



Escalation effects in teacher perceptions of classroom behavior in a U.S. context: The intersecting roles of student race, gender, and behavior severity

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Abstract

Prior experimental, vignette-based research has illustrated an “escalation effect,” whereby classroom teachers in the United States respond more harshly to Black students than White students for the same recurring misbehavior (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). This research aims to examine escalation effects while also (1) considering misbehavior varying in severity, and (2) expanding beyond the male-only, Black-White student dichotomy that dominates this area of research by adopting an intersectional approach that includes male and female target students from Black, White, Asian, and Latino/a backgrounds. Participants included 1,013 kindergarten through 12th grade teachers from a large public school district who responded to vignettes describing classroom misbehavior. Results supported the Black escalation effect for male and female students, with some evidence of heightened escalation for Black males. No similar effects were found for Asian or Latino/a students. The escalation effect appears to be uniquely associated with Black students, carrying important implications for teacher training and school discipline policies.

Keywords Racial bias · Teacher perceptions · Student behavior · Intersectionality

1 Introduction

Increasingly, it is recognized that teacher perceptions may drive disproportionate disciplinary responses to students of color (Godsil et al., 2017; Gregory et al., 2010; Okonofua, Walton, et al., 2016; Warikoo et al., 2016). Influenced by commonly held

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implicit racial biases and stereotypes (Starck et al., 2020), even teachers who explicitly embrace egalitarian values may inadvertently contribute to racial gaps in school discipline (Turetsky et al., 2021). Researchers examining the roots of disciplinary disparities have recognized that teachers' responses to classroom misbehavior occur in the context of evolving teacher-student relationships (Okonofua Walton, et al., 2016) and that the *recurrence* of misbehavior may play a crucial role in how it is perceived by teachers, prompting 'escalation effects' in teachers' perceptions and responses. The present research constitutes a conceptual replication (see Derksen & Morawski, 2022) of prior work on the role of behavior recurrence and further expands the investigation to consider behavior severity and students' intersecting racial and gender identities as additional factors that might interact to influence teacher perceptions.

1.1 Behavior recurrence and the "Black escalation effect"

In two seminal studies, Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) investigated how the recurrence of minor behavioral infractions might impact U.S. teachers' responses to Black and White students. After reading vignettes describing incidents of defiant and disruptive misbehavior by a male student, teachers were more inclined to label the student as a 'troublemaker,' to feel more troubled by the behavior, and to discipline the student more harshly when the student was perceived to be Black rather than White – but only after the second occurrence of misbehavior.

Teachers thus appeared more likely to perceive a problematic pattern and to respond more negatively and punitively toward Black students than White students when moving from single occasions to recurring incidents of challenging classroom behavior – a phenomenon the authors term the 'Black escalation effect.' Subsequent experimental work using vignettes has supported the notion that U.S. educators are more likely to expect patterns of misbehavior among Black students than among White students (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019). Relatedly, we expected that manipulating recurrence of classroom misbehavior would generally reveal a pattern consistent with the Black escalation effect. In the present research, we tested for race-based escalation effects using a between-subjects design (see Gravetter & Forzano, 2012), in which each participant was exposed to examples of *either* single occurrences of misbehavior *or* recurring misbehavior, as an alternative to the within-subjects approach originally used by Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015), in which all participants were exposed to *both* single occurrences of misbehavior *and* recurring misbehavior.

1.2 The role of behavior severity

We also extend prior work in this area by experimentally manipulating how different types of classroom misbehavior might shape teachers' responses to Black and White students. Vignette studies of bias in teacher responses to classroom misbehavior (e.g., Gilliam et al., 2016; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019) typically focus on low-severity behaviors that are also somewhat ambiguous, reflecting the consistent finding that racial disparities in school discipline are greatest for behaviors that are subjectively perceived and interpreted by teachers (e.g., being 'disruptive' or 'defiant') as compared to more severe and/or objective indicators of school code violations or inappro-

priate conduct (e.g., fighting, bringing a weapon to school; Girvan et al., 2017; Losen et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2011). Research has yet to investigate whether behavior severity might contribute to teachers' differential perceptions of single-occurrence and recurring misbehavior by students. Thus, we examined teacher responses to different degrees of classroom misbehavior by including a within-subjects factor using vignettes varying in behavior severity (both related to defiant/disruptive behavior; see Method); here, we expected that race-based escalation effects would be more apparent when misbehavior was less severe, given that such cases would be more susceptible to teacher perception and interpretation.

1.3 Beyond the male-only, black-white dichotomy: An intersectional approach

We also note that prior research on race-based escalation effects has focused exclusively on teacher responses to vignettes describing misbehavior by male students who are either Black or White (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Marcucci, 2020; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Yet intersectional approaches (see Crenshaw, 1991) suggest that racial and gender identities may converge to shape students' experiences in school (Morris, 2005, 2016). Presently, we know little regarding whether teachers' reactions may escalate in comparable or distinct ways when misbehavior is displayed by Black girls or by boys and girls from other racial and ethnic backgrounds, as compared to the Black escalation effect observed in relation to Black boys.

