discipline reforms may fail to

address, and underscoring the need for more effective interventions. Without greater attention to the use and impacts of soft exclusionary practices, policies that intend to reduce disparities in education may overlook a critical contributor to their continuation. For instance, bans on suspension and expulsion may do little to improve child outcomes if children continue to be separated repeatedly and systematically from opportunities to learn from activities and instruction while they are at school rather than effectively supported.

Finally, each of these studies helps to provide foundational information and justification of the need for further research into racial bias and soft exclusionary discipline in early childhood education to inform the design, evaluation, and enhancement of interventions to improve equity in children's access to high quality early learning experiences.

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Teacher Perceptions of Externalizing Behavior Subtypes in Preschool: Considering Racial Factors

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Abstract

Growing evidence demonstrates associations between child race, teacher-child race match, and teacher ratings of externalizing behavior problems in the early years of school. The present study deepens understanding of the relations between child, teacher, and classroom racial factors and teacher-reported externalizing behaviors by examining associations across specific subdomains of externalizing behavior symptoms including inattention, hyperactivity/impulsivity, and oppositionality/defiance. In a sample that included 147 lead teachers and 1,195 children from state, federal, and privately-funded preschool programs within the southeastern United States, we found that Black children were rated as demonstrating more frequent symptoms of inattention than White children across teachers. Ratings for each subtype of externalizing behavior differed depending on teacher-child racial match or mismatch. Finally, the proportion of same-race peers in a child's classroom was negatively associated with teacher ratings of inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity across children. Implications for continued research and intervention development are discussed.

Keywords: externalizing behaviors; preschool; teacher racial match; peer racial congruence

Introduction

Racial disparities in school discipline, extensively documented in older students (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams; 2014), begin as early as preschool (Gilliam, 2005) with Black children being 3.6 times as likely as White children to experience an out-of-school suspension at least once (Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Given these trends, a growing number of studies have examined associations between racial dynamics and teachers' perceptions of problem behavior in early childhood more closely (e.g., Downer, Goble, Myers, & Pianta, 2016; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Mashburn, Hamre, Downer, & Pianta, 2006; Sbarra & Pianta, 2001; Wright, Gottfried, & Le, 2017). Across studies, findings show that preschool and kindergarten teachers tend to rate Black children as demonstrating more frequent behavioral difficulties than their White peers. However, the extent to which these racial gaps in teachers' ratings may be driven by particular subtypes of problem behavior remains unknown.

Studies in this area have exclusively used one of two measures to quantify general problem behaviors, limiting our understanding of racial differences in teachers' perceptions of specific behavior problems. Downey and Pribesh (2004) and Wright et al. (2017), measured externalizing behaviors using a brief scale which combined five items pertaining to anger, verbal and physical conflict, impulsivity, and disruption into a total score. Downer et al. (2016), Mashburn et al. (2006), and Sbarra and Pianta (2001) used the *Teacher-Child Rating Scale*, which includes items related to externalizing behaviors, internalizing behaviors, and learning difficulties all within an overall problem behavior score (Hightower et al., 1986). Moving beyond general problem behaviors to examine racial differences in ratings across discrete types of externalizing behavior is necessary to understand which specific qualities of behavior teachers perceive differently between Black and White

children. Such specificity is warranted to inform improved targeting of intervention efforts to ultimately reduce racial disparities in early education. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates race-related differences in teachers' perceptions of children's specific behavior problems.

Studies of clinical symptoms associated with externalizing disorders, including attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), indicate that oppositional and hyperactive behaviors are more commonly reported than attention problems among preschool-aged children (Chacko, Wakschlag, Hill, Danis & Espy, 2009). Spilt et al. (2010) found that confrontational and hostile behaviors such as those associated with ODD were related to poorer ratings of relationship quality by kindergarten teachers and students, while symptoms of ADHD were not. Over time, patterns of conflictual interaction between teachers and children may begin to negatively shape their beliefs and perceptions about one another's actions and intentions. This can inadvertently create a coercive cycle in which children engage in increasingly disruptive behaviors and teachers respond with decreasing levels of sensitivity, perpetuating their negative beliefs and ultimately leading to worsening outcomes as a child progresses through school (Sutherland & Oswald, 2005). Black children tend to not only be rated higher in externalizing behaviors than White children, but also to experience greater conflict in their relationships with teachers from kindergarten through sixth-grade (Jerome, Hamre, & Pianta, 2008). Given the potential for coercive cycles of interaction to begin early on between teachers and Black children who they perceive as demonstrating externalizing behaviors, preschool is an optimal time to intervene and prevent negative patterns from becoming entrenched and leading to later adverse outcomes. To better inform and maximize the effectiveness of such interventions, a comprehensive examination of

child, teacher, and classroom racial characteristics that may be associated with how teachers perceive and respond to children's behaviors during preschool is necessary. Current research around teacher ratings of problem behaviors in early childhood indicates that associations between child race and behavior ratings may be partially explained by the presence of racial match or mismatch within teacher-child dyads (Downer et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2017), as well as racial/ethnic diversity and congruence within a child's peer group (Benner & Crosnoe, 2011; McKown & Weinstein, 2008).

Teacher-Child Race Match and Externalizing Behaviors

Research examining the potential influence of teacher-child race match during early childhood is sparse, but growing. In studies that include elementary, middle, and high-school students, having a Black teacher is consistently associated with lower ratings of disruptive and externalizing behavior for Black students (see Redding, 2019 for a review). This trend is mirrored somewhat in the early childhood literature, but findings around how and when the relationship of race match to problem behavior ratings arises are inconsistent.

For example, Downey and Pribesh (2004) found that in comparison to White kindergarteners, Black kindergarteners were rated as showing more externalizing behaviors and fewer positive "approaches to learning" only when they were paired with White teachers. In contrast, results reported by Mashburn and colleagues (2006) suggest that teacher race alone may be more strongly associated with differences in ratings than teacher-child race match. Among the preschool teachers in their study, White teachers rated children higher in behavioral problems and lower in social competence than Black teachers, regardless of child race. These findings suggest that differences in ideas and expectations about child behavior more broadly between Black and White teachers may contribute to differences in their ratings of child behavior problems.

More recently, studies have examined associations between teacher-child race match and behavior ratings over time by comparing ratings at the start and end of the school year. In a study by Downer and colleagues (2016), no differences in behavior ratings were observed between Black preschool children with and without same-race teachers in the fall; however, at the end of the preschool year, White teachers reported greater increases in problem behaviors for Black children than did Black teachers. However, Black children who had Black teachers were not rated as demonstrating an average decrease in externalizing behaviors across the school year either, indicating that having a same-race teacher may not necessarily lead to positive changes in a child's behavior or the way it is viewed across the year. In contrast, Wright and colleagues (2017) found that although Black and Latinx kindergarteners received higher externalizing behavior ratings than their White peers in the fall, those with same-race/ethnicity teachers demonstrated a decline in externalizing behavior ratings across the school year that was strong enough to nearly eliminate the gap that had been present at the start. The authors proposed that this protective association of having a same-race/ethnicity teacher could be a function of shared cultural understanding that allows teachers to more accurately interpret and rate child behaviors. Another possibility is that children who are placed with same-race teachers exhibit fewer externalizing behaviors over time because they feel more connected to and understood by their teachers. Though the inconsistent findings between Downer et al. and Wright et al.'s studies may be partially explained by differences in children's developmental stages between preschool and kindergarten, they may also be due in part to differences in how problem behaviors were measured. Between both studies, there is a lack of clarity around which specific behaviors may be driving different racial associations,

further underscoring a need to differentiate ratings by sub-domains of externalizing behavior.

Racial Congruence Among Classroom Peers

Given the potential positive influence of having a same-race teacher on ratings of externalizing behavior, a related question is the extent to which sharing a classroom with same-race peers is associated with how teachers rate child behaviors. It is easy to imagine how a child's peer group may influence both how they behave, and how they are perceived by their teachers in comparison to others. If children who experience greater or less racial congruence within their classroom are rated differently by their teachers, this would have critical implications for future research toward understanding that difference and identifying more precise intervention targets.

Though not examining peer racial congruence directly, a study of the association between classroom racial/ethnic diversity and teacher ratings of children's academic potential in elementary school provides compelling evidence for considering peer racial/ethnic context. McKown and Weinstein (2008) found that teachers had higher expectations for the year-end math and reading achievement of White and Asian children than for Black and Hispanic children, despite controlling for previous academic performance. When classroom diversity was taken into account, the gap in expectations between Black and Hispanic children and White and Asian children was even wider in classrooms where a greater number of racial/ethnic groups were represented. The same study found that in classrooms where teachers acted upon their expectations by treating high and low achievers differently, the achievement gap between White and Asian students and Black and Hispanic students widened at the end of the year. These results demonstrate

that having a more diverse classroom may actually increase the degree to which teachers' view students differentially related to their race/ethnicity.

Peer racial congruence is a factor that overlaps with and may change the significance of classroom racial diversity because for some children, belonging to a more diverse classroom may mean having a greater number of same race/ethnicity peers, while for others it may mean having fewer. The proportion of same-race peers a child has in their classroom is distinct from an overall diversity index or from classroom fixed effects for race, because the latter options would apply the same value to all children within a classroom regardless of their individual race. Measuring the proportion of same-race peers for each individual child allows for exploration of whether teacher ratings of a specific child's behaviors are associated with the extent to which there are other children in the same classroom who may look similar or be subject to similar stereotypes.

Benner and Crosnoe (2011) investigated the associations of both school-level diversity and proportion of same-race peers with teacher ratings of kindergarteners' externalizing behaviors in spring of the school year. When considered independently, neither school-level racial/ethnic diversity nor racial/ethnic peer congruence was associated with externalizing behavior ratings. However, when included together in the same model, proportion of same-race/ethnicity peers was negatively associated with externalizing behavior ratings across racial/ethnic groups. It remains unclear whether these same trends are mirrored at the classroom level, where a child's immediate peer group may be more closely associated than overall school demographics with how they are viewed by their teacher. Given the prior finding that classroom-level diversity is negatively associated with teachers' academic expectations for students whose racial/ethnic groups are more commonly ascribed negative stereotypes (McKown & Weinstein, 2008), further exploration

is warranted around whether ratings of externalizing behavior for children of negatively-stereotyped racial/ethnic groups increase or decrease in classrooms with higher proportions of same race/ethnicity peers.

The Present Study

In this study, we aimed to extend previous findings of racial differences in teachers' perceptions of children externalizing behavior in early childhood in two ways. First, unlike prior work using a global measure of externalizing behaviors (Downer et al., 2016; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Mashburn et al., 2006; Sbarra & Pianta, 2001; Wright, et al., 2017), we investigated whether these racial differences appear to be driven by distinct subtypes of externalizing behavior. More specifically, we examined differences in teacher-rated frequencies of inattentive, hyperactive/impulsive, and oppositional/defiant behaviors. Second, guided by prior work (Benner & Crosnoe, 2011; Downer et al., 2016; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Wright et al., 2017) about how teacher-child race match and classroom racial composition play out in teachers' perceptions of children, we examined teacher-rated specific behavior problems (i.e., inattentive, hyperactive/impulsive, and oppositional/defiant behaviors) as a function of child race, teacher-child race match and mismatch, and peer racial congruence. We examined these research aims in a preschool sample where teachers from a range of program types completed ratings for all children in their classrooms in fall of the school year. Our research questions were as follows:

1. Do teachers rate Black and White children differently in their frequencies of inattentive, hyperactive/impulsive, and oppositional/defiant behaviors after accounting for children's age, gender, and family income-to-needs ratio, teachers' age and years of experience, and preschool program type?

2. Is teacher-child race match/mis-match associated with teachers' ratings across subtypes of externalizing behavior?
3. Do teacher ratings across subtypes of externalizing behavior vary as a function of the proportion of peer racial congruence a child experiences within their classroom?
4. Do associations between peer racial congruence and teachers' ratings of externalizing behavior differ between Black and White children?

Based upon prior research, we anticipated that teachers would report more frequent hyperactive/impulsive and oppositional/defiant behaviors from Black than White children. We also anticipated that these differences in behavior ratings would be more prominent for Black children who experienced racial mismatch with their White teachers. Finally, we expected that greater peer racial congruence would be associated with decreased ratings of externalizing behaviors, and that this association would be stronger for Black children than White children.

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were derived from a larger, randomized control trial study examining an intervention focused on improving teacher-child interactions. The present study was not interested in the intervention effects and used only baseline data that were collected prior to intervention condition assignment at the beginning of three school years, from 2010-2013 (see [name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process]). The full sample from the larger study included 2,378 preschool children and 160 lead preschool teachers. After removing teachers and children who did not meet the inclusion criteria described below, the final sample of participants for the present study included 147 lead

teachers and 1,195 children from 88 preschool programs across three sites within the southeastern United States.

Inclusion in the present study was contingent upon children having returned a family survey that included race/ethnicity data, and teachers having reported their own race/ethnicity. Furthermore, only children and teachers whose races/ethnicities were reported as either Black or White were included in the final analyses. Though the full sample included teachers and children of Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, Mixed, Native American, and "Other" racial or ethnic backgrounds, these subsamples were not large enough to detect meaningful differences by teacher-child race/ethnicity match.

The teachers and children included in the present study resided in mostly urban and suburban areas and belonged to a mix of federal-(28%), state-(27%), and privately-funded (45%) preschool programs. The majority of teachers were female (96.7%) with an average age of 41.82 (SD = 11.4) years and 13.13 (SD = 9.52) years of teaching experience. Approximately 54% of teachers identified as Black and 46% as White. The average age of participating children was 49.18 (SD = 6.67) months, which is equivalent to just over four years. Of the children, 53% were female and 47% were male. Fifty-three percent of children were identified by their families as Black, and 47% as White. Though the children's families ranged in socioeconomic status, the majority were of low-income backgrounds (average income-to-needs ratio [INR] of 1.91, SD = 1.52). See Table 1 for a summary of child, teacher, and classroom characteristics by each child race category.

Procedures

Recruitment for participation in the teacher-child intervention study occurred at the program level through contact with administrators via email, phone, or in person. Upon administrator approval, individual teachers were contacted for participation. Once teachers

agreed to be in the study, a letter was sent home at the beginning of the school year to invite participation of all children in each classroom. Seventy-six percent of families agreed for their children to participate in the larger study. Participating teachers completed a battery of surveys in the beginning of the school year that included questions about teacher and classroom demographic characteristics, as well as ratings of externalizing behavior for each participating child within their classroom. Children's families completed a short survey to provide additional child-level demographic information.

Measures

Child and Teacher Demographics

Demographic data gathered through family questionnaires included child age, gender, race, and family income-to-needs ratio (i.e., annual family income divided by the corresponding federal poverty level set that year for a family of the same size). A family income-to-needs score of 1 means that the family's reported income equals the poverty level for a family of the same size. Teacher demographic data included age, years of teaching experience, and race. Teachers also provided estimations of the percentages of students of each of race enrolled in their classrooms. Program administrators reported program types to the research team (e.g., Head Start, State-Funded, Private).

Teacher-Child Race Match

To examine associations of teacher-child race match and mismatch with our outcome variables, we created a set of four dichotomous variables at the child-level to represent the following pairings: (1) Black teacher, White child; (2) Black teacher, Black child; (3) White teacher, White child; (4) and White teacher, Black child.

Proportion of Peer Racial Congruence

Using the classroom race proportions reported by teachers, we calculated a child-level variable for proportion of same-race peers.

Inattention, Hyperactivity/Impulsivity, and Opposition/Defiance

In the fall of each school year, teachers rated all children in their classrooms on two externalizing behavior scales (Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD] Rating Scale-IV, DuPaul, Power, Anastopoulos, & Reid, 1998; Oppositional Defiant Disorder [ODD] Rating Scale, Hommersen, Murray, Ohan, & Johnston, 2006). Both scales have been used in clinical research with racially and ethnically diverse samples of preschool-aged children and demonstrate strong validity and reliability for assessing child behavioral symptoms (McGoey, DuPaul, Haley, & Shelton, 2007; Williford et al., 2017). The ADHD Rating Scale-IV includes subscales for Inattention and Hyperactivity/Impulsivity, and each subscale includes 9 items. The ODD Rating Scale includes 8 items related to defiant and oppositional behaviors. Items on each scale are rated on a 4-point Likert scale from "never" to "often" for how frequently a child demonstrates each behavior. Children's item scores were summed to create total scores for each subscale.

Data Analysis Plan

We used Stata version 15 (Statacorp, 2017) to conduct all analyses. Separate multilevel models were estimated for each type of externalizing behavior problem (i.e., inattention, hyperactivity/impulsivity, opposition/defiance), and for each research question, such that we estimated four sets of models for each behavioral outcome. All models were hierarchical and nested children within teachers, therefore accounting for both within and between classroom variation in the outcomes. Across all sets of models, child-level covariates included child age, gender, and family INR; all continuous covariates were

group-mean centered to isolate within- and between-classroom variation. Classroom-level covariates included teacher age, years of teaching experience, and type of child care center. In our first, third, and fourth sets of models, we included child and teacher race as covariates, using White, female children with White teachers who attended public, state-funded preschool programs as the reference group. The third set of models was distinguished by adding in the peer racial congruence variable, and fourth set of models was distinguished by adding an interaction term for peer racial congruence by child race. In our second set of models, we removed the individual variables for child and teacher race and replaced them with the four dichotomous teacher-child race match/mismatch variables. We ran the initial set of these models with White children rated by White teachers as the reference group, and a follow-up set with Black children rated by White teachers as the reference group.

