

**Race, Gender, and Suspension: A Quantitative Study of Elementary School
Discipline in Missouri**

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Abstract

The focus of this quantitative study was on suspension rates, race, and gender. Current literature focused on implicit bias, socioeconomic status, zero tolerance, race and gender bias as causes for discipline disproportionality; however, this study examined if differences in suspension rates existed, not the root causes. National data suggests Black students are suspended more frequently than White and Hispanic students for the same infractions. A 2015 report compiled from 2011-2012 suspension data showed that Missouri had the highest rate of suspension for Black elementary school students in the country. There were four public school districts with significantly high suspension rates for Black students – national research focused on one metropolitan area as three “high suspending” districts were located there. This study used the 2011-2012 archival suspension data to examine if suspension rates differed between White, Black, and Hispanic elementary school students in five suburban school districts near the one city area not readily discussed in the research literature. The sample was 78 elementary schools within those five districts as all districts saw increases in the Black and Hispanic student populations over the past two decades. Three research questions were developed to find if differences in suspension rates existed between the racial groups chosen for study, then gendered groups. The hypothesis testing yielded the following results: Black students had a higher rate of suspension than White and Hispanic students, White and Hispanic students had similar suspension rates, the sample of Black male students were suspended at a higher rate than White male students, and White, Black, and Hispanic female students did not have significantly different rates of suspension. These results could aid educators in evaluating current discipline practices for purpose and equity.

Dedication

First, I dedicate this tome to my creators of accidental inspiration. Thanks to the words, “you have to work twice as hard to be thought of half as good,” (*I guess I can apply for the substitute teacher certificate now*). Pips and cheerios to too many of my former teachers, the Worksheet Warriors of the Blackline Masters Clan – you were the driving force in developing the educator I became; I had to give each student in any of my classrooms more than what I received. A fist bump to rejection in general. I’d probably be happier without you but not as surly or awesome. A resounding *Bless you* to those that told me I might as well finish since I paid for it. *Thanks, I guess.*

To Grandma and Dad – I can’t imagine the conversation you’re having in the ethers. I just hope I made you both proud.

To Mike – you did your best trying to wrangle in two toddlers while I researched and frantically typed. Here’s a hi-five and a sticker.

Most importantly, I dedicate any good I put in the world to my moon and my stars. Behr and Blakeney, this is proof your darkest days can yield your brightest achievements. I love you.

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To the A.B.D. Crew – keep on keepin' on. Just finish, you already paid for it...

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the interview for a local publication, she never explicitly accused her son's fourth-grade teacher of discrimination, but the audience noted the disdain with which she spoke of Miss Teacher's white skin and the sheer disbelief regarding his suspensions (Moxley, 2016). The mother admitted that her young son talked during class or sometimes ignored his teacher but did not believe that either transgression was cause for repeatedly sending him home (Moxley, 2016). With each absence the son fell further behind in his studies, then his behavior problems escalated (Moxley, 2016). This student's narrative sparked the interest for this research as school districts across Missouri gained national attention for collectively suspending Black students (both males and females) at disproportionately high rates per their respective populations at school during the 2011-2012 school year (US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016).

For the *Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?* report, Center for Civil Rights Remedies researchers from the Civil Rights Project at the University of California, Los Angeles studied the racial disparities in suspension rates during the 2011-2012 school year and found that many districts across the nation relied on suspensions more than others, especially in the state of Missouri (2015a). That year, 3.8% of Missouri's 890,000 elementary students were suspended out of public school at least once (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway, 2015; MODESE). Less than 2 percent of students suspended were White. Less than 2 percent of Hispanic students were suspended. Losen and fellow researchers noted that more Missouri school districts showed Black students'

suspension rates to be near the national average (2.6%) but of nearly 50 school districts in Missouri (with at least 1,000 students and 100 Black students enrolled), four districts (located in two of Missouri's largest metropolitan areas) collectively had suspension rates above 20% for Black elementary students - thus becoming "high-suspending schools" (Losen, et al., 2015).