Dominant theories in the intersectional literature offer varied predictions about how teachers might respond to disruptive students holding distinct gender and racial identities. Proponents of 'double-jeopardy' perspectives (Beale, 1979; King, 1988) would likely contend that disadvantages associated with marginalized identities accrue in a cumulative fashion. As such, disruptive behavior by Black girls might be perceived as more troublesome and disrespectful, in comparison to disruptive behavior by Black boys or White girls. Alternatively, perspectives on 'intersectional invisibility' (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) posit that people with multiple marginalized identities (e.g., women of color) might be rendered invisible due to being perceived as less prototypical members of their respective identity groups (i.e., people of color, women). In this case, disruptive behavior by Black girls might be seen as less troublesome or disrespectful relative to comparable behavior exhibited by Black boys or White girls.

More broadly, scholars have begun to investigate social perceptions unique to distinct intersectional race-gender groups (Bell, 2022; Ghavami & Peplau, 2013), and how these correspond with prevailing group stereotypes in the U.S. As one example, Black males tend to be perceived as particularly threatening (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Goff et al., 2014; Morris, 2005); correspondingly, educators often monitor Black students—and especially Black boys—when anticipating misbehavior, as compared to how much White boys and girls are monitored for potential misbehavior (Gilliam et al., 2016). Alternatively, Black girls may be subject to specific intersectional stereotypes and unjustly penalized for being perceived as loud or "unladylike" (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Morris, 2016). By contrast, Asian American boys and girls are more likely to be perceived as studious and/or non-threatening (Chang &

Sue, 2003; Ghavami & Peplau, 2013), with Asian American girls often representing ‘educators’ ideal self-disciplined student’ (Morris, 2005, p. 39).

Although such stereotypical perceptions of intersectional race-gender groups are well-documented and pervasive (see Ghavami & Peplau, 2013), our understanding of how teachers perceive misbehavior by students in relation to distinct combinations of racial/ethnic and gender identities remains limited. In particular, we do not yet know whether race-based escalation effects may extend beyond teachers’ perceptions of Black male students. In line with calls for intersectional approaches (Bowleg, 2017; Lei & Rhodes, 2021), the present research further extends prior work by exploring how student gender and race might interact to shape teachers’ perceptions of classroom misbehavior varying in severity, to determine whether and how escalation effects apply to intersectional race-gender groups.

In light of the possibility that somewhat distinct stereotypes might apply to different race-gender profiles, we aimed to assess several aspects of U.S. teachers’ reactions to student misbehavior. First, we examined the extent to which teachers were inclined to apply the label of “troublemaker” to students, which signals assumptions about ongoing student behavior, demeanor, and academic performance, and may be tied to stereotypes about Black students regardless of gender (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Second, we examined teachers’ feelings of being disrespected and threatened, which are closely tied to their concerns about becoming targets of aggression from students (Rosales, 2019) and are particularly relevant to the present research given prevailing stereotypes applied to Black males as being dangerous and aggressive (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Goff et al., 2014; Morris, 2005). Thus, focusing on these two indicators allowed us to examine whether and how student demographics might shape teachers’ subjective perceptions and affective responses to classroom misbehavior.

Given that teachers may feel less able to manage classrooms effectively following misbehavior (see Okonofua, Walton, et al., 2016; Ratcliff et al., 2010), we also examined teachers’ expectations that there would be tension in the classroom environment following each scenario depicting classroom misbehavior. A benefit of this measure is that teachers’ subjective responses regarding the classroom environment may be less susceptible to social desirability bias than when asked to report their own feelings of being threatened (see Fisher, 1993), and they might also be more likely to register teacher discomfort associated with violations of “well-behaved” stereotypes associated with particular groups, like Asian or White girls (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Morris, 2005). Finally, we sought to examine possible disciplinary consequences teachers would be inclined to enact following the given misbehavior, in close approximation to the real-life actions that may contribute to disciplinary disproportionality based on student identity.

2 Method

2.1 Participants and procedures

All procedures were approved by the university institutional review board and school district. Teachers of kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) classrooms (teaching children from ages 5–18, generally) were recruited from an urban school district in the northeastern U.S. with more than 50,000 students (42.5% Latino/a, 33% Black, 14% White, 9% Asian, and 1.5% multiracial or from other racial/ethnic backgrounds). The 4,400 teachers in the district were approximately 60% White, 22% Black, 11% Latino/a, 6% Asian, and 1% from another background. Most students in the district (72%) are considered economically disadvantaged, and all schools receive Title I funds. One hundred K-12 principals allowed teachers in their schools to be recruited for participation, and classroom teachers were invited via email to complete an online survey. Teachers agreed to an online consent form prior to beginning the survey. Altogether, 1,013 teachers completed the survey (23% of teachers in the district; none were excluded).

Responding teachers were 63.0% female, 17.0% male, 0.5% nonbinary (19.5% did not respond) and ranged in age from 22 to 69 years ($M=39.08$, $SD=10.11$). Overall, 50.3% identified as White, 9.6% as Black, 7.7% as Latino/a, 4.8% as Asian, 2.9% as multiracial, and 1.4% as Other (23.3% did not respond); 36.7% came from middle-class backgrounds, with 21.7% coming from lower middle-class or lower-class backgrounds, and 20.5% from upper middle-class or upper-class backgrounds (21.1% did not respond). Years of teaching experience ranged from 0 to 40 ($M=12.21$, $SD=8.27$). As part of a larger project in the school district, participating teachers (1) responded to vignettes describing hypothetical scenarios involving classroom misbehavior, and (2) completed self-report measures including demographic information and other indicators not utilized in the current study.