Because teachers rated all children within their classrooms, a large portion of children who demonstrated no symptoms received ratings of zero across the three behavior problem categories. As a result, each of our outcome variables was positively skewed, with 46% of children rated as demonstrating zero symptoms of oppositionality/defiance, 25% rated as demonstrating zero symptoms of inattention, and 21% rated as demonstrating zero symptoms of hyperactivity/impulsivity. To address this overdispersion of zeroes in the outcome variables, negative binomial regression models were used in all analyses. The coefficients generated by these models are reported as incident rate ratios (IRRs); thus, Level 1 coefficients indicate the percent increase or decrease in the expected frequency of behavioral symptoms for a child that differs by one unit on the Level 1 covariate relative to other children within their classroom. Level 2 coefficients indicate the percent increase or decrease in the expected frequency of behavioral symptoms between children whose

classrooms differ by 1 unit on the level 2 covariate. We conducted Poisson regression models as a sensitivity check; negative binomial models estimated the number of zeros in our outcome data most accurately and therefore are presented below.

Handling of Missing Data

Before removing cases from our sample in which the family survey containing child racial/ethnic data was not returned, or the teacher's race/ethnicity was missing, we used independent samples *t*-tests to compare child outcomes between those with and without missingness for these variables. Tests comparing children with and without family surveys revealed no significant differences for inattention or opposition/defiance, but indicated that children whose parents returned surveys were rated slightly higher in hyperactivity/impulsivity (M = 6.00, SD = 6.34, n =1684) by their teachers than children whose parents did not (M = 5.44, SD = 6.09, n = 691), t(2373) = -1.98, p < .05. Because the effect size (d = -.09) for this difference was small (Cohen, 1988), removing the children without family surveys from our sample is unlikely to bias our results.

Of children whose families did complete the survey, about three percent had no response for the race/ethnicity question. A second series of *t*-tests demonstrated no significant differences in the outcome variables between children with survey data whose families reported race/ethnicity and children whose families did not. In addition, about two percent of the children had teachers who did not report their own race/ethnicity. Teachers who did not report their own race/ethnicity rated children higher in opposition/defiance (M=5.32, SD=7.51, N =38) than teachers who had reported their race/ethnicity (M=3.00, SD=4.71, N =1642), t(1678) = -2.95, p < .01, d = -.48; ratings for inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity did not differ significantly between the two groups.

Following case-wise deletion of teachers and children who did not meet the inclusion criteria of having complete race/ethnicity data and identifying as either Black or White, the majority (88.1%) of children in the final sample had complete data for all variables, including child and classroom-level demographics and externalizing behavior outcomes. Independent samples *t*-tests revealed that children for whom complete data were not available did not differ significantly from children with complete data in terms of age, gender, family INR, their teacher's age, or their teacher's years of experience. However, there were significant differences between children with missing data and those with complete data in terms of child race, teacher race, classroom racial proportions, type of preschool center attended, and ratings of externalizing behaviors. Variables that differed between children with and without missing data were included in our models as covariates (whenever collinearity assumptions would not be violated by doing so) to reduce the likelihood of violating the Missing at Random (MAR) assumption, which otherwise appeared to fit the data appropriately (Enders, 2010).

Missing data were estimated using BLIMP (Keller & Enders, 2017) to carry out multilevel multiple imputation procedures (Enders, Keller, & Levy, 2017). For each unique analysis model (12 total), 10 imputed data files were created with BLIMP and imported into STATA. Multi-level analyses were then conducted across each of the 10 imputed datasets, and coefficients and standard errors resulting from each analysis were averaged to provide estimates of associations between child, teacher, classroom, and center characteristics and teachers' ratings of children's externalizing behaviors.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Across all children within our sample, the average frequency of hyperactivity/impulsivity symptoms was 5.92 (SD = 6.18). For inattentive symptoms, the average frequency was 5.53 (SD = 5.93), and for oppositional/defiant symptoms the average frequency was 3.00 (SD = 4.68).

Associations Between Child Race and Teachers' Ratings of Externalizing Behavior

To address our first research question, we used two-level, negative binomial regression models to examine differences associated with child race (using White as the reference category) for each specific type of externalizing behavior. In contrast to our hypotheses, we found that child race was not associated with teachers' ratings of hyperactivity/impulsivity or oppositionality/defiance symptoms. Child race was associated with teachers' report of children's inattention symptoms such that on average, teachers rated Black children as demonstrating a 38% greater frequency of inattention symptoms than their White peers (IRR = 1.38, p =.003). Results are summarized in Table 2.

Associations Between Teacher-Child Race Match and Teachers' Ratings of Externalizing Behavior

Results were partially consistent with our hypotheses; we found that White teachers rated Black children as demonstrating a 62% greater frequency of inattention symptoms (IRR = 1.62, p = .000) and a 50% greater frequency of oppositionality/defiance symptoms (IRR = 1.50, p = .026) compared to their White peers, but no greater a rate of hyperactivity/impulsivity. Compared to White teachers rating White children, Black teachers did not rate White or Black children differently. However, a follow up analysis demonstrated that in comparison to White teachers rating Black children, Black teachers rated Black children as demonstrating a 26% lower frequency of inattention (IRR = 0.74, p = .045), a 23% lower frequency of hyperactivity/impulsivity (IRR = 0.77, p = .047), and a

43% lower frequency of oppositionality/defiance (IRR= 0.57, p = .008). Full results for these models are included in Table 3.

Associations Between Proportion of Same-Race Peers and Teachers' Ratings of Externalizing Behavior

In partial alignment with our hypotheses, teachers rated children with a greater proportion of same-race peers in their classrooms as displaying lower hyperactivity/impulsivity (IRR = 0.67, p = .028) and inattention (IRR = 0.63, p < .020) after controlling for covariates. These IRRs are interpreted as follows: for each one-percent increase in proportion of same-race peers a child had in comparison to others in their classroom, the frequencies with which they were rated by their teachers as demonstrating hyperactive/impulsive symptoms and inattention symptoms decreased by 33 and 37 percent, respectively. No association with proportion of same-race peers was found for oppositionality/defiance.

Association of an Interaction Between Proportion of Same-Race Peers and Child Race with Teachers' Ratings of Externalizing Behavior

Contrary to our hypothesis, the interaction term for child race and proportion of same-race peers was not significantly associated with any of the outcome variables. Table 4 presents the results of each of the peer racial congruence models.

Discussion

To deepen current understanding of racial differences in how teachers rate preschoolers' externalizing behavior, this study examined associations of child race, teacher-child race match, and extent of classroom peer racial congruence with teacher ratings of inattentive, hyperactive/impulsive, and oppositional/defiant behaviors. Our findings contribute to the literature by providing evidence of further nuance within racial

gaps in externalizing behavior ratings when subtypes of behavior are considered. Our results also further underscore the importance of considering race within the individual child, as well as how this interacts with teacher and peer race, when examining teacher ratings of child behavior. Teacher-child race mismatch and proportion of peer racial congruence were each linked with teacher ratings of externalizing behavior above and beyond other commonly associated child characteristics including gender, age, and socioeconomic status and teacher characteristics including years of teaching experience (Foley, 2011; Howes et al., 2008; Mashburn et al., 2006).

Child Race and Teacher Ratings of Externalizing Behavior by Subtype

Counter to our hypotheses, teachers in the present study rated Black children as demonstrating greater symptoms of inattention than White children, but not of hyperactivity/impulsivity or oppositionality/defiance. The association between inattention and race aligns with the finding of Downey and Pribesh (2004) that Black kindergarteners were rated lower than White kindergarteners in "approaches to learning" which was defined by behaviors including attentiveness, persistence, and organization. They found a similar, but somewhat smaller gap than the present study in teacher ratings between Black and White children for this outcome (about a 23% difference) when controlling for similar covariates. However, Downey and Pribesh (2004) also found that Black kindergarteners were rated as demonstrating greater externalizing behaviors on a scale that included items for arguing, acting impulsively, and disturbing activities – behaviors that are associated with hyperactivity/impulsivity and oppositionality/defiance.

Interestingly, the results of the current study do not support the presence of differences in ratings for these subtypes of behavior between Black and White children as they enter preschool. Instead, our findings indicate that teachers are perceiving more

instances of inattention symptoms, which include difficulty sustaining attention, failing to attend closely to details, not seeming to listen when spoken to, not following through on instructions, avoiding tasks that require sustained effort, and difficulties with organization, distractibility, and forgetfulness. This collection of symptoms is more aligned with teachers perceiving Black students as being less engaged and connected in the classroom, rather than showing outright disobedience, excessive energy, or a lack of self-control. This finding suggests that interventions focused on building teachers' cultural knowledge and understanding of how different students may demonstrate interest and engagement, and how to foster their engagement, may be especially salient as they are entering preschool.

Teacher-Child Race Match and Teacher Ratings of Externalizing Behavior by Subtype

Consistent with the findings of Downey and Pribesh (2004), we found associations between teacher-child race mismatch and externalizing behavior such that White teachers rated Black children as demonstrating greater behavioral difficulties than their White peers. The current study expands upon previous findings by highlighting that among sub-domains of externalizing behavior, White teachers rate Black children as demonstrating more frequent symptoms of inattention and oppositionality/defiance than their White peers, and not hyperactivity/impulsivity. Compared to White teachers, Black teachers in our study rated Black students as demonstrating less frequent symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity/impulsivity, and oppositionality/defiance. This finding corresponds with the work by Downer and colleagues (2016) indicating that White teachers rated Black children as demonstrating higher externalizing behaviors than did Black teachers at the end of the preschool year. However, the present study found this to be the case at the start of the

preschool year, indicating that racial differences in how teachers perceive children's behaviors may begin to take shape earlier than previously found.

Differences in ratings of externalizing behavior related to teacher-child race match and mismatch have been commonly been interpreted as indicative of cultural synchronicity between teachers and children of the same race, and of racial bias in teachers' interpretations of Black children's behavior (Downer et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2017). A recent study provided evidence that both Black and White preschool teachers expect Black children, and Black boys in particular, to demonstrate more externalizing behaviors than their peers (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic; 2016). This finding indicates that all teachers, regardless of their own race, are susceptible to negative racial biases. If teachers allow these biases, whether conscious or unconscious, to color their perceptions of children's behavior at the start of the year, there is a danger of creating a self-fulfilling prophecy for Black children and potentially contributing to gaps in discipline and achievement as they progress through school. Future studies are needed to discern the extent to which implicit biases held by teachers may explain differences in ratings of externalizing behavior between Black and White preschoolers, as well as the extent to which these biases are associated with their responses to problem behaviors.

Peer Racial Congruence and Teacher Ratings of Externalizing Behavior by Subtype

We found that for both Black and White children, the extent to which a child experienced peer racial congruence within their classroom was associated with lower ratings of inattentive and hyperactive/impulsive behaviors. Contrary to our hypothesis, this association was not stronger for Black children. Because we used only teacher ratings to measure child behaviors in the current study, we are unable to determine with certainty

whether this pattern of findings can be partially explained by a propensity of children to regulate their attention and behavior more effectively when they are among racially similar peers, or a tendency of teachers to view children's behaviors in a more or less biased way depending on the extent to which they are among same-race peers. Given mixed findings between prior studies around the benefits of classroom and school diversity overall (e.g., Benner & Crosnoe, 2011; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Rasheed et al., 2019), our results substantiate the need for additional and more nuanced examination of the associations between classroom racial contexts and teacher ratings of behavior.

Limitations

Because the current study included only teachers and children from programs within the southeastern region of the United States, our findings may not be generalizable to other regions. However, prior research demonstrates that there is value in examining associations between race and teacher perceptions by region. For example, Dee (2005) found that associations between student race/ethnicity and teacher perceptions of disruption and inattention for 8th grade students appeared to be more concentrated among those living in the southern United States compared to other regions.

Another weakness of the present study is that the teachers and children included within our final sample may differ systematically from those who were excluded in ways we were unable to account for in our analyses. Nearly one third of the observations from the full sample were not included in our analyses due to missing family surveys that included child race/ethnicity data. Though we used multiple imputation to estimate missing values for other covariates, to answer our research questions about racial differences using a large proportion of estimated race data based on other variables within our dataset would not have been appropriate.

In addition, the percentages of children of each race within classrooms that were used to calculate the proportion of same-race peers for each child were estimated by teachers and inherently involve room for error and/or bias in reporting. The lack of a more precise measurement tool for this variable is another limitation of the current study, and warrants caution in interpreting our results. Because these values were estimated, we were also unable to recalculate them to account for the individual child's contribution to the proportion of same-race peers within their classroom.

Finally, we were only able to examine associations between child race, teacher race match, and peer racial congruence for Black and White children due to limited numbers of individuals from other racial and ethnic groups within our sample. Prior research demonstrates that Latinx students who are learning English may be similarly rated lower in externalizing behaviors when paired specifically with Spanish-speaking Latinx teachers (Wright et al., 2017) but this association was not found for English-proficient Latinx children paired with Latinx teachers (Downer et al., 2016). There is also a possibility that children who identify as mixed or other race/ethnicity may be rated differentially by teachers. Because the processes underlying racial differences in teacher-reported behavioral outcomes remain understudied, it is unclear whether differences in ratings are explained more by differing cultural views of behavior, racial biases, or other factors.

Conclusion and Implications

Continued work is needed to better understand the roles of cultural views, racial biases, and relational processes between preschool teachers and children of different races in predicting child outcomes. Regardless of the processes through which disparate ratings of externalizing behaviors arise, current research has demonstrated that the racial context of the classroom and teacher-child relationship are important considerations for meeting

children's needs during the early years of schooling. At this time, it remains unclear whether racial differences in ratings of externalizing behavior are directly associated with disparities in disciplinary responses to Black and White children in the early years or school. Future research should focus on gaining greater clarification around the impacts of classroom racial contexts on the behaviors of young children, and how teachers assess and respond to child behaviors. Understanding in more detail what factors contribute to racial differences in assessments of behavior and disciplinary responses is an important step toward developing interventions to ensure that teachers have adequate training and support to create more equitable early learning experiences.

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Table 1. Child, teacher, and classroom characteristics by child race.

	White (n=567)			Black (n=628)		
	n	%	M (SD)	*n*	%	M (SD)
Child Characteristics						
Gender						
Male	263	46.4		326	52.1	
Female	304	54.6		300	47.9	
Age (months)			48.33 (6.77)			49.94 (6.55)
Family INR			2.92 (1.37)			0.96 (0.94)
Teacher Characteristics						
Age (years)			42.07 (11.40)			41.59 (11.42)
Years of Teaching Experience			12.48 (9.89)			13.72 (9.12)
Race						
Black	151	26.6		398	63.4	
White	416	73.4		230	36.6	
Classroom Characteristics						
Percent Black			0.16 (0.21)			0.70 (0.23)
Percent White			0.66 (0.28)			0.12 (0.18)
Percent Male			0.53 (0.18)			0.52 (0.17)
Average Child Age			48.39 (5.37)			49.91 (5.42)
Average Family INR			2.82 (1.07)			1.07 (0.78)
Program Type						
Head Start	35	6.2		299	47.6	
State-Funded	94	16.6		155	24.7	
Private with State Status	10	1.7		59	9.4	
Private For-profit	119	21.0		30	4.8	
Private Non-profit	309	54.5		85	13.5	

Table 2. Associations between child race and teacher ratings for each subdomain of externalizing behavior.

	Inattention	Hyperactivity/ Impulsivity	Oppositionality/ Defiance
Intercept	11.89***	16.82***	11.81**
Child Level			
Gender (Male)	1.49***	1.50***	1.37**
Age	0.97**	0.99	1.01
Race (Black)	1.38**	1.16	1.28
INR	0.98	0.99	1.05
Classroom Level			
Teacher Age	1.00	1.00	1.00
Teacher Race (Black)	0.89	0.86	0.72*
Years of Experience	1.00	1.00	0.99
Average Child INR	0.99	0.97	0.96
Average Child Gender	1.49	1.56	1.88
Average Child Age	0.98*	0.98*	0.97*
Program Type			
Head Start	0.86	0.84	0.83
Private for Profit	0.83	0.85	1.11
Private Non-Profit	0.73	0.77	0.97
Private State Status	0.52*	0.81	1.00

Note: Coefficients are presented as incidence rate ratios (IRRs). Public, State-Funded programs were used as the reference group for Program Type covariates.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 3. Associations between teacher-child race match/mismatch and teacher ratings for each subdomain of externalizing behavior.

	White T, White C as Reference Group			White T, Black C as Reference Group		
	Inattention	Hyperactivity/ Impulsivity	Oppositionality/ Defiance	Inattention	Hyperactivity/ Impulsivity	Oppositionality/ Defiance
Intercept	10.89***	15.77***	11.03**	17.67***	20.02***	16.58**
Child Level						
Gender (Male)	1.50***	1.51***	1.38**	1.50***	1.51***	1.38**
Age	0.97**	0.99	1.01	0.97**	0.99	1.01
INR	0.99	0.99	1.06	0.99	0.99	1.06
Racial Match/Mismatch						
BT, BC	1.20	0.97	0.86	0.74*	0.77*	0.57**
BT, WC	1.12	0.98	0.94	0.69*	0.77	0.62
WT, BC	1.62***	1.27	1.50*			
WT, WC				0.62***	0.79	0.67*
Classroom Level						
Teacher Age	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Years of Experience	1.00	1.00	0.99	1.00	1.00	0.99
Average Child INR	0.99	0.97	0.95	0.99	0.97	0.95
Average Child Gender	1.42	1.51	1.75	1.42	1.51	1.75
Average Child Age	0.98*	0.98*	0.97*	0.98*	0.98*	0.97*
Program Type						
Head Start	0.92	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.88	0.91
Private for Profit	0.89	0.88	1.17	0.89	0.88	1.17
Private Non-Profit	0.75	0.79	1.01	0.75	0.79	1.01
Private State Status	0.54*	0.83	1.04	0.54*	0.83	1.04

Note: Coefficients are presented as incidence rate ratios (IRRs). Public, State-Funded programs were used as the reference group for Program Type covariates.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 4. Associations between proportion of peer racial congruence and teacher ratings for each subdomain of externalizing behavior.

