The discipline gap and African Americans: Defiance or cooperation in the high school classroom

Anne Gregory a,*, Rhona S. Weinstein b

a University of Virginia, 147 Ruffner Hall, Charlottesville, VA 22903, United States
b University of California, Berkeley, 2205 Tolman Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720-1650, United States

Received 23 October 2006; received in revised form 5 August 2007; accepted 4 September 2007

Abstract

African Americans are over-represented in school suspensions, yet little is known about the underlying contributing dynamics. Study 1 reviewed a high school’s annual discipline data and 442 students referred for defiance. African Americans were over-represented in referrals for defiance and most students received referrals from one or several teachers. This suggests that defiance referrals are specific to the classroom situation. Examining the situational specificity of referrals, Study 2 used repeated measures and multilevel modeling with a sub-sample of 30 African American students. Attendance, grades, and teacher reports showed that students behaved more defiantly and less cooperatively with teachers perceived as having untrustworthy authority. Predictors of African American student trust in teacher authority included teacher caring and high expectations, offering implications for lowering the discipline gap.

doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2007.09.001