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PUPILS OF THE PIPELINE:

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AND DISCIPLINARY ACTORS ON
ADOLESCENT PSYCHOSOCIAL FUNCTIONING

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For my community

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ABSTRACT

Studies suggest that the school context is critical to the psychosocial growth of adolescents, where student experiences can either support or impair normative developmental processes. Disciplinary actors and disciplinary approaches are important components of school climate, often facilitating or diminishing conducive learning environments depending on the way that they address infractions and harm against students. While well-intentioned, some approaches have been found to have a negative impact on elements of student psychosocial functioning. Critical consciousness refers to the development of cognitive and interactive skills to both accurately evaluate and cope with forms of oppression (Diemer & Li, 2011) and may serve as a protective factor against these harsh disciplinary experiences. The current study aims to explore how adolescents experience and interact with different contributing factors of the school-to-prison pipeline—namely student perceptions of disciplinary actors (i.e., teachers, staff, school resource officers), perceptions of disciplinary fairness. This exploratory, sequential mixed method study utilizes PVEST to examine how these factors relate to adolescent psychosocial functioning (self-efficacy, ethnicity identity membership, perceptions of safety, and school connectedness).

Qualitative focus groups (N = 45; 60% female) were first conducted and demonstrated rich descriptions of how students perceive their school environment. Initial themes from the qualitative data were used to develop the quantitative survey. A sample of 455 high school students (61% female) completed the survey and regression, mediation, moderation, and

moderated mediation analyses were run to explore the relation between perception of school disciplinary actors, perceptions of disciplinary fairness, and subsequent strengths-based psychosocial outcomes, with attention to the mediating role of discrimination and the moderating role of critical consciousness. Support from teachers and staff, procedurally just interactions with SROs, and perceived disciplinary fairness were significantly associated with increased reports of perceived safety, self-efficacy, and school connectedness. Moreover, support from teachers and staff and procedurally just interactions with SROs significantly mediated the association of disciplinary fairness with self-efficacy, perceived safety, and school connectedness. Perceived discrimination mediated the relationship between disciplinary actors, perceived safety, and school connectedness. Critical consciousness significantly moderated the relationship between select disciplinary actors and psychosocial outcomes, but only at low and/or moderate levels. Lastly, the moderated mediation model was not supported, however several conditional indirect effects were significant. Exploratory implications from the study are discussed.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Social-ecological literature has long considered the importance of school environment and climate on adolescent development (Chhoun & LeBaron Wallace, 2014; Velez & Spencer, 2018; Zullig et al., 2010). Studies suggest that school context is critical to the psychosocial growth of adolescents, where student experiences can either support or impair normative developmental processes (Battistich et al., 2004; Verhoven et al., 2019). Disciplinary actors (adults in the school that select and carry out discipline) and the disciplinary approaches utilized are important components of school climate, often facilitating productive learning environments by addressing infractions, harm, and violence against students (Amemiya et al., 2020). While well-intentioned, some approaches (such as zero tolerance policies) have been found to have a negative impact on elements of student success and psychosocial functioning (Bachman et al., 2016). One disciplinary actor particular interest is the School Resource Officer (SRO), or a police officer who is embedded in the school. SROs often facilitate zero tolerance policies which, in turn, can contribute to the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Fisher & Hennessey, 2015). The school-to-prison pipeline refers to policies and practices that systemically pushes students out of public schools and into the criminal justice system (Kim, 2009, p. 956; Skiba et al., 2014).

The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force defines zero tolerance policies as a set of procedures that applies predetermined consequences, usually punitive, to student misbehaviors regardless of context or circumstances (American

Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). A report from the American Bar Association describes zero tolerance policies as a “perverse version of mandatory sentencing” as it often takes little to no account of “adolescent development” (American Bar Association, 2001, p. 32; Pesta, 2018). While this description appears brash, it aptly acknowledges how the presiding assumption of zero tolerance policies – removing disruptive students to protect the learning climate for the remaining students – gives power to fixed, disciplinary consequences for adolescent behaviors that are largely developmentally appropriate (e.g., challenging authority, limit testing; American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Cauffman & Steinberg, 2000; Noguera, 2003). This is particularly relevant for Black and Brown adolescents, who disproportionately face exclusionary disciplinary policies compared to their White counterparts (Shirley & Cornell, 2011; Skiba et al., 2014). Reasons for this inequity relate back to systemic inequalities within the school setting, ranging from institutional racism to implicit biases by those that execute such disciplinary approaches (teachers, staff, administrators, SROs) (Ferguson, 2007; Hinojosa, 2008).

When coupled with the historical context of marginalization for youth of color, processes such as critical consciousness may serve as helpful protective factors for student interactions with disciplinary actors and the resulting consequences. Critical consciousness is defined as the development of cognitive and behavioral skills to both accurately appraise and constructively cope with forms of oppression (Diemer & Li, 2011). Therefore, this mixed-methods study aims to explore how adolescents interact with different contributing factors to the school-to-prison pipeline (perceptions and experiences with school disciplinary actors (specifically, teachers, staff, and School Resource Officers) and the disciplinary approaches they apply) and how these experiences relate to adolescent psychosocial functioning within the school setting. Framed

within an identity-focused cultural ecological perspective, this study also seeks to utilize a strengths-based lens to understand the conditions under which youth experience safe, conducive, and productive learning environments from the youth's perspectives.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of School-to-Prison Pipeline: Criminalization in Schools

For many students of color, entrance into the criminal justice system begins in the school setting. The propensity for Black and Brown students to face higher rates of exclusionary discipline (e.g., office referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests) than their White counterparts has been documented for decades, resulting in a phenomenon referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Nance, 2016). The school-to-prison pipeline illustrates the nexus of the public education system and the criminal justice system, facilitated by the increased use of exclusionary discipline, SROs, and referring students directly to law enforcement for school-based offenses (Nance, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Studies suggest that such policies create an environment that increases involvement in the juvenile correction system (Kupchik & Ward, 2014; Nance, 2016; Tyner, 2014).

Concerns regarding this phenomenon have been wide and varying, largely revolving around denying students opportunities for academic achievement (Arcia, 2016; Davis, 2003; Nichols, 2004; Welsh & Payne, 2011), decreased school engagement (Christle et al., 2005; Rausch & Skiba, 2006), increased risk for drop out (Christle et al., 2005; Suh & Suh, 2007), and future involvement in the criminal justice system (Fisher et al., 2018; Pesta, 2018). The racial disparity is highly significant, where students of color are the main victims of this paradigm.

Racial and ethnic minority youth are more likely to be pulled out of the classroom and given harsher punishments for their behavior (Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Skiba et al., 2002; Tyner, 2014; Welsh & Payne, 2011).

While the documented outcomes of the school-to-prison pipeline remain consistent, the definition of the process itself differs slightly depending on the context (e.g., policy briefs, educational advocacy, scholarly works) (ACLU, 2008; Advancement Project, 2011; Burris, 2012; Skiba et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). In an empirical review of the literature, Skiba and colleagues (2014) identified four main thematic attributes of the school to prison pipeline present across disciplines: the systematic usage of school exclusion, how school exclusion usage increases the likelihood of long-term negative outcomes and juvenile justice involvement, the disproportionate use of school exclusion on students of color, and the direction of causality with which students are impacted.

The authors then developed a model identifying exclusionary discipline and school climate as its main conduits. Kuperminc and colleagues (1997) define school climate as the shared values and attitudes that inform interactions between teachers, students, and administrators, establishing school norms and acceptable behaviors (Mitchell et al., 2010). Specifically, Skiba and colleagues (2014) posit that the predictive power of exclusionary discipline on negative outcomes is most likely mediated by “short-term negative outcomes” such as school climate and school engagement. Literature supports this linkage, with findings suggesting that increased use of exclusionary discipline may be associated with more negative perceptions of school climate (Skiba et al., 2014, p.547; Steinberg et al., 2013). Using Skiba and colleagues (2014) model as a framework, this dissertation will focus on exclusionary discipline

and disciplinary actors (a component of school climate) as elements of the school-to-prison pipeline and explore its relation to adolescent psychosocial functioning.

Exclusionary Discipline

Exclusionary discipline approaches (e.g., “zero tolerance policies”) proliferated to promote school safety and positive school climate in response to the rise of school shootings and violence in the early 1990s (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Mears et al., 2019). Now, nearly thirty years later, many studies suggest that zero tolerance policies have morphed into widespread punitive responses that create major risks for students of color (Johnson et al., 2001; Payne & Welch, 2000).

Literature suggests that exclusionary approaches (e.g., office discipline referrals, in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions) are a common tool used by schools to enact discipline (Gregory & Roberts, 2017; Losen et al., 2015; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013; Skiba et al., 2014). Data suggest that exclusionary procedures as a whole have increased substantially over time, despite the fact that the rates of student victimization and violence have dropped consistently since the 1990s (Cook et al., 2010; Welch & Payne, 2011). For example, nearly 3.5 million students in the U.S. were handed out-of-school suspensions during the 2011-2012 school year, out of 49.5 million students enrolled in school (Digest of Education Statistics, 2013; Losen et al., 2015). Moreover, 95 percent of out-of-school suspensions were for nonviolent, minor disruptions such as tardiness or disrespect (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011).

While these policies were designed to prevent school-based violence and crime, findings suggest mixed effectiveness and a host of disadvantages (Skiba et al., 2008). Exclusionary punishment has been especially detrimental for ethnic minority students, with biased

exclusionary punishments directed to students of color (Advancement Project, 2010; Shirley & Cornell, 2011). For example, African American, Latinx/Hispanic, and American Indian students are suspended at twice the rate of their Caucasian peers (COPS, 2016, p.10).

Exclusion is also disproportionately applied to students with disabilities, exposing the intersectional nature of this phenomenon (Gregory et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2018). During the 2011-2012 academic year, students with disabilities serviced by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) were two times more likely to receive an out of school suspension and represented a quarter of the students arrested and referred to law enforcement (Calero et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). For example, Native students with disabilities are twice as likely to face school exclusion than white students in general (National Congress of American Indians, 2014). African American boys with disabilities account for 36% of all suspensions for students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

A gender disparity also exists when considering outcomes related to exclusionary discipline. African American girls are much more likely to be suspended than any other female demographic (Hill, 2018; National Black Women's Justice Institute & Innis-Thompson, 2017). Data derived from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights reports that Black female students were seven times more likely to receive out of school suspensions than White female students (Hill, 2018; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). In the public school system, Black girls were also nearly four times more likely to be arrested in school, more than 2.5 times more likely to be referred to law enforcement, and nearly twice as likely to

be physically restrained than their White counterparts (National Black Women's Justice Institute & Innis-Thompson, 2017).

Additionally, studies suggest that gender minority youth experience disproportionate infractions that are not explained by increased violations. Presenting the first nationally representative study exploring disparities in school discipline among non-heterosexual youth, Himmelstein & Brückner (2011) found that LGBTQIA youth (particularly girls) are more likely to suffer school punishments than their heterosexual peers. Data also demonstrates how intersectionality heightens this disparity. According to the Center for American Progress (2015), Black/ African American and Latinx LGBTQIA youth were more likely to experience discipline in school than their White, Asian, or Pacific Islander peers.

Overall, Skiba and colleagues (2014) found that exclusionary disciplinary approaches are risk factors for negative outcomes such as increased juvenile justice involvement (Fabelo et al., 2011), increased school dropout (Balfanz et al., 2021), and decreased achievement (Arica, 2016) even when controlling for achievement level, demographic factors, or special education status.

Perceived Disciplinary Fairness

Research often relies on school-wide data on school exclusion rates (Casella, 2003; Christle et al., 2005; Fabelo, 2011; Kupchik & Ward, 2014; Skiba, 2000; Skiba et al., 2002) or administrator reports of exclusionary discipline approaches (Mowen & Freng, 2019; Larson et al., 2019; Welch & Payne, 2012) when examining the extent to which elements of the school-to-prison pipeline affect adolescent outcomes. Student reports of whether or not they perceive

exclusionary discipline as faire may provide a more nuanced understanding of how discipline impact students.

Approximately 15% of U.S. students experience school disciplinary consequences per year, on average (this percentage increases significantly for those with marginalized identities; U.S. Department of Education, 2021; Welch & Little, 2018). However, all students are exposed to the disciplinary practices in their schools and the disciplinary actors executing them. In an attempt to make sense of the apparent link between fairness in discipline and effectiveness of discipline, it is useful to turn to the procedural justice literature. Procedural justice indicates that when people feel they have been treated fairly by an authority they are more likely to (voluntarily) comply with the authority and accept the outcome of the authorities' decisions (Tyler, 1990). A procedural justice perspective of school discipline suggests that students' views of the fairness of their schools' policies and procedures may offer insight into whether, and to what degree, students accept the authority of the school as legitimate and worthy of being obeyed.

Procedural fairness literature suggests that when an authority figure makes a decision, people are inclined to assess whether the decision is fair or unfair (Tyler & Blader, 2003; Valcke et al., 2020). Individual's perceptions of fairness may have subsequent effects on their attitudes, values, and behaviors (Tyler & Blader, 2003). Within the school setting, disciplinary fairness may operate in a similar manner.

Disciplinary fairness refers to student perceptions that disciplinary actors exercise fairness and clear rules (Kotok et al., 2018; Ripski & Gregory, 2009). Students that perceive discipline as unfair (for example, disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline for students of

color), they are less likely to consider the discipline as legitimate and are more likely disregard them. This study aims to extend this concept by considering whether perceived disciplinary fairness impacts students' psychosocial functioning as well. The current study will operationalize exclusionary discipline as perceived disciplinary fairness as it may enrich our understanding of the role of exclusionary discipline on student functioning.

Moreover, less attention has been devoted to qualitative student perceptions of disciplinary approaches. This is problematic in that it erases the social reality of student experiences in the literature, ironically paralleling their lack of voice in the disciplinary processes at their respective schools. McNeal and Dunbar (2010) provide a qualitative report of student perspectives, reporting that students identified inadequate security, poor quality of security services, and lack of constancy in rule enforcement. Jones and colleagues (2018) also surveyed qualitative attitudes toward school exclusion. Students cited feelings of being undervalued and unwelcome at school, disruption of learning due to school exclusion, and limited acknowledgment of co-occurring contexts students are dealing with outside of school by staff (Jones et al., 2018). Therefore, the current study will incorporate qualitative perspectives to center student voices.

Disciplinary Actors

Disciplinary actors (e.g., teachers, school staff, SROs;) play a role in the proliferation of practices that further the school-to-prison pipeline. As critical players in school climate and an adolescent's developmental ecology, disciplinary actors often serve as the vehicle between students and school-wide disciplinary practices. Street-level bureaucracy theory is a sociological concept that explains how field-level workers in public service interpret and enact systemic

policies (Akosa & Asare, 2017; Lipsky, 1980; McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). According to Lipsky (1980), street-level bureaucracy theory posits that field-level workers function as policy makers as a result of the agency and discretion they are given within the “organizational bureaucracy” (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010, p. 297). Similarly, street-level bureaucrats in public school education consist of school staff and the public policies in question are zero tolerance policies (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). School staff as street-level bureaucrats hold significant discretion in applying punishments based on these policies and are often subject to personal biases or relationships with students (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). Simply speaking, disciplinary actors determine which students present a disciplinary concern, what is contributing to the concern, and how to address it. Disciplinary approaches selected and applied by disciplinary actors may be reflective of the overall school climate.

Teachers and Staff

Interactions between teachers, staff, and students are dynamically linked to social situations inside the classroom and within the school. Studies suggest positive associations between school climate, academic achievement, social, and personal attitudes (Battistich et al., 1995;), adjustment concerns (Kuperminc et al., 1997), and an inverse relationship with externalizing behaviors (Battistich et al., 1995; Bradshaw et al., 2009; Kuperminc et al., 1997).

The student-disciplinary actor relationship in particular, from teaching to enacting and executing discipline, can serve as interactional spaces for positive development (Chhuon & Wallace, 2014). But for many students of color, these interactions lead to harsher punishments, and thus have negative developmental consequences. For example, Marsh and Cornell (2001) determined that school experiences (e.g., lack of adult support and victimization at school) were

associated with higher rates of risky behavior, more so for African American students. African American students who endorsed having trustworthy and caring teachers who listened were less likely to receive in-school suspensions (Hinojosa, 2008).

Disciplinary actors and discrimination. Additionally, evidence suggests that disciplinary actors may present with inconspicuous negative beliefs about youth of color's penchant for class disruption and insubordination, thus influencing differential application of disciplinary practices (Gregory & Roberts, 2017; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2015). Implicit biases may impact disciplinary decision-making for students of color. For example, Goff and colleagues (2014) found that Black/African American boys are generally viewed as older and more liable for disruption than same-aged White peers.

Another study conducted by researchers at the Yale Child Study Center examined how preschool educators' implicit biases may impact their application of student discipline. When participants were asked to look at a video clip of preschool students interacting and indicate challenging behaviors, Gilliam and colleagues (2016) found that preschool educators tended to gaze at Black boys longer than other students (when no challenging behaviors were present). This suggests a discrepancy in expecting misbehaviors depending on race.

Studies also suggest that certain conditions may enable disciplinary actors' negative beliefs towards students of color (Gregory & Roberts, 2017). McIntosh and colleagues (2014) empirically studied this phenomenon, conceptualizing these contexts as "vulnerable decision points". According to the authors, vulnerable decision points consist of "contextual" disciplinary situations (e.g., teacher decision to make an office referral, administrator decision to suspend) that may increase the chances of bias affecting decision making (Smolkowski et al., 2016, p. 9).

Among a sample of 1,666 elementary schools and 483,686 office discipline referrals, Smolkowski and colleagues (2016) found a significant discrepancy in office discipline referrals between Black/African American students and White students at the end of the school day relative to earlier in the day. The authors posit that teachers may experience a vulnerable decision point at the end of the school day when they are more fatigued, falling susceptible to racial implicit bias and perceive African American student behavior as disruptive (Smolkowski et al., 2016).

Studies suggest that school-level racial threat (the extent to which punitive social controls expand in response to a large proportion of ethnic minorities) is associated with differential student punishment (Crawford et al., 1998; Payne & Welch, 2010; Welch & Payne, 2010). Existing literature on adolescents has also suggested that the correlates of discrimination by adults in school may differ from those associated with discrimination by school peers (Fisher et al., 2000; Wang & Huguley, 2012). Overall, discipline reflects the values and biases of those who shape and execute it (often concerning class, race, ability status and gender; Apple, 1984; Way, 2011). Therefore, student perceptions of discrimination will be examined as a mediator between selected components of the school-to-prison pipeline (disciplinary actors and perceived disciplinary fairness) and psychosocial outcomes.

This is important when examining student perspectives of the implementation of zero tolerance policies by street-level bureaucrats (i.e., teachers, and SROs) as it contributes to adolescent psychosocial functioning.

School Resource Officers (SROs)

Schools often resort to security measures such as school-based policing to carry out exclusionary discipline approaches. As mentioned earlier, School Resource Officers (SROs) are police officers embedded within the school setting (Theriot, 2009). While the original intent of SROs was not to promote exclusionary discipline policies, many have in practice. Closely following the advent of zero tolerance policies, schools partnered with local law enforcement agencies to install police officers on campus (May et al., 2018). SROs have proliferated across American high school campuses in the past decade (James & McCallion, 2013; Na & Gottfredson, 2013; Theriot, 2009). In 2006, the National Association of School Resource Officers identified school-based policing as the fastest growing area of law enforcement (Holland, 2006). In 2007, a nationally representative survey of school crime found that 69% of students aged 12-18 reported the presence of security guards and/or law enforcement officials in their schools (Dinkes et al., 2009; Na & Gottfredson, 2013). Federal funding has supported the growth of school-based policing. Via the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program, the U.S. Department of Justice invested over \$750 million in grants to local police departments to hire more than 6,500 new SROs between 1999 and 2009 (Merkwae, 2015; Tocci, 2020).

Combined with the increased rates of juvenile crime of the late 80s and 90s and bolstered by funding from the Department of Justice, SRO placements have become well-established (and in many circles, highly regarded) agents of school safety (Jackson, 2002; May et al., 2004; Na & Gottfredson, 2013; Theriot, 2009). However, the impetus to install SROs in schools has occurred independently of any conclusive evidence as to their positive effects on student – findings have

been mixed at best (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016). Wilkinson (2001) examined school-level suspension data before and after the installation of SROs and found no effect of their presence on school exclusion rates. However, the findings also suggested a gender disparity, where female students experienced more suspensions after SRO implementation, but not males.

An examination of the relationship between SRO presence and school-based arrests found that having an SRO in the school reduced the arrest rate for weapon charges, and did not predict more total arrests (Theriot, 2009). May and colleagues (2018) counter the narrative that SROs alone refer more students to law enforcement for minor offenses, rather it is the school disciplinary actors (e.g., schools, administrators) that contribute more to referrals.

Moreover, perhaps the most notable controversy surrounding SROs is the concern that they promote the school-to-prison pipeline. The presence of police in schools may lead to criminal consequences for behavior that would otherwise have warranted much less harsh disciplinary intervention (e.g., a trip to the principal's office) (Javdani, 2019). Several bodies of literature support these concerns. A meta-analysis of seven quasi-experimental studies examining the influence of SROs on school discipline suggested that the presence of SROs in public schools related to increased rates of exclusionary discipline over time (Fisher & Hennessy, 2016; Javdani, 2019). Theriot (2016) demonstrated the role of SRO-student interaction on school engagement, where any SRO interaction was associated with lower feelings of connectedness to school (Theriot, 2016).

Further, SRO discretion has been associated with greater criminalization of students of color (Merkwae, 2015). Together with work showing that juvenile arrests predict a decreased likelihood of subsequent graduation and employment (Theriot, 2016), these limited data present

a seemingly negative picture of the impact of SROs. Studies also suggest that schools that utilize both school exclusion and SROs contribute to the number of youths referred to law enforcement for less severe offenses (May et al., 2018; Rhodes & Clinkinbeard, 2020).

As with most social phenomena, the presence of SROs are largely ecologically driven. Students residing in low-SES communities are more likely attend schools with intense security measures such as metal detectors and x-ray machines, and SROs (Nance, 2013; Tocci, 2020). Civil rights data from the U.S. Department of Education details that regular SRO presence at a school increases the likelihood of referrals to law enforcement, even when controlling for criminal activity, demographic information, and variation in state laws (Nance, 2016). Moreover, despite there not being evidence suggesting students of color exhibit higher rates of misbehavior, SRO presence in schools was associated with increased behavior referrals to law enforcement for minority students (Mbekeani-Wiley et al., 2017).

SROs and Procedural Justice. When examining how SRO presence in schools relate to student psychosocial functioning, it may be helpful to utilize a procedural justice lens. Legal socialization refers to the process through which adolescents develop attitudes regarding legal institutions, authority figures, and beliefs about the law. It is shaped by exposure to both macro- and micro-level legal systems in one's society (Fine et al., 2021; Granot et al., 2021; Tyler & Trikner, 2018). Studies suggest that both the quality of decision-making (impartial and transparent processes) and treatment of citizens (treating individuals with dignity and respect) contribute to police behaviors that are procedurally just (Fagan & Tyler, 2005; Valcke et al., 2020). Individuals who evaluate police and police-adjacent officers (e.g., SROs) actions as procedurally just, are more likely to perceive interactions as positive (Mazerolle et al., 2013).

Research indicates that when youth in particular experience procedural justice from law enforcement figures, it signals a sense of group inclusiveness (i.e., belonging) in the community the law enforcement figure is meant to represent (Van Petegem et al. 2021). This study aims to extend this concept to include SROs and the explore the influence of procedurally just interactions with adolescents.

Scholarly inquiry exploring the relationship on the relationship between the role of SROs as a disciplinary actor on student outcomes are limited. Granot and colleagues (2021) conducted one of first studies exploring the influence of SROs on legal socialization and adolescent perceptions of the procedural justice of the police in and out of school. The authors found that procedural justice perceptions of SROs were associated with academic success, anxiety, and identification with the school community. Moreover, an experimental study found that Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx participants who endorsed procedurally just encounters with societal actors, it strengthened their societal belongingness (Valcke et al., 2021). The current study hopes to extend this finding to adolescents of color within the school context, examining the influence of SROs who behave in a procedurally just manner.

Project Setting

Components of the school-to-prison pipeline are particularly significant in Illinois, specifically the Chicagoland area. A report from the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice described the recidivism crisis in the state, stating that it's juvenile justice system perpetuates a cycle where it serves as a "feeder system" to the adult criminal justice system (Haggerty, 2011; Scott & Saucedo, 2013). The criminalization of urban schools in Illinois has been based on zero

tolerance policies and the installation of SROs (Mbekeani-Wiley, 2017), significantly impacting Black and Brown students.

Moreover, the Chicagoland area presents a unique context to explore the impact of SRO presence in schools. At the start of the millennium, Illinois police departments received more than \$3.2 million in federal funding for the hiring of police officers in schools statewide (Spencer, 2000) expanding the number of police officers walking the halls. A total of 585 Chicago Police Department (CPD) officers were employed in schools by 2006 (Mbekeani-Wiley, 2017). As of August 2020, 72 out of the 93 district run CPS schools have SROs (Chicago Public Schools, 2020). A report from the City of Chicago Office of Inspector General stated that nearly 3,000 people were arrested on or near CPS property between 2017 and 2019. Seventy eight percent of the arrestees identified as African American and 18% were Latinx (Lawrence, 2020; Tocci, 2020).

The long history of inconsistent and limited directives for SROs has been problematic given CPD's history of racism and scandals that have contributed to the distrust between the department and communities of color (Department of Justice, 2017; Futterman, Hunt & Kalven, 2016). Between 2012-2016, SROs accumulated around \$2 million in misconduct settlements for activities conducted on and off school grounds (Mbekani-Wiley et al., 2017). The 180 SROs and 21 School Liaison Supervisors assigned to CPS have accrued 2,354 misconduct complaints against them combined (Ortiz et al., 2020; Tocci, 2020). As of April 2016, 67% of Chicago SROs had complaints lodged against them by the Independent Police Review Authority, 31% had three or more complaints lodged against them, and 11% had ten or more (Mbekani-Wiley et al., 2017). African American youths also comprise 40% of the CPS student population but 60%

of law enforcement referrals and school arrests (Mbekeani-Wiley et al., 2017), continuing the alienating relationship between youth of color and the police.

In 2008, an intergovernmental agreement was ratified between CPD and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) (Chicago Police Department, 2008). For over ten years, the CPD lacked directives to address SRO specific recruitment, selection, placement, training, or evaluation (Mbekeani-Wiley, 2017) for CPS. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between CPS and CPD was recently signed for the 2019 – 2020 school year, establishing Local School Councils (LSCs) that would determine the need for an SRO at their school, selection criteria for SROs, codified roles and responsibilities, and mandatory training (Chicago Public Schools, 2020). Given the recent rollout of the program revisions, not much can be said of their effectiveness.

In June 2020, the Chicago Teachers Union Education Policy Department presented research supporting the termination of the \$33 million contract between Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Police Department (DiOnofrio, 2020). These data were presented in the backdrop of 2020 nationwide Police-Free School movement, following the collective cognizance of police injustice and racial injustice in the United States (Tocci, 2020). Shortly after, Chicago Public Schools released internal data detailing administrator, teachers/staff, student, LSCs, community members, and parent report of SRO presence in CPS (Chicago Public Schools, 2020).

Survey findings suggested that administrators, teachers, LSCs, parents, and students felt positive to neutral regarding whether SROs keep students safe in school, with administrators reporting very positive views of SROs. Community members indicated neutral to negative feelings. The survey data failed to breakdown reports demographically but did indicate the

disproportionate number of police notifications for African American students on a district level. The movement promoting the removal of officers from city schools and the reinvesting of funds into restorative justice and additional staffing for mental health professionals indicates the significance of this issue, particularly for students of color. The current study utilizes data from Chicago and the Chicagoland area with similar characteristics.

Control Variables

In the school discipline literature, several studies present a strong case that, above and beyond individual, family, school, and community risk factors, exclusionary discipline critically relates to negative outcomes (Skiba et al., 2014). Example studies have controlled for SES (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Wallace et al., 2008), risky student behavior (Skiba et al., 2011), and past achievement (Fabelo et al., 2011). In line with previous scholarship, the current study will control for neighborhood environment and student risk within the school to demonstrate that the components of the school-to-prison pipeline may impact psychosocial functioning, without the influence of contextual factors.

Adolescent Psychosocial Functioning

Zero tolerance policies are largely punitive and reactive rather than proactive, often failing to address the risk factors plighting youth that may lead to negative outcomes (Mears et al., 2019). Elements of adolescent psychosocial functioning are fostered within the school context, where particular messages are communicated to adolescents via interactions with and perceptions of school disciplinary actors, experiences with exclusionary discipline, school climate norms and expectations (Verhoven et al., 2019). In addition to investigating perceptions of school disciplinary actors and exclusionary discipline, this project aims to explore how such

approaches may inform adolescent psychosocial functioning (specifically, self-efficacy, perceived safety, ethnic identity membership, school connectedness by drawing insight from the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST).

Theoretical Framework: The Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory

When examining the role of the school to prison pipeline on adolescent psychosocial functioning, it is important to consider student context and student perceptions. Spencer's (1995) Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) is a comprehensive, strengths-based framework that illustrates how individuals perceive and respond to the different stages of human development, within various contextual factors (risk, protective, stress, coping processes) (Spencer et al., 1995). PVEST takes an identity-focused cultural ecological perspective, suggesting that youth self-concept and identity are informed by social structures and cultural influences (Spencer et al., 1997; Swanson et al., 2003). In their report, the APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents described PVEST as an "important contribution to the study of resilience among African American children and youth" as it is one of the few theories that comprehensively considers the ecological contexts unique to youth of color (APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents, 2008, p. 28).