2.2 Experimental manipulations

Each teacher was presented with two vignettes reflecting the same student race x gender x recurrence condition (between-subjects) and differing in the severity of misbehavior described (within-subjects). Thus, the study reflected a $4 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ mixed design, with each teacher assigned to one of 16 groups combining student race (Asian, Black, Latino/a, White), student gender (male, female), and recurrence (single occurrence, recurring). Similar to prior research (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015), student race and gender were manipulated using names pilot tested with district teachers to be stereotypically associated with particular racial groups and genders; names included in this pilot came from lists of the most common first names of K-12 students from distinct racial/ethnic and gender groups, according to the school district's enrollment records. Like Marcucci (2020), we signaled ongoing behavior in the 'recurring' condition by including phrases indicating that the behavior described had occurred previously (e.g., "as has happened on other occasions," "as you had to do... last week").

Vignettes were created in consultation with district administrators and piloted with a small sample of non-participant teachers to ensure the scenarios were realistic. The less severe vignette described an incidence of mild class disturbance, adapted from Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015). The more severe vignette described more defiant physical behavior, reflecting examples of prior misbehavior recorded within the district. Vignette text and names for each condition are available online at https://osf.io/a2wex/?view_only=d28f287799104bd7b85ac920e6c6128f. Order of presentation for the two vignettes was counterbalanced. As expected, teachers rated the ‘less severe’ vignette as less severe ($M=3.46$, $SD=1.53$, on 1–7 scale) relative to the ‘more severe’ vignette ($M=4.39$, $SD=1.43$), $t(940)=17.49$, $p<.001$, significant differences in severity ratings emerged regardless of which vignette was presented first.

2.3 Measures

Measures were developed through extensive discussion with the school district, and therefore represent a balance between seeking to conceptually replicate prior published work and examining issues of interest to district leaders. Following each vignette, teachers responded to three indicators included as dependent measures; teachers’ scores on these indicators were moderately and positively correlated (see Table 1 for means and intercorrelations).

Perceiving student as troublemaker. Paralleling Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015), teachers were asked “If you had to guess, how much of a troublemaker is this student?” and responded on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very much).

Feeling disrespected or threatened. We employed two items that assessed how much teachers would feel *disrespected* and *threatened* in response to the student’s behavior. Scores on the two items ranged from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very much) and were averaged to create a composite measure. Pearson’s $r(975)=0.50$ for the more severe vignette and $r(977)=0.45$ for the less severe vignette. Reliability for this two-item measure was calculated using the Spearman-Brown formula (see Eisinga et al., 2013), yielding reliability estimates of $\rho=0.67$ for the more severe vignette and $\rho=0.62$ for the less severe vignette.

Anticipating classroom tension. Teachers were also asked “After this incident, how would the classroom environment feel?” scored on a scale from 1 (Very relaxed) to 7 (Very tense).

Envisioning discipline. Teachers also offered possible disciplinary consequences for the student in each scenario, based on guidance for disciplinary referrals recommended by the district, in which teachers would first be asked to determine whether they would ‘handle the situation in the classroom’ or ‘refer the student outside the

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among dependent variables

	Less severe vignette				More severe vignette			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
1. Perceiving student as a troublemaker	3.20	1.46			3.60	1.44		
2. Feeling disrespected/threatened	1.77	1.00	.497		2.49	1.36	.527	
3. Anticipating classroom tension	3.40	1.36	.519	.502	4.51	1.42	.428	.523

Note: All intercorrelations significant at $p<.01$

classroom.’ Almost all participating teachers (93%) indicated they would ‘handle the situation in the classroom’ rather than ‘refer the student outside the classroom’; thus, there was too little variation to examine proposed discipline as a binary outcome across all experimental conditions. However, mean comparisons showed that, across both vignettes and with medium to large effect sizes, teachers who indicated they would refer the student outside the classroom scored significantly higher on perceiving the student as a troublemaker, feeling disrespected and threatened, and anticipating classroom tension, relative to those who indicated they would handle the situation in the classroom (see Table 2). In the sections that follow, we therefore estimate models for our three continuous indicators, with the understanding that these indicators are likely to be predictive of teachers’ proposed disciplinary approaches.

2.4 Data analysis plan

We analyzed data using linear mixed-effects regression in R (version 3.6.3, R Core Team, 2020) specifying a Gaussian distribution in the lme4 package (Bates et al., 2015) and including teacher ID as a random effect to avoid pseudoreplication for any within-subjects analyses (i.e., including vignette severity as a predictor). Categorical predictor variables were dummy-coded. Because p -values from linear mixed-effects models are unreliable (Bates et al., 2015), the lme4 package provides 95% confidence intervals (95% CIs) instead. We used the emmeans package (Lenth, 2019) to run pairwise contrasts and gather estimated marginal means when decomposing significant interactions (data and code available at https://osf.io/a2wex/?view_only=d28f287799104bd7b85ac920e6c6128f). We report all parameter estimates, 95% CIs, and p -values in Tables 3 and 4. We interpret and discuss any 95% CI that does not contain zero, and any p -value less than 0.05, which we consider to represent a statistically significant result. Tukey post-hoc pairwise comparisons were used to account for alpha inflation when testing for statistical significance.

