

Disciplinary Differences in School by Gender

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Abstract

Previous research has suggested that there is a correlation between a student's gender and whether or not they get disciplined and what discipline is assigned in school. The purpose of this study was to determine if male students truly misbehave more or if they are just disciplined more frequently. Student behaviors in the classrooms of seven high school teachers at a school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania were observed to determine if there is a difference in who is disciplined by gender. The primary researcher had a set of misbehaviors and teacher responses and once one occurred they would mark it down. We found that male students don't actually misbehave more frequently than female students but are called out more often for actions that may be consistent with gender stereotypes. We also found that male students are more likely to be off task and call-out and female students are more likely to talk and fidget. A safe conclusion to draw from these findings may be that gender stereotypes and teachers' responses play a role in misbehavior in school.

Introduction

Gender affects what students get disciplined for and the discipline assigned to them in schools (1). This affects male students more than it does female students (2). For example, a recent 2022 report from the Learning Policy Institute found that regardless of income male students are more likely to be suspended than female students (3). This can be problematic because when someone is removed from the classroom they start to fall behind academically, which plays a part in the school to prison pipeline and that especially targets black males. One cause of these differences might be gender stereotypes; students feel pressured to conform to social roles, and teachers might interact with students differently based on these roles (1). By studying the role of gender stereotypes in schools, we can come up with ways to reduce this impact on students. In this study, we observed students' misbehaviors and teachers' responses to them in order to record what stereotypes and differences are present.

Discipline practices in the US push some students out of school and keep them behind compared to their peers (4). According to Quinn, this needs to change; Black students were 4 times more likely to be suspended as a discipline than White students in the US. He points out that Black males are more likely to be punished or identified for special education services and that the US incarcerates children at a higher rate than any other country. Quinn argues some solutions to fix these problems are for schools to develop better data systems to track and report discipline, address poor school climate, train teachers in new ways to interact with students and examine racial bias in schools. By making school a place where students want to be and teaching teachers how to better interact with students, it could help to end some of these disparities (4). This is important to our topic because in the current study, all participants are Black, so we expect teachers may identify misbehaviors at a high rate due to their students' race. This might affect how different genders are treated, due to the high amount of scrutiny placed on black students, especially males in the US.

There are clear discrepancies in disciplinary consequences by gender and wealth (2). Slate and Tiger examined elementary discipline records in Texas for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. The poverty line was distinguished by whether or not a student qualified for free or reduced lunch (2). They found that for out-of-school suspensions, the percentage of low-income students that were suspended was 1.4% for girls and 5.6% for boys, and for non-low-income students 0.3% for girls and 1.7% for boys (2). As far as in-school suspensions, the percentage of low-income students that were suspended was 3.2% for girls and 10.5% for boys, and for non-low-income students, the rate was 1.2% for girls and 5.0% for boys (2). This suggests income plays an important role in how students are suspended. They also found that for non-low-income students, out-of-school suspensions for girls were 1.4% and for boys 5.6%. For low-income students, out of school suspensions were 0.3% for girls and 1.7% for boys (2). They also found that regardless of income male students are more likely to be suspended than female students. This is important to my study because it supports the claim that male students are disciplined more, but we want to figure out if they actually misbehave more.

A teacher's experience level plays a role in how they react to the behaviors of students (5). Groeschl and Wetenkamp examined survey responses from teachers in Wisconsin and senior education majors at a university in Wisconsin. There were 107 respondents with 32 being senior education majors at a university in Wisconsin, 36 elementary teachers in Wisconsin, and 39 secondary teachers from Wisconsin schools (5). Inexperienced teachers found behaviors like shoving more acceptable than experienced teachers (5). Inexperienced teachers also found whispering to be happening more than experienced teachers (5). No significant gender difference was found but some reasons for that could be

the small sample size and the fact that each class only had one gender in the room at a time leaving no room for comparisons (5). Because there would only be all girls in the class or all boys in a class teachers couldn't judge one gender's behavior based on the behavior of the others (5). This is important to my study because I now know to factor in the teacher when looking at the misbehaviors that are corrected.