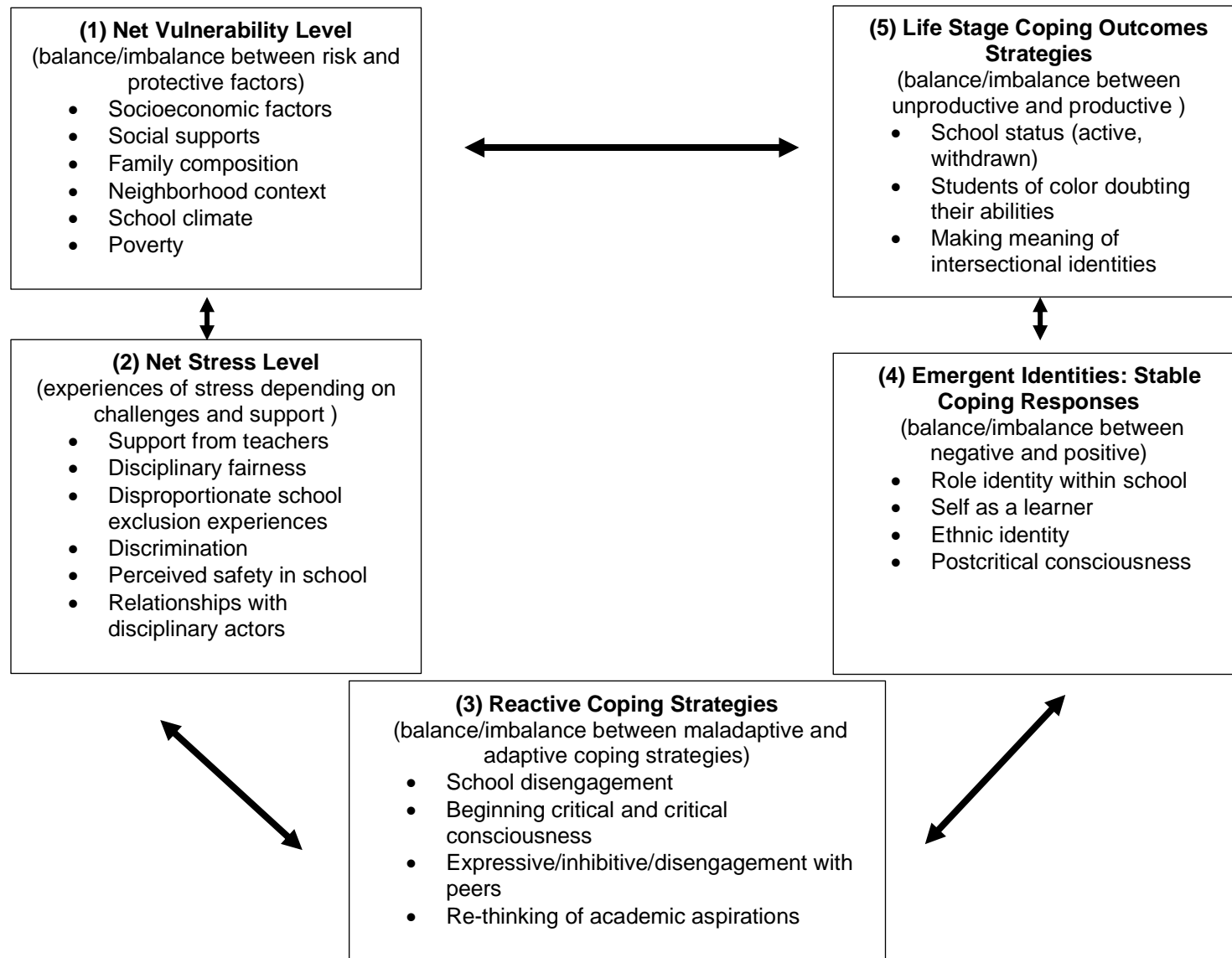
Unlike ecological systems theory, the PVEST model is process-orientated, developmentally focused, and cyclical (Spencer et al., 2003). The model itself includes five main phases that an individual experiences repeatedly over a lifetime: (1) an individual's level of vulnerability (i.e., the presence of both risks and protective factors in a person's life), (2) stress as a normative experience, (3) the need for reactive coping responses from an individual, (4) the

role of emergent identities (i.e., stable coping responses), and (5) links with stage-specific productive and/or unproductive coping outcomes (Spencer, 2003, 2006). A defining feature of PVEST is the fact that there is balance between risks and support within these processes; while adolescents of color are impacted by the risk contributors in their lives, they are also experiencing available supports (e.g., social support, familial support). The push and pull between risks and supports can produce dissonance-producing situations and impact self-appraisal (Spencer et al., 2003). PVEST suggests that adolescents may employ reactive coping methods to resolve said situations

Throughout these processes, individuals make meaning dependent on how they respond to each of the phases which, in turn, informs self-appraisal and identity development (Velez & Spencer, 2018). For example, youth can experience varying levels of vulnerability (risk and protective factors), which influence how they respond to stress (dependent on the individual's level of vulnerability), resulting in either helpful or unhelpful coping responses which, in turn, inform identity development.

Studies suggest that youth of color are cognizant of the systematic biases and injustices that are related to their racial group membership (Spencer et al., 1997; Wang & Hughley, 2012). Student experiences with discrimination occurring within schools have adverse effects on these adolescents' developmental outcomes, particularly for African American males (Chavous et al., 2008; Swanson et al., 2002). By utilizing an identity-focused, cultural ecological framework, PVEST can help make meaning of the psychosocial effects of systematic oppression apparatuses, such as exclusionary disciplinary practices, particularly for students of color (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual Model within PVEST Framework (adapted from Hope & Spencer, 2017)



School Connectedness

School connectedness is a multidimensional construct that involves the student's attitude and investment towards school, feeling of belonging within the school, and the belief in the fairness of the school (Theriot, 2016). Adolescents who feel a higher sense of school connectedness report higher levels of emotional well-being (McNeely et al., 2002). Studies suggest that lower levels of school connectedness can predict later violent behavior, and student safety also plays a role in school connectedness (Theriot, 2016). While designed to promote safety, intensive security measures (e.g., metal detectors, x-ray machines, locker searches, SRO presence) designed to make schools safer, may actually make students feel more anxious and unsafe, decreasing school connectedness (Theriot, 2016). School connectedness also relies heavily on school climate, which is defined as "shared beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape interactions between students, teachers, and administrators and set the parameters of acceptable behavior and norms for the school" (Bracy, 2011: 368).

Perceived Safety

School safety is critical in ensuring conducive learning environments for students. In 2020, The National Youth Rights Association determined "The Right to Physical Safety and Support" as an essential right in their youth-driven Student Bill of Rights, emphasizing the importance safety in schools (National Youth Rights Association, 2020). Several measures installed to promote school safety (such as metal detectors, locker searches, and video cameras) have been found to have more deleterious effects and seen as more punitive than anything else (Bracy, 2011).

The role of school safety on student outcomes has been examined at length in the literature (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Studies suggest that when students perceive their school environment as unsafe, they are more likely to avoid school (Hughes et al., 2015) or carry weapons for protection (Lenzi et al., 2017; Kakar, 1998). Poor school safety has also been associated with decreased academic achievement and increased externalizing symptoms. For example, Milam and colleagues (2010) found that when students worry about self-protection at school, their attention to schoolwork and overall academic performance decreases. Student identity also plays a role in perceptions of school safety, where several studies indicate that students from marginalized identities report more fear (Lacoe, 2014). Juvonen and colleagues (2006) found that African American and Latino students felt safer in school when their classrooms were more ethnically diverse.

Mooji & Fettelaar (2013) developed a theoretical model identifying several school leadership and structure features that impact student perceptions of safety such as quality of teachers support, pedagogical policy, and school discipline (Lenzi et al., 2017). As such, student perceptions of safety will be examined as an outcome of interest.

Adolescent Self-Efficacy

Zero tolerance policies are largely reactive rather than proactive, often failing to address the risk factors plighting youth that may lead to negative outcomes (Mears et al., 2019). In doing so, we fail to obtain an understanding of how such factors impact their psychosocial functioning, particularly their self-efficacy. Adolescent self-efficacy is largely formed within the school context, where particular messages – either purposefully or unpurposfully – are communicated to adolescents regarding their self-appraisal and goal-setting behaviors and what they deserve

through differentiation of discipline, expectations, and school climate norms (Bandura, 1986; Verhoven et al., 2019).

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief to perform and execute tasks in different situations (Bandura, 1986). According to Social Cognitive Theory, individuals learn within social environments and are shaped/actively shape their environment and others (Bandura, 1986). The concept of self-efficacy emerged from Social Cognitive Theory, as one's belief to perform and execute tasks is largely informed by an individual's intrinsic capacities and environmental factors within the social environment (Tsang et al, 2012). Given that school is a social environment, self-efficacy is an important developmental outcome.

While self-efficacy is usually defined in terms of a specific domain (e.g., academic self-efficacy, career self-efficacy), it may be helpful to explore a global sense of self-efficacy to accommodate the various tasks and goals adolescents are expected to engage in during this developmental period. Generalized self-efficacy is a global sense of competence across various domains. For students of color, self-efficacy is particularly relevant when considering PVEST. Self-efficacy impacts the goals individuals undertake, decision-making processes, task initiation, stress when encountering certain tasks, adaptive or maladaptive thought patterns (Caraway et al., 2018; Tsang et al., 2012). All of these components inform how adolescents see themselves and inform their identity development. Therefore, self-efficacy will also be explored as an outcome.

Ethnic Identity Membership

Ethnic and racial identity membership refers to the extent to which an individual's self-appraisal is derived from their ethnicity and the related cultural value and significance (Phinney,

1992; Utsey, 2002). Ethnic and racial identity is an imperative component of self-concept and development. During the exploratory stage of adolescence, ethnic and racial identity often intertwine with an individual's sense of self, thus impacting how the individual appraises different situations as well as copes with stressors (Carter & Reynolds, 2011; Mandara et al., 2009).

Fostering youth identity formation is critical to development for youth of color, as ethnic and racial identity often intertwine with an individual's sense of self, thus impacting how the individual appraises different situations as well as copes with stressors (Carter & Reynolds, 2011; Mandara et al., 2009). Many studies support this notion, suggesting that ethnic and racial identity membership are related to psychological well-being, positive self-evaluation, lower rates of depressive symptoms, and self-esteem (Mandara et al., 2009; Phinney, 1993).

Critical Consciousness

This project also aims to examine how youth critical consciousness may serve as a protective factor in the relationship between perceptions of components of the school-to-prison pipeline and psychosocial development. In his seminal work, Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire defines critical consciousness as the capacity to evaluate, navigate, and challenge the oppressive social forces influencing one's life and community (Frere, 1978; Seidel et al., 2017). Watts and colleagues (2011) present critical consciousness as potentially informing youth development by shifting social agency to marginalized youth.

Contemporary work conceptualizing critical consciousness has operationalized three main processes 1) critical reflection, 2) political efficacy/critical motivation, and 3) critical action (Watts et al., 2011). Critical reflection consists of recognizing and morally objecting to systemic

inequities (i.e., social, racial/ethnicity, sexuality, gender), while critically reflecting on how they harm well-being and oppress youth agency (Watts et al., 2011). Political efficacy refers to the perceived ability to impact social change via individual/collective activism (e.g., voting, protests, community organizing). When individuals feel as though they can elicit change, they are more likely to engage in critical action (specific individual or collective steps taken to make change such as voting, protests, and/or community organizing) (Watts et al., 2011).

Critical consciousness is also a developmental process, where individuals start at a very limited sense of critical consciousness that, when cultivated, develops over time. Several studies suggest that there are four phases of critical consciousness: precritical, beginning critical, critical, and postcritical (Thomas et al., 2014; Watts et al., 1999). Precritical consciousness refers to a lack of awareness of inequality while beginning critical consciousness stage states that the individual begins to acknowledge the existence of social inequalities and their consequences. The critical phase refers to a solid understanding of critical consciousness and, when in the postcritical phase, individuals possess a sophisticated view of critical consciousness and are actively working to be agents of change in their communities to work against oppression (Thomas et al., 2014; Heberle et al., 2020). Watts and colleagues (2011) determined that processes such as group dialogue can be helpful in cultivating critical consciousness and promote its development over time.

Studies suggest that critical consciousness increases youth's cognizance and commitment to challenge pervasive injustice (Ginwright, 2010; Thomas et al., 2014). Critical consciousness is thought to help marginalized youth overcome structural and institutional constraints on self-agency and improve self-concept (Diemer & Li, 2011; Watts et al., 1999). Critical consciousness

has been associated with urban African American youth's mental health (Zimmerman et al., 1999), school engagement (O'Connor, 1997), and civic engagement (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Ginwright (2010) discusses how the critical consciousness of oppressive social structures can help address feelings of self-blame for one's challenges and invigorate a sense of engagement in social justice. Critical consciousness about racism, specifically, can motivate black students to resist oppressive forces through persisting in school and achieving in academics (Carter, 2008), and empowering youth to view the world as agents of change rather than victims of circumstances (Thomas et al., 2014).

Examining critical consciousness as a protective factor falls in line with the PVEST model, as it can be viewed as a reactive coping strategy youth can tap into when given the opportunity (Hope & Spencer, 2017). That is, if youth are able to understand structural inequalities (i.e., elements of the school to prison pipeline) and feel compelled to act on their insights and believe that they have the opportunity to enact social change, they may be more readily able to cope with the potentially negative effects of the institution-based inequities.

Utilizing Mixed Methods

To address the topics under review, this study utilized a mixed method research approach. The use of mixed methodology has become increasingly popular in contemporary research, drawing upon the development, integration, and application of both quantitative and qualitative data (Doyle et al., 2009). As an autonomous research paradigm in its own, mixed methods research is simply defined as the integration of both qualitative and quantitative "strands" (study components that represent the research process, e.g., data collection, analysis, and interpretation; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). However, the design is not without

controversy. Mixed method approaches have been criticized and lauded in the last four decades, with advocates citing the approach's ability to highlight gaps in the research that one paradigm cannot address and critics noting inconsistency amongst researchers on what constitutes as mixed methods research (Robbins et al., 2008). Despite the controversial debate in the literature, by combining two seemingly diametrically opposed methods (the forced choice, positivist quantitative and the interpretive, constructivist qualitative), mixed method research designs seek to counterbalance limitations and offer stronger inferences (Creswell et al., 2003; Doyle et al., 2009).

Mixed methodologies have increased in popularity in the social, behavioral, and education sciences over the past decade, aligning both numeric and narrative data to allude to the same conclusions, thus improving validity (Andrezejewski et al., 2019; Mertens, 2010). Some scholars acknowledge the presence of privilege in relying on inferential statistical analyses alone. For example, Gillborn (2010) notes that numerical data may hide dominant discourses and encode information about societal processes in the findings, namely those concerning structural and institutional racism in education. To reconcile this, some scholars point to the manner in which mixed method studies offer a more justice-oriented, transformative framework. Mertens (2010) notes the importance of transformative paradigms for researchers interested in justice and equity, and how the complementary nature of qualitative and quantitative data may reconcile these tensions.

Mixed methods research designs are also prevalent in the school to prison pipeline literature. Examples include exploring school to prison pipeline programming in schools (Fader et al., 2015), to the examining the impacts of discipline approaches for students of color in

Alabama school districts (Adrezejewski et al., 2019). As such, an exploratory, sequential mixed methods research design was selected for this study for three reasons: to allow for greater validity in the study by seeking corroboration between quantitative data and qualitative data, instrument development, and offering a more transformative approach.

The Present Study

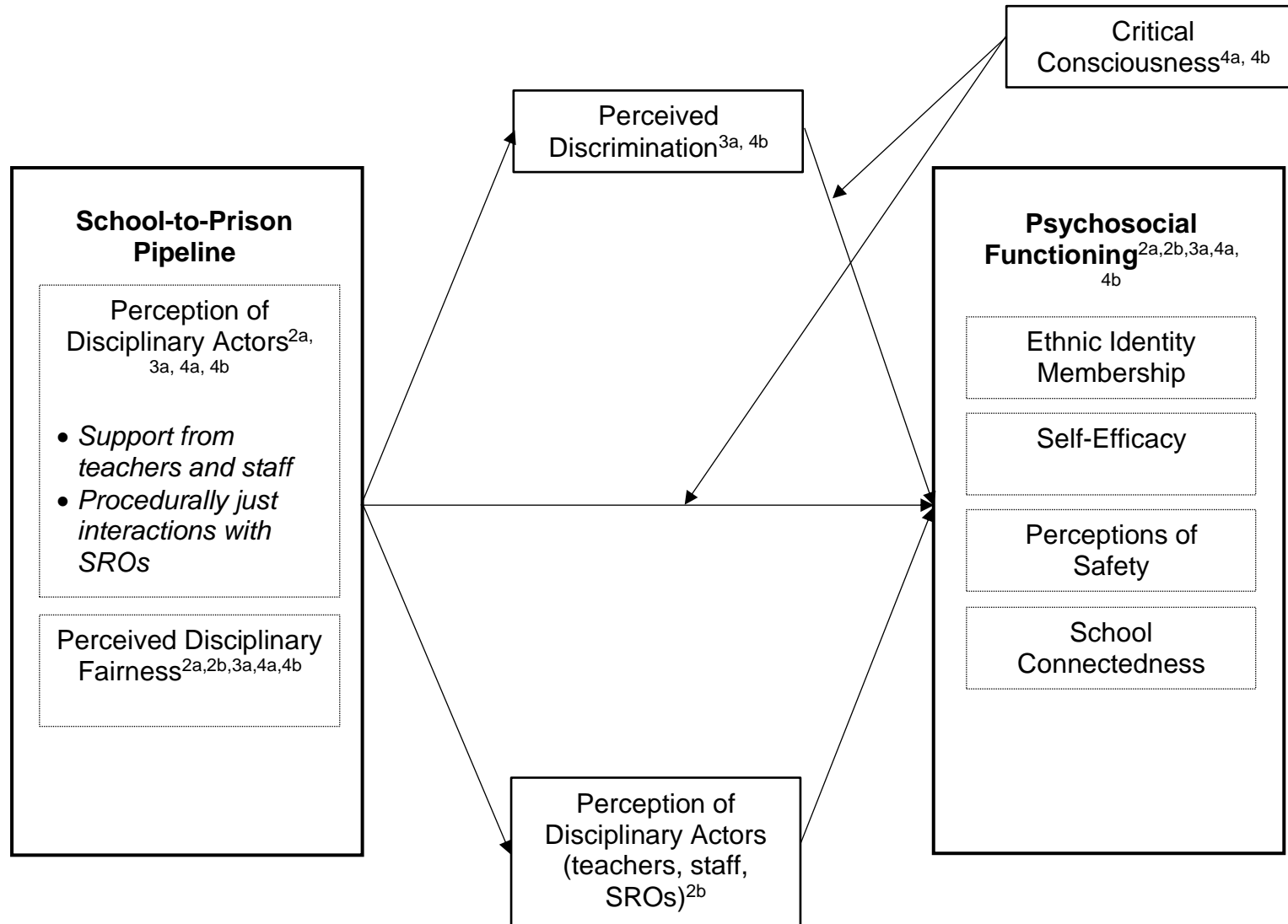
Adolescence represents a critical stage in identity development. In this stage, youth begin to discover and construct their identity by “trying on” goals, values, and beliefs (Waterman, 1984). Therefore, this study sought to explore the relationships between components of the school-to-prison pipeline (i.e., student perceptions of disciplinary actors and perceived exclusionary discipline approaches) and adolescent psychosocial functioning. Given the fact that positive connections with schools provide an important frame through which adolescents negotiate their lives (Brody et al., 2001) and limited literature on these factors as they relate to the school-to-prison pipeline, student sense of belonging in school, perception of safety in schools, adolescent self-efficacy, and ethnic identity membership (in line with PVEST) will be examined in particular. Perceived discrimination and will be assessed as a mediator and critical consciousness will be examined as a moderator (see Figure 2). A strengths-based lens was used, in contrast, in a field of study that is majority deficits-based. In doing so, this study sought to gain an understanding how adolescents may cope with components of the school-to-prison pipeline and how that, in turn, relates to youth psychosocial functioning.

The study used a mixed-methods approach to examine the variables of interest, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods (Bulanda & McCrea, 2012; Denscombe, 2008; Saldana, 2014; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). An exploratory, sequential mixed method design

was used in particular, where qualitative data was collected first, and then quantitative (see Chapter 3).

Moreover, the study obtained direct student perspectives by employing a Youth Advisory Board to advise the project. The goal of the Youth Advisory Board was to give youth an opportunity to contribute to the methodology – shaping how questionnaires can best capture the concerns and needs of the community. Specifically, the Youth Advisory Board reviewed initial qualitative data to help inform the development of quantitative surveys. In doing so, knowledge generated was more likely to be culturally relevant and will allow a more incisive examination of youth experiences with the school-to-prison pipeline.

Figure 2. Conceptual Model



Research Questions

The overall goal of the study is to investigate the association between adolescent perceptions of two critical components of the school-to-prison pipeline, disciplinary actors (teachers, staff, and SROs), perceptions of disciplinary approaches, and psychosocial functioning. Specifically, the study centers on the following variables: support from teachers and staff, procedurally just interactions with SROs, perceived disciplinary fairness, perceived discrimination, critical consciousness, self-efficacy, ethnic identity membership, perceived safety, and school connectedness. Doing so, the study sought to demonstrate the psychosocial implications of school environments with a propensity to increase youth involvement in the criminal justice system, particularly for Black and Brown adolescents.

This dissertation utilizes a two-pronged approach to examine the following research questions and related hypotheses:

Research Question 1. How do students qualitatively perceive school environment based upon their experiences/relationships with disciplinary actors, fairness, disciplinary practices, school connectedness, and identity-based experiences?

Research Question 2. How do student perceptions of the contributing factors of the school to prison pipeline affect adolescent psychosocial functioning within the school context? Specifically, how do student perceptions of disciplinary actors and exclusionary discipline policies relate to students' ethnic identity membership, self-efficacy, perception of safety, and school connectedness?

Hypothesis 2a. Students who endorse negative perceptions of disciplinary actors (lack of support with teachers and staff, procedurally unjust interactions with SROs) and unfair disciplinary approaches will report lower ratings of psychosocial functioning.

Hypothesis 2b. Perceptions of disciplinary actors (support from teachers and staff, procedurally just interactions with SROs) will mediate the relationship between disciplinary fairness and psychosocial functioning.

Research Question 3. The use of disciplinary strategies that are perceived to be unfair are often associated with confrontational student–teacher interactions, which could promote more negative views of school climate for all students (Payne & Welch, 2010). Will youth perceptions of discrimination mediate the relation of student perceptions of disciplinary actors (teachers/staff, SROs), disciplinary fairness, and psychosocial functioning?

Hypothesis 3a. Perceived discrimination will mediate the effect of perceptions of disciplinary actors and unfair disciplinary approaches on psychosocial functioning. As such, disciplinary strategies that are perceived to be more unfair will predict to lack of support from teachers/staff and procedurally unjust interactions with SROs which, in turn, will predict lower scores on self-report measures of psychosocial functioning.

Research Question 4. How will critical consciousness moderate the relationship between student perceptions of the contributing factors of the school to prison pipeline and adolescent psychosocial functioning?

Hypothesis 4a. Critical consciousness will moderate the relationship between student perceptions of disciplinary actors, disciplinary fairness, and adolescent psychosocial functioning. Specifically, the relationship between negative perceptions of disciplinary actors (lack of support

from teachers and staff, procedurally unjust interactions with SROs), disciplinary fairness, and psychosocial functioning will be weaker for youth who report higher levels of critical consciousness.

Hypothesis 4b. Student experiences of discrimination may operate as a mechanism of change between perceptions of disciplinary actors, disciplinary fairness, and psychosocial functioning depending on student ratings of critical consciousness. As such, critical consciousness will moderate the indirect effect of perceived discrimination on the relationship between perceptions of disciplinary actors (support from teachers and staff, procedurally just interactions from SROs), disciplinary fairness, and psychosocial functioning.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The current research aims to examine the role of school disciplinary actors and disciplinary architecture on the psychosocial functioning of adolescents. In particular, the study offers both an objective and subjective exploration of this relationship, examining student perceptions of disciplinary actors, disciplinary approaches. Given that the study aimed to explore these topics from the youth perspective, a sequential, exploratory mixed methods design was utilized.

This research design is comprised of two separate phases: qualitative and then quantitative (Berman et al., 2017; Creswell et al., 2003, 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2015). Qualitative data were collected first, followed by preliminary analyses. The initial themes that emerged were then used to drive the development of the quantitative survey. In doing so, the survey questions were developed with the student perspective in mind. Three stages of analyses were conducted sequentially: after the primary qualitative data collection phase, after the secondary quantitative data collection phase, and at the integration phase, connecting both quantitative and qualitative stages while expanding upon the preliminary qualitative findings. Data from the current study were collected as a part of a larger study examining student perceptions of justice in schools (Granot & Richards, 2022).

Study methodology will be presented in the order of the research design: qualitative followed by quantitative. Focus groups were first conducted to explore the youth perspective on

justice in schools, concepts related to fairness, school safety, school connectedness, personal identity, and critical consciousness. Specifically, students were asked to provide insight on their experiences with three forms of justice in schools: 1) exclusionary discipline, 2) restorative justice, and 3) student experiences/interactions with their teachers, administrators, and school resource officer (SRO) at their school, as part of a larger project. Data for the current study focuses on student perceptions of disciplinary actors, school discipline, school connectedness and safety, discrimination, self-efficacy, and critical consciousness.

Qualitative

Qualitative data are reported following COREQ, the formal reporting guidelines for qualitative studies (Tong et al., 2007).

Study Design

To assess the constructs of interest, a focus group protocol was developed. Focus groups are semi-structured interviews centered on group discussions involving 4-12 people (Tong et al., 2007). Facilitators initiate and guide the focus groups by asking questions focused on the topic of interest. Participants are then allowed answer individually and interact with each other, encouraging interaction and exploring shared perspectives (Tong et al., 2007; O.Nyumba et al., 2018).

The focus group protocol (see Appendix A) was developed using a grounded theory approach. Grounded Theory is an approach for developing theory that is "grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 231). Grounded theory was selected to help develop a conceptual framework that best describes student experiences in school, built upon by an inductive analysis of the data (i.e., the student's own words). It is an empirical process used to explain phenomena, experiences, and actions or events. That is, the

focus groups were conducted with the goal of allowing a theory to emerge from the data, and not conversely (Tie et al., 2019). Space was also provided for students to reflect on changes in their school experiences due to COVID-19 (e.g., remote learning vs. in-person learning).

Data Collection

Sampling. Historically marginalized urban public schools are of highest risk of perpetuating the school-to-prison pipeline and often struggle from lack of resources for adequate education and mental health services in schools (Skiba et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2010). Illinois and northern Indiana state survey data identified a number of urban high school districts in the Chicagoland area with majority student of color populations (i.e., Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latinx, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander) (Indiana Department of Education, 2020; Illinois Report Card, 2019). Moreover, due to the large suspension gap between students of color and White students (Steinberg & Sartain, 2015), schools with a student body that identifies majority student of color were targeted specifically, as well as located in high poverty communities in the Chicagoland area (at least 30% of households living below the poverty threshold). This is due to the disproportionate application of exclusionary discipline to urban students of color.

As such, this study utilized homogenous purpose sampling to recruit students who share particular characteristics and have the potential to provide and relevant data pertinent to the research question (Guest, 2021; Tong et al., 2007). Given disruptions related to COVID-19, the study recruited students from community organizations in the greater Chicagoland area, who attended high schools meeting or close to criteria (see Appendix).

Participants. Forty-five high school students were recruited across three community organizations and one high school in the Chicagoland area (mean age = 16.81; 60.5% female-

identified, 39.5% male-identified; 65.1% Black/African American, 20.9% Asian, 4.7% White/Caucasian, 2.3% Hispanic/Latinx, 4.7% Mixed Race; 2.3% Other). Regarding grade level, 22.7% of the sample were high school sophomores, 27.3% were juniors, and 43.2% were seniors. Two students (4.5%) were recent high school graduates. Nearly 5% of the sample had school accommodations.

Five focus groups were conducted. Formal recruitment procedures included screening students based on inclusion criteria and informed assent and consent (for youth under the age of 18). Inclusion criteria included the following: attending a high school in the Chicagoland area that employs a full time SRO and utilizes exclusionary discipline, completion of 9th grade to ensure that the students have experienced a full year of in person classes at their respective high school. Participation in the study was voluntary and youth responses were confidential. The protocol was approved by Loyola University Chicago's Institutional Review Board and formal agreements were signed and approved by each high school and community organization.

Procedures. Research staff met with community collaborators from each site to assist with recruitment. Communication with participants was done via phone and email. Upon agreeing to participate, students completed informed assent and parental consent online forms through Qualtrics. Focus groups were then conducted over Zoom. On the day of each focus group, 2-3 facilitators guided the proceedings and assigned confidential identification numbers to each student to mask their identity. Each student also completed a preliminary survey on Qualtrics at the start to obtain demographic information. Group facilitators used the focus group protocol to conduct a semi-structured group discussion; each focus group lasted approximately two hours and was recorded.