For each outcome variable (perceiving student as a ‘troublemaker,’ feeling disrespected/threatened, and anticipating classroom tension), we tested the main and interactive effects of vignette severity (within-subjects factor coded as more severe (0) vs. less severe (1), student race (between-subjects factor dummy-coded with White students as the reference group), student gender (between-subjects factor coded as male (0) vs. female (1), and recurrence (between-subjects factor coded as single occur-

Table 2 Results of independent-samples t -tests examining associations between teacher disciplinary inclinations and continuous dependent variables for each vignette

Dependent Variable	Severity	Handle in the classroom		Refer outside the classroom		t	df	p	Cohen’s d
		M	SD	M	SD				
Troublemaker	Less severe	3.12	1.41	4.32	1.74	-5.44	68.97	<.001	0.76
	More severe	3.39	1.36	4.54	1.46	-9.79	957	<.001	0.82
Disrespected/threatened	Less severe	2.20	1.44	3.31	2.27	-3.89	66.60	<.001	0.58
	More severe	2.90	1.68	4.38	2.04	-8.91	226.80	<.001	0.79
Classroom tension	Less severe	3.32	1.30	4.58	1.55	-7.49	970	<.001	0.88
	More severe	4.29	1.36	5.59	1.22	-11.59	968	<.001	1.01

Table 3 Summary of model results, including parameter estimates and 95% confidence intervals

	Troublemaker			Disrespected/Threatened			Classroom Tension					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	95% CI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	95% CI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	95% CI
Severity (less severe = 1)	-0.26	0.21	-1.22	[-0.66, 0.15]	-0.69	0.17	-4.14	[-1.02, -0.37]	-1.22	0.22	-5.60	[-1.64, -0.80]
Black (vs. White)	0.17	0.26	0.65	[-0.33, 0.67]	-0.41	0.21	-1.95	[-0.83, -0.00]	-0.62	0.25	-2.48	[-1.11, -0.13]
Latino/a (vs. White)	-0.05	0.27	-0.18	[-0.58, 0.48]	0.07	0.22	0.32	[-0.36, 0.50]	0.14	0.26	0.55	[-0.36, 0.65]
Asian (vs. White)	-0.04	0.26	-0.16	[-0.55, 0.46]	-0.29	0.21	-1.38	[-0.71, 0.12]	-0.22	0.25	-0.90	[-0.71, 0.26]
Gender (female = 1)	0.10	0.26	0.37	[-0.41, 0.60]	-0.13	0.21	-0.60	[-0.54, 0.29]	-0.40	0.25	-1.62	[-0.89, 0.08]
Recurrence (recurring = 1)	0.10	0.27	0.36	[-0.42, 0.62]	-0.19	0.22	-0.86	[-0.61, 0.24]	-0.49	0.26	-1.88	[-0.99, 0.02]
Severity x Black	-0.25	0.28	-0.89	[-0.80, 0.30]	0.04	0.23	0.17	[-0.40, 0.48]	0.51	0.30	1.71	[-0.07, 1.08]
Severity x Latino/a	0.10	0.30	0.34	[-0.48, 0.68]	-0.33	0.24	-1.39	[-0.79, 0.13]	-0.20	0.31	-0.65	[-0.80, 0.40]
Severity x Asian	-0.24	0.28	-0.84	[-0.79, 0.31]	0.07	0.23	0.32	[-0.37, 0.51]	0.05	0.30	0.16	[-0.53, 0.62]
Severity x Gender	-0.09	0.28	-0.31	[-0.65, 0.47]	0.07	0.23	0.30	[-0.38, 0.51]	0.16	0.30	0.54	[-0.42, 0.74]
Black x Gender	-0.40	0.38	-1.07	[-1.13, 0.33]	0.10	0.31	0.31	[-0.50, 0.69]	0.44	0.36	1.23	[-0.26, 1.14]
Latino/a x Gender	-0.09	0.38	-0.25	[-0.83, 0.63]	-0.30	0.31	-0.99	[-0.90, 0.29]	-0.05	0.36	-0.14	[-0.75, 0.65]
Asian x Gender	-0.06	0.37	-0.16	[-0.79, 0.67]	0.11	0.30	0.37	[-0.48, 0.71]	0.34	0.36	0.97	[-0.35, 1.04]
Severity x Recurrence	-0.58	0.29	-1.96	[-1.15, -0.01]	-0.20	0.23	-0.83	[-0.65, 0.26]	0.24	0.31	0.80	[-0.35, 0.84]
Black x Recurrence	0.05	0.37	0.14	[-0.67, 0.78]	0.62	0.30	2.02	[0.02, 1.21]	1.27	0.36	3.53	[0.57, 1.97]
Latino/a x Recurrence	-0.14	0.38	-0.36	[-0.87, 0.59]	-0.03	0.31	-0.08	[-0.62, 0.57]	0.22	0.36	0.60	[-0.49, 0.92]
Asian x Recurrence	-0.19	0.37	-0.50	[-0.91, 0.54]	0.24	0.30	0.78	[-0.36, 0.83]	0.42	0.36	1.19	[-0.27, 1.12]
Gender x Recurrence	-0.16	0.38	-0.43	[-0.90, 0.58]	0.13	0.31	0.41	[-0.48, 0.73]	0.76	0.37	2.08	[0.05, 1.47]
Severity x Black x Gender	0.26	0.41	0.64	[-0.54, 1.06]	0.00	0.33	-0.02	[-0.64, 0.63]	-0.27	0.43	-0.63	[-1.10, 0.56]
Severity x Latino/a x Gender	-0.06	0.41	-0.16	[-0.87, 0.74]	0.40	0.33	1.23	[-0.23, 1.04]	0.02	0.43	0.04	[-0.81, 0.85]
Severity x Asian x Gender	0.35	0.41	0.86	[-0.44, 1.15]	0.02	0.32	0.05	[-0.62, 0.65]	-0.12	0.42	-0.27	[-0.94, 0.71]
Severity x Black x Recurrence	0.90	0.41	2.22	[0.11, 1.69]	-0.04	0.32	-0.12	[-0.67, 0.59]	-0.90	0.43	-2.12	[-1.73, -0.08]
Severity x Latino/a x Recurrence	0.57	0.41	1.39	[-0.23, 1.37]	0.40	0.33	1.22	[-0.24, 1.04]	-0.03	0.43	-0.06	[-0.86, 0.81]
Severity x Asian x Recurrence	0.86	0.41	2.12	[0.07, 1.65]	-0.01	0.32	-0.04	[-0.64, 0.62]	-0.22	0.42	-0.53	[-1.05, 0.60]
Severity x Gender x Recurrence	0.46	0.42	1.10	[-0.35, 1.27]	-0.09	0.33	-0.27	[-0.73, 0.56]	-0.66	0.44	-1.51	[-1.51, 0.19]
Black x Gender x Recurrence	0.62	0.53	1.17	[-0.41, 1.66]	-0.04	0.44	-0.09	[-0.89, 0.81]	-1.01	0.51	-1.96	[-2.00, -0.01]
Latino/a x Gender x Recurrence	0.28	0.53	0.53	[-0.75, 1.30]	0.13	0.43	0.30	[-0.71, 0.96]	-0.70	0.50	-1.39	[-1.68, 0.28]