	Without Interaction Term			With Interaction Term		
	Inattention	Hyperactivity/ Impulsivity	Oppositionality/ Defiance	Inattention	Hyperactivity/ Impulsivity	Oppositionality/ Defiance
Intercept	13.35***	20.75***	16.88**	12.89***	20.76***	16.43**
Child Level						
Gender (Male)	1.48***	1.48***	1.39**	1.48***	1.48***	1.38**
Age	0.97**	0.99	1.02	0.97**	0.99	1.02
Race (Black)	1.43**	1.19	1.31	1.22	1.19	1.16
INR	0.99	1.00	1.05	0.99	1.00	1.05
% Peer Race Match	0.63*	0.67*	0.65	0.53	0.67	0.58
Interaction Term						
% Peer Race Match x Child Race (Black)				1.42	1.00	1.30
Classroom Level						
Teacher Age	1.00	1.00	0.99	1.00	1.00	1.00
Teacher Race (Black)	0.85	0.84	0.70*	0.83	0.84	0.69*
Years of Experience	1.00	1.00	0.99	1.00	1.00	0.99
Average Child INR	0.96	0.96	0.97	1.00	0.96	0.99
Average Child Gender	1.56	1.48	1.82	1.58	1.48	1.85
Average Child Age	0.98	0.98*	0.97*	0.98	-0.98*	0.97*
Program Type						
Head Start	0.95	0.91	0.97	0.95	0.91	0.97
Private for Profit	0.93	0.89	1.09	0.92	0.89	1.08
Private Non-Profit	0.88	0.88	1.10	0.87	0.88	1.10
Private State Status	0.57*	0.85	1.05	0.55*	0.85	1.01

Note: Coefficients are presented as incidence rate ratios (IRRs). Public, State-Funded programs were used as the reference group for Program Type covariates.

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Identifying Soft Exclusionary Discipline Practices in Early Childhood Education Settings

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Abstract

This qualitative study used vignettes in conjunction with in-depth, *semi-structured interviews* to investigate teachers' and other school personnel's (n = 24) responses to perceived student misbehaviors in early childhood education settings – when their initial approaches fail to reduce the perceived misbehavior. Three main themes and 10 sub-themes were identified: (a) physical exclusion from peers and activities, (b) social exclusion from peers and activities, and (c) soft suspension and expulsion. Our findings indicate that teachers and other school personnel rely on soft exclusionary discipline practices to deal with perceived student misbehavior when their initial attempts to address said misbehavior fail. Implications for policy and practice and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Keywords: exclusionary discipline, soft exclusion, elementary school, preschool

Identifying Soft Exclusionary Discipline Practices in Early Childhood Education Settings

Children's early interactions with their teachers are foundational for their future learning and engagement (Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Hosand & Hoglund, 2017). These interactions may become increasingly negative and exclusionary for children perceived as challenging. As early as preschool, these children are at greater risk of being removed from learning opportunities, ranging in intensity from being called on less than their peers to receiving out-of-school suspensions and expulsions (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Raver & Knitzer, 2002). Powell and colleagues (2007) defined challenging behavior as "any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in prosocial interactions with peers and adults" (p. 83). By including perceptions, this definition specifies that children's behaviors are not merely challenging in themselves – what creates the "challenge" is how adults perceive those behaviors affecting the child and others within a given context.

Because challenging behaviors are subjectively defined, teachers' cognitive biases may influence their perceptions of and approach to addressing those behaviors, whether implicit or explicit. Previous research has established that as early as preschool, teachers' implicit biases related to race and gender shape their expectations for children (e.g., Gilliam et al., 2016). Racial bias can be defined as attitudes and stereotypes about a particular race that results in harmful or preferential treatment of members of that race. Teachers' racial biases can manifest themselves in many ways, such as watching Black children more closely when looking for misbehavior or labeling children with stereotypically Black names as "troublemakers" after two disciplinary infractions (Gilliam et al., 2016; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba et al., 2011). Racially biased teacher behaviors and school policies and processes can lead to decisions that perpetuate

systemic racism. For instance, across the United States, Black children are more than three times as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions than their White peers from preschool through grade 12 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Suspended children are at risk for a host of long-term adverse outcomes, including additional suspensions, academic failure, school dropout, and involvement with the juvenile justice system (Council on School Health, 2013; Maag, 2012).

In response to discipline disparities in early childhood education settings, state departments of education have banned the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions from preschool through early elementary school grades (Loomis et al., 2021). Without providing access to effective alternatives, policies banning the removal of young students from the school premises may inadvertently increase the use of "soft" exclusionary practices *within* the school or classroom. Soft exclusionary practices refer to teaching strategies that "reduce or eliminate the opportunity for a child to learn from the activity or experience they should be engaged in during the school day" (Wymer et al., 2020, p. 37). Examples of these practices include the use of forced silent periods (Lochman et al., 2021; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Vander Zanden, 2013), time-outs (Ryan et al., 2007), removal of privileges, intentional shaming, or sending students to other classrooms (Sanders et al., 2019). Although intentional shaming and forced silence do not physically distance children from learning opportunities, they socially prevent and discourage children from engaging in the learning process.

Exclusionary discipline is not effective in supporting children's long-term behavioral adjustment. For example, it can inadvertently reinforce disruptive behaviors when they provide children with an escape from an undesirable environment or activity or increased teacher and peer attention (American Psychological Association, 2008; Maag, 2012; Mitchell & Bradshaw,

2013; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Exclusionary practices also reinforce teachers' avoidance behaviors by allowing them to escape certain child behaviors, stress, and frustration (Maag, 2012). As a result of this unintentional reinforcement, the use of exclusionary practices may initiate a coercive cycle of interactions between teachers and children that leads to increasingly negative exchanges and more severe exclusions over time. The presence of conflict in early teacher-child relationships and even the mere absence of positive or high-quality interactions are each associated with poorer outcomes in terms of children's school engagement, social-emotional adjustment, and achievement in later grades (Ansari et al., 2020; Roorda et al., 2011).

There is little published data on teachers' use of soft exclusionary practices in early childhood (i.e., preschool through third grade) classrooms. In this study, we therefore set out to identify the soft exclusionary practices used by teachers and other school personnel in response to perceived challenging student behaviors in early childhood education settings. We hoped this research would contribute to a deeper understanding of soft exclusionary discipline, which may perpetuate racial inequities in discipline practices and further inequities in school readiness and access to learning opportunities for young children. Teachers and other school personnel can use such information to design new or modify existing interventions, practices, and services that provide targeted behavioral supports – when initial approaches fail to reduce perceived student misbehavior. We used "behavioral supports" and "responses to perceived misbehaviors" in place of the term "behavior management." Although the term behavior management has been widely used in previous literature to describe teacher responses to child behavior (e.g., Sugai & Horner, 2002; Wehby & Lane, 2019), these words lead to an automatic assumption that children are wrong and must be controlled. Thus, we used terms that place less blame on children and instead focus on the teachers' role in supporting them.

Current Knowledge About Soft Exclusionary Discipline Practices

We derive the term soft exclusion from the term soft expulsion, which has been used in recent policy-related conversations regarding preschool expulsion. Schachner and colleagues (2016) defined soft expulsions on their website as "practices that make it so that the program is not a viable or welcoming care arrangement for the family and leaves the family with little choice but to withdraw their child." Though no studies have assessed the prevalence or frequency of soft expulsions, Zinsser and colleagues (2019) provided qualitative descriptions of such practices among early childhood educators in Illinois following the passing of a state-wide act to ban preschool expulsions. Participants identified several ways in which programs continued to expel children despite the new law. These included requiring repeated early parent pick-ups, coercing families into voluntarily withdrawing their children, and removing families from programs due to a supposed lack of compliance with paperwork or payments rather than child behavior. We consider the term soft exclusion to cover both these types of strategies (i.e., any school removals that take the place of suspensions and expulsions and may be documented differently), as well as any strategies that separate children from opportunities to engage and participate while still in school.

Information about soft exclusionary discipline practices in early childhood education is scarce. Although we have no direct measures of their collective use, vague estimations of the prevalence of some practices can be inferred from studies that pull from systems-level discipline data documented in elementary and secondary schools and those evaluating the effectiveness of school and classroom behavioral support interventions. No previous study has investigated teacher disciplinary practices in-depth to identify a comprehensive set of clearly defined exclusionary responses to perceived challenging behavior. Therefore, the potential for

researchers to accurately assess the prevalence and influence of soft exclusion is limited. The purpose of this study was to identify the soft exclusionary discipline practices that teachers and other school personnel use in response to perceived student challenging behaviors in early childhood education settings – when their initial approaches failed to reduce perceived student misbehavior.

Methodology

Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences and explore beyond what can be obtained by quantitative methods. Qualitative methodologies are ideal for identifying factors and generating new data relevant to unique social phenomena previously overlooked or understudied (Patton, 2015). The present study used vignettes in conjunction with in-depth, *semi-structured interviews* to investigate soft exclusionary practices experienced by children in preschool through grade 3.

Vignettes and In-depth Interviews

In qualitative research, vignettes are typically used to complement other data collection methods (e.g., interviews or focus groups). Vignettes offer researchers a flexible and creative way to explore participants' perceptions, views, and opinions of a social phenomenon within a given context or situation. The researcher sets the study's context and focus-point by drawing up the hypothetical story or scenario parameters. Participants are then asked to fill in the gaps and engage in interpretation processes to provide important insights into complex phenomena and situations through open-ended questioning. An advantage of using vignettes is that we could focus participants' attention on a specific aspect of responding to perceived student misbehavior (i.e., when their initial approaches fail). Second, vignettes are helpful when participants might have little knowledge or understanding of the topic of interest (i.e., soft exclusionary discipline

practices) (Jenkins et al., 2010). Because participants were asked to comment on a hypothetical scenario, they did not need to experience the situation depicted in the vignette directly. Third, vignettes can help prevent 'socially desirable' responses (i.e., a type of response bias in which people tend to answer questions according to how others will view their answers), as they introduce a sense of distance between the researcher and the participant (Jenkins et al., 2010). The present study sought to limit participants from producing 'socially desirable' views on how they would respond to perceived student misbehaviors in early childhood education settings.

In-depth interviewing, a primary method utilized in qualitative research, uses an open-ended response format that presents participants with an opportunity to voice their perceptions outside of the influence of predetermined survey responses (Patton, 2015). An advantage of utilizing semi-structured interviews is that the questions are preformulated, allowing ease for the researcher's delivery and providing an open-ended format that can easily be expanded and enhanced by probes (Patton, 2015). The following research question guided our inquiry: What, if any, are the soft exclusionary strategies that teachers and other school personnel use to respond to perceived student misbehaviors in early childhood education settings –when their initial behavioral strategies fail?

Research Team

Our research team consisted of a doctoral student (first author) in a clinical and school psychology program and three undergraduate student research assistants from a large public research university in the south. Three of the team members were female, and one was male. All team members self-identified as White, and their mean age was 21 years. At the time of the study, no research team members had teaching experience in preschool or K-12 classrooms. The first author developed the methodology, conducted the interviews, and provided qualitative

research training to the team. The three undergraduate students transcribed eight interviews each. All research team members analyzed the data through independent and consensus coding.

Participants

Purposeful, criterion-based sampling (Patton, 2015) was used to identify 24 participants who worked in educational settings with children from preschool through third grade. This number fell within the recommended size for phenomenological studies (Creswell et al., 2007). The participants met the following inclusion criteria: (a) teachers or other school personnel who presently worked with children from preschool through third grade, and (b) lived in the southeastern region of the United States.

Participants self-identified as White (*n* = 16), Hispanic/Latinx (*n* = 2), African American or Black (*n* = 1), Asian (*n* = 1), Multiracial (*n* = 1), and the remaining three did not disclose their racial/ethnic identity. Most of the participants identified as females (*n* = 22), while others were males (*n* = 2). Participants were employed as general or special education teachers (*n* = 17) or administrators, program coordinators, or specialists (e.g., instructional coaches, behavioral consultants) (*n* = 7). Of those employed as general or special education teachers, 10 worked as lead or assistant preschool teachers, three as kindergarten teachers, one as a first-grade teacher, and three as special education or resource teachers of children in early elementary school (grades K-3). Participants' highest educational attainment level ranged from holding an associate (*n* = 1), bachelor (*n* = 7), master's (*n* = 11), or doctoral degree (*n* = 2), with the majority (*n* = 17) having received either a bachelor's or master's degree in education or a related field. Participants' years of experience working with children in preschool through grade 3 ranged from 1 to 40, with an average of about 10 years. Finally, participants' class sizes ranged from 6 to 24, with an average of 18 children per class.

Procedure and Data Collection

The first author obtained institutional review board (IRB) approval before the study commenced. Participants were recruited by emailing informational flyers to school administrators across a southeastern state. The first author requested that, if interested, school administrators forward the materials to teachers and other school personnel who work with children from preschool through third grade. Those who contacted the first author to express interest and met the criteria of working with children in the target age range were invited to complete the informed consent process and schedule an interview.

Interview Protocol

Each participant was asked to complete a brief demographics questionnaire before participating in a one-hour semi-structured interview regarding their responses to perceived student challenging behaviors. All interviews were conducted and audio-recorded by the first author either in-person or via phone. Participants began by reading a series of three brief vignettes (see Appendix A), each describing a child whose behavior disrupted an activity and with whom the teacher's initial attempts at redirection were ineffective. After reading, they were prompted to share how they might respond to the situation in each vignette if the child were one of their students. Next, we asked each participant to describe their most frequently used strategies for responding to child behaviors and how these strategies were learned or developed, and the extent to which they were influenced by school policies and perceived levels of support. Finally, participants were instructed to think about a child from their classroom or school exhibiting severe behavioral difficulties and describe their strategies for responding to that child's behavior. We used scripted follow-up prompts to inquire about the potential use of exclusionary strategies (e.g., "If that was not working, what would you try next?" "Can you give

me an example of a time you used that?"). At the end of each interview, we asked the respondent two questions. The first was whether there was any additional information they felt would be important for us to know. The second was which aspects of behavioral support they would want to learn more about when conducting a study.

Post-Interview Questionnaire

After the interview, teachers were immediately asked about the frequency with which they used 14 specific discipline strategies in their school. Administrators and specialists were asked how frequently they used or observed the use of such strategies. The questionnaire's strategies were drawn from available literature related to soft exclusions and adapted and expanded by the research team through a series of peer debriefings with colleagues who provided feedback on their breadth and face validity. Final survey items are presented in Appendix B. We asked participants to reflect on their past one to two years of experience with children and rate each practice on a 5-point Likert scale of daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, or never. The audio device from the interviews was left recording during survey completion to capture any questions and comments participants expressed.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the phenomenological data acquired in this study. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important to note that thematic analysis is not wed to any pre-existing theoretical framework associated with qualitative research. It can be used within different theoretical frameworks, such as phenomenology. Braun and Clarke (2006) offered the following six steps for conducting a thematic analysis: (a) familiarizing yourself with your data,

(b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing and refining themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) writing up the results.

We began with a start list of codes to help guide data analysis and interpretation based on a literature review and anecdotal accounts of exclusionary practices. However, to familiarize ourselves with the data, the first author and three undergraduate research assistants read each transcribed interview separately. Next, we re-read transcripts to detect recurring words, phrases, or thoughts that may form repeated patterns (themes) across the data, which were then categorized using initial codes. Several initial codes were consistent with our start list, and others were new. The research team also noted discrepancies in the participants' responses. Third, after a list of different codes were identified across the data, they were sorted into potential themes. All the relevant coded data extracts were collated within the identified themes. Fourth, the research team considered the relationships between codes, themes, and different levels of themes (e.g., overarching themes and subthemes). Then, the research team conducted a separate examination to review and identify overlapping themes or un-coded text and subsequently refined and revised each category. Fifth, the research team compared themes and found a high degree of consensus (70%) across different raters. Coding decisions that differed were discussed and modified slightly, and theme names were jointly agreed upon until 100% consensus was reached on content and wording. Sixth, the first author used the completed data analysis to write the results. We acknowledge the possibility that the power dynamic within the research team may have led to the selection of codes being biased toward the lead coder's findings. However, efforts were taken to ensure that ideas from all coding team members were equally encouraged and weighed, despite differences in levels of experience.

Trustworthiness

Several techniques were used to ensure the trustworthiness of the present study. First, we used data triangulation (e. g., interviews, documentation, vignettes, post-interview survey, classroom observations, field notes) to answer the research question and support our findings. Second, peer debriefing involved enlisting skilled colleagues to provide feedback on the research design (e.g., vignettes and interview questions) and qualitative findings from the study (Patton, 2015). Third, the first author provided a thick description of the study to leave an audit trail, providing an opportunity for other researchers to determine the transferability of the findings. Fourth, member checking involved asking participants to: (a) review their transcripts to ensure adequate representation of their ideas; and (b) comment on the themes and emerging patterns that contributed to the results (Patton, 2015). The participants who responded to our request believed the findings accurately depicted their ideas. Saturation occurred naturally during the progress of the study once incremental learning became minimal. The above methodological procedures ensured that the present study met the trustworthiness criteria and the rigorous standards set forth by qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to understand teachers and other school personnel's responses to perceived student challenging behaviors in early childhood education settings – when initial approaches fail. As a result, three main themes emerged: (a) physical exclusion from peers and activities, (b) social exclusion from peers and activities, and (c) soft suspension and expulsion. Each theme had corresponding sub-themes. Direct excerpts from the transcripts are used to illustrate these themes.

Physical Exclusion from Peers and Activities

All 24 participants described situations in which children would be asked or encouraged to spend time physically separated from their peers or an activity. Within this first theme, six sub-themes emerged: (a) taking a break in the classroom, (b) taking a break in another classroom, (c) sitting out from recess, (d) sitting out from specials, (e) spending time in the office, and (f) spending time with the counselor.