This study analyzed 2011-2012 Civil Rights Data Collection discipline data from 78 elementary schools across five districts in one region in Missouri. These districts were located near one "high suspending" district (Large Urban District) identified in the 2015 *Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?* report. The information in that report was derived from 2011-2012 school year out-of-school suspension data but to date, was the most comprehensive writing on school discipline based on the survey information from the Civil Rights Data Collection. The overall goal was to examine if suspension rates, disaggregated by race and gender, differed for elementary students in the schools chosen for study. Given the sensitivity of this issue, no students, schools, or districts will be identified to maintain the confidentiality of all students and school staff.

Background

By the end of the twentieth century, White families left predominately Black Large Urban District and opted for the city's suburbs (Rife, 2014). In addition to White flight, stunted student achievement, inconsistent management, budgeting shortfalls, and accreditation issues, the number of Black students attending Large Urban District in Missouri dramatically decreased (an approximate 40% drop) (Green & Baker, 2006; Rife, 2014). According to a recent analysis on school attendance and racial/ethnic diversity, several districts near Large Urban District in Missouri had an increase in the Black

student population (Green & Baker, 2006; Alcock, 2018); for example, one school district in the city's boundaries had more than 600 Black students in 1998 but had more than 2,000 20 years later (Alcock, 2018). More families moved to the suburbs and the districts expanded to accommodate the growth (Green & Baker, 2006; Rife, 2014).

Table 1 shows Black, White, and Hispanic student enrollment in the state of Missouri as well as in the districts identified for study: Districts A, B, C, D, and E in the year 2001-2002. All five districts experienced cultural and economic expansion as the larger, urban district declined (Green & Baker, 2006; Rife, 2014).

Table 1

Student Demographics in Missouri, 2001-2002

	Total Students	White Students	White Students % of total students	Black Students	Black Students % of total students	Hispanic Students	Hispanic Students % of total students
Missouri	890,000	703,000	79%	150,000	19%	17,800	2%
District A	16,700	14,000	84%	850	5%	700	4%
District B	12,000	11,000	92%	600	5%	300	3%
District C	14,000	13,000	93%	600	4%	200	2%
District D	11,000	9,000	82%	500	5%	400	4%
District E	9,000	8,000	89%	500	6%	200	2%

Note: This information was retrieved from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's State Report Card data retrieval website found at https://apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/Reports/SSRS_Print.aspx. All numbers have been rounded to the nearest tenth.

Table 2 shows the total Black, White, and Hispanic student enrollment in the state of Missouri as well as the five districts in the year 2011-2012. Slightly more than 16.5

percent of Missouri's student population was Black, but more than 14 percent of Missouri's Black students were suspended at least once during the 2011-2012 school year (Center for Civil Rights Remedies, 2015b; Losen et al., 2015; Robertson, 2015).

Table 2

Student Demographics in Missouri, 2011-2012

	Total Students	White Students	White Students % of total students	Black Students	Black Students % of total students	Hispanic Students	Hispanic Students % of total students
Missouri	886,000	655,000	74%	146,000	17%	44,300	5%
District A	18,000	11,500	64%	2,000	11%	2,000	11%
District B	13,900	10,000	72%	1,600	12%	800	6%
District C	17,000	13,000	76%	1,870	11%	170	1%
District D	14,000	9,500	68%	1,540	11%	1,800	13%
District E	10,000	7,000	70%	1,000	10%	900	9%

Note: This information was retrieved from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's State Report Card data retrieval website found at https://apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/Reports/SSRS_Print.aspx. All numbers have been rounded to the nearest tenth.

The highest-suspending Missouri districts all had majority Black student enrollment (Losen et al., 2015). In a recent local publication, University of Kansas Professor Don Haider-Markel noted that majority-Black schools were more likely to focus on disciplinary infractions and have a higher incidence of punishment and suspensions (Moxley, 2016). He also noted that the four “high-suspending” districts discussed in the *Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?* report were majority-Black schools (Losen et al., 2015), but discipline disproportionality was found in Missouri

schools and districts that were not identified as "high suspending" (Losen et al., 2015). The current study examines suspension rates in elementary schools in the five districts where many Black students traditionally did not attend and examines if suspension rates differed for Black students compared to suspension rates for White and Hispanic students in those schools.