Table 3 (continued)

	Troublemaker			Disrespected/Threatened			Classroom Tension		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Asian x Gender x Recurrence	0.72	0.54	1.33	-0.14	0.44	0.44	-0.71	0.52	-1.38
Severity x Black x Gender x Recur	-0.84	0.58	-1.43	0.15	0.47	0.32	1.08	0.61	1.77
Severity x Latino/a x Gender x Recur	-0.55	0.58	-0.95	-0.10	0.46	-0.22	0.80	0.59	1.34
Severity x Asian x Gender x Recur	-1.63	0.59	-2.77	0.26	0.47	0.57	0.53	0.61	0.87

Note: Bold values indicate relations where $p < .05$

Table 4 Post-hoc analyses for teachers': (a) troublemaker perceptions, (b) feeling disrespected/threatened, and (c) anticipating classroom tension

Troublemaker	Less severe			More severe			Feeling Disrespected/Threatened			t	p	
	B	SE	t	p	B	SE	t	p	B			SE
Black (v. White)	-0.14	0.19	-0.74	.459	0.01	0.19	0.06	.951	-0.36	0.12	-3.06	.002
Recurrence	-0.35	0.19	-1.80	.072	0.04	0.19	0.18	.855	-0.24	0.12	-2.05	.041
Black*Recurrence	0.86	0.27	3.23	.001	0.31	0.27	1.15	.249	0.62	0.17	3.76	<.001
		M	SE			M	SE			M	SE	
Single occurrence	Black	3.12 ^a	0.13		3.57	0.14			1.93 ^{c,d}		0.08	
	White	3.26	0.13		3.56	0.13			2.29 ^e		0.08	
Recurring	Black	3.64 ^{ab}	0.13		3.92	0.13			2.31 ^d		0.08	
	White	2.92 ^b	0.14		3.60	0.14			2.05		0.09	
c) Classroom Tension		Less severe			More severe				Male students			
	B	SE	t	p	B	SE	t	p	B	SE	t	p
Black (v. White)	-0.02	0.17	-0.14	.889	-0.41	0.18	-2.26	.024	-0.41	0.18	-2.34	.020
Recurrence	-0.18	0.17	-1.07	.287	-0.12	0.18	-0.65	.515	-0.40	0.18	-2.19	.029
Black*Recurrence	0.40	0.24	1.69	.093	0.78	0.26	3.04	.002	0.88	0.25	3.49	.001
		M	SE			M	SE			M	SE	
Single occurrence	Black	3.42	0.12		4.16 ^e	0.13			3.77 ^f	0.12	3.78	0.15
	White	3.44	0.12		4.56	0.12			4.18	0.13	3.87	0.13
Recurring	Black	3.64	0.12		4.82 ^e	0.12			4.25 ^{fg}	0.13	4.20	0.13
	White	3.26	0.13		4.44	0.13			3.78 ^g	0.13	3.92	0.15

Note: Bold values indicate relations where $p < .05$. Superscript denotes estimated marginal means are significantly different from each other ($p < .05$)

rence (0) vs. recurring (1). We conducted sensitivity analyses in G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009) to estimate minimum detectable effect sizes (MDES) with 0.80 power for each test. These MDES estimates use a repeated-measures ANOVA framework, which approximates the type of mixed model design used here. Using this approach, our MDES estimates range from 0.05 to 0.09 (see Table 5); with Cohen's (1988) guidelines listing 0.10 as a small effect size, we conclude that we are well-powered to detect even small effects.