Following completion of the focus group, students were given \$20 in compensation via cash transfer, cash, or gift card for their time and signed receipts.

Focus group recordings were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents by trained research assistants (RAs), and transcripts were reviewed by the author to ensure saturation. Data saturation refers to the point at which no new information or themes are observed that inform the research data (Guest, 2021). This can be likened to conducting a power analysis with quantitative data. Given the relative homogeneity of the sample (i.e., specific inclusion criteria), saturation was achieved by conducting at least five focus groups, the empirically-supported number of focus groups required to achieve 90% saturation (Guest et al., 2017).

Qualitative Analytic Plan

Coding. Focus group transcripts were reviewed by the research team (the author and trained RAs) and coded following grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The process consisted of three distinct phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. A “coding, consensus, and comparison” methodology was utilized to identify codes and themes across all transcripts, where open coding was conducted to inform the development of a preliminary coding scheme (Lau et al., 2020; Hill et al., 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Open coding involves an initial review of the data while segmenting it into similar groups to form preliminary categories of information about the experiences examined (Delve, 2021). Transcripts were open coded to determine emerging themes and generate initial codes that were data-driven. Following open coding, transcripts were reviewed again to generate axial codes. Axial coding consisted of drawing connections between related initial codes to form broader categories, or axial codes. The categories are “axes” that the supporting codes revolve around (Delve, 2021; Thompson, 2021).

Corbin & Strauss' Coding Paradigm (1990) was used to explore categories in the axial coding phase and selective coding was then used to refine the coding manual. Finally, the team underwent selective coding to organize and integrate the axial codes in a way that articulates theories exploring the constructs of interest (Guest et al., 2017). Once a final coding manual was developed, the coding team (consisting of the author, graduate students, and trained post-baccalaureate RAs) initially coded 10% of the transcripts to examine coding across coders, conduct iterative fine-tuning of code definitions, and arrive on agreement regarding coding discrepancies. Transcripts were reviewed by the senior coder (author) to ensure inter-rater reliability, and coding was refined until 90% inter-rater agreement was achieved. Once achieved, QSR International's NVivo 12 was used to code all transcripts using the finalized coding manual.

Preliminary Qualitative Analyses. During the axial coding phase, the author reviewed the initial emerging themes. These themes were collated for the purpose of sharing with the Youth Advisory Board to inform quantitative survey questions.

Youth Advisory Board. The Youth Advisory Board was recruited based upon community collaborator recommendation and email communications gauging interest. Four high school students involved in a Chicagoland community organization expressed interest in participating as Youth Advisory Board members and completed informed assent and/or parental consent forms. Members met with the author for an hour via Zoom to review the initial emerging themes from the focus groups. Youth Advisory Board members offered feedback on the initial findings and shared topics that they would like more information about. Additionally, members reviewed a draft of the quantitative survey, and completed pilot survey to ensure that questions were

developmentally-appropriate, reliable, and to assess survey fatigue. Members were compensated \$20 via cash transfer, cash, or gift card for their time and signed receipts.

Secondary Qualitative Analysis. NVivo 12 Software was also used to conduct the qualitative data analysis (QSR International, 2021). Inductive thematic analysis was used to identify broad themes indicated in the coded data followed by meetings with the coding team to evaluate consensus. This method of thematic analysis is a qualitative methodology that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within a dataset, with a priori knowledge (Nowell et al., 2017; Braun & Clark, 2006). The broad themes cut across all codes and were refined and discussed with the coding team to arrive at a consensus.

Quantitative

Data Collection

For the quantitative phase of the study, a large-scale survey of high school students from across high schools in the Chicagoland area was disseminated to examine the implications of disciplinary policies and perceptions of disciplinary actors on adolescent psychosocial development.

Participants. Four hundred and fifty-five high school students were recruited across three high schools and three community organizations in the Chicagoland area (mean age = 16.54; 60.2% female-identified, 36.9% male-identified, 2.6% non-binary, 0.2% transgender; 13.4% Black/African American, 5.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 29.7% White/Caucasian, 35.2% Hispanic/Latinx, 1.1% Middle Eastern/North African [MENA], 14.7% Mixed Race.) Regarding grade level, freshman made up 4.0% of the sample while 34.4% were high school sophomores. Thirty-five percent of the sample were high school juniors and 26.7% of the sample

were seniors. Nearly 5% of the sample had school accommodations (i.e., 504 Plan or Individualized Education Plan [IEP].)

Students were recruited through assistance from school staff and email communications to complete a one-time hour-long online survey including demographic information, measures of student perceptions of school authority figures, disciplinary policies, ethnic identity membership, inequality, self-efficacy, perception of safety, and school connectedness. Similar to the qualitative phase, purpose sampling was conducted to increase the likelihood that participants are able to provide data pertinent to the research questions.

Procedures. Parental consent and child assent (or only non-minor consent if 18 or older) were completed via Qualtrics prior to initiating the survey. As part of the consent process, participants were informed that no personally identifying information will be stored with the data they provide, and they are able to withdraw assent at any point of the survey. Students completed the survey online via Qualtrics. All participants received \$20 gift card for completion of surveys, even if they refused to answer questions or withdraw participation.

Measures

Demographics

Demographic information was collected via self-report questionnaires. Identifying information included age, grade, school, gender identity, sexual orientation, and ethnicity/race.

Independent Variables - Perceptions of Disciplinary Actors

Support from Teachers and Staff. To measure student perceptions of teachers and staff as disciplinary actors, students completed the Willingness to Seek Help subscale of the Authoritative School Climate Survey (ASCS; Cornell, 2016). The Authoritative School Climate Survey broadly assesses school climate to support promotive learning environment. The survey

is based on authoritative school climate theory, positing that both disciplinary structure and support are required to maintain safe and conducive learning environments (Cornell, 2016; Gregory & Cornell, 2009).

Given the importance of student support in the school environment, the Willingness to Seek Help subscale was selected to operationalize perceptions of disciplinary actors, as it measures perceived supportiveness of student-teacher and student-staff relationships. Items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), where higher scores indicated more support from teachers and staff. The subscale included items such as “There is at least one teacher or other adult at this school who really wants me to do well” and “There are counselors/social workers at this school I could talk with if I had a personal problem.” This measure has been utilized with a demographically similar sample (51.4% female participants; 26% sophomores, 24.9% juniors, 23.1% seniors), but a predominantly white (59.1%) sample.

Reliability and validity were established in previous research (alphas ranging from .73 to .69; Cornell, 2016; Konold & Cornell, 2016). Past research utilizing this scale indicated that high school students who endorsed higher levels of student support reported less bullying and peer victimization (Gregory et al., 2010). In the current study, the scale yielded an alpha of .75.

Procedurally Just Interactions with SROs. To measure student perceptions of SROs as disciplinary actors, students were instructed to complete a measure designed to assess the extent to which their SRO operates in line with procedural justice. Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness and transparency by those in positions of authority to make and execute decisions (Donner et al., 2015; Granot et al., 2021). It is an important marker of police legitimacy for adolescents and is correlated with promotive school climate outcomes (Granot et

al., 2021). The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*all the time*), with questions such as “When you think about students interaction with the SRO at your school, how much do you feel safe?” and “How often does the SRO treat students with dignity and respect?” Higher scores indicated more interactions that are procedurally just. The measure used was drawn from the larger justice in schools study but designed based on that of Granot and colleagues (2021), which demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = .93$). The measure was also used with similar demographic sample (50.7% female; mean age = 15.74). In the current study, the scale yielded an alpha of .92.

Perceptions of School Disciplinary Approaches. Students completed the School Disciplinary Structure subscale of the Authoritative School Climate Survey to examine perceived fairness and severity of disciplinary approaches. The 7-item scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*), where higher scores indicated more fair disciplinary approaches. The scale included statements such as “Students are suspended without a good reason” and “When students are accused of doing something wrong, they get a chance to explain.” This measure has been utilized with a demographically similar sample (51.4% female participants; 26% sophomores, 24.9% juniors, 23.1% seniors), but a predominantly white (59.1%) sample. Reliability and validity were established in previous research ($\alpha = .78$; Konold & Cornell, 2016). In the present study, two items were removed from the scale as they demonstrated negative item-total correlations with the other items in the scale. Following removal of the two items, the updated 5-item scale yield an alpha of .81.

Dependent Variables

Self-Efficacy. Participants completed the 10-item Brief Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (Tipton & Worthington, 1984) to measure levels of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an

individual's belief in their level of ability and the strength of said belief (Bandura, 1986). The items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*), where higher scores indicated lower self-efficacy. Example items included "I can succeed in any task to which I set my mind" and "Nothing is impossible if I really put my mind to it".

Reliability and validity were established in previous research using a predominantly Black/African American and Latinx sample of high school students (mean age = 16.2; 66% female) and demonstrated good reliability $\alpha = .82$ (Onyeka et al., 2021). In the current study, the scale yielded an alpha of .82.

Ethnic Identity Membership. To assess the extent to which students identified with their ethnic identity, participants completed the Revised Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM-R; Phinney & Ong, 2007). The MEIM-R is a well standardized and widely used 6-item scale measuring participant's attitudes and sense of belonging to their ethnic group and ethnic identity achievement. The scale begins with an open-ended question asking the student to identify their ethnic group. The scale has two subscales assessing exploration of one's ethnic identity and commitment to one's ethnic identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Students rated the items on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) where higher scores indicated stronger membership to one's ethnic identity. The measure consisted of example items such as "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group" and "I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishments".

The MEIM-R and original Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992) are the most common measures used to assess ethnic identity and reliability and validity were widely established in previous research (Phinney & Ong, 2007, Umana-Taylor et al., 2014). In a recent study with a demographically relevant, multi-racial sample of high school youth (M age = 15.27,

55.6% female, (M age= 16.5; 56.35% female), the measure yielded an alpha of .82 (Byrd & Legette, 2022). In the current study, the scale yielded an alpha of .90.

School Connectedness. Operationalized as school connectedness, students completed the School Engagement subscale of the Authoritative School Climate Survey to examine both affective engagement (student's positive feelings toward the school; i.e., proud to be identified with the school and belong) and cognitive engagement (student investment in learning at the school; Cornell et al., 2017). The 7-item scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*), where higher scores indicated more school connectedness. Example items included "I want to learn as much as I can at school" and "I feel like I belong at my school." This measure has been utilized with a demographically similar sample (51.4% female participants; 26% sophomores, 24.9% juniors, 23.1% seniors), but a predominantly white (59.1%) sample. Reliability and validity were established in previous research (alpha = .87; Konold & Cornell, 2016). In the current study, the scale yielded an alpha of .81.

Perceived Safety. Participants were asked complete a measure aimed to measure perceived safety (Granot & Richards, 2021). The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (all the time), with questions such as "When you get to school each day, how much do you feel safe?" and "When you get to school each day, how often do you feel fairly treated?" Higher scores indicated more safety. The perceived safety scale was created for the larger justice in schools study and does not have an established research base. However, the scale yielded an alpha of .77 in the current study.

Mediating Variable - Perceived Discrimination

Perceived discrimination was measured by the Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (ADDI; Fisher et al., 2000). This 15-item index assesses adolescent distress in response to

perceived instances of discrimination (Fisher et al., 2000; Sladek et al., 2020). Students were asked to report how often they experienced various forms of discrimination due to their marginalized identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status), responded to items such as “You were wrongly disciplined for given after school detention” and “You were threatened.” Participants rated items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Prior work has shown the ADDI to be highly reliable with similar samples demonstrating alphas ranging from .62 to .88 (Fisher et al., 2000; Grossman & Liang, 2008; Kurtz-Costes & Rowley, 2007). Higher scores indicated more experiences of discrimination by peers, school personnel, and societal institutions (Benner & Graham, 2013; Fisher et al., 2000). In the current study, the scale yielded an alpha of .89.

Moderating Variable - Critical Consciousness

To measure student levels of critical consciousness, youth completed the Critical Consciousness Inventory (CCI; Thomas et al., 2014). The 9-item scale utilizes Guttman model of scaling to measure self-reported sociopolitical development, social perspective taking, and responses to oppression, an expanded conceptualization of Freire’s original critical consciousness framework based on psychological literature (Thomas et al., 2014; Seider et al., 2020; Watts et al., 1999). Guttman scaling is hierarchical and cumulative, allowing for a developmental perspective and facilitates the ability to distinguish between levels of critical consciousness in the interpretation, where higher scores indicate more developed understanding of critical consciousness (Thomas et al., 2014).

Scores on the CCI are intended to place the individuals in one of the following stages: precritical, beginning critical, critical, and postcritical.

For example, one item will have four choices and the first choice would indicate precritical consciousness (e.g., “I don’t notice when people make prejudiced comments” and the fourth choice would indicate postcritical consciousness (e.g., “When someone makes a prejudiced comment, I tell them that what they said is hurtful”). The example items included “I think people do not respect members of some social groups based on stereotypes” and “I feel like oppression in this country is less than in the past and will continue to change.” This measure has been utilized with a demographically similar sample (Mean age = 18.98; Thomas et al., 2014). Reliability and validity were established in previous research (alpha = .87; Aydin & Vera, 2020).

Control Variables

The study included two control variables: perceived neighborhood environment and self-endorsed levels of risk in within the school setting.

Perceived Neighborhood Environment. Participants were asked complete a measure aimed to measure neighborhood environment (Granot & Richards, 2021). Students indicated their perceptions of their neighborhood by completing a s revised version of the Neighborhood Environment Scale (NES; Elliot et al.,1985). The neighborhood measure was a 4-item self-reported scale with items such as “The presence of police in my neighborhood makes me feel uncomfortable” and “I feel safe when I walk around my neighborhood by myself at night.” Items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 4 (*very true*). Higher scores indicated a safer neighborhood environment. The measure used was drawn from the larger justice in schools study but designed based on that of the Neighborhood Environment Scale (NES; Elliot et al., 1985). While the measure does not have an established research base, the scale yielded an alpha of .77 in the current study.

Student Risk. Students were asked to endorse the frequency of witnessed or direct victimizations on an 8-item scale measuring internal threats in school (Granot & Richards, 2021). Example items included “When you get to school each day, to what extent do you witness or experience bullying among students?” and “When you get to school each day, to what extent do you witness or experience staff threatening violence?” The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*all the time*). The student risk scale was created for the larger justice in schools study and does not have an established research base. However, the scale yielded an alpha of .85 in the current study.

Quantitative Analytic Plan

Power Analysis

The quantitative sample size was determined based on the planned use of linear hierarchical multiple regression, mediation, moderation, and moderated mediation cross-sectional analyses when suitable. An *a priori* power analysis was performed using G*Power Version 3.1.9.6 (Faul et al., 2007) to estimate the necessary sample size. According to Cohen’s criteria for multiple regression models (where adding additional predictors increases the value of R^2 , effect sizes (f^2) of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 are considered small, medium, and large, respectively (Cohen, 1992; Faul et al., 2007). With a 5% Type I error rate and power of 0.80, the projected sample size needed with this effect size is approximately $N = 180$ for the fullest analysis model (Hypothesis 4b) with five predictors (1 independent variable, 1 mediator, 1 moderator, 2 controls). Given that the current sample size is 455, there should not be any concerns regarding power. The data was examined for normality (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996) and missing data was addressed with listwise deletion (very few cases; Peugh & Enders, 2004).

Research Questions

All quantitative analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics for Macintosh (Version 27.0.1.0, 2020) predictive analytics software.

Regression Analyses

The relationship between elements of the school-to-prison pipeline and psychosocial outcomes was examined by a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses (Hypotheses 2a). Cross-sectional analyses were used to assess the relationship between the three predictors (student perceptions of disciplinary actors [support from teachers and staff, procedurally just interactions with SROs] and perceptions of disciplinary fairness) and four outcomes (perceptions of safety, school connectedness, ethnic identity membership, and self-efficacy). In line with previous literature, the study aimed to control for extemporaneous factors that have the potential to influence analyses given the context of chronic environmental stress and risk for many of the students in the targeted schools (Skiba et al., 2014). Youth perceptions of neighborhood environment and student risk were included as covariates to ensure that they do not influence analyses.

Mediation Analyses

This study also is intended to determine the mediating function of student perceptions of disciplinary actors (teachers and staff, SROs) between perceptions of disciplinary fairness and psychosocial outcomes (Hypothesis 2b). Moreover, perceived discrimination was explored as a mediator between elements of the student perceptions of disciplinary actors and perceptions of disciplinary fairness, and psychosocial outcomes (Hypothesis 3a). Model 4 and the computational PROCESS bootstrapping procedure for SPSS were used to determine the total,

direct, and indirect effects for Hypotheses 2b and 3a (Hayes, 2018). Youth perceptions of neighborhood environment and student risk were also included as covariates.

Moderation Analyses

The fourth research question aims to examine whether the strength of the relationship between elements of the school-to-prison pipeline (disciplinary actors and disciplinary fairness) and psychosocial functioning are dependent on the level of youth critical consciousness (Hypothesis 4a). Model 1 of the PROCESS for SPSS was used to estimate the coefficients of a model using OLS regression as well as producing the conditional effects in moderation (Hayes, 2018).

Moderation Mediation Analyses

Additionally, the study aimed to examine the conditional indirect effect (the magnitude to which an indirect effect exists at a particular value(s) of a moderator; Preacher & Kenny, 2007) between perceptions of disciplinary actors, disciplinary fairness, perceived discrimination, and psychosocial functioning. As such, Hypothesis 4b will investigate whether an indirect effect of perceived discrimination differs across levels of critical consciousness. Moderated mediation analysis is used to determine whether the magnitude of the mediated effect varies as a function of a moderating variable (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Hayes, 2009; MacKinnon & Fairchild, 2009; Preacher et al., 2007).

Moderated mediations are helpful in identifying intermediary processes and detecting for whom, or under which conditions, the process is the strongest. Model 15 will be used to test for moderated mediation in PROCESS for SPSS, examining the moderating effect of an outside variable (critical consciousness) on both the pathway between the mediator (perceived discrimination) and the four outcomes, and the pathway between the independent variables and

the four outcomes (Hayes, 2018; Preacher et al., 2007). Each of the predictors and outcomes will be examined individually.

To assess for the presence, strength, and significance of a conditional indirect effect, the computational PROCESS for SPSS bootstrapping procedure will be used to generate confidence intervals for the conditional indirect effect (Preacher et al., 2007). To test whether the moderated mediation is supported, the bootstrapping procedure will also be used to determine whether the weight of the moderator (critical consciousness) in the function defining the indirect effect of X is different from 0” (Hayes, 2018, p.456). Therefore, the 95% bootstrap confidence interval of PROCESS’s index of moderated mediation will be examined to see whether it “straddles zero” (Hayes, 2018).

Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Analyses

The study concludes with connecting both quantitative and qualitative stages while expanding upon the preliminary qualitative findings. The integration of the qualitative and quantitative data was conducted to serve a complementary function, where the quantitative survey data is meant to provide a breadth of information regarding the constructs of interests, and the focus group data offers a depth of understanding of the constructs of interest (Lau et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2010).

CHAPTER 4

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Descriptives of Preliminary Survey

The average age of focus group participants was 16.8 and a little over 43% of the sample were seniors in high school. Approximately 65% of the sample was Black/African American, 20.9% Asian, 4.7% White/Caucasian, 2.3% Hispanic/Latinx, 4.7% Mixed Race; 2.3% Other. A little less than 5% of participants indicated holding a 504 Plan to support classroom accommodations (Table 1). Focus group participants were asked to complete a short 10-minute survey (14 items) to collect demographic information and preliminary data regarding their perceptions of school climate, school discipline usage, fairness, safety, and ethnic identity membership. Frequencies and descriptive statistics of the preliminary survey data are presented in Table 2.

Qualitative Results

As mentioned in Chapter 3, inductive thematic analysis was used to identify emerging themes indicated in the coded data followed by meetings with the coding team to evaluate consensus. To address the first research question, emerging themes from the focus groups were categorized into six main dimensions: disconnect between students and school staff, mixed experiences with SROs, experiences of inequality, school disciplinary culture, feelings of safety, and positive school interactions. Students were instructed to share experiences prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dimension 1: Disconnect between Students and School Staff

This dimension contains participant endorsements related to the lack of alignment between students and staff. Students discussed several instances leading to feelings of detachment from their school, with many contributing factors overlapping across all focus groups. Upon reviewing the transcripts, two main thematic contexts were identified: (a) lack of a supportive school culture and (b) lack of positive engagement with teachers and staff.

Lack of a supportive school culture

Limited opportunities for student voice. Within this domain, many students voiced concerns regarding the lack of student voice within their school, emphasizing that school authority figures do not listen to them or take their views into consideration. This viewpoint was present across all focus groups and stressed many times and often provoked spirited discussion. Participants also shared this sentiment among several areas, commenting that students do not have a say when it comes to disciplinary action, school policy, and school organizations. One student pointedly expressed concern regarding limited student participation in the development of school procedures and stated, “We don’t have those talks. Teachers and staff don’t understand that part and feel like we should have that talk too. Like that’s something considered fair.”

Another student shared similar views, reporting that the lack of student voice is a problem she would like to see addressed, “Like, that is not what we see and I want that to be like happening. That’s something really like concerning to other students, you know?”

Several students discussed school discipline as an area where student voice is rarely considered. One participant shared an anecdote where, when reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* a teacher instructed the class to read the N-word out loud:

The teacher actually said that they were going to read the word out loud and that if you

skipped over it, you would be penalized. So, a lot of students complained and said that was very fishy to say the least, and that that there should have been action taken against that. However, there was no punishment and also she said if those instances were not taken seriously.

The participant further shared that when students ardently complained, neither the teacher nor administration took their complaints seriously, “They didn’t really take into consideration the complaints that students of color, especially Black students at that school, like they didn’t really take our complains seriously, they never really tried to rectify any situations when it came to things like that.”

Few students shared that school-led initiatives to promote student voice only existed at the surface level and did not progress past initial conversations. One participant in particular acknowledged how there is virtually no follow through with these plans at her school:

I never really see like initiative on like really solidifying us as being one group, like they always say treat everyone the same and do this and do that you know everyone is all equal and we are all the same person and they say, but I don’t see any actions on that.

Many students shared recommendations they would offer if given the chance to address discussed concerns. One student reported:

And I think a way to do that is by offering tutoring services and offering things like that to help bridge the gap between these different communities, um which are completely ignored right now and there seems to be like a very clear divide between higher socioeconomic communities and lower socioeconomic communities.”

An additional student, however, was skeptical of the likelihood that school authority figures would include student perspectives in their decision-making: “But I don’t see a lot of change happening. They just listen, but I don’t know if they listen or they hear, you know? And there is a difference between that.”

However, one student reported acknowledged that more work needs to be done:

So far, I feel like it’s getting there, because right now they have created a Board where they let, like, students be on the board, but they only have one spot for a student, and that

one student has to represent all of us, which will be difficult, and at least we're getting our voice heard, but I feel like they need to open it up a little bit more, like two or three more students to be on the board instead of teachers, because --- the school is mostly for us, you know.

Increased pressure in school. Several students endorsed increased pressure within school as an additional determinant towards disconnect between students and staff. Many focus group participants discussed a high achieving culture at their school (e.g., focus on honors, AP, or IB classes) and commented on how that impacts how students are treated: "I would say the administration mostly prioritizes like the key to us doing the best in terms of like academics."

Several students discussed that this phenomenon notably impacts who do not take advanced classes. One group participant illustrated this further by sharing that the pressure creates disconnect between students as well:

I think that, as far as being disconnected from kids like even in the class – I think going back to the first part about how there's a difference between kids who are taking these honors classes and kids who are not—classes that are required classes, I feel like that's when you start to get that."

An additional student reported that the pressure often leads to school avoidance, sharing, "Like, I want to be in school, but then I don't want to be in school when I'm actually in school." When asked to elaborate, the same student identified challenges to keep up with the current academic standard as unsustainable:

...besides that, I think being part of such a big, competitive public school, I often times feel a lot of pressure trying to, not necessarily fit in, but keep up with my classmates and peers that may be slightly more accelerated.

Lack of positive engagement with teachers and staff. This thematic context included statements where student specifically identified limited support from teachers and staff (not including SROs).

Teachers do not support their students. While interactions with teachers depended on the individual school, students largely indicated that limited positive engagement with teachers occurred with respect to academics. Students emphatically shared statements such as “not a lot of support is given to students by teachers” and “I feel like teachers are not supporting their students or they don’t know what their students are capable of.”

One participant noted observations that their teachers often disregard students who exhibited challenges in the classroom:

...when teachers don’t really like care much about like if you’re really struggling or if you need help or if they have a bad attitude—it’s very obvious that you don’t matter to them, and they’re just there to kind of like teach you what you need to know and then get their paychecks.

Multiple students endorsed not feeling supported when taking difficult classes, despite being in an environment that encourages advanced coursework. One student shared criticism regarding the way her school approaches enrolling and supporting IB students:

...especially right now, we’re trying to get diversity into the IB program. When I talked to multiple teachers that have said that the way they do it is a really terrible way. They throw these kids into junior year and at that point you aren’t prepared for it, it actually puts kids failing these classes which is almost worse than not having them because now they feel like they can’t do it. So I think there’s a really big problem with trying to do things like that or they’re trying to push them in when they’re not prepared and I think that’s just really a major problem that’s going on.

Another student expressed feeling obligated to excel in a class where there was limited support from the teacher, and that anything less would confirm that lack of support:

Going back to what 1009 said, I’ve also felt that, where if, you had to fight to take a class, once you got in the class, if you got anything, if your overall grade was below an A, it’s like- you felt like the teacher was right and you didn’t belong to be in that course. Like for me personally, my math teacher they didn’t really want me to take honors Algebra this year.

At a different school, another student shared challenges with being taken seriously when not enrolled in AP classes:

Whereas, if you wanted to be taken seriously and if you wanted to be recommended for like going into an AP in that field, you would have to work just as hard, if not harder than them because otherwise you would be brushed over for the opportunity, so I really don't think that that was fair.

In the same focus group, one participant elaborated that the challenge is more difficult for African American students. To be given the opportunity to enroll in AP classes, she recounted needing to “work twice as hard to get half as much”, an aphorism common in the Black community:

I would say, my experience it was very competitive, in terms of being an African American female, like I feel like I have to work twice as hard just to be taken seriously by my teachers and you if you do want to get into an AP or honors course, you have to put in the work and work harder than your Caucasian peers.

Several students reported on the absence of attunement between students and teachers with respect to considerations of their lives outside of the classroom. Focus group participants reported that some teachers are not sensitive to their workloads in other classes, with one student sharing:

So I think that teachers need to be more considerate that even though your class is supposed to be a hard class, and yes it's a lot of commitment, that students might be in several of those classes.

Participants commented that teacher should take time to learn about students as people, with one participant reporting:

And that's kind of hurting. And also like, teacher's kind of in general, like we don't kind of look back at the other students and how their feeling. And that's kind of really had me feeling like “oh ---- like they don't understand me” at some point.

Further, one student explained that doing so would help address concerns regarding bias, a topic that was brought up in all focus groups (addressed below):

...teachers should really get to know them [students] a lot more a lot better um so that they don't make any misconcep- um misidentif- uh like have any misconceptions about the students.

Staff do not support students. While focus group participants discussed teachers at length, several reported on similar encounters with school staff (namely school counselors, administrators). Participants shared that they have very little interaction with school staff and reported with one student sharing that they did not know who their principal was until this year: “Um, like, no lie, I didn’t know who my principal was until this year (laughs).”

Other students discussed that missed opportunities for interaction have impacted the student-staff relationship: “They’re just usually in their office, which is very unfair because they do have many chances and many opportunities to communicate and interact with the students, but I feel they choose not to.”

Some students indicated that the lack of transparency with the roles of certain staff members supported this belief. One student reported in particular:

Because there’s so many people involved so you tell them your story and they’re like ‘oh that’s not my job so you go to that person.’ So it’s really hard to reach out to who you need to talk to and it’s really hard to convey what you’re feeling you know.

This was often discussed in relation to school counselors, with many participants sharing instances of limited support. One student shared her perception that were echoed by others in their focus groups:

Sorry about that, but um, definitely for, the counselors don’t do, even like half of their job and it’s kinda crazy because I talk to my mom about it and she said, that she was like best friends with her counselor back in the day and she said that her counselor set her up for everything that she’s done in her life. Like even now, like she, well he set her up is what I’m trying to say.

Dimension 2: Mixed Experiences with SROs

This dimension represents statements in which participants describe the encounters they’ve witnessed or directly participated in with the SROs at their school. Within all focus

groups, students expressed both positive and negative experiences with SROs across two main thematic contexts: (a) overall relationships with their SRO and (b) specific SRO behaviors, or SRO conduct. Each of these contexts are described below.

Overall Relationships with their SRO. Students described a variety of interactions with their SRO, suggesting that encounters were widely dependent on the individual school.

Limited encounters with SROs. The lack of encounters with the SRO was indicated across all focus groups, with many students denying a relationship at all or expressing that they don't really see, interact, or know their employed SRO. This lack of visibility often elicited speculative conversations, where students described seeing the SRO once or twice but did not know where the SRO office was located in the building and denied being formally introduced to them. A number of students did not know what their SRO did day to day and shared only seeing them after fights or "something is going down." The following statement illustrates this experience:

I don't know their names, I don't know how many female and how many male, we are never introduced to them. They are just there, and we don't even know they're there most of the time, so that's how it is.

Another participant expressed a similar sentiment:

I mean I don't really know him though. I haven't like met him or anything, I don't even know what he looks like I don't-, well I see him around the building, but I don't know his name or anything like that.