Statement of the Problem

Discipline disproportionality is the gross overrepresentation of certain groups in suspensions or other negative administrative contact (Brown & Steele, 2015). The *Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?* report discussed that Missouri “suspended Black elementary students at a higher rate than any other state in the nation,” (Center for Civil Rights Remedies, 2015b) and had the largest disparity between White and Black students’ suspensions rates (2015b). According to data reported in the *Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?* report, there was a 12.5 percentage point gap between the suspension rates between White and Black students (Losen et al., 2015). This is an example of discipline disproportionality; many Black students were suspended at rates higher than what they represented in student populations across Missouri school districts.

The four Missouri’s high-suspending districts were identified; three of those districts were discussed at length in the *Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?* report but no discussion was offered about the surrounding districts, especially in those suburban or rural areas in or near cities where the high suspending districts were located. More specifically, there is limited information about the possible difference in suspension rates among White, Black, and Hispanic students in the suburban districts (i.e., Districts A, B, C, D, and E) near Large Urban District. Additionally, in the past decade, Black

students' population increased in those five districts; it would be critical to examine if suspension rates for students changed as the demographics of areas did as well.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine 2011-2012 school year discipline data collected via the Civil Rights Data Collection survey for 78 elementary schools where many Black students did not traditionally attend in districts near Large Urban District. The current study examines suspension rates in the 78 elementary schools across five suburban districts near Large Urban District that do not have majority Black student populations to explore if a difference in suspension rates existed among White, Black, and Hispanic students in those schools.

Significance of the Study

The findings from The Center for Civil Rights Remedies' 2015 report based on the 2011-2012 school term highlighted that as a state, Missouri had a significantly high rate of suspension for Black elementary school students and had the widest elementary school-level Black-White discipline gap in the nation (Losen et al., 2015). The collection and dissemination of the nation's public school discipline data led some schools or districts in urban Missouri cities to revise discipline policies after the information was released to the public (Taketa, 2016: We Live Here, 2016) but some detailed information and raw data from the Civil Rights Collection Data surveys was not made readily available in the report. For example, the 2015 *Are We Closing the Discipline Gap?* report did not disaggregate elementary suspension rates by race and gender, except for comparing students with disabilities. This research would add to a growing body of research about Missouri's suspension rates and discipline disproportionality by detailing

the suspension rates of Black female and male elementary school students as well as White and Hispanic female and male elementary school students. This research will also provide discipline data, specifically statistics on out-of-school suspension rates for elementary school students, in suburban districts not previously studied.

Delimitations

Delimitations are “self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study,” (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 134). The delimitations identified for this study were:

- Only five (5) Missouri school districts near Large Urban District were considered for this research; the results may not generalize to other districts or charter schools.
- This study will only use the 2011-2012 suspension data provided from the Civil Rights Data Collection survey as the discipline information was already disaggregated.
- The suspension rates used for this study refer to out-of-school suspension tallied from the Civil Rights Data Collection survey data.
- The population for this study is focused on elementary school, not specific grades. Some schools included in the research end elementary schools at varying grades, from 4th to 6th grades.
- Student groups with Individual Educational Plans (IEPs), receive free or reduced lunches, or are English Language Learners are not identified specifically in the disaggregated data collected. The representative sample only includes students identified as “not having a disability identified/ no 504.”

- The student demographic variables were limited to include gender, race (only White, Black, and Hispanic students), and students who received at least one out-of-school suspension (OSS).

Assumptions

Lunenburg and Irby said assumptions were, “the... propositions that are accepted as operational for purposes of the research” (2008, p. 135). The following assumptions were made in this study:

1. Schools that reported data to the US Department of Education for the Civil Rights Data Collection surveys were accurately identified.
2. Data to complete the Civil Rights Data Collection surveys were collected uniformly even though information was reported by the schools themselves.
3. All data collected for the Civil Rights Data Collection surveys were complete and accurate.

Research Questions

According to Creswell (2009) research questions (RQs) “shape and specifically focus the purpose of the study” (p. 132). The following questions directed this research:

RQ1. In using the 2011-2012 CRDC survey data, would Black students enrolled in 78 elementary schools located in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E, have a different suspension rate than White and Hispanic students?

RQ2. Would Black male students’ suspension rates in 78 elementary schools in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E, differ from White and Hispanic male students’ suspension rates?

RQ3. Would Black female students' suspension rates in 78 elementary schools in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E, differ from White and Hispanic female students' suspension rates?