Misbehaviors get teachers' attention and cause a response (6). With this response, teachers may rely on stereotypes to guide whom they focus on (6). Hendrickson examined footage from 2009-2010 in 26 K-12 southeast Michigan classrooms. Non-minority students committed 81.51% of misbehavior and minority students committed 18.49%, with male students committing 59.66% of misbehaviors (6). Teachers only saw 404 behaviors or approximately 33.5% of the total misbehaviors (6). Male students were singled out most often for talking and minority students were called out more for off-topic behavior (6). Hendrickson says teachers are told black students achieve less, so they might be trying to help keep students engaged, he argues this is not racial bias. This is relevant to my study because we will be studying classrooms of all black students and all white teachers and we can see if the behaviors that these teachers focus on are the same as Hendrickson highlights and if the same patterns in gender exist.

The pressure to conform to gender stereotypes plays a role in female and male students' behaviors (1). Heyder et al. studied 4200 Flemish teens ranging from 12-14 years old. They found that students with high levels of gender conformity had a higher level of school misconduct. It did not differ much between girls who conform and those who don't but male students who highly conform to gender stereotypes have significantly higher scores of school misconduct than those who don't (1). They also found that overall male students misbehave more. Stereotypes concerning being male are more about standing out and controlling the room, while female stereotypes are things not associated with misbehavior, so stereotypes might explain why males misbehave more (1). This is important to my study because this provides reasons why males may misbehave more and why teachers may react to those behaviors more frequently.

Stereotypes reflect general expectations about members of particular social groups and gender is considered a primary feature in personal perception (7). Ellemers argues that gender differences develop because of the way boys and girls are raised and educated. Evidence shows that societal roles of men being providers and women being homemakers is the reason for these differences (7). Social roles have been found to impact hormones and self-regulation, which causes different thoughts and feelings (7). Some male stereotypes are individual task performance, competence, and agency (7). Some female stereotypes are caring for others, having a warm personality, and having community in their domain (7). This is important to my study because it provides reasons why male students act differently than female students and explains some perceptions teachers might have toward students based on gender.

Gender stereotypes	Male	Female
Stereotypical domain	Agency	Community
Relevant behavior	Individual task performance	Care for others
Anticipated priorities	Work	Family
Perceived qualities	Competence	Warmth
Neglected needs	Interpersonal	Professional achievement

Table 1. Gender stereotypes for males and females. Males having Agency as a their stereotypical domain means that in the classroom they are expected to try to control the room and gain attention which makes teachers pay attention more to their behaviors. Males also prioritize work meaning they tend to focus less on those around them.

Overall, research says that gender plays a role in how one is disciplined in the classroom because students' behaviors are often linked to stereotypes and this is especially true for males (1, 2, 4, 6, 7). In addition to this, race, teacher experience, and income play a role in this (2, 4, 5, 6). This study is unique because by studying a classroom with only one race within it gender can be focused on. In this study, we observed several high school classes and students' misbehaviors and their teachers' reactions to them.

We hypothesize that male students will be disciplined more frequently than female students. Previous studies suggest that male students are more likely to be suspended than female students (2). We also believe that there will be a difference in the types of behaviors committed by different genders and that they will be consistent with gender stereotypes. This is because research states that male students who highly conform to gender stereotypes have significantly higher amounts of school misconduct than those who don't (1). Another thing we hypothesize is that teachers' gender will play a role in the types of behaviors they correct. This is nondirectional because we have no source on the effects of teachers' gender but we believe that teachers' genders might affect how they act on stereotypes they hold.

Methods

The participants in this experiment are 9th and 10th grade students and their teachers in a private college preparatory school in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. There were a total number of 59 students and 7 teachers. Around 54% of the students in this study were male and around 46% of the students were female. There were a total of 4 male teachers and 3 female teachers.