When discussing the "SRO issues" (i.e., the 2020 movement to remove SROs from school campuses), an additional student hypothesized that their school removed the SRO due to the lack of visibility:

Because, you see the SRO issues, I feel like most schools remove them because they don't know about them, they didn't know they existed. Students weren't introduced to

them, I wasn't introduced to them, I didn't know who my SRO was, and I feel like our school did remove them, I'm not sure.

Positive perception of SROs. Among participants who knew of their SRO, many indicated that SROs were nice and approachable. Several participants shared positive personal experiences with the SRO, suggesting that having a one-to-one relationship may help inform an affirming view of SROs in general. One student described a personal relationship with his SRO in detail:

I guess I could speak on Robby¹, our officer. He's like super chill. He's like a really cool guy. I have a good relationship with them. We can always-, he's like, I guess, like another student. He knows how to talk to students and make them calm down. He's not really like a big guy posing a threat, you know?

An additional student expressed that their SRO was "really nice" and emphasized that:

She's very serious, like she appears very serious and like if you don't know her you'd probably think she's intimidating, but as soon as you start talking to her she's really friendly and like she tries to make the students feel comfortable.

The difference between SROs and teachers was also acknowledged, where students shared that "I feel like the SROs there are nicer than the teachers" and "They literally just sit with us and eat lunch and chat about life, which is something we don't see from our teachers."

However, one student acknowledged that, despite having a nice SRO, not all SROs behave the same way:

But, again I see the police at my school, and they are very nice, very genuine, and then when I see other people [SROs] who come in as speakers and the way they talk is very aggressive, very serious so I know they are all not the same, but they are mostly not very nice, so.

Negative perception of SROs. While positive encounters with SROs were present in some focus groups, negative encounters were shared in all. One student expressed disdain

¹ Name changed to maintain confidentiality

regarding their presence in the school and shared, “I still don’t like the idea of having a cop in our school, cause that’s-, cause his job is to literally to police the students, I guess, that’s in the building, so.”

Several focus group participants reported being scared or apprehensive of the SRO at their school, often describing them as unapproachable. One student illustrated this when stating:

They looked so intimidating. I don’t even want to shake my hands with them and be like ‘Oh, hi. How are you?’ Like I just don’t wanna see them, you know? Like, that’s the type of feeling you get from them.

Another participant expressed a similar sentiment and stated, “[SROs] just make the person scared, you know?”

Students used words such as “scared”, “weird”, and “fear” to describe their perceptions of SROs, however no students indicated direct negative encounters with SROs – mainly views based on intimidation and the lack of approachability. One student statement in particular best illustrates this experience:

Everybody just avoids them. It’s like, what are you doing here? It’s like, no, I don’t know. I feel like they have - they give no effort. Like, they feel like an outsider and we feel like they’re an outsider.

Association between SROs and community police. When discussing whether views of their SRO reflect student experiences with law enforcement in general, participant responses were also mixed. Several students shared that SROs and police in their community were different. One student pointedly rebuffed the idea that her perception of community police officers were informed by her experience with her SRO and stated:

Definitely not. I know those people are trained to work with teens, and then while the other people...don’t...although I think all officers should be trained the same way because they are going to meet different people different ages and all of that.

Another student similarly stated:

But, my experience with police officers outside of school and stuff have not been bad, so it's like I can't really like, now it's like two things that are just completely different situations, so I can't really make one experience affect how I see the others, so yeah.

Few students reported that, due to their limited encounters with police in their community, they were unable to make an informed evaluation of the two, with one student sharing:

I might see an officer [SRO] say what's up but I guess my resource officer there's always been positive encounters always saying what's up having a conversation, crack a couple of jokes um so yeah I guess that's my answer to that question. I just never really had encounters with the police outside of school.

An additional participant shared a similar sentiment, and even expressed empathy for SROs, sharing:

I don't think that affects my view on the others, because I'm hoping to give them the benefit of the doubt. Like maybe they are just grumpy because they gotta wake up at 8 and deal with children.

Alternatively, many students expressed the opposite sentiment and reported that their view of SROs informed perceptions police in their communities. Among the students who endorsed this belief, statements such as "they really all have the same demeanor" and "they are all the same" were shared. One student identified their presence as a risk for concern, sharing, "Not to say anything happens, even when the SRO is around, but it's more or less likely to happen when the SRO is around. Same with the police like walking home."

An additional student observed the discrepancy between her experiences with SROs and police in the community through witnessed accounts police brutality in the media and reported:

We have good relationships with the police chiefs and officers [SROs] that come there and we form like actual meaningful connections with them, but then when you see the news and everything it kind of fractures that a little bit, um with all the incidents that happen.

SRO Conduct. Participants also shared observations regarding their SRO's behavior, or

simply, what the SRO does at their school. Majority of students discussed seeing their SRO patrol the hallways and monitor students. SRO were often described as “getting active” when they intervened with fights. One student illustrated this experience and stated:

When there are big fights, like when the whole crowd is involved and something is really going down, that’s the only time the SROs are involved and that’s where like the deans come and like, that’s the only time.

SRO do their jobs ineffectively. Several students expressed that the SRO did their jobs ineffectively, commenting that they either did not show up when needed or needlessly exacerbated situations. One student lamented about this in particular and stated:

I’m sorry, but um, yeah, they just like, they just sit there, like, they just be sitting there on their phones sometimes because, like, they have, like, different positions in the building. Like, at least one is supposed to be in the cafeteria or by each door or whatever and um, I don’t know.

Another student highlighted how SROs aggravate incidents and shared, “They be making like, um, I don’t know. They just make, like, big deals out of everything and then nothing serious.”

SROs are helpful. However, a few students discussed how SROs rectify situations and address conflict. One student shared his experience with the SRO at his school after a fight: “he also was a very big help, because everyone liked him so much. Like after fights, he would like, you know ask us like, “what was the drama?” You know, basically, keep everything cool.”

Students also reported how SROs address conflict within the school, such as interpersonal conflict and theft. One focus group participant shared a positive experience in particular, “I actually had an incident, a cyberbullying incident, so I brought it up to him and he actually like did good action on it.”

An additional student indicated that his SRO was helpful when his AirPods had been

stolen:

I know I kind of touched on this earlier but, when I thought my AirPods were still on, I got in contact with my school resource office, so he handles I guess theft, any stolen property and then also any potential threats or danger um. So I know, when was this? I think it was sophomore year, um the casing was found in the locker room... so they needed to come in and investigate that or whatever so um they needed our bags and searched our bags to make sure no one had a gun or anything, um so there was that...Uh I guess he's a nice guy I haven't had any problems with him, so yeah.

Dimension 3: Experiences of Inequality

Participant responses in this dimension contain reports of inequality within the school environment. Common among participants were descriptions of experienced discrimination on the basis of identity, observed discrimination on the basis of identity, and differential application of discipline due to identity. Endorsements within this dimension were best categorized in two thematic contexts: (a) person-centered discrimination on the basis of identity, and (b) discriminatory practices at school.

Person-centered discrimination on the basis of identity. Unfortunately, many students endorsed witnessing or being victimized by discrimination. Several identities were represented, with students sharing experiences with inequality due to their race, gender identity, religion, culture, or a mix of several. Many students shared that discrimination strongly impacted their sense of belonging in the school and fractured relationships with teachers and other peers. One participant reported his experience as a transgender male and how teachers referred to him as his deadname, often invalidating his gender identity. He reported:

I am a transman and in freshman year I just started living my life as being out, but I didn't want, you know, everyone to be knowing about it, because I wanted to just keep that to myself, and I had some difficulty with some of the teachers even though it was pretty early on in the year—you guys did not know me at all. They left my old name on some of the rosters and I would get called when the sub was there and that was kind of awkward and there was one teacher—this one was probably the worst instance I think—was she would never ever call me by my first name which is fine, whatever.... And she

would call me by my last name and sometimes she would be like ‘Ma’am’—no one asked you to do that.

He later shared blatant discrimination where the teacher kept him from using the appropriate bathroom:

I think also that same teacher saw me going into the boys room, because it was close by and she told me ‘Oh, don’t do that.’ It was empty, no one was there, but yeah. That’s the end of that.

Participants also endorsed racial discrimination across focus groups. Students shared witnessed experiences of racism (e.g., minimizing racialized experiences, assuming students of color are not prepared for coursework, and asking students of color to speak on the behalf of their race and/or ethnicity). Students in two separate focus groups endorsed differences between how White students experience school and the experiences of students of color:

“...being a POC has been a very different experience than being a white student there.”

Students discussed being othered by teachers based on their race and witnessed it happening to other students of color:

Students of color, especially African Americans, are kind of picked out sometimes and made an example of. My high school is predominantly White and at times, there were conversations in class about race that got very uncomfortable for the African American or Asians in class and there was no consideration showing towards their feelings.

...but when it came to big issues like, a lot of Black students didn’t, um, feel comfortable with certain teachers, with having certain teachers because they were being racially profiled or they would just say racist things.

Many students discussed biases demonstrated by teachers, namely regarding academic achievement:

Um, I think implicit bias training for the faculty is a good idea because I know a lot of times uh um minority students’ abilities are doubted as far as education goes. And then you have a good majority of the minority students, Black uh Hispanic being placed into just uh regular classes or um I guess whatever the step is below regular classes instead of Honors and AP classes and then I think that, because the teachers have such a

big sway in whether or not the students can get into the Honors and AP classes, so I think implicit bias training would help um with that deciding process.

Another student shared an analogous example, “I definitely feel that in my school environment, um, I feel that the African American students and then just minority students in general, are often overlooked and um, their abilities are doubted.”

Students also indicated direct experiences with racial discrimination. One participant commented that, as one of the three southeast Asian students in her school, she is often mistaken for another Asian student. She shared an anecdote that occurred in her theatre class:

A staff member came up to me after a play preview and was like ‘Oh my god, good job [the other southeast Asian student’s name]’, but there’s only two other southeast Asians, and she was like, ‘Oh my god, sorry, was it [the second southeast Asian student?]’ and that was the other southeast Asian.

Focus group participants also shared instances of religious discrimination, mainly driven by peers. Topics endorsed included microaggressions regarding religious clothing and dietary restrictions, with students sharing how it effects their school experience. As an example, one student reported discrimination from peers on the basis of her religion, “Honestly, what we learned in school, or what we experience in school really does impact on us, because as a Muslim woman, I do get the judgment remarks.”

An additional focus group student expanded on this, sharing his perspective as Sikh-American:

Um, for me, uh as far as things that um, like the school has impacted me, um, I constantly kind of feel like I have my guard up um because it’s kind of, um, because I get misidentified a lot of times because I’m a turban-wearing Sikh.

Discriminatory practices at school. Students spoke at length regarding the differential application of school policies due to identity, notably within the context of discipline. One

student best summarized this occurrence at her school and stated, “In terms of disciplining, it is really unfair for POC students vs. white students.”

Respondents conferred with one another regarding the fairness of this discrepancy and were able to share observations of this difference at their individual schools. One participant acknowledged the difference in how Black and Hispanic/Latinx students are disciplined versus White and Asian:

Um, so I guess like that’s sort of unfair. And that’s due to like a racial, like, [discrimination] part of that, too. Often times, like Black and Latino kids are involved in certain things, there seems to be a little less of a leeway and less of a look into the nuances of the situation, whereas when like, White and Asian kids are involved in something, they often get, like, the benefit of the doubt.

Another student shared the perceived racial discrimination in implementation of school dress code policy, reporting:

Like, such as, like, last year one of the rules that they made that seemed very anti-Black to me was when they said that you can’t wear headscarves, or like, durags, and that just felt like it was a way to police how Black student’s express themselves, so, that’s just one of the ways I felt about school.

At a different focus group, one student shared his personal experience with this discrepancy as an African American male, after being accused of stealing a pair of AirPods:

[The teacher said] ‘No we’re not gonna let you do that, we know we have everybody’s names on these AirPods. We know who these AirPods belong to.’ Whereas, they literally let all my White friends see if any of their phones connected to any of them, but they didn’t believe me and they thought I was just going to take a random pair of AirPods and go about my day.

A student who did not identify with a marginalized identity also reported observations of this form of bias. He shared an anecdote where he was almost reprimanded for being late to class and missing his pass:

[I told the teacher] 'I think my teacher forgot to sign it [the pass], if you want I can take the slip in and have my teacher sign it.' And then he [the teacher] goes 'No it's alright, you look like you're a good, smart kid' and then I was like 'Okay' and I got away with that. But then it got me thinking later like would a Black student or a Latino student have the same benefit of the doubt as I got, and I don't think that would be the case.

Dimension 4: School Disciplinary Culture

This dimension represents statements in which participants describe how discipline is approached at their school. Students were asked to share perceptions on the culture of school discipline and several accounts were endorsed related to the topic. However, common themes were congruent across all focus groups participants, generating three main thematic contexts (a) exclusionary practices as main disciplinary approach, (b) limited use of restorative justice, and (c) inadequate transparency and staff accountability.

Exclusionary practices as main disciplinary approach. This thematic context contains statements relating to the use of exclusionary discipline. Respondents overwhelmingly reported that exclusionary practices served as the main disciplinary approach in their respective school. Three exclusionary discipline practices were identified by focus group participants: in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspension, and detention. When commenting on the rate of exclusionary discipline, students mostly identified detention and suspensions, with one student identifying in-school suspension in particular, "Uh...but in-school suspension does seem like a common discipline that they practice."

Teachers and deans were often identified as the main school authority figures carrying out discipline, with teachers recognizing misbehavior in the moment and deans mainly executing punishment.

Usually, when teachers have problems, um, they usually call our deans in and I've also noticed that, um, more often, when they're female teachers, they usually call male

teachers in and we only have male deans, so they call the deans in. So, they end up handing out most of the punishment, whether the offender, I guess, is a boy student or a girl. So, usually it's like male deans and we have like an assistant, but she's not really there a lot, so usually our male deans are the ones dealing out most of the punishment.

Current discipline strategies are not commensurate with the offense. Participants spoke at length about the types of offenses resulting in exclusionary discipline, often reporting high-acuity violations such as fighting, vaping, and drug possession. Some students came to same consensus when it came to fights specifically, sharing that exclusionary practices were often warranted (outside of self-defense). One student shared that, given the frequency of fights at their school, “we give them suspensions”:

Fighting is one and sometimes it escalates to the security guard breaking it up and people end up hitting security guards not knowing out of anger so I feel like they should handle stuff like that well to like the fullest extent.

However, several participants across focus groups indicated that the disciplinary practices used at their school were overly punitive and unnecessary for the violation committed. Minor infractions such as dress code violations and late attendance were described as receiving “harsher punishment” than seemingly more egregious offenses (e.g., sexual assault allegations, use of racial slurs). The following statements best illustrate this pattern, “I’ve heard numerous people getting into, like, in-school suspensions over, like, over things that I, like, think that just could’ve been like a couple, like, after school detentions served”, “For which the honor code, is great obviously. However, with the dress codes, I think it’s kind of almost comical that they would take more concern over the length of the shirt you’re wearing and whether or not a teacher just said a racial slur”, “...the school was very lax when it comes to um, racial things but when it comes to, to like dress code or cheating, then that’s like when they put more of their energy, more of their time.”

An additional student underscored that exclusionary discipline was simply ineffective in addressing misconduct:

Like they [students who fought] know they're going to get suspended. Like, the fact that they're going to get suspended doesn't prevent them from fighting. Right? Like, they're at a certain point where they just don't care anymore, um, and just giving them suspension and just taking them out of school or making them sit in a room quietly for a long period of time is not going to prevent them from fighting again.

Participants also reported that rather than addressing the offense with a consequence, disciplinary actors should devote more energy into prevention. Several students acknowledged this problem and provided recommendations:

I feel like instead of discipline, they should focus on how to stop them from fighting again, but they don't really focus on the issues that are causing them to get into these altercations in the first place. So, it's more disciplinary and not so much, 'how can we provide this kid with the resources', to like, help their situations...

A more fair way to do it would be to actually get to the root of the problem and provide them with resources, um, to like to get their mind off of things and provide them with like educational resources and focus on school, instead of having the time and the opportunity to like create problems with other kids and fight in school.

Giving suspension and leaving it as it is not going to help. It's going to happen again between those same exact students. Instead of finding the root cause and solving the root cause, we aren't doing that, and I feel like that's something that's fair to students." "So like having those peace circle talks and finding out the root of the problem will help solve that argument they had in the first place.

Limited use of restorative justice. However, when restorative justice practices were mentioned by group facilitators as alternative, the majority of students did not know what restorative justice was or denied seeing it in practice at their school. Some students acknowledged the use of peace circles, but did not acknowledge them as a restorative practice, "No, I haven't seen that, I don't even—I don't know if that would benefit or bring that down (unclear here), but I haven't seen it."

But for restorative justice never never never seen in my school talked about. I want more staff and teachers to know about that since they really push over punishment. Go for the punishment part instead of doing other things.

Some students were skeptical regarding the effectiveness of restorative justice, while others indicated openness to the idea at their respective school, “I’ve heard of it, but I personally have never heard of it being used in our school; but I don’t have like a good idea cuz I’m just maybe I’m not talking to those people but yeah.

One student shared her openness to restorative practice despite concerns regarding its effectiveness.

I know sometimes in disciplinary actions if two kids are in a fight they’ll have them like reconcile and talk through their differences, but I don’t know how effective that is it just results from a physical fight to a verbal fight, um but yeah I guess there should be more effective ways to introduce restorative justice into schools.

Inadequate transparency and teacher/staff accountability. While focus group participants demonstrated insight regarding the manner to which discipline is applied, many felt as though the decision-making process was as not clear. That is, many students reported lack of transparency when one disciplinary approach was used over another. One student reported the influence parents may have in the process, “I don’t know who makes these decisions, but I know a lot of it is the parents because it is a private school that I go to.”

Participants also reported lack of teacher and staff accountability with respect to discipline. Several respondents shared instances where teachers committed violations and were not held accountable, despite complaints being made by students. One student summarized this succinctly:

“Um behavior that is not addressed is especially from teachers, just adults in the building it just really does not get, like they’re not held accountable for their actions.”

Actions that would otherwise receive attention if displayed by students were reportedly not appropriately acknowledged when displayed by staff. The following statements also illustrate this, “But, uh, for example, a teacher said the N-word in class over Zoom, one time, uh, in the spring, and nothing was done”, “...when it came to disciplining faculty for saying racially insensitive things was always just, very passive. They didn’t really correct it or handle the situation like they should’ve.”

Um, I would say for the discipline at my high school, um, there were multiple incidents where students and staff and teachers um, said the N-word, and um, students complained to their teachers about it or just to those in charge and nothing was done about it or something was done, it was very, very minor.

Dimension 5: Perceptions of Safety

Participant responses in this dimension contain statements discussing safety within the school environment. Students described experiences that were best categorized in two thematic contexts: (a) protection from external threats and (b) recommendations to promote safety in school. For the most part, students did not endorse significant internal threats.

Protection from external threats. Most students reported feeling safe at school, citing protection from external threats. Students shared a several means to this end, discussing factors such as safe neighborhood, school precautions, and teacher support. One participant underscored the importance of this support:

And to come off that, teachers and adults I would say like them getting to school early, because I know me I have to get to school early because that just helps me and my thinking and my family get out and leave early go to work. So, I have to get to school early. And in terms of being safe, they don’t just leave you out of the building being stranded, they have to let you in, once you come to the school, they have people there already so you can come in. Teachers will be arriving early also and they are there to talk to they’ll be there for you, so that’s one thing I know from experience.

Of the students who expressed concern regarding external threats, many cited challenges

with the commute to school and transportation. Students who attended Chicago Public Schools discussed this challenge in particular, “But I think what my school fails to see is people who have a long commute to school. Especially when we go home too”, “A lot of people go to the South side and the West side, so I wish we had some sort of like, shuttle, just to make sure we got home safely, especially during the winters when it’s really dark and we don’t have access to cars and we take transportation and such, so...”

Recommendations to promote safety in school. Focus group participants eagerly shared recommendations to support safety in their school. Many respondents indicated that school should be a place where students feel safe, suggesting an expectation of safety within the school environment, “I would also say that the school shouldn’t be in like a vulnerable spot for any, like, external things to kind of threaten, like, the safety of the school.”

While this view was anticipated, the insight students shared regarding potential recommendations was unexpected. Despite feeling safe at school, participants also reported more recommendations to promote safety than current practices, which suggests more work could be done to promote safety at their respective schools, “To kind of add on what everyone’s saying, a safe school for me would be a school that takes all the necessary precautions to handle the external threats the students and faculty might face...”

Other students described what constitutes a safe school environment and discussed the importance of ensuring the general welfare of all students. Students endorsed factors consistent with belonging, citing emotional security, inclusion, access to resources, and academic safety. Several students indicated this in their responses, for example:

To me, a safe school looks like everyone having access to the resources they need to have, like, good, to like -- have a successful school life, to have like a successful school year, to make sure that they can compete, they can learn and compete at their highest

level.

Kind of going off of what 1002 said, like I feel like a safe school looks like students feel comfortable entering the building, but also within their own classrooms, like amongst their teachers and peers.

I also say that, in my opinion, a safe school is an area where you had the exposure of meeting other people who are also like you in different ways, even if there's racial differences you can still find people who also have the same interests as you...

I would say it would be like other people being more comfortable. Like if I see people being themselves, I just feel like being more comfortable would be like telling people more things, telling me more things, you know being more social, or like getting up in class I guess just like talking. I feel like when I see people do that that is being more comfortable and being more social in the class setting, than that would make me feel like oh they're not getting talked about or this and that, that makes me feel like oh if they're being themselves why can't I be? Yeah, that makes me feel more safe, that makes me feel like I can be comfortable around this environment, my class, and the school.

In addition to identifying factors that may help with promoting safety, one participant emphasized the need for transparency and education regarding the importance of safety practices, aligning with procedural justice. Similar to statements in Dimension 4, the participant stated, "Sorry, sorry, so like I would want like a safe school where I would actually know why I have to do all these things for --in just order -- for safety precautions. Not just being told what to do, but also understanding why it's important."

Dimension 6: Positive Interactions Supporting Connectedness

Lastly, student responses in this dimension contain reports of positive engagement within the school environment that support student connectedness. Students shared affirming experiences with teachers, staff, and other peers that promoted belonging and discussed the importance of affinity spaces for specific identities. Endorsements within this dimension were best categorized in four thematic contexts: (a) peer-driven connectedness, (b) participation in extracurricular activities, (c) access to affirming spaces, and (d) teachers supporting students.

Peer-driven connectedness. This thematic context included statements where participants described the importance of peer relationships, and how that supports belonging in school. One student summarized description in this context aptly, “The students themselves support one another and we, we make a lot of changes by coming together and pushing [for] certain stuff.”

Participants cited smaller classes, collaboration with classmates, and peer-driven activities (e.g., lunch, student activities) as the main vehicles for connectedness, “It was such a small class, we got to know each other very well, and the teacher was very nice.”

And as far as students go—I think that in some of my classes we do a lot of collaboration and so—in that way you start to talk to kids you might not have really talked to a lot of times and you end up in classes where maybe you haven’t had friends before and so you kind of just find people you connect with and help with homework.”

One student shared their experience with cross-age peer mentoring generating peer connectedness, reporting:

Also, one thing that us students got together and built was this program where, basically we have older kids in (school): juniors and seniors, basically get trained for a few months and stuff like that and then basically we are mentors to the younger students.

Participation in extracurricular activities. Across all focus groups, students emphasized the significance of extra-curricular activities in promoting school connectedness. Many participants endorsed being involved in afterschool activities such as sports, community organizations, Student Council, and honors societies. When discussing the relationship between activity involvement and school belonging, one student discussed his participation with football:

But what I was saying is I feel connected due to me being on the football team. Just because of that automatically I have connections to administration because we have to make local announcements about who won, what’s the score, who we’re going against, and pep rallies. So it makes whoever’s on the team a very important part of the school so I automatically feel connected.

Access to identity-affirming space. In addition to afterschool activities, participants discussed the importance of identity-affirming spaces. Students from marginalized identities underscored the necessity of affinity spaces to not only develop community but sustain relationships with peers and teachers:

A positive trusting relationship that I have noticed that happens at (school) is they're very helpful with new students who especially don't speak English with just come into the country, they help with them a lot to assimilate into the whole high school and everything."

For me, we have a diversity counselor, so she has her office and a lot of BIPOCs and POCs go to her room and that's how we make friends and we feel like we belong there.

The only other white teacher that I feel comfortable around is, does (subject) the right way and doesn't have any feelings of white savior or white guilt or something and she directly teaches a class on racism.

During one of the focus groups, a Muslim student shared how meaningful it was that their school had created a dedicated space for students to pray:

...cause for Muslim students we had to find a space to pray in school. So he [teacher] was who we were referred to set that up. So he was a really nice dude, when we weren't in trouble. So, yeah, I had pretty positive interactions with them.

Teachers supporting students. Lastly, many students indicated that teacher support in and out of the classroom was a helpful antecedent to school connectedness, suggesting the importance of the student-teacher relationship. Across focus groups, respondents reported behaviors such as checking in on student progress, joking with students, and being "just like us" were beneficial in supporting connectedness. The following statements illustrate supportive interactions:

I think that teachers themselves at SCHOOL SITE are really great. As far as what I've – the experience I've had with teachers have been really positive –most of my teachers have been really positive and I think a lot of them try to reach out to you –this way and that—depending on—also I think you make connections that way and teachers really make sure that—and I know teachers that—I've seen another teacher I know that made

sure on the first day of school, he pronounced our names right and he could tell if we're hesitant even and he would make sure that it was right. So, I think things like that, even simple things like that really help build our relationship...

Some teachers will be really good about like giving out surveys or giving out this or that to make sure like –did you understand this, do we need to take this slower or do we need to take this quicker.

I guess they did a really good job on trying to include everyone in every discussion we had, make sure everyone was getting the help that they needed for their, I guess, specific learning styles because we are all different students in our own ways. So, I feel like that's a really good example of, and of them trying to do their best job on making sure everyone had the same opportunities that, you know, they all deserved in that classroom.

One student shared how their teacher helped support their culture/identity:

But they're doing a decent job by trying to include all the cultures into the school/curriculum, by implementing clubs and groups directed towards minority groups. So, I think they're doing a decent job."

Importantly, several students indicated that promotive student-teacher relationships

helped humanize teachers:

Guess the same as everyone else, yeah they're all super chill. They're like friendly, like someone said, I forgot who it was, they said, "like one of us" and it's exactly like that. My football coaches, I can talk to them about anything I wanted, football related, school related, family related-, they're fun, easy to talk to. They are easy-, understanding. If you're having an issue or just wanted to talk about anything at all, they're always down for it and they're always there to help, so yeah. Same with my teachers they're all just the same though, yeah you can always just rely on them to hear you out."

And when teachers kind of act like they're more your friend and not "Oh I'm just here to instruct you, that's it, that's all" I don't know it kind of humanizes them a bit and are open to the fact that sometimes they make mistakes. I don't know it just helps me feel more connected with my teacher and not like I'm gonna get pushback if I mess up in some way.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants in Focus Groups (N = 45)

	N (M)	% (SD)
Gender		
Female	26	60.5
Male	17	39.5
Race/ethnicity		
Black/African American	28	65.1
Hispanic/Latinx	1	2.3
White/Caucasian	2	4.7
Asian	9	20.9
Mixed Race	2	4.7
Other	1	2.3
Grade		
Sophomore (10 th grade)	10	22.7
Junior (11 th grade)	12	27.3
Senior (12 th grade)	19	43.2
Graduated	2	4.5
School Accommodations		
IEP	0	0
504 Plan	2	4.8
No accommodations	42	95.2
Age	(16.81)	(1.05)

Note. IEP = Individualized Education Plan; 504 Plan = Section 504 Plan

Table 2. Preliminary Survey Questions and Descriptives

1. How much would you say that you trust other students at your school?		
	N (M)	% (SD)
Not at all	3	7.0
Slightly	9	20.9
Somewhat	24	55.8
Very Much	6	14.0
Completely	1	2.3
Total	43 (2.84)	100.0 (.84)

2. How much would you say that you trust the teachers at your school?		
	N (M)	% (SD)
Slightly	5	11.6
Somewhat	21	48.8
Very Much	14	32.6
Completely	3	7.0
Total	43 (3.35)	100.0 (.78)

3. How much would you say that you trust the school administration at your school?		
	N (M)	% (SD)
Not at all	3	7.0
Slightly	9	20.9
Somewhat	24	55.8
Very Much	6	14.0
Completely	1	2.3
Total	43 (3.02)	100.0 (1.06)

4. How much would you say that you trust the School Resource Officer (SRO) at your school?		
	N (M)	% (SD)
Not at all	5	11.6
Slightly	8	18.6
Somewhat	13	30.2
Very Much	11	25.6
Completely	6	14.0
Total	43 (3.12)	100.0 (1.22)

5. To what extent do you agree with the following: I value being a member of my school.

	N (M)	% (SD)
Strongly disagree	1	2.3
Disagree	2	4.7
Neither agree nor disagree	13	30.2
Agree	17	39.5
Strongly agree	10	23.3
Total	43 (3.77)	100.0 (.95)

6. To what extent do you agree with the following: I am proud to be a member of my school.

	N (M)	% (SD)
Strongly disagree	5	11.6
Disagree	13	30.2
Agree	15	34.9
Strongly agree	10	23.3
Total	43 (3.70)	100.0 (.95)

7. To what extent do you agree with the following: Belonging to my school is an important part of my identity.

	N (M)	% (SD)
Strongly disagree	4	9.3
Disagree	10	23.3
Neither agree nor disagree	12	27.9
Agree	12	27.9
Strongly agree	5	11.6
Total	43 (3.09)	100.0 (1.17)

8. How often do you feel that your school uses immediate extended removal from the classroom or other school activities in school (e.g., in-school suspension, detention, office referral) as a response for misbehavior?