3 Results

Full results for each model are presented in Table 3, and post-hoc tests are presented in Table 4.

3.1 Perceiving student as troublemaker

We observed a significant three-way interaction between severity, student race (Black vs. White), and recurrence, $B=0.90$, $SE=0.41$, $t=2.22$, 95% CI=0.11, 1.69. Post-hoc analyses revealed no significant main effects or interactions of student race (Black vs. White) with recurrence for the more severe vignette. For the less severe vignette, however, there was a significant interaction between student race (Black vs. White) and recurrence, $B=0.86$, $SE=0.27$, $t=3.23$, $p=.001$. Pairwise comparisons showed that teachers rated Black students ($M=3.64$, $SE=0.13$) more likely to be troublemakers compared to White students ($M=2.92$, $SE=0.14$) in the recurring condition, $t(475) = -3.81$, $p=.001$, but not in the single occurrence condition, $t(475)=0.74$, $p=.880$. Teachers also rated Black students as more likely to be troublemakers in the recurring condition ($M=3.64$, $SE=0.13$) than in the single occurrence condition ($M=3.12$, $SE=0.13$), $t(475) = -2.78$, $p=.029$, but this effect was not observed in relation to White students, $t(475)=1.80$, $p=.274$.

Additionally, although results of the initial model showed a significant four-way interaction between severity, student race (Asian vs. White), gender, and recurrence, $B = -1.63$, $SE=0.59$, $t = -2.77$, 95% CI = -2.78, -0.49, post-hoc analyses did not show any significant race by recurrence effects within any gender-severity combinations. Similarly, a significant three-way interaction in the initial model among severity, student race (Asian vs. White), and recurrence did not yield any significant effects in post-hoc analyses (see online supplemental Table S1).

3.2 Feeling disrespected or threatened

We observed a two-way interaction between student race (Black vs. White) and recurrence, $B=0.62$, $SE=0.30$, $t=2.02$, 95% CI=0.02, 1.21. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons showed that, in the single occurrence condition, teachers reported feeling less disrespected or threatened in response to Black students ($M=1.93$, $SE=0.08$) compared to White students ($M=2.29$, $SE=0.08$), $t(957)=3.06$, $p=.012$. However, teachers reported feeling more disrespected and threatened by Black students in the recurring condition ($M=2.31$, $SE=0.08$) than in the single occurrence con-

Table 5 Estimates of minimum detectable effect size

		MDES (Minimum Detectable Effect Size – Cohen's <i>f</i>)		
		Troublemaker	Disrespected/Threatened	Classroom Tension
Main effects	Between-subjects factor, <i>df</i> =1 (student gender, recurrence)	0.07	0.08	0.07
	Between-subjects factor, <i>df</i> =3 (student race)	0.09	0.09	0.08
	Within-subjects factor, <i>df</i> =1 (severity)	0.05	0.05	0.05
Interactions ^a	Within x between, <i>df</i> =1	0.05	0.05	0.05
	Within x between, <i>df</i> =3	0.06	0.05	0.06

Note: Estimated using G*Power 3.1. Power set to 0.80, $\alpha=0.05$; correlations among repeated measures=0.414 (troublemaker), 0.467 (disrespected/threatened), and 0.310 (classroom tension)

^aInteractions among between-subjects factors were not able to be assessed using G*Power.

dition ($M=1.93$, $SE=0.08$), $t(957) = -3.29$, $p=.006$, but no significant difference between recurring and single occurrence conditions was observed for White students, $t(957)=2.05$, $p=.171$.

3.3 Anticipating classroom tension

We observed a three-way interaction between severity, student race (Black vs. White), and recurrence, $B = -0.90$, $SE=0.43$, $t = -2.12$, 95% CI = -1.73, -0.08. Post-hoc tests revealed no significant main effects or interactions of student race (Black vs. White) and recurrence for the less severe vignette. However, for the more severe vignette, we found a significant interaction between student race (Black vs. White) and recurrence, $B=0.78$, $SE=0.26$, $t=3.04$, $p=.002$. Pairwise comparisons showed that teachers anticipated higher classroom tension following classroom misbehavior by Black students in the recurring condition ($M=4.82$, $SE=0.12$) than in the single occurrence condition ($M=4.16$, $SE=0.13$), $t(471) = -3.68$, $p=.002$; however, such a difference was not observed following classroom misbehavior by White students, $t(471)=0.65$, $p=.915$.