An example of the misbehavior "off-task" would be a student on their phone when they are supposed to be doing work. A teacher's response to the whole "class" would be something like standing in front of the class and saying "Everyone do your work.". The rest of the misbehaviors and teacher response codes with examples could be found in Tables 2 and 3.

Student Misbehaviors

Disruptive Answering (DA)	Calling Out (CO)	Talking (T)	Gossip (GO)	Gesturing (G)	Fidgeting (F)	Off-Task (OT)
Answering a question as a joke	Disruptively saying loud things in class	Two students talking socially when they shouldn't be	Two students talking about a student not there	Someone making disruptive movements with their body	Dancing	Being on a computer in class when it isn't needed

Teachers Response

Reprimanding (R)	Say Students Name (S)	Positive Response (P)	Non-Verbal (NV)	Whole Class (C)	None (N)
Telling a student to stop doing what they're doing	Saying a student's name to let them know to stop misbehaving	A teacher using humor to redirect a student's behavior	A teacher standing silent next to those misbehaving	A teacher addressing the whole class	Doing nothing

Tables 2 and 3. Misbehavior and Teacher Response Examples and Codes The Da, Co, T, G, F, OT, R, S, PV, NV, C, and N codes were taken from Ellemer's study, while GO was added based on personal experience. In Table 1 above, there are Misbehaviors. Table 2 contains Teachers' Responses.

We chose to observe 9th and 10th grade classes because they are worst behaved than 11th. We were told this information from teachers in the school. We were told 12th grade is also one of the worst behaved grades but the primary researcher cannot observe 12th grade because they are in it and that would affect their results. We chose to observe each grade in 4 male teachers' classes and 3 female teachers' classes. The primary researcher sat in a part of the classroom where they could see everyone and wrote down the misbehaviors and teachers' responses throughout the entire class period. The primary researcher prioritized things that were disruptive rather than every single little misbehavior when more than one thing happened at once. We picked the class periods observed because they went with the class periods in which the primary researcher was in Senior Seminar which was their time to observe.

Results

This study is on misbehaviors in schools by gender and teachers' responses to these misbehaviors. We believed that teachers would give more responses to male misbehaviors and the teachers' gender level will play a role in who and how much they discipline. The way we tested this was by sitting in classrooms and marking the misbehaviors and the teachers' responses to these.

Among a total of 337 misbehaviors across 74 males and 41 females, the most common misbehavior was talking (54%) followed by off-task behaviors (31%). Most commonly teachers did nothing, or reprimanded students.

Fidgeting (F)	Talking (T)	Off-Task (OT)	Calling Out (CO)	Disruptive Answering (DA)	Gossiping (GO)	Gesturing (G)
2%	54%	31%	8%	1%	0%	4%
Reprimand (R)	Student Name (S)	Positive Response (P)	Non-Verbal (NV)	Whole Class (C)	None (N)	
27%	8%	3%	3%	15%	44%	

Table 4. Student Misbehaviors and Teacher Responses. A total of 337 misbehaviors and responses were recorded for 74 males and 41 females in the 9th and 10th grades.

Our first hypothesis was that male students will be disciplined more frequently than female students. There were a total of 227 male misbehaviors observed and 110 female misbehaviors observed. We subtracted the total number of non responses by the total number of misbehaviors to find that 136 (60%) male misbehaviors were responded to and 54 (49%) female misbehaviors were responded to. We used a Z-test for two independent proportions and found a significant difference in that male students were disciplined more than female students ($z= 1.878, p=0.03$).

Our second hypothesis was that males will misbehave more frequently than females. To figure out if this was true we compared the observed misbehaviors to the expected misbehaviors. We got our expected misbehavior values by taking the percent of a specific gender and multiplying that by the total number of misbehaviors observed. We ran a χ^2 Goodness of Fit test for the observed vs. expected frequencies for males and females and found a non significant effect for gender ($\chi^2=1.17, p=0.28$). Male students were found to misbehave 227/337 (i.e 67%) total times and female students were found to misbehave 110/337 (i.e 33%). There was a higher number of males observed, therefore we expected 217/337 (i.e 64%) for male students and 120/337 (i.e 36%) for female students. Therefore this suggests male students did not misbehave more than female students when adjusted for the different number of students.