	N (M)	% (SD)
Never	1	2.3
Rarely	12	27.9
Sometimes	18	41.9
Frequently	10	23.3
All the time	2	4.7
Total	43 (3.00)	100.0 (.90)

9. How often do you feel that your school uses out-of-school suspensions as a response for misbehavior (1 day or longer)?

	N (M)	% (SD)
Never	1	2.3
Rarely	18	41.9
Sometimes	14	32.6
Frequently	9	20.9
All the time	1	2.3
Total	43 (3.00)	100.0 (.90)

10. How often do you feel that your school uses expulsions as a response for misbehavior?

	N (M)	% (SD)
Never	2	4.7
Rarely	27	62.8
Sometimes	12	27.9
Frequently	1	2.3
All the time	1	2.3
Total	43 (2.35)	100.0 (.72)

11. How often do you feel that your school responds to misbehavior with a conversation that involves all participants to discuss their feelings and opinions?

	N (M)	% (SD)
Never	2	4.7
Rarely	8	18.6
Sometimes	14	32.6
Frequently	15	34.9
All the time	4	9.3
Total	43 (3.26)	100.0 (1.03)

12. How fair or unfair are school discipline practices at your school?

	N (M)	% (SD)
Completely unfair	2	4.7
Somewhat unfair	7	16.3
Neither fair nor unfair	7	16.3
Somewhat fair	19	44.2
Completely fair	8	18.6
Total	43 (3.56)	100.0 (1.12)

13. How safe or unsafe does the presence of the School Resource Officer (SRO) -- the police officer that works at your school -- make you feel?

	N (M)	% (SD)
Somewhat unsafe	5	11.6
Neither safe nor unsafe	11	25.6
Somewhat safe	14	32.6
Completely safe	13	44.2
Total	43 (3.81)	100.0 (1.00)

14. How much do you agree with the following statement: I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group?

	N (M)	% (SD)
Strongly disagree	2	4.7
Disagree	2	4.7
Neither agree nor disagree	14	32.6
Agree	18	41.9
Strongly agree	7	16.3
Total	43 (2.63)	100.0 (1.83)

CHAPTER 5

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

During the axial coding phase of qualitative data analysis (Research Question 1), initial emerging themes were collated and reviewed to share with the Youth Advisory Board which, in turn, informed the development of the quantitative survey. Feedback from Youth Advisory Board members led to the inclusion of measures exploring discrimination, disciplinary fairness, experiences with SROs, and the relationship of students with teachers and staff. Data from the quantitative survey are presented below to answer research questions 2-4.

Preliminary and Correlational Analyses

Means and standard deviations for reports of support from teachers and staff, quality of interactions with SROs, perceived disciplinary fairness, perceived discrimination, critical consciousness, self-efficacy, ethnic identity membership, perceived safety, school connectedness, student risk, and perceptions of neighborhood environment were assessed and presented in Table 3

Correlational analyses demonstrated statistically significant, moderate to large, and positive correlations between the three elements of the school to prison pipeline (support from teachers and staff, quality of interactions with SROs, perceived disciplinary fairness). The strength of the correlations among the independent variables may demonstrate unfavorable effects on estimated coefficients in later regression analyses (Mansfield & Helms, 1981). To assess whether the similarities among the independent are problematic, collinearity diagnostics

were conducted to assess for multicollinearity. Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) are included in Table 3. Large VIF values indicate a high degree of multicollinearity among the independent variables (Mansfield & Helms, 1981; Yoo et al., 2015). In the present study, VIF values for the independent variables ranged from 1.04 to 1.18 (i.e., VIF values less than 10), suggesting limited evidence for multicollinearity (Yoo et al., 2015). Additional bivariate relationships among the independent variables, the mediator variable, the moderator variable, covariates, and dependent variables are also displayed in Table 3.

As expected, support from teachers and staff was positively associated with perceived safety (where increased support was associated with increased safety; $r = .42, p < .01$), school connectedness (where increased support was associated with increased connectedness; $r = .45, p < .01$), and ethnic identity membership (where increased support was associated with increased sense of ethnic identity; $r = .11, p < .01$). In addition, the procedurally just interactions with SROs were positively associated with perceived safety (suggesting procedurally just interactions were associated with increased safety; $r = .49, p < .01$) and school connectedness (suggesting procedurally just interactions were associated with increased connectedness; $r = .39, p < .01$). Lastly, perceived disciplinary fairness was positively associated with perceived safety (indicating that fair disciplinary practices were associated with increased safety; $r = .48, p < .01$), school connectedness (indicating that fair disciplinary practices were associated with increased connectedness; $r = .44, p < .01$), and ethnic identity membership (indicating that fair disciplinary practices were associated with increased sense of ethnic identity).

Support from teachers ($r = -.22, p < .01$), procedurally just interactions with SROs ($r = -.13, p < .01$), and perceived disciplinary fairness ($r = -.20, p < .01$) demonstrated negative

associations with self-efficacy. This is an appropriate interpretation of the expected relationship between support from teachers and staff, procedurally just interactions with SROs, and perceived disciplinary fairness, as higher scores on the self-efficacy scale indicated lower self-efficacy. Perceived discrimination was negatively associated with support from teachers and staff ($r = -.26, p < .01$), procedurally just interactions with SROs ($r = -.26, p < .01$), and perceived disciplinary fairness ($r = -.42, p < .01$). Lastly, critical consciousness was negatively associated with procedurally just interactions with SROs ($r = -.18, p < .01$) and perceived disciplinary fairness ($r = -.24, p < .01$).

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of Participants in Survey Sample

	N (M)	% (SD)
Gender		
Female	274	60.2
Male	168	36.9
Non-binary	12	2.6
Transgender	1	0.2
Race/ethnicity		
Black/African American	61	13.4
Hispanic/Latinx	160	35.2
White/Caucasian	135	29.7
MENA	5	1.1
Asian	27	5.9
Mixed Race	67	14.7
Grade		
Freshman (9 th grade)	18	4.0
Sophomore (10 th grade)	156	34.4
Junior (11 th grade)	159	35.0
Senior (12 th grade)	121	26.7
School Accommodations		
IEP	34	7.6
504 Plan	27	6.0
No accommodations	389	86.4
Age	(16.5)	(1.3)
Perceived student risk (Min = 1, Max = 4)	(2.08)	(.66)
Perceived neighborhood environment (Min = 1, Max = 4)	(2.73)	(.88)

Note. MENA = Middle Eastern/North African; IEP = Individualized Education Plan; 504 Plan = Section 504 Plan

Table 4. Bivariate Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Variables Under Study (N = 455)

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Support from teachers and staff	1									
2. Procedurally just interactions with SROs	.388**	1								
3. Perceived disciplinary fairness	.386**	.523**	1							
4. Perceived discrimination	-.260**	-.312*	-.424**	1						
5. Critical Consciousness	-.061	-.182**	-.237**	.087	1					
6. Perceived safety	.418**	.494**	.483**	-.387**	-.133**	1				
7. School connectedness	.451**	.387**	.437**	-.335**	-.054	.530**	1			
8. Ethnic identity membership	.107**	.070	.116*	-.060	.075	.140**	.261**	1		
9. Self-efficacy	-.222**	-.129**	-.195**	.088	.045	-.180**	-.302**	-.127**	1	
10. Neighborhood environment	.179**	.267**	.271**	-.236**	-.079	.340**	.211**	.084	-.211**	1
11. Student risk	-.102*	-.227**	-.329**	.445**	.078	-.270**	-.203**	-.024	.020	-.220**
<i>M</i>	3.20	3.72	2.86	1.77	2.94	3.76	3.10	3.38	2.73	2.08
<i>SD</i>	.616	.832	.573	.703	.549	.863	.8985	.946	.879	.663
<i>VIF</i>	1.04	1.11	1.18							

Note: Self-efficacy - lower scores indicate higher self-efficacy; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Regression Analyses

Hypothesis 2a predicted that negative perceptions of disciplinary actors (teachers and staff, SROs) and unfair disciplinary approaches will predict to lower psychosocial functioning (perceived safety, ethnic identity membership, self-efficacy, and school connectedness). To test this hypothesis, a series of cross-sectional hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted with three independent variables (support from teachers and staff, quality of interactions with SROs, and perceived disciplinary fairness), four dependent variables (perceived safety, ethnic identity membership, self-efficacy, school connectedness), and two covariates (student risk within the school environment, perceptions of neighborhood environment). A regression model was run for each dependent variable separately (see Table 4).

When controlling for student risk and perceptions of neighborhood environment, the full model of teacher and staff support, quality of interactions with SROs, and perceived disciplinary fairness significantly predicted to perceived safety, $R^2 = .389$, $F(3, 443) = 55.26$, $p < .001$; adjusted $R^2 = .382$, where 38% of the variance in perceived safety was explained the three predictors. Within the full model, higher teacher and staff support ($b = .205$, $p < .001$), more procedurally just interactions with SROs ($b = .242$, $p < .001$), and more fair disciplinary practices ($b = .206$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted to higher levels of perceived safety.

Examining school connectedness next, the full model was statistically significant as well, where approximately 30% of the variance in school connectedness was explained by the three predictors, $R^2 = .305$, $F(3, 443) = 48.78$, $p < .001$; adjusted $R^2 = .297$. Within the full model, increased teacher and staff support ($b = .295$, $p < .001$), more procedurally just interactions with SROs ($b = .125$, $p < .001$), and more fair disciplinary practices ($b = .231$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted to higher levels of school connectedness.

Although the full model predicting to ethnic identity membership was not statistically significant, the model to self-efficacy was, $R^2 = .069$, $F(3, 443) = 10.25$, $p < .001$; adjusted $R^2 = .058$. Support from teachers and staff was the only predictor, of the three, that significantly predicted self-efficacy, where more support from teachers and staff predicted more self-efficacy ($b = -.166$, $p < .01$). 5.8 % of the variance in self-efficacy was explained by the predictors.

Table 5. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses with Perceptions of Disciplinary Actors and Unfair Disciplinary Practices Predicting to Psychosocial Outcomes (Self-Efficacy, Ethnic Identity Membership, Perceived Safety, and School Connectedness)

Model	Self-efficacy		Ethnic identity membership		Perceived safety		School connectedness	
	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Predictors								
Model 1		.004		.007		.160		.070
Student risk	-.023	---	.004	---	-.201	---	-.155	---
Neighborhood	-.064	---	.084	---	.303	---	.183	---
Model 2		.065		.016		.229		.234
Student risk	-.080	---	.034	---	-.086*	---	-.047	---
Neighborhood	-.004	---	.056	---	.171***	---	.058	---
Support from teachers and staff	-.166**	---	.072	---	.205***	---	.295***	---
Procedurally just interactions w/ SROs	.002	---	-.017	---	.242***	---	.125**	---
Perceived disciplinary fairness	-.159	---	.098	---	.206***	---	.231***	---

Note. Student risk and perceptions of neighborhood environment were included as covariates but are not represented here; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Mediation Analyses

Disciplinary Actors as Mediators

Hypothesis 2b posited that perceptions of disciplinary actors (teachers and staff, SROs) would mediate the relationship between perceived disciplinary fairness (independent variable) and youth psychosocial functioning (dependent variables). Specifically, it was predicted that disciplinary strategies that were perceived to be unfair will predict to negative perceptions of disciplinary actors which, in turn, will predict to lower scores on self-report measures of psychosocial functioning. To test this postulate, mediation was examined using significance testing of the indirect effect employing the computational PROCESS bootstrapping procedure for SPSS (n = 10,000 bootstrap samples; Hayes, 2013, 2021; Preacher & Hayes, 2004). The bootstrapping procedure was selected as it offers effect-size estimation while not making assumptions regarding the sampling distribution of the statistic (Mooney & Duval, 1993; Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

Model 4 of PROCESS was used to conduct two separate simple mediation analyses (with perceptions of teachers and staff and SROs as mediators) for each outcome variable (Version 4.0 PROCESS; Hayes, 2021). Three models were estimated to determine the total, direct, and indirect effects of both perceptions of disciplinary actors and perceived disciplinary fairness. In line with previous literature, the study aimed to control for extemporaneous factors that have the potential to influence analyses given the context of chronic environmental stress and risk for many of the students in the targeted schools (Skiba et al., 2014). As such, student risk and perception of neighborhood environment were again included as covariates. Point estimates of

these effects were considered significant when the confidence intervals (CIs) did not contain zero.

Mediator 1: Teachers and Staff. When examining ethnic identity membership as the outcome, the path (direct effect) from perceived fairness of disciplinary strategies to support from teachers and staff was positive and significant ($b = .408, p < .001$). The direct effect of support from teachers and staff on ethnic identity membership was not significant, but the direct effect of perceived fairness of disciplinary strategies to teacher and staff support is positive and significant ($b = .186, p = .042$). The indirect effect was not statistically significant.

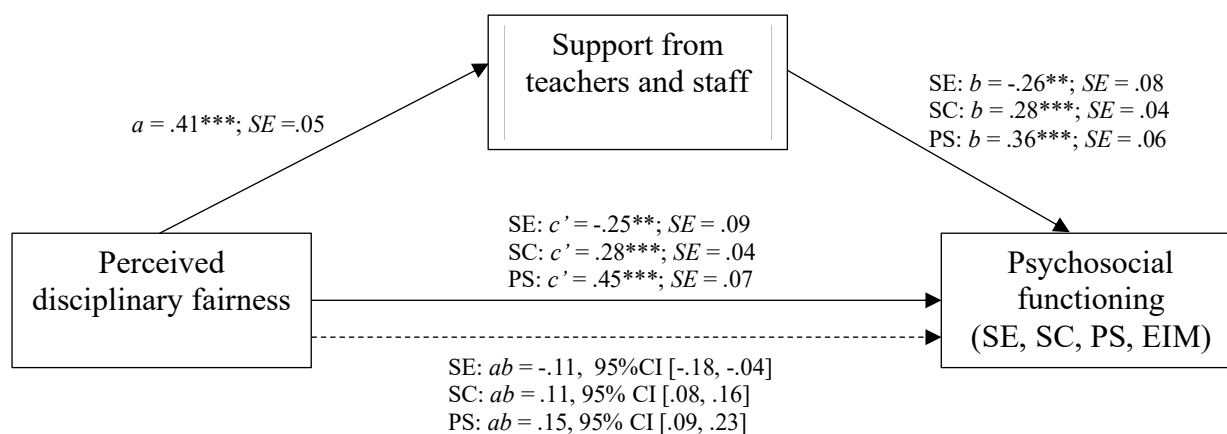
The analyses demonstrated a significant positive indirect effect of perceived disciplinary fairness on perceived safety through support from teachers and staff (point estimate = .1468), 95%CI [.087, .217]. Approximately 35% of the variance in perceived safety is attributable to the indirect effect of disciplinary fairness through support from teachers and staff, $R^2 = .347, F(4, 449) = 59.72, p < .001$.

Support from teachers and staff was also found to significantly mediate the relationship between perceived disciplinary fairness and school connectedness (point estimate = .113), 95%CI [.078, .158]. Approximately 29% of the variance in school connectedness can be explained by indirect effect of disciplinary fairness through support from teachers and staff, $R^2 = .292, F(4, 449) = 46.26, p < .001$.

Lastly, there was a significant negative indirect effect of perceived disciplinary fairness on self-efficacy through support from teachers and staff (point estimate = -.106), 95%CI [-.175, -.044], $b = -.106$. Less than 7% of the variance in self-efficacy is attributable to the indirect

effect of disciplinary fairness through support from teachers and staff, $R^2 = .068$, $F(4, 449) = 8.14$, $p < .001$.

Figure 3. Significant Path Coefficients for Simple Mediation Analysis on Psychosocial Functioning, with Perceived Disciplinary Fairness as the Predictor and Support from Teachers and Staff as the Mediator



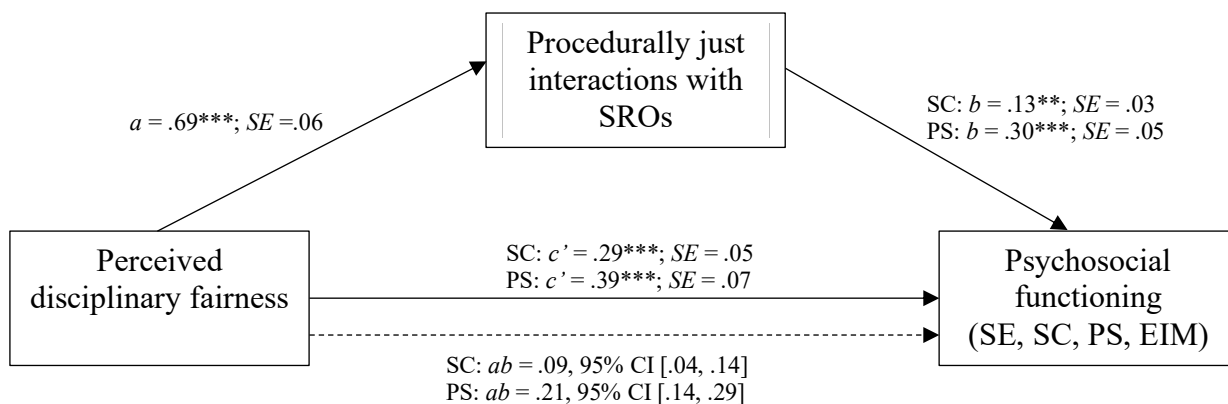
Note. Dotted line represents the indirect effect of perceived disciplinary fairness when level of support from teachers and staff is included as the mediator; 95% Bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (CI) is included. a , b , c' , and ab are unstandardized regression coefficients (SE = self-efficacy, SC = school connectedness, PS = perceived safety, EIM = ethnic identity membership.). Student risk and perceptions of neighborhood environment were included as a covariate but is not visually represented here, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Mediator 2: SROs. The procedurally just interactions with SROs did not significantly mediate the relationship between perceived disciplinary fairness and ethnic identity membership. However, the path (direct effect) from perceived fairness of disciplinary strategies to the procedurally just interactions with SROs was positive and significant ($b = .688, p < .001$), where more fair disciplinary approaches indicated more procedurally just interactions with SROs. Procedurally just interactions with SROs did not mediate the association between perceived disciplinary fairness and self-efficacy either.

The procedurally just interactions with SROs significantly mediated the relationship between perceived disciplinary fairness and perceived safety (point estimate = .209), 95%CI [.136, .289]. Approximately 36% of the variance in perceived safety is attributable to the indirect effect of disciplinary fairness through procedurally just interactions with SROs, $R^2 = .355, F(4, 444) = 61.08, p < .001$.

Analyses also demonstrated a significant positive indirect effect of perceived disciplinary fairness on school connectedness through procedurally just interactions with SROs (point estimate = .087), 95%CI [.0417, .1361]. Results indicated that nearly 24% of the variance in school connectedness can be explained by the indirect effect of disciplinary fairness through procedurally just interactions with SROs, $R^2 = .24, F(4, 444) = 24.20, p < .001$ (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Significant Path Coefficients for Simple Mediation Analysis on Psychosocial Functioning, with Perceived Disciplinary Fairness as the Predictor and Procedurally Just Interactions with SROs as the Mediator



Note. Dotted line represents the indirect effect of perceived disciplinary fairness when procedurally just interactions with SROs are included as the mediator 95% Bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (CI) is included. a , b , c' , and ab are unstandardized regression coefficients (SE = self-efficacy, SC = school connectedness, PS = perceived safety, EIM = ethnic identity membership.). Student risk and perceptions of neighborhood environment were included as a covariate but is not visually represented here.], $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Perceived Discrimination as a Mediator

Hypothesis 3a predicted that negative perceptions of disciplinary actors (teachers and staff and SROs) and unfair disciplinary practices will predict increased school-based perceived discrimination which will, in turn, predict lower scores on self-report measures of psychosocial functioning. To examine this hypothesis, Model 4 of PROCESS was again used to perform three separate simple mediation analyses (with support from teachers and staff, quality of interactions with SROs, and perceived disciplinary fairness as independent variables) for each psychosocial dependent variable. Student risk and perception of neighborhood environment were again included as covariates.

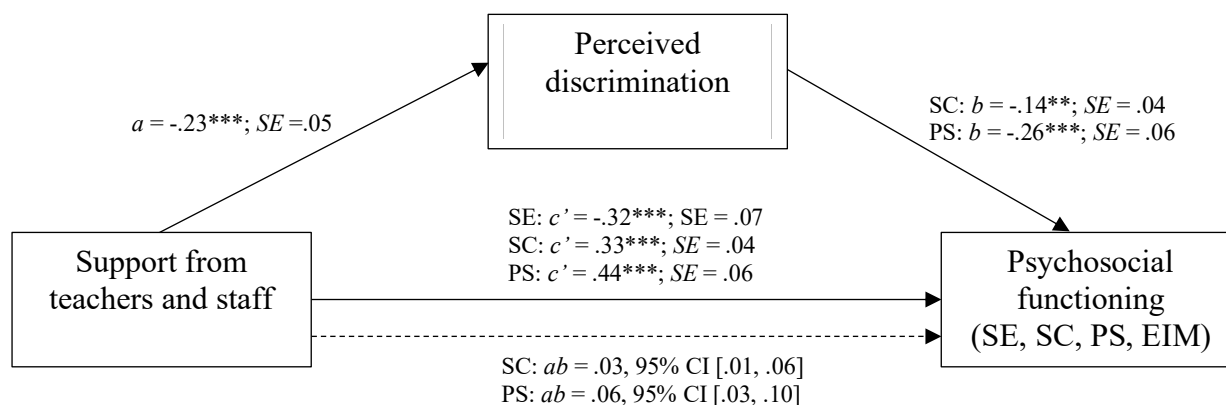
Independent Variable 1: Teachers and staff. Analyses did not demonstrate perceived discrimination as a mediator between support from teachers and staff and ethnic identity membership. Relatedly, there was no significant indirect effect of support from teachers and staff on self-efficacy through perceived discrimination.

Mediation analyses found a significant positive indirect effect of support from teachers and staff on perceived safety through perceived discrimination (point estimate = .059), 95%CI [.025], .099]. Results indicated a negative direct effect of support from teachers and staff on perceived discrimination ($b = -.227, p < .001$) and a negative direct effect between perceived discrimination and perceived safety ($b = -.259, p < .001$). Approximately 32% of the variance in perceived safety can be explained by indirect effect of support from teachers and staff through perceived discrimination, $R^2 = .315, F(4, 449) = 51.73, p < .001$.

Perceived discrimination significantly mediated the relationship between support from teachers and staff and school connectedness (point estimate = .032), 95%CI [.012, .058]. There

was a negative direct effect between perceived discrimination and school connectedness ($b = -.143, p < .001$). Approximately 26% of the variance in perceived safety can be explained by indirect effect of support from teachers and staff through perceived discrimination, $R^2 = .263, F(4, 449) = 39.99, p < .001$ (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Significant Path Coefficients for Simple Mediation Analysis on Psychosocial Functioning, with Support from Teachers and Staff as the Predictor and Perceived Discrimination as the Mediator



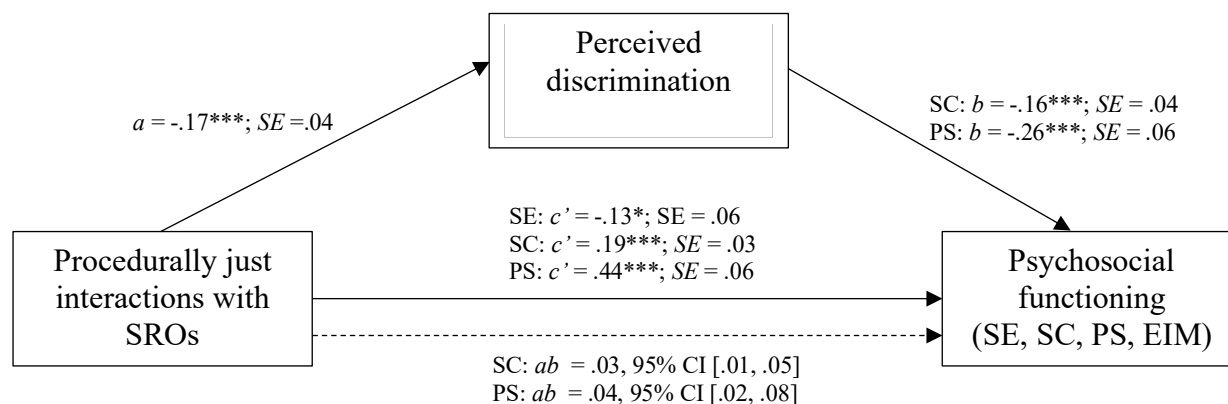
Note. Dotted line represents the indirect effect of support from teachers and staff when perceived discrimination is included as the mediator 95% Bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (CI) is included. a , b , c' , and ab are unstandardized regression coefficients. Student risk and perceptions of neighborhood environment were included as a covariate but is not visually represented here, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Independent Variable 2: SROs. When examining perceived discrimination as a mediator between procedurally just interactions with SROs and ethnic identity membership, there was no significant indirect effect. Likewise, perceived discrimination did not significantly mediate the relationship between procedurally just interactions with SROs and self-efficacy.

However, analyses indicated that there was a significant indirect effect of procedurally just interactions with SROs and perceived safety through perceived discrimination (point estimate = .0434), 95%CI [.019, .075]. A significant, negative direct effect between procedurally just interactions with SROs and perceived discrimination was found ($b = -.166, p < .001$) and between perceived discrimination and perceived safety ($b = -.262, p < .001$). About 34% of the variance in perceived safety can be explained by indirect effect of procedurally just interactions with SROs through perceived discrimination, $R^2 = .263, F(4, 449) = 39.99, p < .001$.

Results demonstrated that there was a significant, negative direct effect between perceived discrimination and school connectedness ($b = -.161, p < .001$). A significant positive indirect effect on procedurally just interactions with SROs on school connectedness through perceived discrimination was also revealed (point estimate = .027), 95%CI [.011, .048]. Specifically, nearly 21% of the variance in school connectedness can be explained by indirect effect of procedurally just interactions with SROs through perceived discrimination, $R^2 = .206, F(4, 444) = 28.73, p < .001$ (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Significant Path Coefficients for Simple Mediation Analysis on Psychosocial Functioning, with Procedurally Just Interactions with SROs as the Predictor and Perceived Discrimination as the Mediator



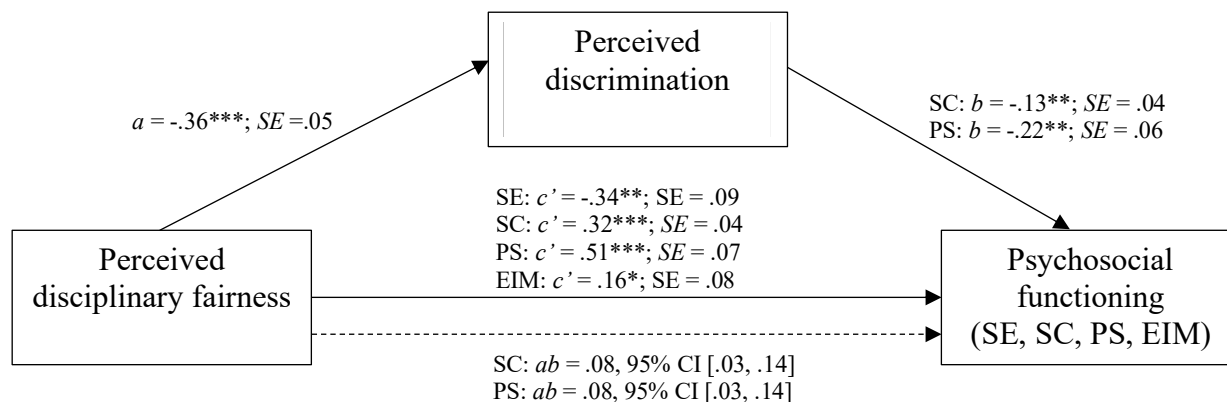
Note. Dotted line represents the indirect effect of procedurally just interactions with SROs when perceived discrimination is included as the mediator 95% Bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (CI) is included. a , b , c' , and ab are unstandardized regression coefficients (SE = self-efficacy, SC = school connectedness, PS = perceived safety, EIM = ethnic identity membership.) Student risk and perceptions of neighborhood environment were included as a covariate but is not visually represented here, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Independent Variable 3: Perceived disciplinary fairness. Similar to procedurally just interactions with SROs, perceived discrimination did not significantly mediate the relationship between perceived disciplinary fairness and ethnic identity membership. Further, there was no significant indirect effect from perceived disciplinary fairness to self-efficacy through perceived discrimination.

Analyses demonstrated a significant direct effect between perceived disciplinary fairness and perceived discrimination ($b = -.359, p < .001$) and between perceived discrimination and perceived safety ($b = -.220, p < .001$). Moreover, there was a significant positive indirect effect of perceived disciplinary fairness on perceived safety through perceived discrimination (point estimate = .079), 95%CI [.033, .136]. Approximately 31% of the variance in perceived safety can be explained by indirect effect of disciplinary fairness through perceived discrimination, $R^2 = .314, F(4, 449) = 51.39, p < .001$.