Taking a Break in the Classroom

A majority of the participants (n = 23, 96%) described using designated areas in the classroom for children to take a break away from peers and activities. However, when asked directly about how often they asked children to go to a "time-out area" within the post-interview survey, four participants responded with "never". Conversely, 18 of the remaining 20 participants reported using or observing this practice daily or weekly. Participants described student breaks within the classroom using various terms, from taking a time-out to using a calm-down corner or quiet area.

When asked about their "go-to" responses to perceived challenging behaviors, one preschool teacher shared: "The peace tent is one of them, when you just have to remove them, let them calm down, and then we talk about the problem." Another shared: "We have a calm down corner, so I feel like that's a pretty frequent place I have my students go." In response to one of the vignettes, an elementary teacher reported: "First, I would have the student go and sit for at least five minutes to think about why I'm having them sit, with the hitting and going back to where they were told they are not supposed to be."

As they shared about their use of breaks within the classroom, participants expressed different ideas about the appropriate terminology for and use of such breaks. For example, one

preschool teacher reported: “We can’t call it a time-out area, but we can ask them to take a break in the calm down area.” Another preschool teacher stated:

> From my understanding of what this [break area] is supposed to be, it is for kids to check in with their emotions. It should be a choice. […] [Lead teacher’s name] sends them there… I feel like she definitely just uses it for a punishment, and she even uses the word punishment, which I feel like we’re not supposed to do. But, once again, I don’t know that.

Taking a Break in Another Classroom

More than half of the participants (n = 14, 58%) described the practice of sending children to take breaks in a different classroom within the school, with seven reporting that they either used or observed its use on a daily or weekly basis. As one preschool teacher reported:

> … even though we’re not supposed to do this, I would just have him [child] go over to her [neighboring teacher] room. […] I think he knew when his behavior hit a certain level….and I’ll be honest when it was like I had just had it if I don’t send him next door I’m gonna have to take a time-out….and part of me thinks, well, maybe he was doing it so he could go next door and see her.

Another preschool teacher used the term “teacher time-outs” to describe the strategy, explaining:

> So, when [teachers get] on the brink of freaking out on the child, you know [what] happens, they would call in one of the teachers in one of the surrounding classrooms and just ask them, ‘Hey, I need a break from so-and-so, so can you please just come get them and hang out with them for a minute?’ I had one [student] that had a behavior problem, so

> I would just call over like, 'Hey, I really need a break right now.' That was really nice. That was their version of time-out, but it was more for the teacher because the kid got to go over and do stapling.

Similarly, others used errands or administrative tasks like taking a note or folder to another teacher as a means of having a child take a break in another classroom. An elementary teacher said of this practice:

> …it gives them a walking break to go to this other teacher, the teacher will read this [note] for a minute, let them sit in their classroom, and then they'll come back to me …so just leaving the zone without it being a punishment but everyone gets a break.

In describing the experiences of a child whose behaviors they viewed as particularly challenging, another elementary teacher stated, "…he spent a lot of time in different teachers' classrooms taking a break from the teacher who'd had enough of the outbursts and of the verbal disruptions."

Sitting out from Recess

Half of the participants (n = 12, 50%) reported taking away all or a portion of a child's recess time, and one-third reported doing this daily or weekly within their classroom or school. Across descriptions of the practice, school policies were a common thread of influence. One elementary teacher reported: "… so really; there are policies in my school like no taking away recess, but that's something that a lot of us don't really follow." Notably, most teachers reported taking away only a portion of the recess. For instance, the same elementary teacher noted, "I usually do five minutes from recess. That's probably the most I'll do." While a preschool teacher shared, "We don't sit out at recess; we take breaks." Another elementary teacher mentioned that assigned laps were used in place of having a child sit out at recess:

> …we could make them walk laps during recess if their behavior warranted it. They would walk laps, so I don't know if you'd call that not participating because they'd still get to go to recess; they'd just have to walk laps around the basketball court.

Sitting out from Specials

A minority of participants (n = 5, 21%) reported requiring a child to sit out from special activities like art or music lessons weekly to monthly. Nearly all preschool teachers described this practice as not applicable, noting "we don't have specials." Nonetheless, an educational specialist working with preschoolers mentioned a practice through which a child's behavior may lead to long-term loss of learning opportunities in the classroom. They shared:

> I'm seeing that probably monthly – them being refused areas to go in – and this includes preschool children. For example, 'you can't go to the water table because you splash too much. You're going to get the other children wet, so you'll have to find something else to do.' So again, it's punitive rather than a consequence of their action.

Another respondent noted that children sometimes missed specials due to being sent to the office for misbehavior. The elementary teacher reported that when teachers send students to the office "they will sit during their gym or their art or music."

Spending Time in the Office

Exactly two-thirds of the participants (n = 16, 66%) described scenarios in which they would send a child to the office to talk with an administrator or complete their schoolwork, nine of whom reported using or observing this response daily or weekly. As one early childhood specialist expressed:

> That actually does happen in preschool quite a bit. That they would be asked to leave the classroom and go to the director's office for help as a way to get some severe behaviors

> out of the classroom. So that's not unusual, but I'd say it's probably monthly, not a typical strategy.

Indeed, many respondents indicated that this strategy was the last resort or would only be used for severely disruptive or dangerous behavior. When describing her responses to children, one preschool teacher explained:

> One of my last is sending them out of the room because I really feel like just sending them to the office, it takes my power away. It takes that sense of respect of the teacher away like I don't have to listen to them they're just going to get rid of me kind of thing.

In some schools, sending children to the office was discouraged by administrators. A specialist shared: "I have seen kids like destroy furniture, kick an adult for 30 minutes straight, and they still don't get suspended because they want to keep those numbers low. They don't want to see the student in their office." However, other participants mentioned the office fairly quickly when asked their next step in responding to the children described in the vignettes. In response to the second vignette, one elementary teacher shared: "It may be to remove them from the cafeteria altogether. So, they might have to eat, you know, finish their lunch, in the office. And then they could return to their class." In response to the third vignette, another stated: "I would probably contact administration and have them go to the office and take some time out to talk to an administrator."

Spending Time with a Counselor

Over half of respondents (n = 15, 62.5%) reported sending a child to a school counselor, with most using the strategy weekly to monthly. For example, one teacher shared, "…probably three times a year; a situation will arise that I'll say, 'Alright, let me see if the counselor's available to chat with you right now because this is either beyond my

scope or my abilities.'" Another reported: "That's when I called the guidance counselor rather than send them to the office, [be]cause it's a problem that could be solved with behaviors. They needed a counselor, not a principal."

Of the preschool teachers who participated, many expressed frustrations with not having an option to send a child to see a counselor. One preschool teacher summarized these frustrations well:

> We don't have a counselor. We're not like a public school where if you have a behavior issue, you can send them out of the room and have a counselor talk to them. […] We'd love to do some of these things. We'd love to have somebody come and be able to remove a child or have them talk to a counselor or something like that, but there's just no way, no one we can send them too. It's really hard.

Social Exclusion from Peers and Activities

Over half (n = 13, 54%) of participants described situations in which children were either prevented from socially engaging or received a public, negative message about their behavior, potentially leading to disengagement or peer rejection. We labeled these situations as social exclusions. Two sub-themes emerged within this second theme: (a) requiring silence/silent lunch and (b) receiving public ratings or consequences.

Required Silence/Silent Lunch

Half of the participants (n = 12, 50%) reported having used the strategy of requiring a child to remain silent during an activity when talking would have otherwise been allowed. This strategy was reported to be used weekly to yearly by administrators and teachers of children in elementary grades. For instance, one teacher, who described silent lunch as part of their standard progression of responses to perceived misbehavior, said:

> I know that's frowned upon, but that makes them understand. […] I know what my students like and what doesn't really matter to them. I have some students that if I told them five minutes from recess, it wouldn't really matter to them because they don't really care about recess, but if I told them silent lunch, that's something they really care about. I feel like it depends on what the child will understand more and kind of what they value and what their interests are.

In response to the second vignette, another elementary teacher stated: "I would move the students back to their desks, and it would be quiet lunch for the rest of the class."

Other participants expressed concerns with teachers using the strategy, like an administrator who shared:

> One of the big things that teachers would do is assign students to silent lunch, and I'm like, 'Okay, why are they having silent lunch?' 'Well, they didn't do their homework.' Well, I'm like, 'Is silent lunch really connected to not doing their homework?' […] Again, obviously, consequences are needed, but at the same time, I want them to be tied to whatever infraction.

Among preschool teachers specifically, this was not a common practice. As one teacher put it: "…three and four-year-olds aren't going to stay quiet. We don't do table work where they need to stay quiet; that would just make it worse, and they would talk even more."

Public Ratings, Reprimands, or Consequences

A small minority of participants spoke about their use or observation of public ratings, reprimands, or consequences (n = 5, 21%) to criticize or punish a child in front of their peers in a way that could lead the child to feel socially excluded or othered. These practices were not asked

about directly during the interview. One teacher provided an example of using ClassDojo, a common classroom behavior tracking application, to deliver a public consequence:

> I would probably say, 'Well, I've given you an opportunity. Now I'm going to have to take a dojo point.' And then I would go back to the computer, and I'd take a dojo point. Usually, well, it always makes a little sound—if you're doing a good job, it's a "ding," and if you're not, it's a "blah," and they don't like to hear that."

The following excerpt illustrates the same teacher's account of using a clip-chart to display to the classroom how each child is faring behaviorally and asking children to move their clips as a consequence of misbehavior:

> I also have a color chart with red and green, and yellow on it. That child probably, that first time I told them to go to their desk, would go to the yellow. […] Most children don't like that—they're just totally horrified. To be on the yellow color or the red color, they don't like that at all.

A different teacher expressed concern with the impact of such strategies on children's self-concepts and peer relationships:

> I didn't like the clip charts because one of my kids was like, 'I'm always on red. I'm never not on red.'…and the kids would just always talk about how he's always on red And that's just not….it makes the child believe that they're always on red. I didn't like that."

Other participants mentioned observing or using reprimands (e.g., "You cannot do that. You need to come over here and talk to me."), threatening the use of consequences (e.g., "...if this continues, I'm going to have to talk to your mom or dad."), or raising voices at children. A specialist noted: "…something that I have seen a lot in my job is adults telling kids 'Well, you

don't yell in this classroom' when they [the adults] are yelling." One preschool teacher shared about their co-teacher, "[Name] is yelling at the kids, she'll yell and make them lay down, that's how she gets them under control."

Soft Suspension and Expulsion

Eighteen participants (75%) described using or observing a series of strategies in place of suspension or expulsions that either removed the child from school or made it challenging for families to establish or maintain their enrollment. Two sub-themes emerged within this third theme: (a) soft suspensions and (b) soft expulsions.

Soft Suspension

Half of the respondents (n = 12, 50%) indicated that they had requested or observed that a child left school early due to behavioral concerns. Most participants specified that this strategy was used for "extreme cases" only monthly or yearly; however, two specialists indicated it occurred in their schools weekly or daily. While recounting the experiences of a specific student, an educational specialist shared: "She was being sent home every day last school year, she was not a special education student, I tried to tell them to stop sending her home but I didn't have any power…" Another specialist described the following phenomenon in their school district:

> So, um, there's some perceived, and it's a directive so it's not like administrators are going rogue and doing this themselves, …but a directive from our student services staff is that administrators have the discretion if a child became or is becoming so unsafe that they can enforce administrative leave, and that is something different than out-of-school suspension. [M]y understanding of a suspension is you are removed from the classroom, and certainly, if you had to leave the building because an administrator asked you to come pick up your child, that seems like a suspension to me. Now, for this kid, he's a

> special education student; if they were on administrative leave and they missed their special education time, then we would owe them compensatory services for that. So, an administrator has to keep track of that if they call a parent to come pick up a student. […] Discipline and disproportionality and suspension of kids in K-2 or K-3 is being looked at, so I don't know if that is a means to just skew numbers, skew percentages. I don't know. I mean that's just being honest.

Teachers also reported situations in which it was arranged for children to attend only partial school days due to their behavior. A preschool teacher shared: "I actually had one this year who could not handle it and was only… we started with him only being at like two hours, and then after a little while went to two and a half, and then to three..." Similarly, an elementary teacher explained: "Okay, so, I have a student who […] last year he was in, when he was in kindergarten, he had such a struggle that he had half days, so this year is really his first year of having full days at school."

Soft Expulsion

Nearly half of participants (n =11, 46%) reported using or observing other forms of permanent exclusion that were not classified as expulsions. The first form identified was described by an administrator, who reported:

> "I think the biggest thing [question] that I hear from teachers is how to manage students who are really displaying some extreme behavior. A lot of times, they get frustrated, and their first go-to is: 'they need to get removed.' It's interesting with our [preschool] program because, with four-year-olds, there's no compulsory attendance. I remind those teachers…before I got here, apparently the practice was if a student did not properly behave themselves, they were removed from the program. I've had to have this

> discussion with teachers and with administrators, and I still find myself having this discussion. I said, "First of all, this is a state-funded program, so we can't just arbitrarily remove kids from it because they're not behaving appropriately. We need to teach them. More importantly, though, this student is going to be returning here next year. In kindergarten, when there is compulsory attendance, there will be no option then to just remove them and say don't come back until you learn how to behave."

While some children were asked to leave programs with non-compulsory attendance, others were prevented from enrolling in the first place. An early childhood education specialist reported of some programs: "They have to screen kids if they're potty-trained or not before they come…and I'm thinking all those kids who aren't potty-trained yet are often not being allowed into Pre-K programs. It's an issue."

Others discussed recommending to families that their child transfer to another program more suited to their needs. One preschool teacher said of a child who was transferred from their classroom: "I wasn't trying to make him leave, but I felt that he would be better with a smaller group of kids." Another reported: "We had a child in here who had to leave. He was here until December, but they finally took him out because he needed one-on-one." Similarly, an elementary teacher shared about one of their students: "…he ended up in an alternative school because eventually, his behaviors kept getting worse and worse."

Finally, one teacher described how a family chose to disenroll their child before a formal expulsion was received:

> He was going to be expelled because he attacked – there was an aggressive encounter with a teacher that was documented by multiple witnesses and expulsion was the next

step. They withdrew him from school and decided to homeschool him at that point rather than that paperwork be submitted.

Discussion

In this qualitative phenomenological study, we engaged with early educators to understand their experiences responding to children's perceived challenging behaviors when their initial approaches failed. We were particularly interested in whether and how educators may use strategies that exclude children from fully participating in learning opportunities before or in place of formal suspensions or expulsions. Our results indicate three main forms of soft exclusionary discipline used within the early years of school: physical exclusion, social exclusion, and soft suspension and expulsion. In addition to broadening the range of strategies identified as exclusionary discipline, these findings are significant in terms of demonstrating a need for further consideration and examination of the frequency by which young children experience soft exclusion, the effects this exclusion may have on children who are perceived as challenging, and the barriers to using alternative approaches that are more inclusive.

Our results suggest that in preschool through grade three, teachers and other school personnel regularly rely on soft exclusionary discipline practices when their initial attempts to reduce or eliminate students' perceived misbehaviors fail. This appears particularly true of physical exclusions, as some participants reported either using or observing within-classroom and between-classroom breaks from activities, having a child sit out from recess time, or sending a child to the office on a daily basis. Though limited, other studies of soft exclusionary responses similarly demonstrate that it is relatively commonplace for young children to spend a portion of their school day physically separated from learning opportunities when school personnel find their attempts to support them or change their perceived misbehavior to be ineffective (Mitchell

& Bradshaw, 2013; O'Grady & Ostrosky, 2021; Ritz et al., 2014; Ryan et al., 2007; Sanders et al., 2019). Because participants were not directly asked about how often they used public ratings, reprimands, or consequences, it remains unclear how the frequency of social exclusions compares to that of physical exclusions in this sample. However, studies examining the use of reprimands with preschool and K-3 students suggest that these occur on a daily basis within many classrooms as well (Reinke et al., 2016; Ritz et al., 2014). Overall, there remains a lack of quantitative data in the literature regarding the relative frequency with which soft exclusionary strategies are used in large samples of early childhood classrooms. Gathering this information in future studies will be critical for understanding the risk of negative outcomes for children who experience exclusion more often, as well as assessing the need for and effectiveness of interventions to reduce the use of these strategies.

Participants described a range of responses that physically separated children from the activities they were meant to be engaged in, with notable variation regarding how participants labeled strategies (e.g., time-out vs. calm down), whether children were offered a choice, whether strategies were viewed as punitive or supportive, who was perceived to benefit from the strategy (i.e., teacher, target child, peers), and where children were sent. Their descriptions illustrate how even well-known strategies like time-outs may be viewed, used, and labeled differently between classrooms and programs, indicating a need for clear and accessible definitions, documentation, and guidance around effective and appropriate use of such strategies to minimize potential harms. The use of time-out has long been a controversial topic in early childhood education settings due to the punitive nature of the strategy as well as challenges with effective and appropriate implementation (Prochner & Hwang, 2008; Ritz et al., 2014; Wolf et al., 2006). One common critique is that while time-outs can effectively reduce perceived

misbehavior when implemented properly, they do not teach the child appropriate replacement behaviors or social and emotional skills (Readdick & Chapman, 2000). As such, experts advise that time-outs only be used in conjunction with a comprehensive approach to teaching positive social behaviors, and only in cases where preventive and proactive practices have not been effective (Dunlap et al., 2004). When interviewing preschool teachers from privately-funded programs about discipline, O'Grady and Ostrosky (2021) found that most participants reported temporary classroom removals alone did not seem to positively impact child behavior. There are also concerns that physical removals may provide a reinforcing escape to children and to teachers, leading to lengthier and more frequent removals over time (Maag, 2012), though studies examining this phenomenon with young children are limited.