Our third hypothesis is that the types of misbehaviors will be related to gender. For this test we eliminated Gossiping because both male and female students had 0 and combined Fidgeting and Gesturing because they are similar misbehaviors. We did this because the mathematical test we were using was restricted to 5 categories. We ran a Cramer's V-test of association and found a significant effect on gender across the misbehavior categories ($V=0.2056, \chi^2=14.25, p=0.0065$). Female students were found to both fidget and talk at a frequency higher than what was expected under the assumption that gender doesn't affect misbehavior. Female students were also found to be off task and call out at a frequency lower than what was expected. Male students were more likely to be off-task and call-out.

Misbehaviors	Fidgeting + Gesturing	Talking	Off Task	Calling out	Disruptive Answering
Males	11 (-14.1%)	109 (-11.1%)	81 (+14.5%)	24 (+27.2%)	2 (-1%)
Females	8 (+29%)	73 (+22.9%)	24 (-30%)	4 (-56.2%)	1 (+2.1%)

Table 5 Misbehavior by gender. The number indicated the number of times the misbehavior was observed and the percent is the percent deviation from the expected frequency of the null hypothesis. We found that gender does affect the types of misbehaviors ($p < 0.05$).

Our fourth hypothesis was that teachers' gender will play a role in the type of behaviors they correct. The fractions in the table represent the number of misbehaviors responded to over the number of misbehaviors that actually occurred by the teacher's gender. We ran 5 Fisher Exact Probability Tests for 2x2 Contingency Tables, one for each misbehavior between both genders of teachers. We found one significant difference in that male teachers corrected talking 45% more than female teachers ($p = 0.01$, $RR = 1.45$). For the other four misbehaviors, we found no significant difference by gender.

	Fidgeting + Gesturing	Talking	Off Task	Calling out	Disruptive Answering
Male Teacher Response Rate	3/4	25/34	28/40	6/11	1/1
Female Teacher Response Rate	6/15	75/148	36/65	11/17	1/2
p-value (one-tail Fisher Exact Test)	0.25	0.01	0.099	0.44	0.66
Risk Ratio	1.88	1.45*	1.26	0.843	2.00

Table 6. Teacher response rate by teacher's gender. The fraction represents the number of misbehaviors responded to over the number of misbehaviors that actually occurred by the teacher's gender. Only talking was significantly significant ($p < 0.05$)

Discussion

In this study, we wanted to observe misbehaviors in school by gender and teachers' responses to these misbehaviors. Our first hypothesis was that male students will be disciplined more frequently than their female counterparts. This was supported by our data (Table 4). We also hypothesized that male students will misbehave more than female students. This isn't supported because the expected misbehavior values were not far from the observed misbehavior values (Table 5). Our third hypothesis was that the types of misbehaviors will be related to gender. Female students were found to talk and fidget at a higher rate than expected, while males were off-task and called out more often (Table 5). Our final hypothesis was that teachers' gender will play a role in the type of behaviors they correct. This was supported; male teachers corrected talking more often than female teachers (Table 6).

Our results are partially supported by previous studies conducted by Tiger and Slate and Groeschl and Wetenkamp. Tiger and Slate found that males were disciplined more frequently than female students, while Groeschl and Wetenkamp found no significant difference between gender and who got disciplined more. Our data found that males were disciplined more than females. It makes sense that our data matches Tiger and Slate because they examined suspension records and we observed in our study how teachers were reacting to misbehaviors in classes, which are both real-world examples. Groeschl and Wetenkamp looked at surveys of hypothetical situations. When someone is looking at hypotheticals they get to concentrate and most of the time they are trying to find what it is that the survey is testing. In real-world situations one relies on instincts to tell them how to react to certain situations. Stereotypes are unintentionally used to simplify and categorize things to make it easier to react in different situations and this is probably why the data only found a difference in real-life situations where these stereotypes are most likely to be used to make a complex situation simpler. In addition, it makes sense that this was perceived most in male students because in Ellmers's study, she found stereotypical behaviors for males to be things like agency and competence (Table 1). This is directly in conflict with school because in class teachers are supposed to have agency so when they see male misbehaviors they may see this as the student trying to challenge their authority in the classroom because of the perceived male associations with individual agency and competency.