We also observed a significant three-way interaction between student gender, student race (Black vs. White), and recurrence, $B = -1.01$, $SE=0.51$, $t = -1.96$, 95% CI = -2.00, -0.01. Post-hoc tests showed no significant main effects or interactions of student race (Black vs. White) and recurrence for female students. However, for male

students (collapsed across severity conditions), we found an interaction of student race (Black v. White) and recurrence, $B=0.88$, $SE=0.25$, $t=3.49$, $p=.001$. Teachers anticipated significantly higher classroom tension in response to misbehavior from Black male students ($M=4.25$, $SE=0.13$) than White male students ($M=3.78$, $SE=0.13$) in the recurring condition, $t(481)=-2.60$, $p=.048$, but not in the single occurrence condition, $t(481)=2.34$, $p=.091$. Teachers also expected significantly higher tension in the recurring condition ($M=4.25$, $SE=0.13$) than in the single occurrence condition ($M=3.77$, $SE=0.12$) for Black male students, $t(481)=-2.77$, $p=.030$, but such a difference was not observed for White male students, $t(481)=2.19$, $p=.127$.

4 Discussion

This research extends prior work on race-based escalation effects by testing how teachers' responses to classroom misbehavior may depend not only on whether misbehavior recurs, but also on the severity of the misbehavior and on the particular race-gender intersection for the student in question. We observed that, in response to recurring misbehavior, teachers were more likely to perceive students as troublemakers if they were presumed to be Black (either male or female) than if they were presumed to be White—yet this was only true for less severe forms of classroom misbehavior. This pattern of findings complements previous work showing that subjective and minor behavioral infractions like those associated with 'disruptiveness' and 'defiance' allow for more subjective interpretation by teachers and appear to be more susceptible to racial bias (Girvan et al., 2017; Losen et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2011). It may be that when disruptive behaviors are both recurring and low in severity, teachers are more likely to view such behaviors as part of a Black student's "troublemaking" personality compared to recurring and higher-severity behaviors, which might be more often attributed to external factors (and compared to the same pattern exhibited by a White student). Teachers also reported feeling more disrespected and threatened in response to recurring misbehavior by students presumed to be Black (either male or female) than by students presumed to be White. These findings corroborate prior research on race-based escalation effects, showing teachers' greater propensity to apply a 'troublemaker' label in response to classroom misbehavior committed by Black students (as compared to White students), while also highlighting how teachers' own subjective experiences may contribute to shaping their perceptions of student behavior (see Okonofua et al., 2020).

Interestingly, however, we also found that teachers reported feeling *more* disrespected and threatened in response to a single occurrence of classroom misbehavior from students presumed to be White than from students presumed to be Black. It is possible that, in the absence of additional information, teachers may have overcorrected so as not to appear racially biased in response to a single incident of misbehavior (see Marcucci, 2020, for a related argument). Indeed, people may be more prone to revealing bias when they possess greater information that helps them to feel their judgments are substantiated (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2017). In this case, the recurrence of classroom misbehavior—and particularly as tested in the current between-subjects design—may have validated teachers' greater feelings of being disrespected

and threatened in response to misbehavior presumably committed by Black students, rather than by White students.

Additionally, we found that teachers anticipated higher classroom tension when repeated, higher-severity misbehavior was enacted by (both male and female) Black students compared to White students. Furthermore, for Black male students specifically, the escalation effect emerged in relation to anticipated classroom tension across both higher- and lower-severity behaviors. Thus, both male and female Black students may be at risk of being perceived by teachers as sources of classroom tension when their misbehavior is severe, yet male Black students may be at greater risk of being perceived as sources of classroom tension even when their misbehavior constitutes a less severe classroom disturbance. Still, the limited gender differences we observed in Black escalation effects suggest that racialized perceptions of recurring misbehavior are likely to play a role in how teachers respond to both male and female Black youth (see, e.g., Okonofua, Walton, et al., 2016).

Notably, we found no significant differences when comparing effects for Asian or Latino/a target students to White target students, suggesting that the escalation effect is specific to Black students. This anti-Black bias in teachers' perceptions likely reflects long-standing, persistent, negative stereotypes of Black students in U.S. educational contexts (see Dumas, 2016), and is consistent with scholarship on the unique stereotypes of Black Americans as dangerous, criminal, and "having an attitude" (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013). Previous U.S.-based research has demonstrated that more prototypical Black phenotypic characteristics including darker skin tones and more Afrocentric features are associated with the activation of more negative anti-Black stereotypes (Blair et al., 2002; Maddox & Gray, 2002), reflecting the pervasiveness of anti-Blackness within U.S. society.

Given that Latino/a students also tend to experience disproportionate school discipline rates and stereotyping (Anyon et al., 2014; Morris, 2005; Skiba, 2011), it was somewhat unexpected that no escalation effects were found for these students relative to White students. Latino/a students were particularly well-represented in the school district where this research took place (42.5%), such that participating teachers may have had greater experience or familiarity with a range of Latino/a students, thereby limiting the extent to which these target students were perceived in terms of group stereotypes. Furthermore, the term 'Latino/a' represents a broad and diverse pan-ethnic category; it is possible that how Latino/a students are racialized and disciplined by educators may depend on additional characteristics like students' skin color and phenotype, such that stereotypical Latino/a names alone would not be sufficient to trigger disproportionate reactions to misbehavior (although Black Americans are phenotypically diverse as well, darker skin tone is considered more prototypical for Black Americans than Latino/a Americans; see Ma et al., 2018).