Whether or not physical exclusions are effective in reducing the occurrence of a particular behavior, they appear likely to negatively influence teacher-child relationships, child engagement in the classroom, and child self-esteem. Readdick and Chapman (2000) interviewed preschoolers immediately following time-out experiences and found that most reported feeling alone and disliked by their teacher, and only about half could accurately describe why they were put into time-out. In an ethnographic qualitative study, Gansen (2021) found that preschool children who experienced more punitive, exclusionary forms discipline (e.g., time-outs, being sent to the office) were labeled as "bad" and "troublemakers" by teachers, peers, and themselves.

Study participants also described strategies that prevent or discourage students from engaging socially in the classroom, whether directly through required silence or indirectly by publicly providing negative feedback. Social interactions with teachers and peers are two primary ways that young children learn (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2011; Nguyen et al., 2020; Zigler et al., 2004). Excluding children from social interaction as a consequence for perceived

misbehavior in early childhood means not only that children miss out on positive learning opportunities, but that they may receive the message that their ideas and bids for connection are unwelcome. As was suggested by a participant in the current study regarding the use of clip charts, researchers have identified public displays of behavioral or discipline data as likely to induce feelings of shame or embarrassment in students (Goodman & Cook, 2019; Sanders et al., 2019). For children who are repeatedly singled out, reprimanded, or shamed during the early years of school, the potential harms to their self-concepts, peer relationships, and engagement over time could be substantial (Reinke et al., 2016).

Finally, participants noted the use of policies and practices that were not documented as formal suspensions or expulsions but similarly removed students from school or made it challenging for families to either establish or maintain their child's enrollment. While these types of strategies have previously been grouped under the descriptor of soft expulsions (Schachner et al., 2016; Zinsser et al., 2016), the present study distinguishes soft expulsions from soft suspensions by using the former term specifically to describe undocumented permanent removals, and the latter to describe undocumented temporary removals. Whether temporary or permanent, these practices create barriers to accessing the benefits of early education for children perceived as challenging. Overall, differing views and concerns voiced by participants in the current study in combination with the available literature support the need for closer examination of how soft exclusionary practices may influence child outcomes.

When evaluating potential negative child outcomes associated with soft exclusions, it is important to consider the likelihood that the racial and social inequities present in the most severe forms of exclusion in early childhood are being mirrored in softer forms, placing boys, children of color, children with disabilities, and children with adverse childhood experiences at

greater risk (U.S. Department of Education, 2021; Zeng et al., 2019; Zeng et al., 2021). Indeed, one recent study that included time-outs and short-term removals from the classroom in a cumulative measure of exclusionary discipline found that preschoolers who were of a different race than their teachers were excluded more often, underscoring the probability that the same factors contributing to inequitable use of suspensions and expulsions may extend to the use of soft exclusionary strategies (Wymer et al., 2022). Given the range of exclusionary strategies documented by the present study that may be implemented despite policies banning formal suspensions and expulsions, it is clear that further research and additional policy changes will be needed in order to adequately limit exclusionary discipline and to address the underlying issues that fuel inequities in early discipline experiences and learning opportunities, including individual and systemic biases, underfunded and under-resourced programs, and inadequate teacher preparation and professional development (Children's Equity Project, 2021).

Though understanding contextual factors associated with the use of soft exclusions was beyond the scope of the current study, the differing views expressed by participants regarding whether these strategies were appropriate or allowable emphasize a need for further research around predictors of soft exclusion as well as barriers to use of effective alternative approaches. This lack of consensus around appropriate practices is especially concerning when considering that decisions based on subjective feelings and opinions about child behavior in the moment are more likely to be influenced by racial biases (Baker, 2019) than those guided by more objective measures and policies. Studies of suspension and expulsion in preschool suggest that teachers may rely on exclusion more often when their programs do not provide clear policies or procedures for responding to perceived misbehavior, when they feel they do not have adequate training or support to identify and meet a child's individual learning needs, when they are

experiencing increased stress, are concerned about the impact of a child's behavior on their peers, and when they are hopeless about the likelihood the child's behavior will improve (Gilliam & Reyes, 2018; O'Grady & Ostrosky, 2021). Emerging research also indicates that when preschool teachers have access to and make use of supports such as mental health consultation, professional development and materials for promoting children's social and emotional learning, or a comprehensive, evidence-based system of strategies for preventing and responding to perceived misbehavior, suspensions and expulsions are less likely to occur (Edge et al., 2018; Hemmeter et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2017; Zinsser et al, 2017). However, additional evidence for the effectiveness of interventions that provide access to these types of supports is needed (O'Grady & Ostrosky, 2021). Furthermore, future studies should aim to assess whether such interventions are effective in mitigating inequities in and reducing use of the full spectrum of exclusionary responses identified in the present study.

Implications

This study has several implications for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners of early childhood education. Foremost, our findings provide documentation of how, beyond suspensions and expulsions, teachers and other school personnel employ a range of other strategies that separate children from learning opportunities when their initial attempts at behavioral support are not effective. These softer forms of exclusion warrant closer examination and consideration in research, policy, and practice efforts to improve equity and quality in education, from pre-service training to professional development, supportive interventions, and policy reforms. Policymakers and school leaders should seek to ensure that programs and teachers have access to adequate training and support for understanding and mitigating the impact of implicit biases and using effective, evidence-based, and inclusive approaches to foster

young children's social, emotional, and behavioral development. Training and support should detail clear processes for assessing child needs and making decisions around behavioral supports that are culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate, and equitable. Clear guidance is also needed at policy and program levels to limit exclusionary discipline in all forms. However, rather than instituting bans on the use of soft exclusion, these strategies could be systematically measured and used by program leaders and policymakers to determine the effectiveness of current supports and allocate additional support to teachers and children who may need it most.

Limitations

There were several limitations to the present study. First, the findings may not be generalizable beyond the population of educators who participated. There might be a range of soft exclusionary practices used by other educators and in other locations and individual and school factors related to their use that we could not identify in the present study. Second, our relative frequency estimates are imprecise because we allowed participants to report on their use and observation of various responses. Finally, although we asked teachers to report their responses, we did not ask how they used each type of soft exclusion. Therefore, additional research is needed to systematically gather detailed qualitative descriptions of how these responses are used (e.g., specific child behaviors are they used with, and the extent and duration of the exclusion).

Future Directions

Further research is imperative to understand how soft exclusions are associated with children's outcomes, and to identify practical approaches that reduce the time children spend excluded. Researchers should examine these practices in a national sample to determine how they are associated with program, teacher, and child characteristics, and how children across

grade levels experience them. Findings from these studies could help to highlight essential targets in policy and practice to improve racial and social equity in children's educational opportunities and experiences. Understanding systemic factors at various levels – from the classroom to the district, to the community, to state and federal policy – that contribute to soft exclusionary discipline in early childhood is critical to inform effective interventions that can reduce inequities in education where they begin.

Future studies that aim to measure soft exclusions should draw from the qualitative descriptions provided in the present study to inform the design of survey items or research questions that define specific exclusionary responses in ways that all raters will interpret similarly. To parse out differing beliefs about the definitions or intentions of particular strategies from the degree to which they exclude children, it will be necessary for future studies of soft exclusions to use unambiguous descriptions of specific adult responses. For example, a description like "directed the child to take a brief [1-5 minute] break" may result in more accurate information gathering than "sent the child to time-out." Practical quantitative measurements of soft exclusion will provide a more precise examination of how these practices may be associated with child outcomes in the short and long term.

Lastly, future studies should include children and families' perspectives who may have experienced soft exclusions. There may be experiences perceived as exclusionary by children or families but have been overlooked or underreported by researchers and school personnel. Previous documentation of soft exclusions has relied on both parent and teacher reports (Sanders et al., 2019). Recently, parents reported higher counts of preschool suspensions and expulsions in a national survey than those reported to the United States Department of Education by school officials during the same year (Zeng et al., 2019).

Conclusion

The present study contributes to the literature by expanding current understanding and awareness of exclusionary discipline practices, which are any adult responses to child behavior that prevent or reduce children's engagement in learning opportunities. Although school policies are shifting toward limiting suspensions and expulsions, this may lead to a rise in softer forms of exclusion, suspension, and expulsion unless programs and educators are supported to use more effective practices. By gathering and reporting detailed information about soft exclusionary practices in early childhood, we pave the way for necessary future research, including developing tools to describe and monitor the use of soft exclusionary responses to young children at scale and determine their associations with child outcomes. Understanding the breadth, prevalence, and impacts of soft exclusion is imperative for developing effective policies and practices to improve classroom behavioral supports and increase equity in children's early learning experiences.

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Appendix A.

Prompt: In this study, we are particularly interested in what steps teachers take when their first line of "go to" strategies don't work. I'm going read a few scenarios to you and ask how you might respond initially, and then what your next steps would be. These scenarios may or may not happen in your classroom, but try to imagine the students in these scenarios as your own students.

Classroom: This morning as you provided instructions for a partnered language activity, one of your students interrupted you by talking with nearby peers. Your attempts at redirection did not work in getting them back on task, and they continued to talk to their peer. While most of your students are working on the activity, this student has been turning away from their partner to talk to a student who is sitting behind them. The student's partner calls your attention to what is happening.

Lunch room: During lunch, one of your students is up walking around the room instead of eating. After you guide them to their seat, explaining that you want to make sure they have time to eat their lunch, they begin putting food in another student's hair and laughing in an attempt to entertain themselves and nearby peers. When you approach, the student briefly stops but then starts again. Now multiple students are putting food in each other's hair.

Indoor Recess/Center time: You have set up various games and activity centers around the room for students to engage in during indoor recess/center time. You have placed a number at each station to let students know how many people can be there at one time. You see one student approaching a station that is full and starting to play. Their classmates tell them that the station is full, but they ignore them. You redirect the student to an open station. As you walk away to check in with other students, this student goes back to the previous station and begins hitting one of the students there.

Appendix B.

How often have you had a student who experienced this because of their behavior? *Scale: Never, Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Yearly*
1. Asked to remain silent during an activity when talking would otherwise be allowed
2. Asked to take a break in a time-out area or at an independent work desk away from peers
3. Required to sit out from an academic activity or do a different activity than their peers
4. Asked to sit in the hallway
5. Sent to spend time in another classroom
6. Required to sit out from recess
7. Required to sit out from art, music, or other specials
8. Sent to the office to talk with an administrator
9. Sent to talk with a school counselor
10. Required to complete their schoolwork in the office or in a different classroom
11. Had their parents called and asked to pick them up early
12. Attended only partial school days (i.e. early dismissals were arranged for a certain period of time)

Soft Exclusionary Discipline in Preschool: Examining Associations with Child Race, Teacher-Child Race Match, and Child Engagement

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Abstract

Before children are suspended or expelled from school, they experience a range of other adult responses to their behavior that exclude them from opportunities for social and academic learning, from being sent to sit in a corner to spending time in the office. Though other studies have documented such experiences, little is known about how often they occur in the early years of school, what contextual factors may influence their use, and how they may relate to children's outcomes. Based upon trends in suspension and expulsion, these "softer" forms of exclusion may be experienced disproportionately by Black children in comparison to their White peers. In a sample of 767 children and 103 preschool teachers, the present study investigated teacher-reported frequencies of soft exclusionary discipline experienced by preschool children in relation to child race/ethnicity and teacher-child race match. We also explored associations between teacher-child race match and children's engagement with teachers and learning activities. Finally, we examined associations between soft exclusion frequency and changes in the quality of children's engagement across the preschool year. Findings demonstrated no significant differences in the frequency of teacher-reported soft exclusionary discipline between Black and White children, regardless of race match or mismatch with their teachers. Soft exclusionary discipline was associated with decreases in the quality of children's engagement across the year, as assessed by both teacher-report and direct observations. Further research is needed to understand how contextual factors, including systemic racism, intersect to influence children's learning experiences in early education settings, and to improve the availability and efficacy of interventions that support children's engagement.

Introduction

Persistent racial disparities in the receipt of harsh and exclusionary school discipline sanctions over recent decades (Skiba et al., 2011) are just one manifestation of the historic and systemic racial injustices present across social institutions within the United States that inflict profound harm upon Black children and families (Feagin, 2006; Feagin & Ducey, 2018). Based upon recent federal data, (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights [OCR], 2020), Black children continue to be overrepresented among students who are removed from school through disciplinary measures across grade levels. In public preschools across the United States, Black children made up 18% of enrollment in the 2017-2018 school year, but represented 43% of children who received one or more out-of-school-suspension. Though boys experienced significantly more suspensions on average than girls, these racial disparities held true regardless of child gender. Black girls made up 8.6 percent of preschool enrollment but represented 53% of girls who were suspended once or more (OCR, 2020).

As noted by Skiba, Arredondo, and Williams (2014) and others, if exclusionary discipline strategies were an effective punishment for misbehavior, we could expect them to reduce future rates of disruptive behavior and to improve child outcomes. Yet, research indicates the opposite. Students who experience suspensions are more likely to miss out on instructional time, to be negatively labeled or stigmatized, and to exhibit declines in achievement (Duxbury & Haynie, 2020; Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2014). In the long term, being suspended is associated with a greater likelihood of school drop-out, lower degree attainment, arrests, and incarceration, even after controlling for student histories of delinquency and family and school risk factors (Rosenbaum, 2020; Shollenberger, 2015). Though limited information is available regarding how exclusions during early childhood may relate to child outcomes, one recent study

found that experiencing one or more suspensions between ages 5 and 9 was associated with significant increases in aggressive behavior over the same time frame as reported by both parents and teachers (Jacobsen et al., 2019).

Given that children begin to experience suspensions and expulsions in preschool, and that these exclusions are associated with a range of adverse social and educational outcomes including worsening behavior problems over time, the need for effective, early interventions to reduce racial inequities in discipline is critical. Following a federal call to limit the use of exclusionary discipline in early childhood settings (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014), a number of state departments of education have instituted bans and restrictions on the use of out-of-school suspension or expulsion with children from preschool through early elementary grades (Loomis et al., 2021; Rafa, 2018). Widespread recognition of the ineffective and harmful nature of these practices is an essential first step toward improving children's learning experiences. However, such outright bans may not produce the desired effect if they do not include dedicated funding and requirements for school personnel to learn to monitor and challenge their implicit and explicit racial biases and to implement effective alternative practices for supporting children. With the differential treatment and support of Black children serving as a primary driver of inequities in discipline (Owens & McLanahan, 2020), exclusions and disparities in access to learning opportunities are likely to persist within schools, though they may occur in subtler forms when suspensions and expulsions are banned. To determine whether interventions are truly effective in improving equity, these subtler forms of exclusion, which have been largely ignored in prior research, must also be examined more closely.

Before children are suspended, they are likely to have experienced a range of other disciplinary actions within school—from time outs to office disciplinary referrals—that exclude them from social, emotional, and academic learning opportunities in less formal ways. While studies of elementary school students indicate racial disparities in office disciplinary referrals (ODRs) similar to those present in suspension rates (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2011), there have been no studies to our knowledge that have examined whether this is true of other forms of "soft" exclusionary discipline as well. The term soft exclusionary discipline refers to any adult response to child behavior that prevents or limits opportunities for the child to learn from the activities or experiences they are meant to be engaged in at school (Wymer et al., 2020). Furthermore, no studies have examined how children's experiences of soft exclusionary discipline in preschool might relate to their present and future social and academic engagement. The present study begins filling each of these gaps in the literature, and provides critical information for researchers, policymakers, and educators working to foster more equitable early learning experiences.

Soft Exclusionary Discipline

Examples of discipline strategies that exclude children from social and academic learning opportunities while they are still in school have been documented in various ways throughout the literature (e.g., timeouts, forced silent periods; Ryan et al., 2007; Vander Zanden, 2013). However, studies that examine these practices together as a group of related variables are scarce, limiting our capacity to understand how often they are collectively experienced by children. A recent policy brief published by Texas advocacy groups provides indication that discipline practices such as intentionally shaming or embarrassing students, sending students to another classroom, requiring students to eat lunch silently or in isolation, taking away recess, and

informal parent pick-ups are relatively common within K-12 schools (Sanders et al., 2019). In the state of Texas, there are no requirements to track these practices, which the authors labeled as "shadow discipline", in the way that formal suspensions and expulsions are tracked; their report relied upon survey data from families and teachers. In preschool classrooms, observers have provided qualitative reports of seeing children whose assigned seats were at isolated desks away from their peers, children who were required to sit out from activities both in the classroom and on the playground, and those that received both threats of removal and removals to the office (Barbarin & Crawford, 2006; Gansen, 2020). While no quantitative data were collected, there was agreement between observers that in the classrooms they visited, these exclusions were more often experienced by Black children than White children, and particularly by Black boys.

The cumulative influence of experiencing these soft forms of exclusion on young children's outcomes remains unknown. However, to the extent that they occur within the context of negative or harsh interactions between teachers and children, it is likely they lead to increased social and academic difficulties. When students in kindergarten through third grade were observed receiving more reprimands and negative attention than praise from their teachers during a brief observation window in the fall, they exhibited increased problems with concentration as well as behavioral and emotional regulation by the end of the school year (Reinke et al., 2016). Taking into account the array of adverse consequences associated with suspensions, the potential of soft exclusions to lead to children being labeled as "bad", or to decrease their enthusiasm or engagement toward learning during their first years of school is highly concerning – especially considering that Black children may be more likely than White children to experience them.