Definition of Terms

Discipline Disproportionality - refers to the hyper- or gross underrepresentation of certain groups (typically based on race/ethnicity, gender, the presence of a disability, or socio-economic status) in administrative referrals, suspensions, and expulsions (Brown & Steele, 2015, p. 14).

Implicit bias – The Kirwan Institute, a leading research group for studies of race and ethnicity, defined implicit bias as, “The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control. Can be either positive or negative,” (Gullo, 2017, p.7; Straats, Capatosto, Tenny, & Mamo, 2017, p. 10).

School-to-Prison Pipeline – refers to a national trend where primarily students of color leave public schools and go into criminal justice systems because of several factors that include how the enforcement of ‘zero-tolerance’ policies criminalize minor violations of school rules and discriminatory discipline practices within schools (American Civil Liberties Union, 2018)

Socioeconomic Status (SES) – refers to the "social standing or class of an individual or group...measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation," (American Psychological Association, 2018). For this research, socioeconomic status "refers to the environment related to family income level experienced by students and is measured by eligibility for free or reduced lunch (F/RL)," (Gullo, 2017, p. 11).

Suspension Rate - refers to how the Office of Civil Rights calculated the percentages of students suspended from school. This report referenced information from Civil Rights Data Collection survey data on students receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions and combined them to look at the unduplicated count of suspended students (Losen et al., 2015). The Office of Civil Rights added the sums of "X students suspended once, and Y students suspended two or more times," then divided that total by the total student enrollment (Losen et al., 2015, p. 12). This basic calculation produced the percentage of students suspended, i.e., the suspension rate (Losen et al., 2015).

Zero Tolerance Policies - refers to strict enforcement of policies and procedures that regulate undesirable behaviors or possession of illegal contraband on school properties created by a "seemingly overwhelming tide of violence...in the early 1990s," (Skiba & Knesting, 2001, p. 17). Proponents tout said policies as preventive measures against drug, gangs, weapons, and violence but disproportionately affect Black and Hispanic students in enforcing them. The implementation of zero tolerance policies led to significant increases in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009; Mitchell, 2014).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Introduced in chapter 1 was a short history of the topic and the purpose and significance of this research. The information also included delimitations, assumptions, research questions, and research-related definitions. Chapter 2 contains a basic history of discipline in American schools, an overview of issues associated with the possible implications for why Black students and in particular, Black males face higher rates of elementary-level discipline and the current

research on related topics such as socio-economic status, and teacher perceptions of race/ethnicity. Described in chapter 3 are the research design, the rationale for the chosen design, and the methodology of the study. In chapter 4, the results of the study are revealed, including descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing results. In conclusion, chapter 5 includes a summary of the study findings related to the body of the literature. This chapter ends with implications for action and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

A Review of the Literature

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to provide a general summary and research review regarding the history of school discipline. Additionally, this chapter will highlight factors that have been associated with creating discipline disparities: implicit bias, socioeconomic status, and zero tolerance policies. Chapter 2 also examines discipline data to compare rates of discipline by race and gender.

History of School Discipline and Discipline Disproportionality

People wax nostalgic for the good old days when children were obedient, but no such historical evidence exists (Coontz, 1992 in Danforth & Smith, 2005). Disruptive students posed classroom problems from the colonial era to modern day. Social issues that transformed the norms of the day and how schools handle those changes shifted dramatically over time.

In the late 1880s, students were to “speak the truth, be honest, be punctual, be clean and be kind,” (Sauceman & Mays, 1999, p. 12) and show respect for God, family and the teacher. One-room schoolhouse teachers in the Wild West prairies often complained of the encumbrance of managing 40 or more students of all ages, interests, and abilities in a single space (Danforth & Smith, 2005). Common forms of discipline included: being whipped on the palms or buttocks with a rod or ruler, sitting in the corner wearing a dunce cap, memorizing long passages, cleaning the floors, losing recess, and for boys, sitting on the girls’ side of the room wearing a feminine bonnet (Pioneer Sholes School, 1998; Sauceman & Mays, 1999).