Perceived discrimination was also found to significantly mediate the relationship between perceived disciplinary fairness and school connectedness (point estimate = .046) 95%CI [.017, .082]. A significant negative direct effect between perceived discrimination and school connectedness was also found ($b = -.129, p < .001$). That is, 22% of the variance in school connectedness can be explained by indirect effect of disciplinary fairness through perceived discrimination, $R^2 = .224, F(4, 449) = 32.43, p < .001$ (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Significant Path Coefficients for Simple Mediation Analysis on Psychosocial Functioning, with Perceived Disciplinary Fairness as the Predictor and Perceived Discrimination as the Mediator



Note. Dotted line represents the indirect effect of perceived disciplinary fairness when perceived discrimination is included as the mediator 95% Bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (CI) is included. a , b , c' , and ab are unstandardized regression coefficients (SE = self-efficacy, SC = school connectedness, PS = perceived safety, EIM = ethnic identity membership.). Student risk and perceptions of neighborhood environment were included as a covariate but is not visually represented here, $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$.

Summary of Mediation Analyses

Support from teachers and staff significantly mediated the relationship between disciplinary fairness and perceived safety, disciplinary fairness and school connectedness, and disciplinary fairness and self-efficacy. When ethnic identity membership was examined as an outcome, there was no indirect effect.

Procedurally just interactions with SROs significantly mediated the relationship between disciplinary fairness and perceived safety and disciplinary fairness and school connectedness, and disciplinary fairness and self-efficacy. When ethnic identity membership and self-efficacy were examined as outcomes, no indirect effects were found.

When examining perceived discrimination as a mediator, no indirect effects between support from teachers and staff and ethnic identity membership and support from teachers and staff and self-efficacy. However, perceived discrimination significantly mediated the relationships between support from teachers and staff, perceived safety, and school connectedness. Likewise, results indicated significant indirect effects of procedurally just interactions with SROs on perceived safety and school connectedness through perceived discrimination. Lastly, perceived discrimination mediated the relationships between disciplinary fairness, school connectedness, and perceived safety. Results for mediation analyses for psychosocial outcomes are presented in Table 5.

Table 6. Results of Mediation Analyses for Psychosocial Outcomes: Direct Effects, Indirect Effects, and 95% Confidence Interval for Bootstrapping Estimates

IV	Mediator	DV	Effect of IV on mediator (a)		Effect of M on DV (b)		Direct effect of IV on DV (c)		Indirect effect (c')	95% CI	
			β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	Lower	Upper
Perceived disciplinary fairness	Support from teachers and staff	SEF	.41***	.05	-.26**	.08	-.25**	.09	-.11	-.18	-.04
		EIM	.41***	.05	.10	.07	.13	.08	.04	-.03	.10
		PS	.41***	.05	.36**	.06	.45***	.07	.15	.09	.23
		SC	.41***	.05	.28***	.04	.28***	.07	.11	.08	.16
Perceived disciplinary fairness	Procedurally just interactions w/ SROs	SEF	.69***	.06	-.04	.06	-.33**	.09	-.03	-.12	.05
		EIM	.69***	.06	.00	.06	.18*	.09	.00	-.09	.09
		PS	.69***	.06	.13**	.03	.39***	.07	.21	.14	.29
		SC	.69***	.06	.30***	.05	.29***	.05	.09	.04	.14
Support from teachers and staff	Perceived discrimination	SEF	-.23***	.05	.07	.07	-.32***	.07	-.02	-.05	.02
		EIM	-.23***	.05	-.03	.07	.13	.07	.01	-.03	.04
		PS	-.23***	.05	-.26***	.06	.44***	.06	.06	.03	.10
		SC	-.23***	.05	-.14**	.04	.33***	.04	.03	.01	.06
Procedurally just interactions w/ SROs	Perceived discrimination	SEF	-.17***	.04	.10	.07	-.13*	.06	-.02	-.04	.01
		EIM	-.17***	.04	-.06	.07	.05	.05	.01	-.01	.04
		PS	-.17***	.04	-.26***	.06	.44***	.06	.04	.02	.08
		SC	-.17***	.04	-.16***	.04	.19***	.03	.03	.01	.05
Perceived disciplinary fairness	Perceived discrimination	SEF	-.36***	.05	.05	.07	-.34**	.09	-.02	-.07	.03
		EIM	-.36***	.05	-.02	.07	.16*	.08	.01	-.04	.06
		PS	-.36***	.05	-.22**	.06	.51***	.07	.08	.03	.14
		SC	-.36***	.05	-.13**	.04	.32***	.04	.05	.02	.08

Moderation Analyses

Critical Consciousness as a Moderator

Hypothesis 4a predicted that that the strength of the relationship between disciplinary actors, perceived disciplinary fairness, and adolescent psychosocial functioning would depend on student levels of critical consciousness. That is, the relationship between negative perceptions of disciplinary actors, unfair disciplinary practices and psychosocial functioning will be weaker for youth who report higher levels of critical consciousness.

Model 1 of the PROCESS for SPSS macro was used and is able to estimate the coefficients of a model using OLS regression as well as producing the conditional effects in moderation (Hayes, 2013). The proportion of the total variance of the outcome that is independently attributed to the interaction is demonstrated. Additionally, the macro displays estimates of the conditional effects of X at the 16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles. These selected percentiles were interpreted as low, moderate, and high, respectively (Hayes, 2018). Consistent with previous analyses, student risk and perceived neighborhood environment were included as covariates. Three moderation analyses were performed to examine the independent variables (support from teachers and staff, procedurally just interactions with SROs, and perceived disciplinary fairness) and each of the psychosocial outcomes, examined separately as dependent variables.

Independent Variable 1: Teachers and staff. Moderation analyses demonstrated that critical consciousness significantly moderated the relationship between support from teachers and staff and ethnic identity membership, for youth who reported low levels ($b = .086, p = .006$) of critical consciousness (see Figure 8). The addition of the interaction term explained an

additional .83% of the total variance, $p = .027$. That is, students who reported more support from teachers and staff at their school as more fair were more connected to their ethnic identity, only if they endorsed low levels of critical consciousness.

Regarding perceived safety, the conditional effects of support from teachers and staff were trending, but not significant, with the interaction term explaining an additional 0.57% of the total variance, $p = .051$.

Analyses indicated that critical consciousness significantly moderated the relationship between support from teachers and staff and school connectedness at all levels, where the addition of the interaction term explained an additional .83% of the total variance, $p = .027$. The effect was the strongest for students who indicated a less developed sense of critical consciousness ($b = .424, p < .0001$; see Figure 9). Critical consciousness did not moderate the relationship between support from teachers and staff and self-efficacy.

Figure 8. Moderation of the Direct Effect of Support from Teachers and Staff on Ethnic Identity Membership by Level of Critical Consciousness

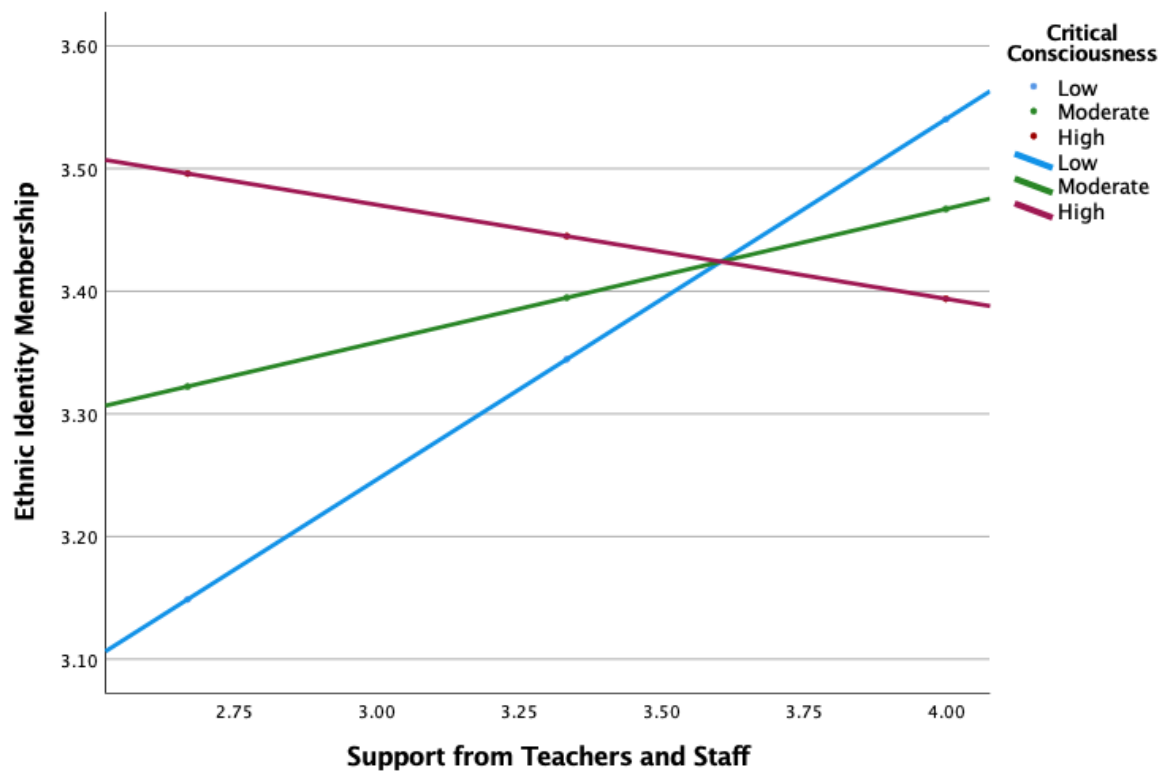
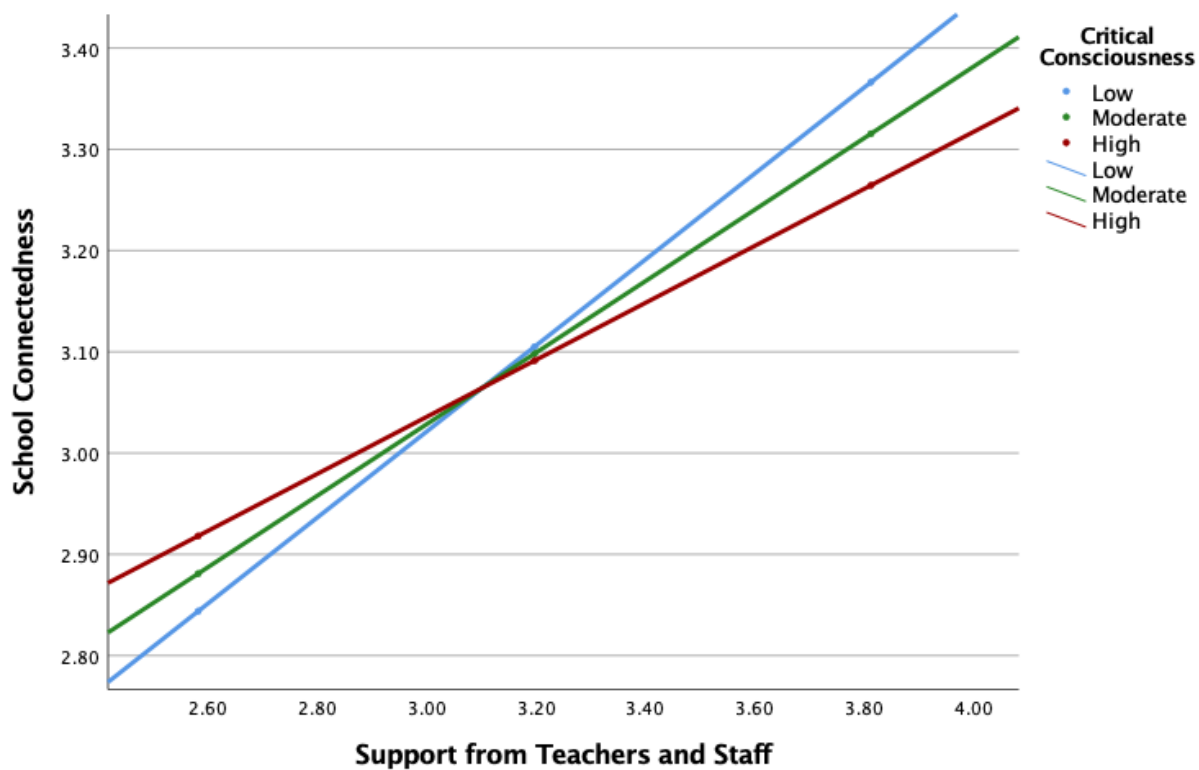
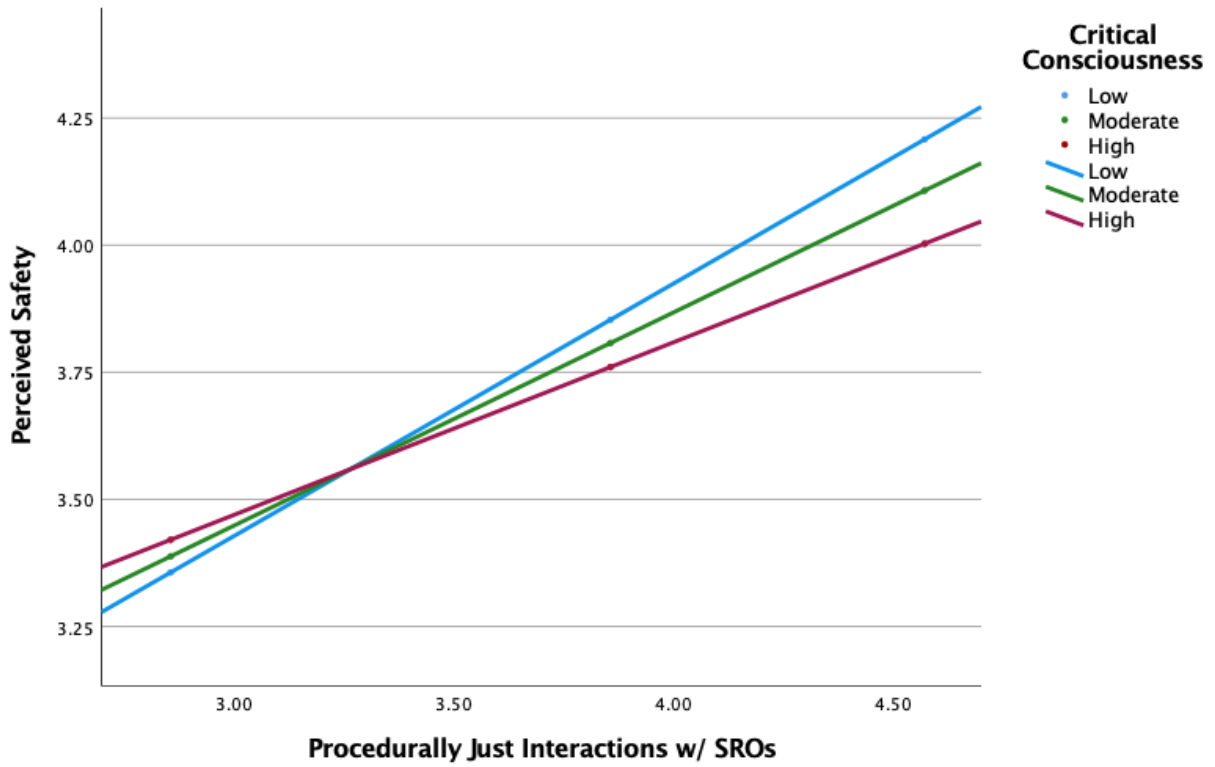


Figure 9. Moderation of the Direct Effect of Support from Teachers and Staff on School Connectedness by Level of Critical Consciousness



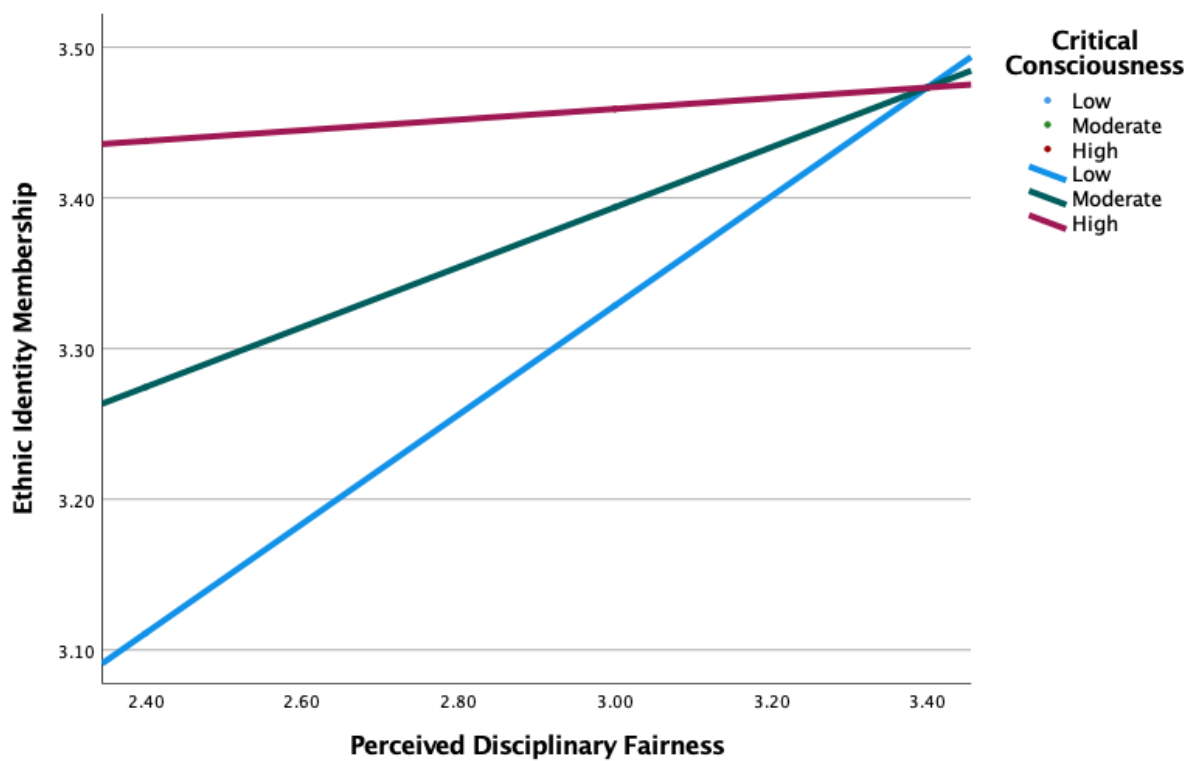
Independent Variable 2: SROs. There was a statistically significant moderator effect of critical consciousness on the relationship between procedurally just interactions with SROs and perceived safety, as evidenced by the additional of the interaction term explaining an additional .74% of the total variance, $p = .029$. The conditional effects of procedurally just interactions with SROs at all values of critical consciousness were significant, however the relationship was the strongest for those that reported low levels of critical consciousness (see Figure 10). That is, youth who reported more procedurally just interactions with SROs felt safer at all levels of critical consciousness, with those endorsing a less developed understanding of critical consciousness experiencing the strongest effect ($b = .497$). Critical consciousness did not significantly moderate the relationship between perceptions of SROs, self-efficacy, ethnic identity membership, and school connectedness.

Figure 10. Moderation of the Direct Effect of Procedurally Just Interactions with SROs on Perceived Safety by Level of Critical Consciousness



Independent Variable 3: Perceived disciplinary fairness. Critical consciousness significantly moderated the relationship between perceived disciplinary fairness and ethnic identity membership, where the inclusion of the interaction term explained an additional 1.35% of the total variance, $p = .013$. The conditional effects of perceived disciplinary fairness at three levels of critical consciousness indicated more fair disciplinary practices were associated with increased levels of ethnic identity membership, but only when critical consciousness was low ($b = .3622, p = .004$) and moderate ($b = .1989, p = .0143$; see Figure 11). Critical consciousness did not significantly moderate the relationship between perceived disciplinary fairness, self-efficacy, perceived safety, and school connectedness.

Figure 11. Moderation of the Direct Effect of Perceived Disciplinary Fairness on Ethnic Identity Membership by Level of Critical Consciousness



Summary of Moderation Analyses

Critical consciousness significantly moderated the relationship between support from teachers and staff and ethnic identity membership (only at low levels), support from teachers and staff and school connectedness (all levels, strongest for the lowest level), procedurally just interactions with SROs and perceived safety, and disciplinary fairness and ethnic identity membership (low and moderate levels). Significant moderation findings are displayed in Table 6.

Table 7. Significant Conditional Direct Effects at Levels of Critical Consciousness

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable, Moderator Variable	Conditional effect	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2
Support from teachers and staff	Ethnic identity membership, critical consciousness (<i>low</i>)	.294	3.44	.0006	.019
	School connectedness, critical consciousness (<i>low</i>)	.424	9.12	.0000	.008
	School connectedness, critical consciousness (<i>moderate</i>)	.353	9.73	.0000	.008
Procedurally just interactions with SROs	School connectedness, critical consciousness (<i>high</i>)	.281	5.58	.0000	.008
	Perceived safety, critical consciousness (<i>low</i>)	.497	8.91	.0000	.007
	Perceived safety, critical consciousness (<i>moderate</i>)	.420	9.62	.0000	.007
Perceived disciplinary fairness	Perceived safety, critical consciousness (<i>high</i>)	.340	5.94	.0000	.007
	Ethnic identity membership, critical consciousness (<i>low</i>)	.362	3.55	.0004	.014
	Ethnic identity membership, critical consciousness (<i>moderate</i>)	.199	2.46	.014	.014

Note: Student risk and perceived neighborhood environment were entered as control variables

Moderated Mediation Analyses

Hypothesis 4b posited that student experiences of discrimination may operate as a mechanism of change between perceptions of disciplinary actors, unfair disciplinary practices, and psychosocial functioning depending on student ratings of critical consciousness. As such, critical consciousness will moderate the indirect effect, buffering the relation between perceived discrimination and psychosocial functioning.

Moderated mediation analyses were performed following the guidelines defined by Preacher and colleagues (2007). Specifically, the indirect effects of the hypothesized mediated pathways were compared at low and high levels of the moderator (critical consciousness), operationalized at the +1 SD, mean, -1 SD. Bias-corrected bootstrapping procedures with 10,000 resamples were applied to calculate 95% confidence intervals of the indirect effect at each level of the moderator. As with bootstrapping for mediation analyses, the confidence interval produced by the bootstrapping procedure is examined. If the null of 0 falls between the lower and upper bound of the 95% confidence interval, then the inference is that the population indirect effect is not significant. If 0 falls outside of the confidence interval, then the indirect effect is considered significant, and it is concluded that moderated mediation is present.

The hypothesized moderated mediation model (otherwise known as a direct effect and second stage moderation model) was tested using PROCESS macro Model 15 (Edwards and Lambert, 2007; see Figure 12). This tests a model whereby critical consciousness moderates effect of path b and c' (Hayes, 2013). That is, critical consciousness was examined as a moderator on both the direct effect of perceptions of disciplinary actors and unfair disciplinary practices on psychosocial functioning and the indirect effect of perceptions of disciplinary actors

and unfair disciplinary practices on psychosocial functioning through discrimination for the same outcomes. Three moderated mediation models were performed for each of the independent variables (support from teachers and staff, procedurally just interactions with SROs, and perceived disciplinary fairness), for each of the four psychosocial outcomes (Tables 7-9). As with previous analyses, student risk and perceived neighborhood environment were included as covariates.

Independent Variable 1: Teachers and staff

Critical consciousness did not significantly moderate the indirect effect of support from teachers and staff and self-efficacy through perceived discrimination and the overall moderated mediation was not supported. Similarly, there was no conditional indirect effect on support from teachers and staff and ethnic identity membership and the overall moderated mediation model was not significant.

While the overall moderated mediation model was not supported for perceived safety, the conditional indirect effect was strongest in those high in critical consciousness (1 SD above the mean of critical consciousness ; $\omega = .0580$, Boot SE = .0220, 95% CI [.0199, .1052]) and weakest in those low in critical consciousness (1 SD below the mean, $\omega = .0557$, Boot SE = .0213, 95% CI [.0179, .1013]). However, given that the overall moderated mediation model was not supported, the three indirect effects are not significant from each other.

When examining school connectedness, the overall mediation model was not significant. However, the conditional indirect effect was significant for those high in critical consciousness (1 SD above the mean of critical consciousness; $\omega = .0407$, Boot SE = .0157, 95% CI [.0133, .0745]).

Independent Variable 2: SROs

Examining self-efficacy and ethnic identity membership as the dependent variables, results indicated that the cross-product term between perceived discrimination and critical consciousness was not significant and the conditional indirect effect was not significant.

With perceived safety, the overall moderated mediation model was not significant. Conversely, the conditional indirect effect was strongest in those high in critical consciousness (1 SD above the mean of critical consciousness ; $\omega = .048$, Boot SE = .018, 95% CI [.018, .087]) and weakest in those low in critical consciousness (1 SD below the mean, $\omega = .0375$, Boot SE = .016, 95% CI [.009, .073]). It is important to note that, given that the overall moderated mediation model was not supported, the indirect effects are not significant from each other.

Comparably, the overall moderated mediation model was not supported for school connectedness. The conditional indirect effect, however, was greater for those who reported higher levels of critical consciousness (1 SD above the mean of critical consciousness ; $\omega = .03$, Boot SE = .012, 95% CI [.010, .056]) and lowest for those who reported lower levels of critical consciousness (1 SD below the mean, $\omega = .0241$, Boot SE = .011, 95% CI [.004, .047]).

Independent Variable 3: Perceived disciplinary fairness

Lastly, critical consciousness did not significantly moderate the indirect effect of perceived support from teachers and staff and self-efficacy through perceived discrimination, and the overall moderated mediation was not supported.

There was no overall moderated mediation model when examining ethnic identity membership or perceived safety as outcomes. Regarding perceived safety, the conditional indirect effect was strongest in those high in critical consciousness (1 SD above the mean of

critical consciousness ; $\omega = .0824$, Boot SE = .035, 95% CI [.021, .161]) and weakest in those low in critical consciousness (1 SD below the mean, $\omega = .0777$, Boot SE = .036, 95% CI [.011, .152]). However, given that the overall moderated mediation model was not supported, the indirect effects are not significant from each other.

Finally, the overall moderated mediation model was not significant when assessing school connectedness as the dependent variable. However, the conditional indirect effect was significant for those high in critical consciousness (1 SD above the mean of critical consciousness ; $\omega = .063$, Boot SE = .022, 95% CI [.024, .109]).

Summary of Moderated Mediation Analyses

None of the moderated mediation models were supported in the data. Results indicated several significant conditional indirect effects. Regarding support from teachers and staff, procedurally just interactions with SROs, and perceived disciplinary fairness, the conditional indirect effects on perceived safety was significant for those high in critical consciousness and weakest in those low in critical consciousness.

The conditional indirect effect of support from teachers and staff and perceived disciplinary fairness on school connectedness was significant for those high in critical consciousness. With regards to procedurally just interactions with SROs as a predictor, the conditional indirect effects on perceived safety were strongest in those high in critical consciousness and weakest in those low in critical consciousness.

Table 8. Results of Moderated Mediation Analyses for Psychosocial Outcomes: Predictors, Mediator, and Interactions for Bootstrapping Estimates of Each DV.

IV	Direct effect of IV on M	Predictor	Self-efficacy			Ethnic Identity Membership			Perceived Safety			School Connectedness		
			β	SE	<i>p</i>	β	SE	<i>p</i>	β	SE	<i>p</i>	β	SE	<i>p</i>
Support from teachers and staff	-.23***	TS (X)	.23	.38	.54	1.12	.36	.002	.90	.29	.002	.76	.19	.000
		ADDI (M)	.32	.31	.30	.02	.30	.95	-.22	.24	.35	.05	.15	.73
		CCI (W)	.82	.52	.12	1.25	.50	.01	.41	.41	.31	.60	.26	.02
		TS x CCI (X x W)	-.19	.13	.14	-.34	.12	.006	-.16	.10	.11	-.15	.06	.02
		ADDI x CCI (M x W)	-.09	.10	.41	-.01	.10	.87	-.01	.08	.91	-.07	.5	.20
SRO	-.17***	SRO (X)	-.13	.06	.03	.06	.06	.26	.38	.17	.000	.19	.03	.000
		ADDI (M)	.10	.07	.19	-.05	.07	.46	-.26	.05	.000	-.16	.04	.000
		CCI(W)	.04	.08	.66	.13	.08	.10	-.06	.06	.32	.03	.04	.49
		SRO x CCI (X x W)	-.09	.10	.39	-.08	.10	.39	-.15	.08	.04	-.02	.05	.67
		ADDI x CCI(M x W)	-.06	.11	.56	.05	.10	.62	-.06	.08	.48	-.03	.05	.55
Disc.	-.36***	Disc.	-.34	.09	.000	.21	.09	.01	.34	.05	.000	.34	.05	.000
		ADDI (M)	.05	.08	.52	-.02	.07	.81	-.14	.04	.000	-.13	.04	.000
		CCI(W)	.01	.08	.96	.16	.08	.04	.05	.04	.26	.05	.04	.26
		Disc. x CCI(X x W)	.03	.15	.82	-.32	.14	.02	-.16	.07	.03	-.16	.07	.03
		ADDI x CCI(M x W)	-.02	.11	.84	-.03	.11	.75	-.07	.06	.21	-.07	.06	.21

Table 9. Conditional Direct Effects of Perceptions of Disciplinary Actors and Disciplinary Fairness on Psychosocial Functioning through Perceived Discrimination at Levels of Critical Consciousness.