Our results are not consistent with previous studies conducted by Heyder et al and Hendrickson. Heyder et al. and Hendrickson both found male students tend to misbehave more frequently than female students. Our data found that male and female students misbehaved at about the same rate. Studies show that the more a male student feels the need to conform to gender stereotypes the more likely they are to misbehave (1). This gives possible reasons as to why my data may differ because male students at the school I observed may not feel pressured to conform to gender stereotypes like the one in Heyder et al.'s study. One reason why male students at the school we observed may not conform as much to these stereotypes is because it is a private school meaning certain behaviors will not be tolerated there. Also, the community has high racial homogeneity which means students may just feel more comfortable and have less of a need to fit in. Hendrickson also found that male students misbehave more and were singled out more for talking but that didn't happen in the school we observed. This may be because students observed by Hendrickson may feel they will already be singled out more than female students so they don't bother to lower the amount of misbehaving they participate in. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that at the school we observed the two most senior leadership positions are held by black males. Male students may respect them more and are more likely to meet expectations and less likely to misbehave in class (8).

Our results are partially consistent with previous studies by Ellmers. Ellmers argues that various social roles have been found to affect one's ability to control and understand their behaviors and their reactions to the things around them. Our data found that female students were observed to talk and fidget at a higher frequency than male students. There are many gender stereotypes that play a role in one's behaviors (7). Talking is consistent with the female gender stereotypes of community and caring for others (7). These connect because this means they focus on those around them and possibly talk in order to try to help their peers. On the other hand, fidgeting isn't consistent with female gender stereotypes and more aligns with male stereotypes of agency and trying to control the room they are in. In our study, female students were found to talk and fidget at a higher rate than male students. Being off task and calling out are both consistent with male stereotypes of agency and competence (7). These connect because someone calling out is done to capture the attention of those around them which is trying to

control their domain, which is an example of agency. Being off task connects to competence because when someone is off task they are trying to do what they want how they want to do it (7). Therefore, we argue that due to certain gender stereotypes, certain misbehaviors are more likely to occur.

To expand upon the idea of gender stereotypes there can be some found in the role that teachers' gender plays in the type of behaviors they correct. Male teachers were found to discipline talking more frequently than female teachers. A reason for this may be because female teachers are females themselves meaning the gender stereotype of being more talkative may apply to them, making them not see that as much of a big deal. Male teachers may react to it more because they might value quiet more and may see talking as more disruptive. Another reason for this may be because gender stereotypes say that male stereotypes are more problematic in school settings (7). Due to this, female teachers may focus on these misbehaviors more than female misbehaviors because they perceive those to be more disruptive. This suggests that a teacher's gender may be an essential factor in why a teacher may correct or ignore specific behaviors of either male or female students.

We had several limitations in this study due to different reasons. One limitation is I am only one person and there are misbehaviors and teacher responses that I surely missed. Another limitation is that we only looked at this in one school instead of multiple different schools so our results only explain things at The Neighborhood Academy. One last limitation was the classes mostly had more male students than female students which may have played a role in these misbehaviors and teacher responses. Some recommendations to someone planning to try and redo this study is to try and set up a camera in these classrooms so no misbehaviors or teacher responses gets missed. Another recommendation is to do this study in more than just one school so the results will be more transferable.

In conclusion, our research suggests that male students don't actually misbehave more than female students but they are disciplined at a higher rate. One reason for this may be gender stereotypes and how male gender stereotypes are seen as more detrimental in school settings. One way we suggest a school tries to fix this inequity is to get teachers to recognize these gender stereotypes that they hold. Once they can recognize that they hold these biases they can work to eliminate them.

Works Cited

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