Differential Treatment of Black Children at School

Studies examining the underlying factors that lead to racial inequities in discipline have pointed to a number of partial explanations, from differences in individual child behavior, to differences in school social demographics, to differential treatment and support of Black children both within and between schools (see Owens & McLanahan, 2020 for a review). Owens and McLanahan found that at age 9, 46% of the gap in exclusionary discipline between Black and White children could be explained by differential responses to Black children, 21% by school characteristics, and 9% by parent and teacher ratings of child externalizing behavior from kindergarten. In follow-up analyses using parent and teacher ratings of externalizing behavior at age 9, the researchers found that while differences in child behaviors increased to predict 24% of the discipline gap, the differential treatment of Black children increased to explain 70%. In their initial models, the authors examined behavior at age 5 as a contributor to the discipline gap rather than concurrent behavior to capture whether the influence of child behavior before school factors—such as disparate experiences of discipline and negative interactions with teachers or peers—may have exacerbated behavioral challenges. Both sets of findings illustrate how, for any Black children who may be perceived to struggle with behavioral regulation and accumulate more negative school experiences, the ways in which they are differentially responded to explain an increasing and substantial amount of the disproportionate exclusionary discipline they receive over time, far beyond that of their own behaviors or the demographic characteristics of the schools they attend.

Researchers have uncovered ample evidence of the ways in which Black students whose behaviors are perceived as disruptive or challenging receive differential treatment and support at school. Skiba and colleagues (2011) found that in elementary schools, Black children were more than twice as likely to be referred to the office as White children, and almost four times as likely

to experience out-of-school suspensions in response to the same minor misbehaviors (e.g., inappropriate language, defiance, disruption). The finding that Black children are perceived and treated differently when they exhibit the same behaviors as White children suggests that, whether consciously or unconsciously, the expectations and responses of educators and administrators may be influenced by negative stereotypes or biases about Black children. Indeed, as early as preschool, there is evidence to suggest that teachers expect Black children, and Black boys in particular, to be more likely to misbehave (Gilliam et al., 2016). In an experiment where K-12 teachers were provided with a vignette about a student who committed two behavioral infractions, Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) found that participants who were told the student had a stereotypically Black name were more likely to label them as a "troublemaker", to assume their behavior was part of a long-standing pattern after the second infraction, to recommend more severe disciplinary action after the second infraction, and to imagine themselves suspending the student in the future.

Recent evidence indicates that racially biased treatment toward Black children may be mitigated by having a teacher of the same race. In a study that included children from elementary, middle, and high school across the state of North Carolina, Lindsay and Hart (2017) found that Black children exposed to a greater number of same-race teachers experienced fewer suspensions and disciplinary referrals. Their results indicated a particularly prominent reduction in referrals for defiance among Black children who experienced greater racial congruence with their teachers across time. Perceptions and decisions around defiance, which is a category of behavior that is subjectively defined through teachers' own experiences and interpretations in context, appear especially susceptible to the influence of racial bias (Baker, 2019). Several studies have demonstrated that Black children are rated as exhibiting more frequent externalizing

problem behaviors (e.g., disruption, physical and verbal aggression, impulsivity) when their classroom teachers are White than when they are Black (Bates & Glick, 2013; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Redding, 2019; Wright et al., 2017). With regard to oppositional and defiant behaviors specifically, White preschool teachers rate Black children as demonstrating these more frequently than White children, while Black teachers do not (Accavitti & Williford, 2020). It is important to acknowledge that the factors underlying these ratings have not been directly examined. It may be the case that Black teachers tend to interpret and respond to the behavior of Black children in less biased ways; or, it may be the case that when Black children are paired with Black teachers, they are more successful in regulating their behaviors or more engaged in the classroom. It may also be the case that both processes are occurring simultaneously.

As most prior studies have examined associations of race match with teacher perceptions of child behavior rather than children's observed patterns of moment-to-moment engagement in the classroom, or the ways that teachers respond to children, the contributions of the present study to the literature in this area are two-fold. First, we examine whether children's engagement as rated by both teachers and by a team of trained classroom observers differs between conditions of teacher-child race match and mismatch in early childhood. Second, we examine whether findings related to the protective function of race match extend to teachers' use of soft exclusion in preschool. One previous study found that Black preschoolers whose teachers rated them as having poorer psychological, social, and educational functioning were rated by trained classroom observers as exhibiting more positive social engagement with their peers (Humphries et al., 2012), indicating that perceptions of children's engagement vary by rater and may be significantly influenced by rater-level factors, including implicit racial biases. By examining

both teacher ratings and direct observations conducted by trained research assistants, the present study provides a more comprehensive picture of children's engagement in preschool classrooms.

Discipline and Child Engagement

In preschool, children who are observed engaging more positively with teachers, peers, and tasks demonstrate greater gains in important school-readiness skills (Williford, Maier, et al., 2013). Though there is a lack of data about how exclusionary discipline relates to young children's engagement, older students who experience more suspensions exhibit decreased engagement in school (Skiba et al., 2014). Middle school students who experience suspensions report lower trust that adults in their school treat students fairly, care about, or support them, as well as diminished desire for and importance of performing well in school (Pyne, 2019). For preschool-aged children, the information they take away from experiences of soft exclusion and their subsequent engagement in school may follow a similar pattern – ultimately leading to fewer gains in the skills that early childhood education is meant to provide.

Drawing from the transactional framework of teacher-child interactions outlined by Sutherland and Oswald (2005), experiences of exclusion may accumulate and diminish young children's engagement gradually over time through a series of ongoing, reciprocal exchanges with their teachers that inadvertently reinforce unhelpful beliefs and behaviors in both individuals. For example, a child who is reprimanded because their teacher perceives their excitement as disruptive might begin to feel disconnected and misunderstood by their teacher. The next time this child is redirected, they might ignore or avoid the teacher, leading the teacher to use a harsher tone of voice or to provide a consequence that they must sit out from the activity. The child's avoidance reinforces thoughts the teacher had about them being disruptive or disrespectful, and the teacher's response reinforces thoughts the child had about their teacher not

understanding or appreciating them. Over time, this back-and-forth exchange leads to escalating avoidance and defiance from the child when the teacher corrects their behavior, which in turn leads the teacher to use increasingly harsh and exclusionary responses that separate the child from opportunities to learn academically and socially in the classroom. The more the child sits out, the less desire they feel to follow through with instructions or finish tasks that are assigned by the teacher. And, the less engaged they are academically, the lower the teachers' expectations for them may be. By considering the quality of exchanges between children and their teachers at this micro level, it is easy to see how – particularly for children whose teachers perceive them as struggling with emotional and behavioral regulation – early experiences of exclusion could pave a pathway toward increasingly adverse outcomes as children continuously influence and are influenced by their teachers and classroom environments. Moreover, considering the ways that negative racial biases have been shown to influence adult decisions at multiple points within this cycle, from expecting Black children to exhibit more disruptive behaviors in preschool (Gilliam et al., 2016) to escalating more quickly to harsh disciplinary responses as they grow older (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015), helps to demonstrate how the consequences of moment to moment interactions beginning in preschool may unfairly hamper the educational trajectories of Black children.

Current Study

The present study contributes to the literature around exclusionary discipline during early childhood in three ways. First, we provide descriptive information about the use of a subset of under-studied soft exclusionary discipline practices. Second, we examine whether racial disparities and trends related to teacher-child race match associated with out-of-school suspensions extend to these softer forms of exclusionary discipline. Third, we explore how

teacher-reported frequency of soft exclusionary discipline with a particular child relates to changes in their social and academic engagement across the preschool year. The present study also contributes to the literature around racial disparities in teacher ratings of child externalizing behaviors and classroom engagement in preschool. To provide a more balanced estimation of children's social and behavioral engagement, we examine these outcomes using both teacher-report measures and observational measures in which trained research assistants scored concrete, moment-to-moment child behaviors.

Through each of these aims, we identify considerations for enhanced targeting and evaluation of early interventions to reduce inequities in children's educational experiences. Guided by prior research, we focused specifically on racial inequities and the influence of teacher-child race match on soft exclusions and engagement between Black and White children and teachers. Our specific research questions were as follows:

1. How frequently do teachers report using soft exclusionary discipline, including removals from an activity, time outs, and temporary breaks in other classrooms, with individual children during preschool?
2. To what extent does teacher-reported use of soft exclusionary discipline with preschool children vary by child race/ethnicity?
3. To what extent is teacher-reported use of soft exclusionary discipline with preschool children associated with teacher-child race match?
4. To what extent are teacher and external observer ratings of children's classroom engagement across the preschool year associated with teacher-child race match?

5. How does teacher-reported use of soft exclusionary discipline with children relate to teacher and external observer ratings of children's classroom engagement across the preschool year?

Given previous findings (e.g., Barbarin & Crawford, 2006; Gansen, 2020; OCR, 2020), we expected that Black children would experience more frequent soft exclusions than White children in preschool. Drawing from the results of prior studies examining associations between race match and teacher-reported externalizing behavior, we predicted that Black children would experience soft exclusionary discipline more frequently than White children particularly when their teachers were White. With regard to teacher-child race match and engagement, we expected that race-match may be associated with more positive ratings of Black children's engagement across the year. Finally, we predicted that children who experienced more frequent soft exclusions in preschool would demonstrate less positive and more conflictual engagement with their teachers and learning tasks.

Method

Participants

Data for the present study were drawn from a larger, observational study of children's classroom experiences during preschool that targeted publicly-funded preschool programs serving families facing multiple barriers (i.e., family income at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines, family homelessness, parents/guardians lack a high school diploma). The study followed two cohorts of children; those in Cohort 1 attended preschool from fall 2016 to spring 2017, and those in Cohort 2 attended from fall 2018 to spring 2019. Together, the two cohorts included children from 17 preschool programs across two urban communities in the

southeastern United States. Across both cohorts, a total of 767 children and 103 preschool teachers participated.

Of the children who participated, 50% were identified by their families as Black or African American, 23% were identified as White, and 13% were identified as having Hispanic/Latine ethnicity regardless of race. About four percent of children were identified as belonging to other racial groups including Asian, Native American, and Pacific Islander, and 11% were identified as biracial or multiracial. Children's average age was 53 months (*SD*=3.6), or about 4.5 years old, in the fall of preschool. Family income-to-needs ratios (INRs) of children who participated in the present study were calculated by comparing the family's annual income to the federal poverty level for a family of their size. Families had an average INR of 1.44 (*SD*=1.06; range 0.05–5.05) meaning that the average family in the study had an annual income at 144% of the federal poverty level for their household size (e.g., $ 37,728 for a family of 4; U.S. Health & Human Services Department, 2020). The majority of children (88%) attended public, state-funded preschool programs, and 12% attended Head Start programs.

Of the teachers who participated, 30% identified as Black or African American, 65% identified as White, 2% identified as biracial or multiracial, and 3% identified as having Hispanic ethnicity regardless of race. The majority (98%) of teachers identified as female. On average, teachers had nine (*SD*=7) years of experience working with preschool-aged children. The average class size reported was 18 children (*SD*=1). The majority of teachers (94%) reported that they had the help of a teaching assistant in their classroom.

Procedure

Recruitment

At the start of the larger study, researchers contacted the administrators of public and private preschool programs serving primarily children from low-income families within two urban areas in the southeastern United States to invite them and their teachers to attend recruitment meetings through which they could learn more about participation. All preschool teachers serving primarily 4-year-old children who would enter kindergarten the following year were eligible to participate in the first year of each cohort. For Cohort 1, 50 preschool teachers were randomly selected to participate from a pool of those who were eligible and gave their informed consent. An additional three teachers joined after the start of the study to accommodate the temporary absences of two originally selected teachers and the transfer of one child between schools. In Cohort 2, teachers who had volunteered but were not selected for Cohort 1 were prioritized for participation, while any teachers who met criteria and had not participated in Cohort 1 were eligible. A total of 57 preschool teachers consented and participated in Cohort 2.

All children within a selected teacher's classroom were eligible to participate. Of those whose families provided consent, up to eight children were randomly selected for participation from each classroom after blocking by gender. If fewer than eight children within a classroom consented, all who consented were selected to participate. All participating teachers consented to complete surveys about themselves and their students, and to allow observers from the research team to visit their classrooms to collect observational data. The families of participating children consented to complete demographic questionnaires.

Data Collection Procedures

All data for the present study were drawn from two data collection windows: one six- to eight-week period in fall of each preschool year, and one six- to eight-week period in the spring.

Observations. Before classroom observations were conducted, a team of data collectors were recruited and trained to use the *Individualized Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (inCLASS*;* Downer et al., 2010) to assess children's engagement. This training included a detailed review of the measure and opportunities to practice using video footage of children in their preschool classrooms. To become certified in use of the inCLASS for the present study, data collectors were required to score children's engagement along dimensions of the measure across five training videos within one point of a set of master scores with at least 80% accuracy. In addition, they were required to complete recalibration assessments using additional training videos across each school year in order to maintain reliable scoring. The observers conducted inCLASS assessments in both fall and spring. At each time point, they assessed each child's engagement during six, 10-minute observation cycles that were dispersed across one to two school days.

Direct assessments. The team of data collectors also received training to administer various direct assessments to preschool children. During both the fall and spring data collection windows, they administered assessments of children's academic and self-regulation skills. This study used data from direct assessments of children's mathematics, reading, and behavioral regulation skills conducted in the fall to control for school readiness at the start of the year.

Surveys. Both teachers and the families of participating children completed demographic questionnaires at the start of the preschool year. Teachers completed rating scales related to facets of each individual child's classroom engagement during both the fall and spring data collection windows. In spring, teachers also reported on the frequency with which they had used various disciplinary strategies in response to individual children across the school year.

Measures

Determination of Child and Teacher Race/Ethnicity

A family member (most often the mother) reported on their child's race/ethnicity, and each teacher reported their own race/ethnicity on the fall demographic questionnaires. Initial categories included: "American Indian/Alaska Native", "Asian," "Black/African American," "Hispanic/Latine of any race," "White," "Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander," "Two or more races," or "Other race". Following data collection, the categories of "American Indian/Alaska Native", "Asian," and "Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander" were recoded into the "Other race" category, as there were not enough children from each group represented in our sample to allow for inclusion of these individual groups in our analyses.

Teacher-Reported Discipline Experiences

Teachers reported on their use of exclusionary discipline with individual children through an online questionnaire that was developed by the research team of the larger study. Items were adapted from the *Teacher Strategies Questionnaire* (Webster-Stratton et al., 2001) for use with individual children. Teachers were asked: "How often is [student name]'s behavior addressed via the following techniques?" They rated the frequency with which they used each technique across the current school year on a 7-point, Likert scale that ranged from "0 = never" to "6 = multiple times per day". Scores of 1 through 5 corresponded to "a couple times a year," "once or twice a month," "once a week," "a few times a week," and "once a day," respectively. We identified three items from the strategies questionnaire as representing soft exclusionary discipline, including: "Removal from an activity," "Time out/take a break/rest time (child has to take a break from all classroom activity for a short time)," and "Short-term removal from classroom (to another teachers' room, the office, etc.)". Because these items have been scarcely examined in prior research, we used each item individually as a child outcome in our models for the first and

second research questions to explore associations with predictors in greater nuance. For use in models for our fourth research question as a predictor, a sum score of the three items was created as a measure of how frequently each child experienced soft exclusionary discipline overall. Scores across the three items demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.77$).

Teacher Ratings of Classroom Engagement

Teachers completed the *Teacher-Child Rating Scale* (TCRS; Hightower et al.,1986), which provides scores related to children's classroom engagement and includes subscales for Task Orientation and Behavior Control in both fall and spring. Each subscale is comprised of eight items that describe child behaviors and are ranked on a 5-point scale of how well the item matches the teacher's views of the child from "not at all" to "very well". Example items include "tolerates frustration" within the Behavior Control subscale and "works well without adult support" within the Task Orientation subscale. A total of 40 points are possible on each subscale, with higher scores indicating more positive social and behavioral engagement. Internal consistency within the present sample was excellent, with Cronbach alphas of 0.91 for Task Orientation and 0.89 for Behavior Control.

Observational Assessment of Child Engagement

Trained research assistants conducted live observations of individual children's engagement with teachers and tasks in fall and spring of preschool using the *Individualized Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (inCLASS*;* Downer et al., 2010). Prior studies of the measure have consistently supported the fit of a four-factor model, which includes domains of Positive Engagement with Teachers, Positive Engagement with Peers, Positive Engagement with Tasks, and Negative Classroom Engagement (Bohlmann et al., 2019; Hartz et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2019; Williford, Maier, et al., 2013; Williford, Whittaker, et al., 2013). These studies have

also provided indication of strong psychometric properties including construct, criterion-related, concurrent, and predictive validity, inter-rater reliability, and internal consistency for the inCLASS as a measure of children's observed classroom engagement during preschool. The inCLASS has been used with large and diverse samples of children and has demonstrated measurement invariance across groups that differ in gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Bohlmann et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2019).

Because peer interactions are not a focus of the present study, we included only the domains of Positive Engagement with Teachers, Positive Engagement with Tasks, and Negative Engagement in our analyses. Summary scores for each of these three domains were calculated by averaging observer rating scores across the 2–3 dimensions that underlie each domain. The Positive Engagement with Teachers domain includes the dimensions of positive engagement with teachers and communication with teachers. The Positive Engagement with Tasks domain includes the dimensions of engagement and self-reliance with tasks. Finally, the Negative Classroom Engagement domain includes the dimensions of teacher conflict, peer conflict, and behavior control (reverse coded). Ratings for each dimension range from 1 to 7, and are guided by descriptions of distinct behaviors that indicate low, medium, and high scores. High scores are associated with more frequent and higher quality engagement, with the exception of the Negative Engagement domain where high scores indicate more conflictual interactions or dysregulated behaviors. Dimension scores were averaged across six, 10-minute cycles of observation per child at each timepoint. Within the present study, internal consistency for the domain scores ranged between cohorts from .58 to .74 for Teacher Interactions, .64 to .74 for Task Orientation, and .79 to .82 for Negative Engagement.