	IV	Self-efficacy		Ethnic Identity Membership		Perceived Safety		School Connectedness	
		Coeff.	Boot 95% CI	Coeff.	Boot 95% CI	Coeff.	Boot 95% CI	Coeff.	Boot 95% CI
TS	-1 SD	-.23	[-.42, -.03]	.31	[.12, .49]	.52	[.37, .67]	.40	[.31, .50]
	M	-.33	[-.48, -.19]	.12	[-.02, .26]	.43	[.32, .55]	.32	[.25, .39]
	+1 SD	-.44	[-.64, -.22]	-.07	[-.26, .13]	.35	[.19, .51]	.24	[.14, .34]
SRO	-1 SD	-.08	[-.24, .08]	.11	[-.04, .26]	.46	[.34, .58]	.21	[.12, .29]
	M	-.13	[-.24, -.01]	.06	[-.05, .17]	.38	[.29, .47]	.19	[.13, .25]
	+1 SD	-.17	[-.33, -.02]	.12	[-.13, .17]	.30	[.18, .41]	.18	[.10, .26]
Disc.	-1 SD	-.36	[-.60, -.12]	-.001	[-.06, .06]	.42	[.20, .54]	.42	[.30, .54]
	M	-.34	[-.52, -.17]	.001	[-.05, .05]	.34	[.25, .42]	.34	[.25, .42]
	+1 SD	-.32	[-.55, -.09]	.04	[-.06, .08]	.35	[.13, .37]	.25	[.13, .37]

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Study Overview

School context is an important contributing factor to the psychosocial development of adolescents, where experiences on campus can either support or impair normative developmental processes. PVEST posits that as adolescents interact with their ecological systems (such as school context), they begin to integrate components of identity, societal expectations, stereotypes, and biases that influence their how they see themselves, and how they make meaning based upon these experiences (Spencer et al., 2006). For many students (particularly those who are Black and Brown), within the school context exists the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon and its long-standing outcomes may have a detrimental impact on adolescent psychological well-being. The primary purpose of the current study is to examine the relation between school disciplinary actors (teachers, staff, SROs), disciplinary practices (common antecedents leading to youth involvement in the school-to-prison pipeline), and adolescent psychosocial functioning. The study sought to explore this by utilizing a mixed method, exploratory sequential approach, first obtaining qualitative reports of student experiences with school disciplinary actors, disciplinary culture, school climate, discrimination, safety, and ethnic identity membership. Qualitative descriptions informed the development of a quantitative survey. Data from the quantitative survey were then used to explore the relation between perception of school disciplinary actors, perceptions of disciplinary fairness, and subsequent strengths-based

psychosocial outcomes, with attention to the mediating role of discrimination and the moderating role of critical consciousness.

Qualitative data revealed rich descriptions of how students perceive their school environment. Student reports were categorized into six thematic dimensions: disconnect between students and staff, mixed experiences with SROs specifically, experiences of inequality, school disciplinary culture, perceptions of safety, and positive interactions supporting connectedness. Students shared a wide range of experiences, highlighting lack of support from teachers and staff, the importance of student-teacher relationships, limited student voice in schools, peer connectedness, discrimination, and a disciplinary culture lacking restorative justice, accountability, and one that is rife with overly punitive disciplinary practices that are not equal to the offense. Sub-themes within each dimension illustrated salient findings to investigate further with quantitative data and explore how the experiences students reported relate to the psychosocial outcomes of interest. For example, within the “mixed experiences with SROs” dimension, youth reports of SRO conduct highlighted an opportunity to explore whether students would view SRO actions as procedurally just with our survey data. Moreover, it also offered an opportunity to assess whether student perceptions of SRO conduct are associated with their perceptions of safety, school connectedness, ethnic identity membership, and/or self-efficacy. As such, the remainder of this chapter will present both qualitative and quantitative findings together.

Revisiting Study Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study sought to address the following hypotheses:

- **Research Question 1.** How do students perceive school environment based upon their experiences/relationships with disciplinary actors, fairness, disciplinary practices, school connectedness, and identity-based experiences?
- **Research Question 2.** How do student perceptions of the contributing factors of the school to prison pipeline affect adolescent psychosocial functioning within the school context? Specifically, how do student perceptions of disciplinary actors and exclusionary discipline policies relate to students' ethnic identity membership, self-concept, perception of safety, and school connectedness?
 - *Hypothesis 2a.* Students who endorse negative perceptions of disciplinary actors and unfair disciplinary approaches will report lower ratings of psychosocial functioning.
 - *Hypothesis 2b.* Perceptions of disciplinary actors will mediate the relationship between disciplinary fairness and psychosocial functioning.
- **Research Question 3.** Will youth perceptions of discrimination mediate the relation of student perceptions of disciplinary actors, disciplinary fairness, and psychosocial functioning?
 - *Hypothesis 3a.* Perceived discrimination will mediate the effect of perceptions of disciplinary actors and unfair disciplinary approaches on psychosocial functioning.
- **Research Question 4.** How will critical consciousness moderate the relationship between student perceptions of the contributing factors of the school to prison pipeline and adolescent psychosocial functioning?

- *Hypothesis 4a.* Critical consciousness will moderate the relationship between student perceptions of disciplinary actors, disciplinary fairness, and adolescent psychosocial functioning.
- *Hypothesis 4b.* Critical consciousness will moderate the indirect effect of perceived discrimination on the relationship between perceptions of disciplinary actors, disciplinary fairness, and psychosocial functioning.

Results of the current study suggest the importance of exploring student perceptions of disciplinary actors (i.e., teachers and staff, SROs) and disciplinary approaches as predictors of psychosocial outcomes that support adolescent development. While most findings were generally consistent with predictions and are supported in the existing literature, some findings were not.

Major Findings

Hypothesis 2a: Promotive Encounters with Disciplinary Actors and Disciplinary Fairness Relate to Increased Safety, Self-Efficacy, Ethnic Identity Membership, and School Connectedness

Hypothesis 2a sought to investigate the relationship between perceptions of school disciplinary actors, perceptions of disciplinary fairness, and psychosocial outcomes. Perceptions of school disciplinary actors and disciplinary fairness were examined together due to the fact that these authority figures often identify misconduct and select and/or execute disciplinary approaches at their discretion. Specifically, student reports of support from teachers and staff, procedurally just interactions with their SRO, and perceived disciplinary fairness were explored in relation to their ratings of self-efficacy, ethnic identity membership, perceived safety, and school connectedness. Partially consistent with the first hypothesis, results indicated that, when combined, support from teachers and staff, procedurally just interactions with SROs, and

perceived disciplinary fairness were significantly associated with increased reports of perceived safety, self-efficacy, and school connectedness. Analyses predicting to ethnic identity membership were not significant. Particularly, youth who reported more support from teachers and staff, more procedurally just interactions with their SRO, and more fair discipline were more likely to report increased safety, increased self-efficacy, and increased school connectedness.

These findings align with literature concerning the role of teacher and staff support and promotive student outcomes. In their review, Eccles & Roeser (2011) report on a broad evidence base demonstrating that the quality of teacher-student relationships are associated with adolescent engagement and social-emotional learning. The authors indicate that this is supported by both cross-sectional and longitudinal data, demonstrating the immediate impacts and longevity of these associations (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Support from teachers and staff in particular have been found to improve engagement in the classroom and overall connectedness (Goodenow, 1993; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2006). A systematic review found similar associations between teacher and student relationships and enhanced engagement and connectedness in schools (Quin, 2016). Overall, students, who view their teachers as dedicating their time and emotional support to helping them succeed, are more likely to feel connected to school, which is illustrated in the findings (Biag, 2014; Chung-Do et al., 2013).

Moreover, the finding is also consistent with literature linking teacher and staff support and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to the level of a person's confidence in his or her ability to successfully perform a behavior and is influenced by their intrinsic capacities and environmental factors within the social environment (Tsang et al, 2012). Given that school is a social context, studies suggest that supportive student-teacher/staff relationships are related to a host of promotive outcomes, including academic self-efficacy (Hughes & Chen, 2011; Hughes et al.,

2008). According to Social Cognitive Theory, individuals learn within social environments and are shaped by their environment and actively shape it (Bandura, 1986).

The study findings also are consistent with the literature regarding the association between student-teacher relationships and perceived safety. An important element of the context in which children are educated is the safety in their schools. While the rate of violence in schools has decreased steadily in the past several decades (Kupchik & Bracy, 2008), it does not take away from the role perceived school safety has on student outcomes. Studies have shown that students who endorse unsafe school environments are more likely to demonstrate poorer academic performance (Milam et al., 2010) and school absenteeism (Hughes et al., 2014). The literature also suggests a positive relationship between student-teacher relationships and perceived safety, where students that demonstrated fear in school also reported poorer relationships with teachers and students (Berg & Aber, 2015). Lenzi and colleagues (2017) found that students who endorsed more support from teachers and increased school sense of community were less likely to report unsafe school environments.

Qualitative findings aligned with this result as well. Most students, if not all, reported feeling safe at school, indicating several contributing factors: safe neighborhood, school precautions, and teacher support. One student explicated identified teacher support as a contributing factor towards safety, shared the following: "...I feel like a safe school looks like students feel comfortable entering the building, but also within their own classrooms, like amongst their teachers and peers."

Study results also suggest that student encounters with their SRO are related to their perceived safety and school connectedness, particularly if students perceive these encounters as procedurally just. As discussed in Chapter 2, when individuals evaluate police and police-

adjacent officers (e.g., school resource officers) actions as procedurally just, they are more likely to perceive interactions as positive (Mazerolle et al., 2013). Research indicates that when youth in particular experience procedural justice from law enforcement figures, it signals a sense of group inclusiveness (i.e., belonging) in the community the law enforcement figure is meant to represent (Van Petegem et al. 2021). When extending this to the school context, SROs who behave in a procedurally just manner increase the likelihood that students are respected and valued members of the school environment (Van Petegem et al., 2021; Valcke et al., 2020), thus consistent with quantitative findings.

Revisiting the study conducted by Granot & colleagues (2021), the current study aligned with their findings; the more SRO actions that were perceived as procedurally just, the less likely students reported feeling threatened or anxious at their school (where threat and anxiety served as a proxy for safety). Moreover, the authors found that students who endorsed encountering procedurally just SROs in their school were also more likely to endorse a “stronger sense of identification with their school community” (i.e., school connectedness; Granot et al., 2021, p.429).

Findings from the qualitative data may corroborate why this finding is salient to students. Students, who endorsed positive perceptions of SROs and saw them as members of the school community, reported direct positive encounters with them. This is unlike reports from students who endorsed negative perceptions of SROs, where those students only reported assumptions and attitudes and not direct negative experiences.

Additionally, many students made several recommendations on what factors would support safety in schools and connectedness with disciplinary actors. One student emphasized the need for transparency in the decision-making processes behind safety practices, stating:

...I would want like a safe school where I would actually know why I have to do all these things for --in just order -- for safety precautions. Not just being told what to do, but also understanding why it's important.

This excerpt aligns with the concept of transparent decision-making, a procedurally just practice (Blader & Tyler, 2003).

Lastly, results indicate a positive relationship between disciplinary fairness, school connectedness, perceived safety. This is also consistent with the literature. Revisiting the street-level bureaucracy theory in Chapter 2, school disciplinary actors determine which students present a disciplinary concern, what is fueling the concern, and how to address it. Disciplinary approaches selected and applied by school disciplinary culture may be reflective of the overall school climate. Research suggests that students who perceive their discipline as fair are more likely to report increased school connectedness (Konopljova, 2018). Research conducted by Gottfredson and colleagues (2005) found that students who perceived greater fairness and clarity of rules reported less student victimization, impacting school safety. Moreover, a review of 25 studies suggested an overall association between positive relationships with teachers, fair disciplinary policies, and increased safety (Johnson, 2009).

Hypothesis 2b: Perceptions of Disciplinary Actors Mediate the Relationship between Perceived Disciplinary Fairness, Self-Efficacy, Safety, Ethnic Identity Membership, and School Connectedness

The study also sought to extend the existing scholarship by investigating whether perceptions of disciplinary actors would mediate the relationship between perceived disciplinary fairness, and psychosocial functioning. Disciplinary strategies that are perceived to be unfair are often associated with negative student–teacher interactions, which could promote more negative

views of school climate for all students (Payne & Welch, 2010). The study findings were consistent with Hypothesis 2b, where support from teachers and staff and procedurally just interactions with SROs significantly mediated the association of disciplinary fairness with self-efficacy, perceived safety, and school connectedness. Perceptions of disciplinary actors did not significantly mediate the relationship between perceived disciplinary fairness and ethnic identity membership.

The significant indirect effects suggest that when students perceive disciplinary approaches as fairer, it may influence the promotion of their psychosocial functioning via their views of the disciplinary actors within their schools (i.e., more support from teachers and staff and more procedurally just interactions with their SRO).

While this result is not explicitly prevalent in the psychosocial literature, it is present in psychology and law research. The study findings align with Tyler (2006) and Sherman (1993)'s work on the normative perspective regarding authority and compliance. This perspective opposes the deterrence theory of compliance, where individuals comply to rules and policies to avoid negative consequences (Pratt et al., 2008). Rather, individual perceptions of justice and fairness (social norms) are more likely to influence whether authority figures are deemed legitimate and are worth complying to (Tyler & Just, 2007; Way, 2011). In sum, when individuals view practices or rules as unfair, they are less likely to view the authority figures applying them as legitimate (Tyler & Huo, 2002). The normative perspective may extend to adolescent psychosocial factors in addition to their compliance behavior. Way (2011) extended this work to include school settings and explored whether the association between school discipline and student behavior may rely on student perceptions of the discipline system as fair and legitimate. Among a sample of 10,922 high school students, Way found that perceptions of disciplinary

fairness predicted lower classroom disruptions, and the effects were mediated by positive teacher–student relations (Way, 2011). The results from Hypothesis 2b may extend this finding to include student psychosocial functioning.

Descriptions from the focus groups provide some necessary background for this finding. Students participating in the focus groups reported that the disciplinary practices used at their respective schools were overly punitive and unnecessary for the violation committed. Minor infractions such as dress code violations and late attendance were described as receiving “harsher punishment” than seemingly more egregious offenses (e.g., sexual assault allegations, use of racial slurs) and students shared that this was unfair.

These qualitative results are consistent with those of Bracy (2010). Utilizing ethnographic research, Bracy conducted interviews and direct observations with adolescents attending high-security public high schools. Students reported feeling safe at their schools and reported that many of the security approaches utilized were overly punitive and unnecessary. Moreover, students endorsed feeling “powerless” as a result of the manner in which their schools enforce rules and hand down punishments.

The quantitative findings may offer a mechanism (perceptions of disciplinary actors) and consequences (impacts on psychosocial functioning) for the experiences and feelings described by the focus group participants. The implications of these findings are particularly meaningful for Black and Brown students, who are more likely to be impacted by the school to prison pipeline.

Hypothesis 3a: Perceived Discrimination Mediates the Effect of Support from Teachers and Staff, Procedurally Just Interactions with SROs on Perceived Safety, Self-Efficacy, Ethnic Identity Membership, and School Connectedness

Results from Hypothesis 3a offer an explanatory understanding of the relationship between disciplinary actors, disciplinary fairness, and adolescent psychosocial outcomes within the school setting (a relationship established in the literature), by way of perceived discrimination. Hypothesis 3a assessed the role of perceived discrimination as a mediator on the relationship between disciplinary actors and disciplinary fairness on adolescent psychosocial functioning. Mediation analyses predicting to self-efficacy and ethnic identity membership were not significant. In sum, more support from teachers and staff and procedurally just interactions with the SRO predicted to less perceived discrimination which, in turn, predicted to increased safety and increased school connectedness. The findings also indicated a significant indirect effect of perceived discrimination of the relation of support from teachers and staff to perceived safety, and school connectedness. That is, perceived discrimination served as a mechanism through which support from teachers and staff and procedurally just interactions with SROs predicted perceived safety and school connectedness.

Teachers and staff. Findings from Hypothesis 3a are broadly consistent with the literature writ large, particularly the direct effects between support from teachers and staff and perceived discrimination, and the direct effects of perceived discrimination and psychosocial functioning (namely, perceived safety and school connectedness). A wide range of research implies that students of color often contend with discrimination within the school setting, and the most frequent perpetrators are adults in the school, which is consistent with the study's qualitative data (e.g., teachers, staff, SROs; Chavous et al., 2008; Cooper et al., 2022). A meta-

analytic review found that perceived discrimination has harmful effects on adolescent psychological well-being, such as academic engagement and behaviors in conflict with the law (Benner et al., 2018).

In addition, the study findings are supported by previous research demonstrating the detrimental effects of school-based discrimination on adolescent psychological functioning (Cogburn et al., 2011; Cooper et al., 2022; Keel et al., 2019). Pena-Shaff and colleagues (2019) found that student perceptions of unequal treatment of racial groups influenced their experiences in school (e.g., school connectedness). Research also suggests that systemic school discrimination experiences (e.g., school disciplinary inequities and school-based teacher/staff discrimination) relate to a host of negative outcomes such as school dropout and externalizing symptoms (Cooper et al., 2022).

The results uniquely contribute to the existent literature by confirming perceived discrimination as a mechanism through which support from teachers and staff and disciplinary fairness relate to adolescent psychosocial functioning. There is a large body of empirical work examining the role of discrimination in the relationship of students to teachers and staff, the disproportionality in the application of disciplinary practices, and differential treatment by SROs (Crawford et al., 1998; Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011; Welch & Payne, 2010). For nearly three decades, studies have found that students of color have been overrepresented in exclusionary discipline practices, a finding consistent at the national-, state-, district-, and school level data (Skiba et al., 2002, 2011). This experience directly informs the school-to-prison pipeline, where students of color (particularly Black/African American students) are predominantly affected. Many studies have identified racial stereotyping as a causal factor, recognizing that disciplinary actors often offer differential treatment to students based on racially

conditioned characteristics (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019; Neal et al., 2003; Pena-Shaff et al., 2019; Skiba et al., 2011).

A rising number of studies also indicate schools use more exclusionary discipline with students with disabilities, students with intersecting identities, and LGBTQIA students (Achilles et al., 2007; Cooper et al., 2022; Morgan et al., 2017). One study in particular reporting that LGBTQIA students of color were at a higher risk of being suspended when compared to white LGBTQIA students (Snapp et al., 2022).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, studies suggest that students with marginalized identities are aware of the oppression they face in the school environment (Cooper et al., 2022; Spencer et al., 1997; Wang & Hughley, 2012). Given that disciplinary actors are mainly the source of discrimination in schools, the disproportionate application of discipline towards marginalized youth, and the impacts of discrimination on psychological well-being, the results make conceptual sense.

SROs. The novel role of perceived discrimination as a mediator between procedurally just interactions with SROs, perceived safety, and school connectedness is also compelling. The results are consistent with the procedural justice framework. The findings suggest that when students believe that their SRO treats them with dignity and respect, and that the SROs actions are fair and just, they are less likely to endorse discrimination which, in turn, relates to promotive outcomes. This is consistent with the idea that procedurally just practices promote trustworthiness and legitimacy. According to Tyler & Lind (1992), trustworthiness of authority figures is important in that it gives individuals an idea of what to expect in future interactions with that authority figure or with other authority figures similar to them. When students trust their SRO to do their job (which does not include discrimination), they will expect SROs to

continue to do their job in future interactions with them (and not discriminate them) and are less likely to feel excluded and discriminated against, therefore, less likely to experience negative outcomes (i.e., decreased safety and decreased school connectedness).

Qualitative data may also help support the quantitative findings. Many students shared experiences with inequality and discrimination at their schools at the hand of disciplinary actors (namely teachers), and it has impacted their overall school experience. So much so, that two thematic contexts emerged from the qualitative dimension “Experiences with Inequality”: person-centered discrimination based on identity and discriminatory practices at school. Students reported witnessed experiences of racial discrimination, direct experiences of racial discrimination, direct experiences of religious discrimination, and direct experiences of gender discrimination at both the person-level and within the school culture.

The results also suggest how critical it is to explore this relationship for students of color. According to PVEST, adolescents interact with their varying ecological systems (such as school) and begin to form/make meaning of their identities based upon societal expectations, biases, and stereotypes. The social positioning of Black and Brown adolescents (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, SES) is associated with the experiences they encounter (such as racism). For students of color who do not report support from their teacher and staff, procedurally just interactions with their SRO, and school connectedness, the underlying mechanism of perceived discrimination may have a significant impact on, not only their psychosocial functioning but also, how they view themselves. It is important to note that this is an exploratory conjecture, given that the current study was unable to make pointed determinations regarding this finding as it relates to Black and Brown students (see Limitations). Nonetheless, it an important factor to consider.

Hypothesis 4a: Critical Consciousness Moderates the Relationship between Perceptions of Disciplinary Actors, Disciplinary Fairness, and Psychosocial Functioning

Hypothesis 4a aimed to explore the role of critical consciousness as a moderator of the established relationships between perception of disciplinary actors, disciplinary fairness, and adolescent psychosocial functioning. Critical consciousness refers to the ability of individuals from oppressed groups to recognize the constraints of their oppression, critically reflect on their “sociopolitical environment”, and take steps towards action to be agents of change (Diemer et al., 2006, p. 112; Watts et al., 2011). Given that students who are disproportionately impacted by the school-to-prison pipeline also hold marginalized identities and experience related negative outcomes, it is important to consider this strengths-based process as a potential protective factor.

Results indicated that critical consciousness was found to influence the relationship between perceptions of disciplinary actors, disciplinary fairness, and varied psychosocial outcomes depending on its strength. That is, when students endorsed low and moderate levels of critical consciousness, more support from teachers and staff predicted to increased ethnic identity membership. A similar finding was demonstrated when examining disciplinary fairness as a predictor, where critical consciousness significantly moderated the relationship between perceived disciplinary fairness and ethnic identity membership but only at low and moderate levels. These findings are not consistent with the predicted hypothesis, where higher levels of critical consciousness was thought to influence a positive relationship between perceptions of disciplinary actors and psychosocial functioning. A potential reason for this finding is two-fold and presented below.

Study data suggest that support from teachers and staff and perceived disciplinary fairness may be effective in supporting ethnic identity membership when students endorse low

and moderate levels of critical consciousness, but not as necessary when students endorse higher levels of critical consciousness. That is, critical consciousness is no longer an effective protective factor when it is too high. This may be due to the fact that critical consciousness follows a developmental sequence and individuals that endorse lower levels of critical consciousness are actually presenting with a less developed sense of critical consciousness that, when cultivated, will develop over time. As discussed in Chapter 2, several studies indicate that there are four phases of critical consciousness: precritical, beginning critical, critical, and postcritical (Thomas et al., 2014; Watts et al., 1999). Precritical consciousness refers to a lack of awareness of inequality while beginning critical consciousness stage states that the individual begins to acknowledge the existence of social inequalities and their consequences. The critical phase refers to a solid understanding of critical consciousness and, when in the postcritical phase, individuals possess a sophisticated view of critical consciousness and are actively taking action to be agents of change in their communities to work against oppression (Thomas et al., 2014; Heberle et al., 2020).

Moderation analyses suggest that students who experience the strongest relationship between support from teachers and staff/perceived disciplinary fairness and ethnic identity membership fell in the precritical to beginning critical consciousness stages (most likely erring on the beginning critical consciousness end since no student endorsed a mean composite score of 1 or less on the Critical Consciousness Inventory). This suggests that having a beginner's understanding of critical consciousness is enough to promote belonging and affirmation with one's ethnic identity when students feel supported by their teachers and staff and believe that the disciplinary practices at their school are fair.

Being in the beginning critical consciousness phase may be normative for high school students, as it is less likely for adolescents to have a fully developed sense of critical consciousness at this age. Thomas and colleagues (2014) suggest that fully formed critical consciousness requires individuals to have the capacity to critically evaluate situations and then act against societal inequities, or the ability for critical consciousness. To do so necessitates 1.) a base level awareness and understanding of oppression and 2.) multiple avenues to formulate, discuss, and cultivate these thoughts (Watts et al., 2011; Heberle et al., 2020).

In his initial writings, Freire discussed that dialogue is a key prerequisite of critical consciousness development (Freire, 1976). Several studies indicate that group dialogues and discussions related to current events and fostering awareness of sociopolitical topics are positively related to sociopolitical efficacy and critical action (markers of critical and postcritical phases of critical consciousness development; Godfrey & Burson, 2018; Diemer & Hsieh, 2008).

In the present study, students completing the survey may not have had the opportunity to openly discuss these topics or participate in critical pedagogy in their schools to reflect upon these critical concepts. As such, it may be developmentally appropriate for students in our sample to endorse beginning levels of critical consciousness and have it remain effective.

As discussed earlier, literature suggests that students who perceive support from their teachers and staff are more likely to feel connected to school (Biag, 2014; Chung-Do et al., 2013). This may extend to their personal identities, where students who experience this support may feel safe enough to feel affirmed in their ethnic identity. For example, studies suggest that quality teacher–student relationships predicted greater engagement in ethnic/racial identity exploration for a diverse sample of high school students in the Midwest (Camacho et al., 2017). In their findings, Camacho and colleagues (2017) illustrate the significance of school climate in

helping shape ethnic/racial identity among youth attending a culturally diverse school. For students that are also aware of societal inequalities, the relationship may be stronger.

When looking at school connectedness as an outcome, the study suggested similar findings. Moderation analyses indicated that critical consciousness significantly moderated the relationship between support from teachers and staff and school connectedness at all levels (low, moderate, and high). The strongest effect was found for students who endorsed low levels of critical consciousness. The relationship between support from teachers and staff and school connectedness is well-established in the literature (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Monahan et al., 2010). As seen in the previous analyses, endorsing an initial understanding of critical consciousness is enough to start demonstrating protective effects, suggesting that it is a developmental asset (Diemer et al., 2016).

Qualitative findings support this suggestion. As mentioned previously, students endorsed a wide range of experiences regarding inequality and discrimination. However, students reported benefiting from having supportive teachers and presence of affinity spaces, while experiencing inequality and being actively aware of it. Students from marginalized identities underscored the necessity of affinity spaces to not only develop community but sustain relationships with peers and teachers. Two excerpts that best illustrate this is as follows:

The only other white teacher that I feel comfortable around is, does (subject) the right way and doesn't have any feelings of white savior or white guilt or something and she directly teaches a class on racism.

...cause for Muslim students we had to find a space to pray in school. So he [teacher] was who we were referred to set that up. So he was a really nice dude, when we weren't in trouble. So, yeah, I had pretty positive interactions with them.

Lastly, when looking at procedurally just interactions with SROs as the predictor, a similar pattern emerged. Critical consciousness significantly moderated the relationship between procedurally just interactions with SROs and perceived safety at all levels but was strongest for those who reported low levels. Findings from Hypothesis 2a discussed the relationship between procedurally just interactions with SROs and perceived safety established in the literature (Granot et al., 2021). The inclusion of critical consciousness as a moderator, even at an elementary level, suggests that acknowledging social inequality and oppression may be empowering and support experiences within the school, namely safety.

PVEST may also help explain this finding for students of color in particular. PVEST acknowledges the intricate role of risk contributors (e.g., race, socioeconomic status [SES], sex, gender), coping methods, stress engagement, and responses to emerging identities during development for adolescents of color (Fisher et al., 2020; Spencer et al., 2003). For students who are disproportionately impacted by the school to prison pipeline, the school context may serve as a risk contributor in their lives (Neblett et al., 2012). However, a hallmark of PVEST is the fact that while adolescents of color are impacted by the risk contributors in their lives, they are also experiencing available supports (e.g., supportive teachers and staff, fair disciplinary approaches). The push and pull between risks and supports can produce dissonance-producing situations and impact self-appraisal (Spencer et al., 2003). PVEST suggests that adolescents may employ reactive coping methods to resolve said situations. This is present in the literature, where Hope & Spencer (2017) identified civic engagement (comparable to postcritical consciousness) as a coping response. The moderation analyses propose that critical consciousness may be an adaptive reactive coping method that is effective for students, even when it is not fully developed.

It is also important to consider the direction of the significant moderation models. Critical consciousness significantly moderated positive associations between disciplinary actors/disciplinary fairness and psychosocial functioning. While lower levels of critical consciousness may serve as an effective moderator as more positive perceptions of disciplinary actors and fairness predict to increased psychosocial functioning. However, at the same time, when students are experiencing poor perceptions and poor psychosocial outcomes (e.g., limited support from teachers and staff, procedurally unjust interactions with SROs, unfair discipline) and poor psychosocial outcomes, higher critical consciousness weakens that relationship. This suggests that increased critical consciousness may be more effective as a protective factor. However, it is important to note that these interpretations are speculative, and more research needs to be done to explore these relationships further.

Overall, it is promising that an early understanding of critical consciousness is enough to influence youth outcomes. These results highlight the importance of exploring critical consciousness as a protective factor when considering the relationship between disciplinary actors, perceived disciplinary fairness, and psychosocial functioning.

Hypothesis 4b: Critical Consciousness Will Moderate the Indirect Effect of Perceived Discrimination between Disciplinary Actors, Disciplinary Fairness, and Psychosocial Functioning

A series of twelve moderated mediation analyses (three for each outcome variable) were conducted to test Hypothesis 4b of this study. Hypothesis 4b predicted that the indirect effect of perceptions of disciplinary actors and perceived disciplinary fairness on psychosocial functioning through perceived discrimination is conditional on the value of critical consciousness. That is, the study sought to examine the extent to which perceived discrimination explained the

relationship between support from teachers and staff, procedurally just interactions with the SRO, and disciplinary fairness depends on the student's level of critical consciousness.