4.1 Limitations and future directions

The use of hypothetical vignettes represents both a strength and weakness of this research, by allowing for a controlled experimental design while also limiting generalizability to teachers' actual classroom experiences and developing teacher-student relationships (see also Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Marcucci, 2020). One other

limitation of this study is that we did not counterbalance the two names used to indicate each race-gender pairing across the two vignettes—that is, each specific name was used for either the less severe or more severe vignette, but not alternating across the two vignettes. This could result in a potential confound between the presumed racial and gender identity of the target student and behavior severity. Furthermore, although names were derived from lists of names of students in the district, it is possible that some participants may not have associated the intended gender or race with each name.

We also wish to note that target students' identities were limited to the four broad racial/ethnic categories used in the current study (Asian, Black, Latino/a, White). Although the inclusion of these four racial/ethnic categories constitutes an empirical expansion beyond prior work, future studies would benefit from referring to target students from more specific racial/ethnic groups—including Native, Indigenous, and Pacific Islander identities—as these groups of students tend to experience over-discipline as well (e.g., Gion et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2019). Similarly, we limited our investigation of student gender to a female/male binary; however, future work should further expand the intersectional approach by exploring teachers' racialized perceptions of trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming students.

Future research may also help to determine whether the findings reported here are broadly generalizable across the U.S., or whether patterns might differ among teachers in other school districts and geographic regions, where other groups of students might be more highly represented or familiar to teachers. We also recognize that our findings may be specific to the unique racial context of the U.S.; further work would be needed to examine whether and how escalation effects apply to teachers' perceptions of different marginalized racial or ethnic groups in other national contexts. The present study demonstrates the utility of an intersectional framework for such investigations.

Recent research suggests that higher proportions of students of color in schools may be linked to heightened tendencies for teachers to 'blame' students (Owens, 2022), suggesting that a fuller understanding of teachers' racialized perceptions of student behavior must take organizational, relational, and individual teacher factors into account. Additionally, as students may benefit from racial/ethnic match with their teachers (Blake et al., 2016; Saft & Pianta, 2001), future studies might also consider how teacher race and gender interact with student race, gender, behavior recurrence, and severity in predicting teacher perceptions of misbehavior—issues we were not able to investigate in the present study, due to an already highly complex research design.

4.2 Implications and conclusions

In this paper, we contribute to a growing literature suggesting that U.S. teachers often respond differently to the same behaviors from Black students, as compared to White students, in ways that may contribute to distinct teacher-student dynamics and likely perpetuate racial disparities in school discipline. Expanding on prior work and utilizing an intersectional approach to student identity, we find preliminary evidence that escalation effects apply mostly to Black students and not to their Latino/a or East

Asian peers; we also find some evidence that the Black escalation effect may apply not only to Black boys, but to Black girls as well. These findings reinforce the view that, although Black boys are especially likely to be subject to disproportionate discipline in schools, we must continue to attend to the experiences of Black girls when considering underlying processes that may shape troublesome dynamics between teachers and students.

Thus, a primary implication of this study is the need to encourage teachers to question their objectivity and guard against racial bias in their perceptions of student misbehavior (Godsil et al., 2017; Ispa-Landa, 2018). Interventions shown to promote emotion regulation and reduce implicit bias (e.g., Emerson et al., 2017; Hirshberg et al., 2019) may allow teachers to interpret students' behaviors more deliberately (Godsil et al., 2017), thereby reducing the influence of implicit bias in their practice. Our findings also support the use of brief interventions promoting empathic responding among teachers, which have been shown to reduce reliance on discipline and improve student-teacher relationships (Okonofua et al., 2020; Okonofua, Paunesku, et al., 2016; Okonofua, Walton, et al., 2016).

With increasing evidence that perceptions of student behavior are often racially biased, schools and educators must consider alternative strategies that are less reliant on punitive and exclusionary practices. Restorative practices—such as those that repair harm and strengthen relationships—may provide alternative ways for teachers to handle misbehavior constructively within classrooms without depending on exclusionary measures that tend to disadvantage students of color (Gregory et al., 2016). Training in restorative approaches, as well as teacher coaching programs focusing on classroom interactions, may also provide teachers with means to build more positive relationships with students across racial and ethnic backgrounds, thereby making them less susceptible to racial bias in their perceptions of student misbehavior and potential (Gregory et al., 2016; Hafen et al., 2015). By combining such efforts toward systemic policy change with support for mindset shifts among teachers (Okonofua et al., 2020), we could realize our potential to make further progress in creating more equitable educational experiences for all youth.

Author contributions C. L. Rucinski and L. R. Tropp developed the study concept and design. Data collection was performed by C. L. Rucinski. T. M. Mandalaywala conducted the data analysis. C. L. Rucinski and T. M. Mandalaywala drafted the initial manuscript, and L. R. Tropp provided substantial edits and revisions. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

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Data availability The data that support the findings of this study are openly available on OSF at https://osf.io/a2wex/?view_only=d28f287799104bd7b85ac920e6c6128f.

Declarations

Compliance with ethical standards All study procedures were approved by the institutional review board at the authors' home institution. Informed consent was obtained from all study participants.

Competing interests The first and third authors have served as research advisors for Perception Institute.

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