Control Variables

To more precisely assess associations between race, race-match, and our outcome variables, we included a number of control variables in our models that have been associated with children's social and behavioral classroom engagement, school disciplinary experiences, or both, in prior studies. These included teacher, child, and classroom demographic characteristics, as well as survey and direct-assessment measures.

Teacher, Child, and Classroom Demographics. Previous studies have consistently found that at the individual level, being a boy and being from a family with lower income is associated with greater likelihood of experiencing exclusionary discipline (Camacho & Krezmien, 2019; Skiba et al., 2014). At the school level, prior studies indicate that attending schools that serve greater proportions of Black children and children who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and those that have higher teacher-to-child ratios is associated with increased risk of experiencing exclusionary discipline (Camacho & Krezmien, 2019; Ramey, 2015; Skiba et al., 2014; Welch & Payne, 2010). In addition, a recent study found that teachers with more years of experience teaching preschool were less likely to use exclusionary discipline children in publicly-funded preschool programs (Chow et al., 2021). We controlled for these factors in the present study by drawing upon data from fall demographic surveys. Teacher-reported demographic covariates included years of experience teaching preschool children, class size, and the percentage of Black children enrolled in their classroom. Family-reported demographic covariates included child gender, age, and family income-to-needs ratio (INR). Using family INR, we created a control variable for the average INR at the school level.

Child Academic Achievement. In older children, higher academic achievement is associated with lower risk for suspension or expulsion (Camacho & Krezmien, 2019). Because we suspected that children's early academic skills may be related to experiences of soft exclusion

in the same way, we included scores from direct assessments of children's math and reading abilities in fall of preschool using the *Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement III* (WJ-III; Woodcock et al., 2001) in the present study. We used children's standard scores for the Basic Reading and Math Reasoning clusters. These domain-specific cluster scores have demonstrated high internal consistency and are positively correlated with other measures of academic achievement (Woodcock et al., 2001).

Child Behavioral Regulation. Though the contribution of individual child behaviors to likelihood of experiencing exclusionary discipline in the early years of school appears minor in comparison to environmental factors (Owens & McLanahan, 2020), we expect that children who are less able to regulate their behavior in response to classroom demands may be at greater risk for experiencing soft exclusionary discipline, and be more likely to be rated as demonstrating conflictual or negative engagement by teachers and observers. Therefore, we included children's fall scores for a direct assessment of behavioral regulation, the *Head Toes Knees Shoulders* (HTKS; McClelland & Cameron, 2012), as controls in our models. Scores on the HTKS range from 0 to 60, where higher scores indicate stronger behavioral self-regulation.

Teacher Emotional Exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion has been identified as a primary indicator of feeling over-stressed and experiencing burnout, and prior studies have found that teachers experiencing higher levels of emotional exhaustion are more likely to use reactive and punitive strategies, and to perceive greater levels of misbehavior from their students (Eddy et al., 2020). In preschool in particular, teacher stress and depressive symptoms have been consistently associated with greater use of expulsions (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Martin et al., 2018; Zinsser et al., 2019). To control for the potential associations between teachers' emotional exhaustion and children's experiences of soft exclusion as well as their engagement with teachers, we used the

sum score of the emotional exhaustion subscale from the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (Maslach, et al., 1996) that teachers reported in the fall. The subscale includes nine items related to symptoms of burnout, which are rated on a 7-point scale from "never" to "every day". The internal consistency reliability estimate was $\alpha = .89$ for the Emotional Exhaustion subscale in this sample.

Data Analysis

We conducted all analyses using Stata version 15 (Statacorp, 2017). To answer our research questions, we used multilevel modeling (MLM) to account for the nesting of children (level 1) within classrooms (level 2).

Preliminary Data Preparation

Before running any models, we calculated intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) to determine the proportion of variance that could be attributed to child-level factors in comparison to classroom-level factors for each of our outcome variables. For soft exclusions, 17% of variance for removal from an activity, 12% for time out, and 2% for sending to another classroom was explained by classroom-level factors. For teacher-rated engagement, 14% of variance for TCRS Task Orientation, and 13% of variance for TCRS Behavior Control was explained by classroom-level factors. For observer-rated engagement, 19% of the variation for inCLASS Task Orientation, 44% for inCLASS Teacher Interaction, and 1.6% for inCLASS Conflict was explained by the classroom level. Thus, the majority of variance for all variables of interest was situated at the child level. Because coding did not appear to accurately capture children's experiences at the continuous level, we recoded the variable for being sent to another classroom from its original six-point scale to 0 for "never" and 1 for "one or more times". All variables, aside from gender and race/ethnicity dummy codes, were grand mean centered in our

final models to allow for interpretations of how child outcomes differed from the average child's experience within the sample in relation to each predictor. Fixed effects for cohort and school site were included in each model to control for variance related to time period, geographic/community location, and differences in administrative leadership.

Upon examining the distributions of each of our outcome variables, we found that each of the soft exclusionary discipline items was strongly positively skewed due to an overdispersion of zeros, with 36% of children never being removed from an activity, 37% never receiving a time out, and 85% never being sent to another classroom. After comparing Poisson and negative binomial models, we found that the proportion of zeros estimated by negative binomial regressions best fit our data for both removal from an activity and time out as outcomes. The coefficients generated by these models are reported as incident rate ratios (IRRs). Given the dichotomous nature of our recoded variable for being sent to another class, we used a logistic regression model to examine associations between child race and this third and final soft exclusionary outcome. The coefficients generated by the logistic regression model are reported as odds ratios (ORs). The teacher and observer-reported engagement variables were better suited to the assumptions of OLS and were thus examined using linear mixed effects models. We corrected for slight positive skew in the inCLASS teacher interaction and conflict domain scores using log transformations, which resulted in more normal distributions.

Missingness. Missing data for demographic surveys as well as teacher-reported and observer-reported engagement were minimal, and ranged from zero to nine percent. However, likely due to the survey being sent as an added follow-up at the end of the spring data collection window, 23% of children were missing data for experiences of soft exclusion. We examined missingness by exploring the proportion of missingness for each of our outcome variables, and

by comparing children and teachers who were missing data to those who are not among our predictors, demographic covariates, and outcomes using independent samples *t*-tests. Scores for inCLASS Task Orientation were lower on average and scores for inCLASS Conflict were higher on average for children with missing data compared to children without missing data. In addition, children with missing data had lower family INRs on average than those without missing data. Upon calculating the effect sizes for these differences using Cohen's *d* (Cohen, 1988), we found that all three were small. Consequently, there was little indication that our data violated the Missing at Random (MAR) assumption necessary to conduct multilevel multiple imputation procedures (Enders et al., 2017). Thus, we used BLIMP (Keller & Enders, 2017) to impute 10 data files for each of our unique models, which were then imported into Stata for final analyses. We estimated associations between our predictors and outcome variables by averaging coefficients and standard errors across each of the 10 imputed datasets for each model.

Selected Models

To answer our second research question, we used a set of three models to examine associations between child race/ethnicity and each type of soft exclusion. Covariates included child age, gender, family INR, fall math score, fall reading score, and fall HTKS score, as well as teacher race/ethnicity, years of preschool teaching experience, emotional exhaustion, classroom size, classroom percent enrollment of Black children, and average school INR. Child gender and child and teacher race/ethnicity were dummy coded, using female and White as the reference groups. Dummy codes for data collection site and cohort were also included as fixed effects.

Based upon prior findings around race-match (e.g., Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Redding, 2019), and because there were too few teachers and children in the Hispanic/Latine, multiracial, and other race categories to allow for meaningful comparison between categories of match and

mismatch, we examined associations of teacher-child race match and mismatch with children's experiences of soft-exclusion and engagement within a subset of the data that included Black and White children with Black and White teachers only (n = 538). Following an approach used to examine race match and mismatch in prior studies (e.g., Wright et al., 2017), we included an interaction term between being a Black child and having a Black teacher in our models for research questions three and four to assess differences in the average frequencies of soft exclusion and changes in child engagement between Black and White children based on having a Black teacher versus a White teacher. Aside from the omitted race/ethnicity categories, the models for our third and fourth research questions included the same set of control variables as those listed for the second. We ran eight models in total; three to assess associations of race-match with each of the soft exclusionary outcomes, and five to assess associations of race-match with each of the teacher-reported and observer-reported engagement outcomes. For each of the engagement outcomes, fall scores were included in the models to allow for assessment of changes in engagement across the year.

To answer our fifth research question, we used a sum score of the frequencies for each of the soft exclusionary items as our main predictor in relation to each of the five child engagement outcomes. Of note, this sum score was calculated using the variable of sending children to another classroom on its original scale, rather than the dichotomized version. We controlled for fall scores for each respective engagement outcome, along with the same set of child and teacher covariates from earlier models.

Results

Descriptive statistics for predictor and outcome variables are presented in Table 1. Across all children for whom there were complete data (n = 594), the average frequency of experiencing

soft exclusionary discipline in preschool was reported by teachers as being between yearly and monthly (M = 1.77) for removal from activities and for time out (M = 1.64), and between never and yearly (M = 0.28) for being sent to another classroom. Nearly one third of children experienced removals from an activity (32.32%; n = 192) and time outs (31.31%; n =186) on a weekly to daily basis. About 14% of children (n = 86) were sent to take a break in another classroom or the office at least one time because of their behavior.

Soft Exclusionary Discipline Experiences and Child and Teacher Demographics

Contrary to our hypotheses, Black children were not significantly more likely than White children to experience removal from an activity (Incidence rate ratio [IRR] = 0.95, p = .62), time out (IRR = 0.93, p = .56), or being sent to another classroom (Odds ratio [OR] = 0.76, p = .42). Full results of the three models are shown in Table 2. Hispanic/Latine children were less likely than White children to experience time out, and children who were grouped within the "other" race category were less likely than White children to experience both removal from an activity and time out. Compared to children whose teachers were White, children whose teachers were Hispanic/Latine were less likely to experience removal from an activity.

Teacher-Child Race Match, Soft Exclusionary Discipline Experiences, and Child Engagement

We found no significant associations between teacher-child race match and children's experiences of soft exclusion, nor between race match and changes in children's classroom engagement as reported by observers and teachers across the school year. The full results of these respective models are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Soft Exclusionary Discipline Experiences and Child Engagement Across the Preschool Year

To address our final research question, we ran a series of five two-level, mixed effects regression models assessing associations between children's total frequency of soft exclusionary discipline experiences and changes in their engagement with teachers and classroom activities from fall to spring of the preschool year. To aid in our interpretation of the results of these models, we first compared fall and spring scores for each measure of engagement to determine whether, on average, children's scores increased, decreased, or were not significantly different over the course of the preschool year. Using paired-samples *t*-tests, we found that children's average task engagement increased between fall and spring on both the teacher-reported and observation-based measures. Averages for other aspects of engagement were not significantly different between fall and spring. We hypothesized that increased frequency of soft exclusionary experiences would be associated with increases in negative engagement over the course of the year as measured by the inCLASS, and decreases in positive engagement with teachers and tasks as measured by the inCLASS and TCRS. The results of these models are presented in Table 5.

With regard to the quality of children's engagement with tasks as reported by their teachers, each one-unit increase in a child's frequency of soft exclusionary experiences was associated with 0.60 points less of an increase in their task orientation score from fall to spring of preschool compared to the average child in the sample ($b = -0.60$, $p < .001$).

For the teacher-reported quality of children's behavior control during classroom activities, each one-unit increase in a child's frequency of soft exclusionary experiences was associated with an 0.77 unit decrease in behavior control across the preschool year compared to the average child in the sample ($b = -0.77$, $p < .001$).

Children's positive engagement with tasks as measured by the inCLASS decreased by 0.03 points across the year for each one-unit increase in their frequency of soft exclusionary experiences compared to the average child in the sample (b = -0.77, $p < .001$).

Due to log-transformation, associations between soft exclusionary experiences and children's scores for the inCLASS positive engagement with teachers domain are interpreted in terms of percentage change. Contrary to our hypothesis, for each one-unit increase in frequency of soft exclusionary experiences, children's positive engagement with teachers increased by 1% across the year compared to the average child in the sample (OR = 1.01, $p = 0.001$).

Associations between soft exclusionary experiences and children's scores for the inCLASS negative engagement domain are also interpreted in terms of percentage change. As we predicted, for each one-unit increase in frequency of soft exclusionary experiences, children's scores for negative engagement increased by 2% across the year compared to the average child in the sample (OR = 1.02, $p = 0.001$).

Discussion

This study is one of the first that we are aware of to report on the frequency of soft exclusionary discipline teachers used with individual children during preschool, and to assess associations of soft exclusion with various child and classroom-level factors. This study also took a step toward better understanding how children of color experience differential treatment and support in their preschool classrooms. Specifically, we examined whether broader trends in racial inequities related to experiences of exclusionary school discipline from preschool through grade 12 extend to softer forms of exclusion within preschool, including removals from learning activities, time outs, and being sent to take breaks in other classrooms. Furthermore, we sought to understand how such experiences of soft exclusion might relate to children's engagement with

tasks and teachers across the school year, and whether having a teacher of the same race could serve as a protective factor by reducing experiences of exclusion, as well as fostering higher quality engagement in learning.

Our findings demonstrate that within a sample of randomly-selected children from publicly funded preschool programs serving low-income families, on average, teachers report using removals from an activity and time outs from all activity monthly or less, and sending children to another classroom to take a break yearly or less. Based upon teacher reports, Black children in our sample were not more likely than White children to experience softer forms of exclusionary discipline, including being removed from an activity, sent to time out, or sent to take a break in another classroom. Furthermore, we did not find an association between teacher-child race match and teacher-reported use of soft exclusions with children, nor any associations between race match and teacher or observer-reports of the quality of children's classroom engagement. Finally, and most notably, the present study found evidence that children who were reported by their teachers to experience more frequent soft exclusionary discipline exhibited less ideal engagement across the year. These results have important implications for policies and practices related to supporting children's engagement in early learning.

Documenting Soft Exclusions

The results of this study indicate that teachers reported using daily or weekly removals from activities or time outs with nearly a third of children, and sending about one in seven children to another classroom to take a break during the course of the year. Due to the random selection of preschool children to participate in this study, our results may underestimate the rates of soft exclusion preschool teachers use with the children whose behaviors they perceive as most challenging. For children who are regularly excluded, the accumulating loss of

opportunities to engage in social and academic learning activities and punitive or control-oriented responses from teachers they experience across the year could substantially reduce the widely documented academic, social, and emotional benefits of receiving a preschool education (see Meloy et al., 2019 for a review). Though the majority of preschool teachers within this sample reported using soft exclusions to some extent, suggesting that these strategies are relatively ubiquitous, there is a paucity of literature that documents why and how these practices are used in preschool and what consequences they may have for children. Overall, a more comprehensive understanding of soft exclusionary discipline in the early years of school is needed to inform policy and practice.

Soft Exclusion and Engagement Within the Context of Teacher and Child Race and Ethnicity

Based upon the findings of the present study, it appears the soft exclusionary responses to children captured within our brief measure may not be associated with child and teacher race and ethnicity in the same ways as more severe types of exclusion. Nonetheless, qualitative studies have indicated that racially biased use of soft exclusion with young children is occurring in some contexts (Barbarin & Crawford, 2006; Gansen, 2020). Therefore, it seems more likely that our finding about equitable discipline experiences of Black and White preschool children is due to unique characteristics of our sample or to limitations in measurement, rather than to soft exclusionary discipline in preschool not being as susceptible to the influences of implicit biases or institutional racism that contribute to discipline inequities more broadly.

The pervasive effects of systemic racism in education are evidenced in decades of research demonstrating how Black children are, on average, provided access to fewer opportunities and resources (Barnett et al., 2013; Reyes et al. , 2013), more likely to viewed

through a deficit lens and as "troublemakers" by teachers (Baker, 2019; Gilliam et al., 2016, Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015), and subjected to more harsh and exclusionary discipline than their White peers from the time they are in preschool (Gilliam, 2005; OCR, 2020). Scholars of Critical Race Theory assert that racism is embedded in the U.S. education system and perpetuated at all levels of social ecology – from macro-level beliefs, policies, and practices to micro-level interactions between individual teachers and children (Anyon et al., 2018). Thus, there may be factors counteracting or masking the broader influence of systemic racism at various ecological levels in this sample that help to explain why we did not find that Black children were more likely to experience exclusionary discipline than White children, or that teacher-child race match was associated with reduced likelihood of soft exclusions or increased likelihood of positive classroom engagement for Black children.

Foremost, at the macro-level, there has been an ongoing, national discussion of the critical need to address racial discipline disparities in the field of early education (e.g., U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Head Start, 2019; NAEYC, 2017; Zero to Three, n.d.). By drawing increased attention from leaders within the field of early education to racial inequities and the role of racial bias, the efforts of these national organizations may have influenced the practices of teachers in our sample in ways we did not account for at both meso- and micro-levels. For example, it is possible that the teachers within this sample received professional development training or took personal initiative to reflect upon and reduce biased responses to children, or that these national efforts led to shifts in culture and policies around discipline in our sample at the program level.

At the meso-level, the programs included within this sample were designed to exclusively serve children from families facing multiple socioeconomic barriers and to support their

readiness for kindergarten. Thus, it may be the case that teachers in this sample had access to more resources to support equitable practice than those in other populations. In addition, 30% of teachers who participated in the present study were Black, which is over twice the proportion of Black teachers represented in the early childhood education workforce at the national level (Kashen et al., 2016). It is possible that due to Black teachers being better represented in these programs and communities, the population of teachers in our sample had more experiences that counteracted anti-Black racism and reduced the influence of bias in their individual practices than those in the broader early educator workforce. Trends in preschool discipline inequities have been almost exclusively reported on at a national scale (e.g., Gilliam, 2005; OCR, 2020), where children from a variety of program types and communities are included. It is possible that in order to detect racial inequities in soft exclusion, a larger sample size that includes greater variation in program-level racial and ethnic diversity as well as greater variation in family income levels of the children served is needed.