The results indicated that the moderated mediation model was not supported across all models, suggesting that critical consciousness did not significantly moderate the indirect effect of all three predictors on all four outcomes through perceived discrimination.

However, the results yielded several significant conditional direct effects (see Table 6) and a number of significant conditional indirect effects. When examining support from teachers and staff, procedurally just interactions with SROs, and perceived disciplinary fairness as the predictors, the conditional indirect effects on perceived safety were strongest in those high in critical consciousness and weakest in those low in critical consciousness. Similarly, the conditional indirect effect of support from teachers and staff and perceived disciplinary fairness on school connectedness was significant for those high in critical consciousness. With regards to procedurally just interactions with SROs as a predictor, the conditional indirect effects on perceived safety were strongest in those high in critical consciousness and weakest in those low in critical consciousness.

This suggests that perceived discrimination may explain the relationship of perceptions of disciplinary actors, and perceived disciplinary fairness (components of the school to prison pipeline) to perceived safety, and school connectedness for students with higher critical consciousness. This finding is striking in that it is different from those of Hypothesis 4a, where critical consciousness was an effective moderator between perceptions of disciplinary actors, disciplinary fairness and psychosocial functioning at lower levels. One reason may be that when perceived discrimination is included as mediator, the cognizance of inequality required to

develop critical consciousness helps promote the effectiveness of critical consciousness as a moderator.

This finding helps explain the developmental process of critical consciousness, where awareness and understanding of perceived discrimination (reflective of acknowledging social inequalities and their consequences) maps onto more promotive outcomes for those with more developed critical consciousness. It is important to note that these interpretations are speculative as we are unable to distinguish whether the indirect effects are significant from each other due to the insignificant index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2013). While these findings were not statistically significant, they may offer insight that can be considered relevant for practice and theory. Future research should examine this relationship with a predominantly Black and Brown sample, as the impacts of discrimination and critical consciousness are more relevant.

Strengths

The current study presents several strengths. First, the study utilized a sequential, exploratory mixed method design to examine the constructs of interest. The exploration of these constructs was driven from the youth perspective, where focus group data and youth feedback (i.e., Youth Advisory Board) helped inform the development of the quantitative survey. The students who participated in the Youth Advisory Board in particular presented youth an opportunity to contribute to the methodology – shaping how questionnaires can best capture the concerns and needs of the community. In doing so, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of school disciplinary actors and disciplinary fairness within the larger architecture of the school climate, and its role on youth psychosocial functioning. The integration of the two data forms also offers breadth and depth of the examined topics by demonstrating contextualized, thorough insights via qualitative data that may be validated with quantitative

data. The study also contributed to the school to prison pipeline literature by identifying three potential components and assessing their impact on adolescent psychosocial functioning.

The study was also framed within an identity-focused, cultural ecological framework, PVEST, to help make meaning of the psychosocial effects of systematic oppression apparatuses, such as disciplinary actors and disciplinary practices, particularly for students of color. Moreover, the study helped contribute to the critical consciousness and PVEST literature by offering an explanatory mechanism underwriting the development of critical consciousness in adolescents and identifying critical consciousness as a coping method. Lastly, a strengths-based lens was also used in this study (e.g., strengths-based outcomes, PVEST, critical consciousness), which is in contrast to the literature that is primarily deficits-based.

Limitations & Future Directions

In addition to its strengths, the study had several limitations. First, the sample demographics do not accurately represent the students who are predominantly affected by the school to prison pipeline – Black students. Due to recruitment challenges, Hispanic/Latinx students (35.2%) and White/Caucasian (29.7%) made up the majority of the quantitative sample, while Black students only make up 13% of the quantitative data. However, students were recruited from schools that have an SRO, have a student body that identifies majority student of color, and were located in under-resourced Midwestern areas (at least 30% of households living below the poverty threshold), all indicators that increase the likelihood of involvement in the school to prison pipeline (Skiba et al., 2014). On the other hand, the focus group sample was majority POC (Black/African American = 65.1%; Hispanic/Latinx = 4.7%; Asian = 4.7%; Mixed Race = 2.3%). As such, future research should explore the relation between the constructs of interest with a predominantly Black/African American sample.

The discrepancy between the focus group participants and the survey participants demonstrates an additional limitation. The students who participated in the focus groups were not the same students who completed the survey, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, given the sequential, exploratory mixed method design, causal relationships between the qualitative data and quantitative data are not made and all integration is exploratory, not explanatory. Future studies should conduct mixed method research utilizing a sub-sample of either group to help support a more explanatory approach.

Further, the cross-sectional and correlational nature of this study disallows making absolute causal inferences between the constructs of interest over time. Research should explore whether these findings are consistent throughout high school. As such, longitudinal research is needed to establish causal relationships over time among these variables.

Finally, the operationalization of self-efficacy and perceived safety present an additional limitation. As mentioned previously, the study utilized a generalized measure of self-efficacy, that may have been too broad for interpretation. Domain-specific measures of self-efficacy are recommended in future research. Moreover, the current study utilized a safety measure composed of two items. To show strong internal consistency, a more thorough measure of student perceptions of safety would be helpful in further understanding how safety is promoted or threatened in the school setting.

Conclusion & Implications

The study supports the value of shifting from a deficits-based approach to a strengths-based framework when exploring how the school to prison may influence adolescent psychosocial functioning and, by extension, how they make sense of the world. Given that positive connections with schools provide an important frame through which adolescents

negotiate their lives (Brody et al., 2001), this study contributes to the literature by offering insight on how factors that contribute school-to-prison pipeline relates to the psychosocial functioning via discrimination and critical consciousness. Disciplinary actors may be able to address the potential negative impacts of the school to prison pipeline on students by promoting supportive and procedurally just learning environments, while offering opportunities for students to critically discuss perceived injustice and inequality. This is particularly important because, as the qualitative data suggests, youth are already having these conversations. It is only a matter of whether schools are willing to listen, cultivate, and respond to them.

APPENDIX A
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

NSF Justice in Schools Project Youth Focus Group Protocol

Loyola University Chicago

Updated 1/5/2021

(Italicized = script to introduce section)

- I) **Introducing focus group and logistics.** *Thank you all for participating in our conversation and focus group on justice in schools. We are hoping to learn more about students' feelings about school safety, school connection, school climate and that's what we are going to be asking you about tonight. (no more than 5 minutes)*
- A) Facilitators introduce the purpose of the focus group and themselves.
 - B) Discuss ID student received in email. Ask students to rename self and add ID number to name. Use ID on survey. (Jamie or Chana will confirm that each student is using the correct ID)
 - C) Discuss **quick 5 minute survey** to complete before we get started with focus group – there will be a link in the chat. **Loyola Focus Group Pre-Survey**
(https://luc.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_56aYobj8IDAL2ct)
 - D) Let the youth know that some of these questions may be phrased to refer to school in the present tense – please think back to when school was in person (if it is not currently).
 - E) Preferred form of compensation – gift cards or cash transfer?
 - 1) Pay ASAP, check emails within the week. Compensation this was left off – I had added to a previous draft.
- II) **Participant introductions**
- A) **Ground Rules.** *To ensure that this is a safe space, we have the following ground rules.*
 - 1) **You have the option** to pass/participate in any/all process
 - 2) Expectation of privacy
 - 3) Mutual regard (listening to others when they speak, adding to the conversation as best as you are able)
 - 4) Authenticity - respond as honest as you can.
 - 5) Any other ground rules from the group?
 - 6) In the future – keep comments down to two minutes
 - B) **Introductions with pronouns - really quick**
 - 1) *What is your current grade in school? Age?*
 - 2) *How would you describe your gender and ethnicity? Any other identities that you would like to share?*
 - 3) *What school do you attend?*
 - 4) *How is online schooling conducted at your school? Remote only, in-person, hybrid?*
- III) **School climate.** *We recognize a lot has changed since the last academic year (e.g., COVID-19, online learning, quarantine) and it has impacted how school is experienced. We'll plan*

on discussing that towards the end, but first wanted to have a discussion on your thoughts about school before COVID, so let's go back to the time when you were all attending school in a school building:

A) How would you describe the culture of/overall attitudes about your school?

IV) **School Community/Connectedness.** *Now we are going to talk about your school community.*

A) How connected and valued do you feel towards your school community?

B) What are some things that make you feel connected to your school?

C) How are positive, trusting relationships built and sustained within your school community? Non-traditional students treated differently from traditional students

D) How disconnected or unvalued do you feel towards your school community? What about things that happen at school that devalue student voices?

E) How does your school make sure all voices are valued and everyone is heard? (e.g., non-judgmental listening, cooperation, negotiation, equal opportunities for participation and decision-making).

F) What about things that happen at school that devalue student voices? What about things that happen at school that devalue student voices?

V) **Identity.** *Now we'll switch gears to talk about our identities.*

A) Does your school impact how you view yourself? If so, how? If it does not, why?

B) Some students have experienced injustices such as racism in school, specifically with authority figures. Have you (or someone you know) ever experienced racism in school?

1) From other students?

2) From teachers?

3) From staff?

C) Do you think there are other groups of students whose identities make them a target or struggle to be heard/feel safe at school?

1) **Make sure to query for:**

- *LGBTQ+ students*
- *Students w/ disabilities (have accommodations, have extra time on tests)*
- *Immigrant/refugee students*

VI) **Autonomy.** *In what ways do you feel like you have control over yourself or your surroundings while at school?*

VII) **School Safety / Environment.** *Thanks for sharing everyone. Now we want to talk a bit about how you feel while in school. For these questions, try to think back to when school was in person.*

- A) Is your school safe? What does/would a safe school look like to you? What features would it have or not?
- B) Outside of safety, what other things do you feel at or about school?*(probe for both in-person and remote experiences)*
- C) In general, what kinds of actions do the adults at your school do to promote a positive and safe school environment?
 - 1) Specifically, what kinds of rules or procedures are in place at your school to create a positive school environment?
 - 2) What kinds of policies are in place to ensure a safe learning environment?
 - 3) In general, what kinds of actions have been unsuccessful in promoting a positive school environment?

VIII) **Discipline.** *Okay great everyone, now we'll talk about your thoughts on discipline, or ways your school addresses misbehavior or breaking the rules.*

- A) What types of behaviors do students get in trouble for?
- B) What types of discipline strategies and/or approaches have you experienced? Witnessed?
- C) When and how is exclusionary punishment (e.g., in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, arrests) paired with other kinds of actions at your school?
- D) If you have experienced discipline, who disciplined you?
- E) How often do **you** experience discipline? Witness discipline?
- F) Are the discipline practices at your school fair? If not, what would make it fair?
- G) What do you think fair treatment looks like in school?

IX) **Restorative Justice.** *Now we are going to ask some questions about RJ.*

- A) Have you heard the term “restorative justice” or “restorative practices”? What does it mean to you? Is it happening at your school/how? If you have, do people use it?
- B) *Give prompts to elicit specific practices?* Circles (peace, community, problem-solving), restorative conversations, conferences, peer mediation, restorative mindset, affective questions/statements
- C) *How are conflicts resolved / are you given a chance to share your side / are you included in a discussion about what consequences you should face?*

X) **School Authority Figures in General.** *Now let's talk about the adults in your school.*

- A) Who are the authority figures **ADULTS** in your school? AKA who are the people who have the power to make decisions at your school?
- B) Do you interact with them? How would you describe these interactions?
- C) When you interact with your teachers/coaches/staff, how do you feel?
- D) How would you describe your relationship with your teachers? Coaches? Other staff?

- XI) **School Resource Officers (SROs).** *We'd like to get more specific about the adults in your school and talk about School Resource Officers (SROs).*
- A) Tell us what you know about SROs. What does the SRO in your school DO?
 - B) Maybe instead, what are the opportunities you might interact with an SRO at your school, where might they be present?
 - C) When school was in-person, how would you describe your SRO?
 - 1) How many SROs were in your school?
 - *Query if needed.* How would you describe your relationship with SROs?
 - *Query if needed.* Do you talk to the SROs at your school?
 - *Query if needed.* When you talk to them, how do you feel?
 - D) What kinds of behaviors receive attention or involvement from SROs.
 - 1) What does it feel like when the SRO is present?
 - 2) How does your experience with SROs compare to or affect your experience of police in the outside community (or vice versa)?
- XII) **Critical consciousness.** *Now we want to talk about social justice and equality, in the school setting.*
- A) What does equality mean to you? Inequality?
 - 1) *If you believe there are inequalities, is there anything that can be done about it?*
 - 2) *Query if needed. Can we, as citizens, do anything about it?*
 - B) Do you believe equality depends on a person's status or identity in this country (e.g., gender identity, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation)? Or are people treated differently based on status or identity? If so, how?
 - 1) *Query if needed.* Are specific groups being oppressed? If so, which ones?
 - C) What are your thoughts about oppression/unfair treatment in this country?
 - D) Are you involved in any social or political activities (Key Club, Student Council, BAMS, WOW, Local School Council, civil rights group or org, demonstrations)?
- XIII) **Wrap Up.** *We recognize that COVID-19, online learning, and quarantine has impacted how school is experienced.*
- A) What are your thoughts about these changes?
 - B) How do you think your school has done managing / responding to COVID?

Thank you all for participating in our focus group!

Let 'em know: If you are interested in participating further by doing future focus groups or getting more involved in the research process, but didn't answer "yes" on the preliminary survey, please feel free to reach out by email.

APPENDIX B
QUALITATIVE CODING MANUAL

NSF Justice in Schools Project
Focus Group Coding Manual - Axial Codes

Overarching theme 1: Actors/authority figures = teachers, staff, administration, SROs, other students

Axial Code 1: Student experiences with teachers

Sub-codes

- a) Difficult gaining positive recognition from teachers
 - a. *Example. Students have to work hard to be recognized by teachers*
- b) Teachers not supporting their students
 - a. *Example. Trying to make students not be accepted into accelerated programs, allowing students to be insensitive toward given racial groups, do not care to help students get out of bad situations/attitudes*
- c) Teachers supporting their students
 - a. *Example. Push to take harder classes, making students feel included, adapting to students having different learning styles, providing equity, push students to be the best they can, being a coach as required but being personable as needed*
- d) Teachers creating additive pressure/stress on student to succeed
 - a. *Example. Prove the teacher wrong in not allowing students recommendations to accelerated programs by succeeding in these programs, students feel incapable, students feel the need to over exceed, teachers set high expectations*

Axial Code 2: Student experiences with staff (deans/counselors/administrators)

Sub-codes

- a) Staff is selective in choosing the inappropriate behaviors they hold students accountable for
 - a. *Example. Harsher with dress code than racially insensitive things, racial injustices and fighting is considered a major problem while write ups are not*
- b) Staff doesn't take students seriously
 - a. *Example. Complaints are not recognized, situations not rectified*
- ↔ Staff don't do job effectively, are not supportive
- d) Staff barely interact with students personally
- e) Staff interactions are subjective
 - a. *Example. Good experience if not in trouble, bad experience if in trouble, experiences depend on social identities*
- f) Staff are personable
 - a. *Example. Student can call some staff by their first name, staff wants students to stay out of trouble*

Axial Code 3: Student experiences with SROs

Sub-codes

- a) SROs do their jobs ineffectively
 - a. *Example. They don't fix problems from the ground/root up, more reactive than proactive work*

- b) SROs biases toward given groups
 - a. *Example. Gravitating toward African American students for being “loud”.*
- c) Students do feel protected by the SRO
- d) Students do not feel protected by the SRO
- e) Students feel that SRO are nice, kind, and/or approachable.

Axial Code 4: Staff (deans/counselors/administrators) conduct

For these codes, ensure that the context suggests administration or staff and NOT teachers

Sub-codes

- a) Deans disciplines students
 - a. *Example. ISS, OSS, call police, talk with students*
- b) Counselors help with given tasks annually
 - a. *Example. Picking classes, picking colleges, etc.*
- c) Monitor students
 - a. *Example. Watching students in the bathroom*
- d) Create spaces for students to feel comfortable in their given identities
 - a. *Example. Space for Muslim students to pray*
- e) Deans are considerate of the circumstances of student’s situations
- f) Implement and reiterate rules/policies

Axial Code 5: Teacher conduct

Sub-codes

- a) Call for other staff to disciplines students
- b) Discipline students
- c) Recommends students for accelerated classes
- d) Facilitate class discussion
- e) Teacher actively prevents student misbehavior (address student problems)
 - a. *Example. Deal with problems, help students not do problems/issues again*
- f) Run in between fights

Axial Code 6: SRO conduct

Sub-codes

- a) Talks directly to students
 - a. *Example. Take students out of class to converse regarding bad behavior, ask students about their whereabouts*
- b) SRO disciplines students/Decides the way students will be disciplined
- c) Help rectify situations
 - a. *Example. Help students with stolen items, cyberbullying, get in between fights*
- d) Monitor students
- e) Drug checks

Overarching theme 2: Context = school culture, school population, safety

Axial Code 7: Overall school culture

Sub-codes

- a) High-achieving culture of academic performance, academic rigor
- b) Negative school attitude due to pressure in school
- c) Strict school culture
- d) Permissive, easy-going school culture
- e) Participation in extracurricular activities
- f) Emphasis on sports in school
- g) Lack of trust with school staff

Axial Code 8: Student experiences of safety

Sub-codes

- a) Protection from internal threats
- b) Protection from external threats
- c) Student report lack of protection from external threats
- d) School and school environment is not safe
- e) Student reports that school is a place where students can/should feel safe
- f) Safety training/drills for students and teacher

Axial Code 9: Population of the school

Sub-codes

- a) Diversity at the student level (diversity regarding various identities)
 - a. *Example. Student report diverse student body, clubs, student government, etc.*
- b) Diversity at the administration level
 - a. *Example. Student reports diverse teachers, coaches, administration, etc.*
- c) Diversity at the community level
 - a. *Example. Schools serving the community at large and reflect community demographics.*
- d) School population is demographically homogenous
- e) Lack of diversity at the administration and staff level.
 - a. *Example. Student reports that their aren't POC teachers at school.*

Overarching theme 3: Student Outcomes = how are students feeling in response to school experiences (e.g., stressed, happy, etc.)

Axial Code 10: Students performing actions to assist with fitting in

Sub-codes

- a) People seek attention through impressing others, being something they are not, attention in general/ be noticed
- b) Classmates wanting to impress other students
- c) Students are tokenized for their identity

- a. Example. Only person of a certain identity in a class or club, speak for whole group
- d) Joining or wanting a cultural club/group/activity to represent them

Axial Code 11: Experiences of fairness

- a) Students satisfied with fairness of school, that the school hears/listens to them
- b) Students voicing concerns about school (not satisfied with school), school doesn't hear or listen to them, lack of student voice
- c) Students report having a voice, school seeks feedback from students and allows for student input on school, assemblies

Axial Code 12: Students feeling positive in response to experience in school

Sub-codes

- a) Students feel comfortable and safe with teachers, staff, and SROs
- b) Students feel like their culture is recognized and valued at their school
 - a. Example. Cultural assembly, festivities, sense of community for all groups
- c) Students have a positive self-view while at school
 - a. Example. Do not feel like they need to change to be included, can be themselves, encouraged and supported by staff
- d) Students have not experienced racism, sexism, or any other form of oppressive discrimination at their school

Overarching theme 4: Disciplinary Policies = discipline approaches discussed, frequency of EX discipline use, types of EX discipline use, frequency of RJ use, general use of RJ

Axial Code 13: Types of discipline used

Sub-codes

- a) Items confiscated
- b) OSS/ISS
- c) Detention
- d) Therapy
- e) Arrest
- f) Sent to the office
- g) Discipline from the dean
- h) Being pulled to the side to talk w/ teacher
- i) Removal of privileges

Axial Code 14: Perceptions of school use of exclusionary discipline (e.g., ISS, OSS, arrests, office referrals)

Sub-codes

- a) Harsh discipline for non-racist incidents
- b) School disciplinary action dependent on source of complaints
- c) School disciplinary action does not address bigger issues (racism, sexual assault)

- d) Student feels targeted at school
- e) Unnecessarily punitive discipline/Ineffective current discipline strategies

- f) Invasion of privacy
- g) Unequal punishment is racial discrimination
- h) Dehumanizing punishment

Axial Code 15: Types of actions/behaviors receiving discipline

Sub-codes

- a) Discipline for dress code
- b) Discipline for cyberbullying
- c) Discipline for attendance/tardiness
- d) Discipline for fights in school
- e) Discipline for vaping and drug possession

Axial Code 16: Experiences with restorative justice

- a) Advocating for restorative justice reform
- b) School failing to implement restorative practices
- c) Peace circles
- d) Staff-driven restorative practices

Axial Code 18: Disciplinary culture in school

Sub-codes

- a) Lack of transparency – rules aren't explained clearly to students
- b) Disconnect between student
- c) Student desire for school to provide preventative resources
- d) Student opinions ignored
- e) Student scared to report misconduct
- f) Staff and teachers are not held to the same disciplinary standard as students, not held accountable

Overarching theme 5: Identity-Based Issues = student experiences

Axial Code 19: Identity-based discrimination (e.g., homophobia, racism)

Sub-codes

- a) Differential treatment based on race
- b) Differential treatment based on gender identity
- c) Differential treatment based on sexual orientation
- d) Differential treatment based on religion or culture
- e) Discrimination due to lack of Diversity and Inclusion

Axial Code 20: Equality/equity

Sub-codes

- a) Students do not report access and equal distribution of resources or opportunities

- b) Students report access and equal distribution of resources or opportunities

Axial Code 21: Contribution to school community

Sub-codes

- a) Peer-driven school connectedness
- b) Students report receiving or observing academic and social support
- c) More Student Engagement in Extra Curricular Activities
- d) More Positive Relationships with Staff and Staff

Axial Code 22: Involvement in civic/social justice organizations

Sub-codes

- a) Currently involved in civic, community, social justice orgs
- b) Students desire more community, civic, and social justice initiatives

APPENDIX C
MEASURES

1. Authoritative School Climate Survey, Student Support – Willingness to Seek Help subscale (Cornell, 2017)

Instructions: How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?

Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
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1. There are teachers at this school I could talk with if I had a personal problem.
2. There is at least one teacher or other adult at this school who really wants me to do well.
3. There are counselors/social workers at this school I could talk with if I had a personal problem.

2. Procedurally Just Interactions with SROs (Granot & Richards, 2020)

Instructions: For the following questions, think about the way the SRO(s) interacts with students at your school. In your opinion, how often does the SRO(s)...

Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	All the time (5)
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1. Make fair and impartial decisions in the cases they deal with.
2. Give students a chance to tell their side of the story before they decide what to do.
3. Make decisions based on the law and not on their personal biases or opinions.
4. Treat students with dignity and respect.
5. Explain their decisions in ways that students can understand.
6. Treat all students who are in a similar situation the same way.

3. Authoritative School Climate Survey, School Disciplinary Structure subscale (Cornell, 2017)

Instructions: Thinking about your school, would you agree or disagree with the statements below? Pick the answer that is closest to how you feel.

Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
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1. The school rules are fair.
2. The punishment for breaking school rules is the same for all students.
3. Students at this school are only punished when they deserve it.
4. When students are accused of doing something wrong, they get a chance to explain.
5. Students are treated fairly regardless of their race or ethnicity.

4. Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (Fisher et al., 2000)

Instructions: After each statement, indicate whether you've experienced the type of discrimination described, and if so, if it was because of your race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, family income, etc.

Select identity: race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, family income, immigrant status.

Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
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1. You were discouraged from joining an advanced level class.
2. You were given a lower grade than you deserved.
3. People expected more of you than they expected of others your age.
4. People expected less of you than they expected of others your age.
5. You were wrongly disciplined or given after-school detention.
6. People acted as if they thought you were not smart.
7. You were called insulting names by other students.
8. Others your age did not include you in their activities.
9. You were threatened by other students.
10. You were discouraged by other students from joining a club/sport.
11. You were disciplined for your choice of clothing or hairstyle.
12. You were treated less favorably by a teacher/staff/admin.
13. You overheard an insulting comment targeted at your identity.
14. Someone made an incorrect assumption about your identity.

5. Critical Consciousness Inventory (Thomas et al., 2014)

Instructions: For each set of 4 statements below, please select the one that most reflects your views

1. I believe that the world is basically fair. (1)
 - a. I believe that the world is basically fair, but others believe that it is unfair. (2)
 - b. I believe that the world is unfair for some people. (3)
 - c. I believe that the world is unfair, and I make sure to treat others fairly. (4)
2. I believe that all people are treated equally. (1)
 - a. I believe that some people don't take advantage of opportunities given to them and blame others instead. (2)
 - b. I believe that some groups are discriminated against. (3)
 - c. I work to make sure that people are treated equally and are given equal chances. (4)
3. I think that education gives everyone an equal chance to do well. (1)
 - a. I think that education gives everyone who works hard an equal chance. (2)
 - b. I think that the educational system is unequal. (3)
 - c. I think that the educational system needs to be changed in order for everyone to have an equal chance. (4)

4. I believe people get what they deserve. (1)
 - a. I believe that some people are treated badly but there are ways that they can work to be treated fairly. (2)
 - b. I believe that some people are treated badly because of oppression. (3)
 - c. I feel angry that some people are treated badly because of oppression and I often do something to change it. (4)
5. I think all social groups are respected. (1)
 - a. I think the social groups that are not respected have done things that lead people to think badly of them. (2)
 - b. I think people do not respect members of some social groups based on stereotypes. (3)
 - c. I am respectful of people in all social groups, and I speak up when others are not. (4)
6. I don't notice when people make prejudiced comments. (1)
 - a. I notice when people make prejudiced comments and it hurts me. (2)
 - b. It hurts me when people make prejudiced comments but I am able to move on. (3)
 - c. When someone makes a prejudiced comment, I tell them that what they said is hurtful. (4)
7. When people tell a joke that makes fun of a social group, I laugh and don't really think about it. (1)
 - a. When people tell a joke that makes fun of a social group, I laugh but also feel uncomfortable. (2)
 - b. When people tell a joke that makes fun of a social group, I realize that the joke is based on a stereotype. (3)
 - c. I tell people when I feel that their joke was offensive. (4)
8. I don't see much oppression in this country. (1)
 - a. I feel hopeless and overwhelmed when I think about oppression in this country. (2)
 - b. I feel like oppression in this country is less than in the past and will continue to change. (3)
 - c. I actively work to support organizations which help people who are oppressed. (4)
9. I don't feel bad when people say they have been oppressed. (1)
 - a. I feel sad or angry when experiencing or seeing oppression. (2)
 - b. I often become sad or angry when experiencing or seeing oppression, but I find ways to cope with my feelings. (3)
 - c. I work to protect myself from negative feelings when acts of oppression happen. (4)

6. Brief Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (Tipton & Worthington, 1984)

Instructions: *The following statements are about attitudes and feelings you might have about yourself and a variety of situations. Work quickly and give your first impression.*

Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Slightly agree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Slightly disagree (5)	Disagree (6)	Strongly disagree (7)
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1. I am a very determined person.
2. Once I set my mind to a task, almost nothing can stop me.
3. I believe I would respect myself less if I gave up something I started.
4. Sometimes things just don't seem worth the effort (REVERSE)
5. I would rather not try something I'm not good at (REVERSE)
6. I can succeed in any task which I set my mind.
7. Nothing is impossible if I really put my mind to it.
8. When I have difficulty getting what I want, I just try harder.
9. I have more will power than most people.
10. I would go through physical discomfort to complete a task because I just don't like to give up.

7. Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised (Phinney & Ong, 2007)

Instructions: *In this country, people come from a lot of different cultures and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Mexican-American, Hispanic, Black, Asian-American, American Indian, Anglo-American, and White. Every person is part of an ethnic group, or sometimes multiple groups, but people differ on how important their ethnicity is to them, how they feel about it, and how much their behavior is affected by it. These questions are about your ethnicity and how you feel about it or react to it.*

Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
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1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group.
2. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
3. I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
4. I have often done things that will help me understand my ethnic background better.
5. I have often talked to other people in order to learn more about my ethnic group.
6. I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.

8. Perceptions of Safety (Granot, 2020)*Instructions: When you get to school each day, how much do you feel...*

Not at all (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Completely (5)
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1. Safe
2. Fairly treated

9. Authoritative School Climate Survey, School Engagement subscale (Cornell, 2017)*Instructions: How do you feel about going to this school?*

Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
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1. I like this school.
2. I am proud to be a student at this school.
3. I feel like I belong at this school.
4. I usually finish my homework.
5. I want to learn as much as I can at school.
6. Getting good grades is very important to me.
7. I feel like students with my identity/identities are valued at my school.

10. School-Based Student Risk (Granot & Richards, 2020)*Instructions: When you get to school each day, how often do you witness or experience...*

Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	All the time (5)
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1. Physical fights between students?
2. Bullying among students?
3. Robberies or thefts?
4. Gang activity?
5. Students disrespecting teachers?
6. Staff threatening violence?
7. Students threatening violence?
8. Sexual harassment between students?

11. Neighborhood Environment Measure (Granot & Richards, 2021; inspired by Elliot et al.,1985)

Instructions: The following statements ask about your perceptions of the neighborhood(s) you live in/spend a lot of time in. Answer to the best of your ability as honestly as possible. There are no right or wrong answers.

Not at all true (1)	A little true (2)	Sort of true (3)	Very true (4)
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1. I feel safe when I walk around my neighborhood by myself during the day.
2. I feel safe when I walk around my neighborhood by myself at night.
3. Police treat residents in my neighborhood fairly.
4. The presence of police in my neighborhood makes me feel uncomfortable.

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