At the micro-level, differences in individual teachers' beliefs, values, and expectations related to children's classroom behavior may also have shaped their use of soft exclusions in ways we did not account for. These individual differences may also underlie inconsistencies in the current literature around race-match in preschool regarding whether having a Black teacher is associated with improved educational experiences for Black children, and how the positive influence of having a same-race teacher operates. Although Black children are reported as demonstrating less disruptive and dysregulated behavior in preschool and kindergarten when rated by Black teachers in comparison to White teachers (e.g., Accavitti & Williford, 2020; Wright et al., 2017), Gilliam et al. (2016) found that both Black and White teachers spent more time watching Black children than White children when looking for potential challenging

behaviors in a video. Curenton and colleagues (2020) found that Black preschool teachers appeared less likely on average to demonstrate equitable discipline practices in their sample – meaning they were observed using practices such as public or harsh reprimands, isolated seating, or having strict and rigid expectations with children of minoritized racial and ethnic groups more often than White teachers. These findings are unexpected, given studies showing that children in elementary through secondary school who have more teachers of the same race experience fewer suspensions (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). It appears that interactions between children and teachers within the context of intersecting racial and ethnic backgrounds are more complex and nuanced than we have been able to account for thus far in the literature. In this sample, we also found that teachers who identified as Hispanic/Latine were less likely to use removals from activities than White teachers, and that compared to White children, children who were Hispanic/Latine were less likely to experience time outs, and children whose race was included in the "other" category were less likely to experience removals from activities and time outs. These unexpected associations further underscore that there may be additional individual and sociocultural factors contributing to teachers' use of soft exclusions that we did not account for.

An additional reason we may not have found the associations we expected between teacher-child race match, child engagement, and children's experiences of soft exclusion is that we were not able to account for the race/ethnicity of other adults the children interacted with while in the classroom. The majority of children who participated in the present study had at least one assistant teacher in their classroom in addition to their lead teacher. It seems likely that the positive outcomes associated with having a teacher of the same race are not dependent on that teacher being the lead teacher in the classroom – particularly in preschool, when assistant teachers can have as large a role as lead teachers in supporting children emotionally and

behaviorally (Curby et al., 2012). Thus, the ways in which interactions with assistant teachers may have shaped children's engagement and their experiences of soft exclusion may have confounded our findings around teacher-child race match. To more closely examine the ways in which racial and ethnic identities of teachers and children are related to teacher-child interactions and children's early learning experiences, future studies should account for all adults who support children within their classrooms.

Though we did not find the expected associations between race and children's experiences of soft exclusion or engagement, this study contributes to the literature by highlighting two areas in great need of further research. First, soft exclusionary discipline needs to be examined in depth and at scale to determine whether inequitable use of these strategies is occurring more broadly. Second, the features of preschool programs and teachers that may be protective against racial inequities in these practices need to be explored.

Soft Exclusions and Child Engagement

On average, children in this sample who experienced more frequent soft exclusionary discipline during preschool demonstrated lower gains than their peers in terms of positive engagement with tasks (e.g., following instructions, sustaining focus, working independently). Moreover, children who experienced more frequent soft exclusions demonstrated decreases in their behavior control (e.g., accepting limits, coping with failures, tolerating frustration) as reported by their teachers, and increases in negative engagement (e.g., conflictual interactions with teachers and peers, dysregulated behavior) as reported by observers from fall to spring. In all, these findings demonstrate that use of soft exclusionary discipline is not associated with increases in the types of classroom engagement that help children to develop important early academic and social skills (Williford, Maier, et al., 2013). The associations between soft

exclusion and children's engagement in the present study align with the findings of Reinke et al. (2016), which demonstrated that young children observed to receive more negative behavioral feedback from their teachers in fall exhibited worsening concentration and increases in disruptive and dysregulated behavior across the school year. Though further research is needed in order to fully understand the underlying processes that contribute to these associations, it is possible that associations between negative attention or harsh responses from adults and children's future behavioral and emotional regulation may follow a similar general pathway. Children who are discouraged or prevented from engaging in learning opportunities have fewer chances to build and practice important skills that could improve the quality of their engagement, which may mean that children who experience more of these responses from adults fall further behind their peers in terms of the quality of their classroom engagement over time. In addition, children who are discouraged or prevented from engaging more frequently may feel less interested or motivated in engaging positively over time. This second pattern has been demonstrated in older children, who tend to experience school settings, and the adults within them, as increasingly unsupportive, unwelcoming, and demotivating the more they are suspended from school (Pyne, 2019; Skiba et al., 2014).

One unexpected finding was that children who experienced more frequent exclusions demonstrated growth in their positive interactions with teachers across the school year. However, we did not find a coinciding decrease in their negative or conflictual engagement like we would expect if they were receiving effective support for navigating and coping with the social, emotional, and behavioral demands of preschool. Instead, we suspect this result may be due to teachers monitoring these children more closely and interacting with them more often than their

peers in general as they attempted to prevent them from engaging in behaviors that were inconsistent with their classroom expectations.

Preschool programs offer great promise in preparing children for positive school adjustment and achievement in kindergarten and beyond (Barnett et al., 2018; Phillips et al., 2017). However, our results related to child engagement provide strong indication that children who experience frequent removals from activities or the classroom may not be receiving the supports they need for preschool to deliver on that promise. Instead, they may be at risk of increasingly negative school experiences over time. To ensure that every child who enrolls in preschool can access its benefits, there is a need for greater understanding and implementation of policies and practices that effectively promote children's positive engagement and reduce experiences of exclusionary discipline in all forms.

Limitations and Future Directions

Beyond the major limitation of being able to assess the frequency of only a small number of soft exclusionary practices, the items we used also lack the nuance to distinguish the degree to which a child has been separated from learning opportunities both physically and in terms of time spent separated. Future studies of soft exclusion should seek to document soft exclusions both more broadly and with a greater level of detail.

Another limitation of the present study is that, despite finding that soft exclusions did not appear to be used inequitably between Black and White children, we do not have enough information about teachers and programs to help us understand whether any additional factors may help to explain our outcomes. Because we did not ask the teachers in our study about their professional development experiences or access to supports, such as coaching or mental health consultation, it is not possible for us to rule out the potential effect of such experiences in

contributing to improved equity in soft exclusionary discipline among children in our sample. Future studies should consider how teachers' beliefs and expectations about child behavior and access to different types of support and training are associated with their use of soft exclusionary discipline. Further research is also needed to determine how administrator and program-level attitudes or expectations regarding exclusionary responses to children, which have been associated with rates of suspension and expulsion for older students (Skiba et al., 2014), are associated with use of soft exclusions.

Finally, as future studies examine the factors that contribute to teachers' decisions to use soft exclusionary strategies, they should also consider the ways that being in a classroom where children are excluded more often, or in racially biased ways, may be associated with outcomes for children who are not directly experiencing the exclusions themselves. Previous research with older children indicates that in schools with higher rates of exclusionary discipline, even the children who have not been suspended from school perform worse academically (Perry & Morris, 2014). In addition, young children take in information about adults' beliefs and biases by observing their verbal and nonverbal interactions with others, and children will often imitate the social preferences and types of interactions they see (Huesmann, 2018; Skinner, Meltzoff, & Olson, 2016). Therefore, children who witness their teachers engaging in racially biased treatment of their peers may begin to model that same behavior both within the classroom and other contexts.

Implications and Future Directions

This study adds to an area of the literature where little information is currently available, advancing knowledge regarding children's early experiences of exclusion within the preschool environment and creating a foundation from which future studies can examine soft exclusion in

greater detail. The associations we found between experiences of soft exclusion and declines in the quality of children's engagement across the preschool year provide implications for policy, practice, and research. Given these findings, policymakers should seek to ensure that preschool programs and teachers have access to necessary supports to meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of children they serve, and to reduce the use of adult responses to child behavior that separate children from learning opportunities. One consideration for leaders of preschool programs is to systematically measure the use of these types of responses, both to document potential inequities in use and to determine which teachers and children may be in need of greater support. In addition, program leadership should provide guidance to teachers on available supports and practical alternative strategies for responding to children, and educators should seek to reduce their use of exclusionary responses to children in order to minimize potential negative implications for their learning and engagement. Researchers who are seeking to better understand equity in early education and who are designing interventions to improve equity should also consider the use of these practices in their work. Although we did not find national trends of racial inequity in school discipline to be mirrored among preschool children in this particular sample, further research is needed to understand the role differential experiences of softer forms of exclusionary discipline may play in contributing to and perpetuating broader systemic racial inequities in education.

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Table 1.

Descriptive statistics for child and classroom variables of interest.

	n	%	M (SD)	Range
Child-Level				
Gender				
Male	388	51		
Female	379	49		
Race/Ethnicity				
Black	374	50		
Hispanic/Latine (any race)	96	13		
Multiracial	84	11		
Other	26	4		
White	168	22		
Age (months)			52.63 (3.60)	40–67
Family INR			1.45 (1.06)	0.44–5.05
Removal from Activity			1.77 (1.76)	0–6
Time Out			1.64 (1.72)	0–6
Sent to Another Classroom			0.28 (0.81)	0–5
Spring inCLASS Task Engage			3.68 (0.64)	1.17–6
Spring inCLASS Teacher Engage			2.07 (0.72)	1–4.5
Spring inCLASS Conflict			1.39 (0.36)	1–3.72
Spring TCRS Task Orientation			30.95 (7.83)	8–41
Spring TCRS Behavior Control			30.46 (7.65)	8–40
Teacher/Classroom Level				
Emotional Exhaustion (Fall)			2.33 (1.06)	1–5.75
PreK Teaching Experience			9.27 (7.21)	0–30
Race/Ethnicity				
Black	227	30		
Hispanic/Latine	24	3		
Multiracial	16	2		
White	492	65		
Class Size			17.91 (0.88)	14–21
School-Level INR			1.44 (0.44)	0.55–2.49
Percent Black Enrollment			62.02 (21.46)	0.22–1

Table 2.

Multilevel analyses of associations between child race/ethnicity and frequencies of soft exclusion.

	Removal From an Activity	Time Out from All Activities	Sent to Another Classroom
	IRR	IRR	OR
Intercept	0.56	0.67	0.09
Child Level			
Gender (Male)	1.66***	1.72***	2.91***
Age	0.98	1.00	0.97
Race/Ethnicity			
Black	0.95	0.93	0.78
Hispanic/Latine	0.77	0.71*	0.52
Multiracial	0.92	0.98	0.67
Other Race	0.40**	0.39**	0.65
INR	0.95	0.98	1.17
Fall Math Score	0.99	0.99	0.98
Fall Reading Score	1.00	1.01	1.00
Fall Self-Reg Score	0.99***	0.99***	0.98
Cohort	0.56	1.00	0.56
Classroom Level			
Teacher Race/Ethnicity			
Black	1.16	1.16	1.32
Hispanic/Latine	0.42*	0.76	0.45
Multiracial	0.45	0.81	0.40
Years PreK Experience	0.98	0.97**	0.97
Fall Teacher Stress	0.93	1.03	0.89
School Average INR	1.71	1.59	1.99
Class Size	1.28**	1.05	1.09
Class % Black	1.63	1.93	5.50
Site 1	0.75	0.70	0.37
Site 2	1.15	1.19	2.20
Site 3	1.05	1.02	0.55

Note: Coefficients are presented as incident rate ratios (IRR) or as odds ratios (OR). *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.
Reference categories include White Children, White Teachers, and Site 4.

Table 3.
Multilevel analyses of associations between teacher-child race match and frequencies of soft exclusion.

	Removal From an Activity	Time Out from All Activities	Sent to Another Classroom
	IRR	IRR	OR
Intercept	0.59	1.02	0.11
Child Level			
Gender (Male)	1.61***	1.65***	2.66**
Age	0.98	0.99	1.01
Child Race Black	1.03	1.03	1.18
INR	0.95	0.99	1.05
Fall Math Score	0.99	0.99	0.98
Fall Reading Score	1.00	1.00	1.00
Fall Self-Reg Score	0.99**	0.99**	0.98
Cohort	1.06	1.03	0.51
Interaction Child Race Black x Teacher Race Black	0.83	0.74	0.36
Classroom Level			
Teacher Race Black	1.35	1.36	2.48
Years PreK Experience	0.98*	0.97**	0.96
Fall Teacher Stress	0.96	1.02	0.85
School Average INR	1.59	1.31	1.86
Class Size	1.23*	1.01	1.04
Class % Black	1.28	1.37	2.69
Site 1	0.85	0.65	0.36
Site 2	1.27	0.95	1.52
Site 3	1.13	0.80	0.40

Note: Coefficients are presented as incident rate ratios (IRR) or as odds ratios (OR). *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.
Reference categories include White Children, White Teachers, and Site 4.

Table 4.

Multilevel analyses of associations between teacher-child race match and children's engagement in spring of preschool.

	Teacher-Reported Engagement		Observation-Based Engagement		
	TCRS Task Orientation	TCRS Behavior Control	inCLASS Positive Task Engagement	inCLASS Positive Teacher Engagement	inCLASS Negative Engagement
	b	*b*	*b*	OR	OR
Intercept	32.54***	28.95***	3.97***	1.88	1.33***
Child Level					
Gender (Male)	-1.45**	-0.49	-0.20***	0.97	1.10***
Age	0.08	-0.05	0.02*	1.00	1.00
Child Race Black	-1.12	-0.16	0.04	0.98	0.96
INR	0.09	0.02	0.02	1.00	1.00
Fall Math Score	0.07**	0.03	0.01**	1.00	1.00*
Fall Reading Score	-0.01	-0.02	0.00	1.00	1.00
Fall Self-Reg Score	-0.01	0.00	0.00		1.00
Fall TCRS TO Score	0.71***				
Fall TCRS BC Score		0.78***			
Fall inCLASS Task Engage			0.05		
Fall inCLASS Teacher Engage				1.10***	
Fall inCLASS Neg. Engage					1.23***
Cohort	-0.63	-0.37	-0.13	0.91	1.01
Interaction Child Race Black x Teacher Race Black	1.81	-1.02	-0.05	1.01	1.02
Classroom Level					
Teacher Race Black	-0.94	1.33	0.09	1.05	0.97
Years PreK Experience	-0.01	0.04	0.00	1.00	1.00
Fall Teacher Stress	-0.06	-0.63	-0.05	0.99	1.02
School Average INR	-0.17	-0.26	0.02	0.98	1.05
Class Size	-0.12	0.05	0.04	1.03	1.00
Class % Black	-1.44	-1.30	0.68*	1.62**	1.20*
Site 1	0.38	1.83	-0.06	1.14	0.87*
Site 2	2.21	5.53	-0.78**	1.15	1.12
Site 3	-0.53	1.14	-0.26	1.18	0.99

Note: Reference categories include White Children, White Teachers, and Site 4. Because inCLASS Positive Teacher Engagement and inCLASS Negative Engagement were log transformed for analysis, their coefficients have been exponentiated and presented as odds ratios. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Table 5.

Multilevel analyses of associations between total frequency of soft exclusion and children's engagement in spring of preschool.

	Teacher-Reported Engagement		Observation-Based Engagement		
	TCRS Task Orientation	TCRS Behavior Control	inCLASS Positive Task Engagement	inCLASS Positive Teacher Engagement	inCLASS Negative Engagement
	b	*b*	*b*	OR	OR
Intercept	30.94***	27.95***	3.98***	2.00	1.37
Child Level					
Total Soft Exclusion	-0.60***	-0.77***	-0.03***	1.01**	1.02***
Gender (Male)	-0.53	0.34	-0.13**	0.96*	1.07***
Age	0.15**	-0.02	-0.02**	1.00	1.00
Race/Ethnicity Black	-0.48	-0.60	0.02	0.98	0.97
Race/Ethnicity Hispanic/Latine	1.02	-0.51	0.06	0.98	0.96
Race/Ethnicity Multiracial	0.01	-0.42	-0.08	0.96	0.96
Race/Ethnicity Other Race	0.81	0.18	0.00	0.91	0.92*
INR	0.01	-0.15	0.04	1.01	0.99
Fall Math Score	0.08***	0.02	0.01**	1.00**	0.99
Fall Reading Score	0.00	-0.02	0.00	0.99	1.00
Fall Self-Reg Score	-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.99	1.00
Fall TCRS TO Score	0.53***				
Fall TCRS BC Score		0.50***			
Fall inCLASS Task Engage			0.06		
Fall inCLASS Teacher Engage				1.10***	
Fall inCLASS Neg. Engage					1.12***
Cohort	-0.49	0.13	-0.14	0.91	1.01
Classroom Level					
Teacher Race/Ethnicity Black	0.30	0.61	0.03	1.02	0.97
Teacher Race/Ethnicity Hispanic/Latine	-0.08	1.95	-0.02	1.02	0.98
Teacher Race/Ethnicity Multiracial	0.68	3.42	0.08	1.19	1.01
Years PreK Experience	-0.06	-0.01	-0.00	1.00	1.00
Fall Teacher Stress	-0.31	-0.74*	-0.04	0.99	1.02
School Average INR	0.83	0.54	0.04	0.98	1.04
Class Size	0.03	0.16	0.04	1.00	0.99
Class % Black	-0.30	-0.20	0.68*	1.56**	1.17
Site 1	-0.61	0.96	-0.09	1.08	0.86
Site 2	1.72	3.69	-0.75**	1.09	1.07
Site 3	-1.03	1.10	-0.25	1.14	0.96

Note: Reference categories include White Children, White Teachers, and Site 4. Because inCLASS Positive Teacher Engagement and inCLASS Negative Engagement were log transformed for analysis, their coefficients have been exponentiated and presented as odds ratios. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.