Generations later, the subjectivity of who or what was worthy of punishment, the severity with which those sanctions were given, and the consequences that came from them would be the subject of continued research. As America rapidly industrialized, the type of student in need of moral correction was, “poor, male, and either an immigrant or a rural transplant to the city,” (Danforth & Smith, 2005, p. 14) thanks to the economic shift and waves of emigration. The archetype of the so-called problem child either worked in a factory alongside his immigrant Catholic or Jewish parents or ran the streets (Danforth and Smith, 2005).

The social work profession began as teachers and settlement house workers attempted to "soften... the rough manners of this uncivilized child," (Danforth & Smith, 2005, p. 15). This first major wave of social progressivism brought groups of primarily middle-class, college-educated White women into schools to solve complex social issues like an influx of students, communicating with students whose first language was not English, meeting academic and "career-readiness" needs, new compulsory attendance laws (Danforth & Smith, 2005). This era "also forced schools to handle large numbers of new students who often did not fit neatly into traditional school structures and social habits," (Danforth & Smith, 2005, p. 24). At the beginning of the 20th century, the public schools struggled with disciplining lower class and lower-middle class African-American boys' behaviors, and even Hispanic boys' behaviors as data highlighted the disparities in which they were suspended (Danforth & Smith, 2005). These complex social issues created continued cultural clashes between teachers and students.

Race and Discipline Disproportionality

The University of California, Los Angeles' Civil Rights Project was founded in 1996 to research the law and social issues regarding "civil rights and equal opportunity for racial and ethnic groups in the United States," (2010a, para. 1). One such initiative was the Center for Civil Rights Remedies, which conducted education-focused research by identifying, then advocating to remedy problematic and inequitable policies (Civil Rights Project, 2010b). The Center for Civil Rights Remedies analyzed 2009-2010 term statistics from nearly 7,000 school districts from all 50 states and published the results as the first major national endeavor in interpreting school suspension data. After interpreting the survey data, Daniel J. Losen and Jonathan Gillespie reported that "1 out of every 6" Black children were suspended from school at least once (2012, p. 6) in *Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School*. Conversely, only "1 out of 14" Hispanic students and "1 in 20" White students were suspended at least once, (Losen and Gillespie, 2012, p. 6). This corroborated information found within studies conducted over the past 40 years in almost all 50 states, Black students, particularly Black males, have been suspended from school at a higher rate than their White counterparts (Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010).

The 2009-2010 report discussed probable causes for the racial disparities in punishment, likely possible consequences for suspended students, and offered some discussion points for educators and policymakers to consider. These ideas were noted years earlier. In 2002, Skiba and his colleagues asserted that race and gender did matter regarding school discipline in that Black males and females were disciplined at higher rates than their White and Hispanic classmates.

More than a decade later, researchers detailed in the *Are We Closing the Discipline Gap?* report that Black male students typically had the highest suspension rates, followed by Black female students (Losen et al., 2015). Black boys and girls have been suspended more than any of their White or Hispanic peers as 20% of Black boys, and more than 12% of Black girls are suspended out of school (Losen et al., 2015). Black females have been suspended at higher rates than all other groups, except Black males (Goff, Jackson, Allison, Di Leone, Culotta, & DiTomasso, 2014; Skiba, Arrendondo, & Rausch, 2014; Losen et al., 2015;).

Ann Arnett Ferguson's ethnography (2000) offered that Hispanic males were disproportionately punished at school and these findings were corroborated by Morris' 2005 study (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011). Hispanic students are more likely to be penalized than White students, but not Black students (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011). Data published in 2012 for the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights detailed how Black students faced harsher sanctions for school infractions. They made up 46% of those students suspended more than once but only represented close to 18% of the total student population. One in four Black students were suspended at least once compared to one in 11 White students (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2012).

For the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Research Triangle Institute for the National Center for Education Statistics, researchers analyzed suspension data of White and Hispanic students to find if male and female Hispanic students were suspended at similar rates of White male and female students. According to Peguero and Shekarkhar, the results

showed that Hispanic students were disproportionately punished for misbehaving just as the White male students did, or even less (2011).

Skiba, Arredondo, and Rausch noted the rates with which Hispanic students were disciplined were inconsistent and varied by academic level (2014). In two studies discussed in the 2014 report, *New and Developing Research on Disparities in Discipline*, either no disproportionality or little was found with Hispanic students at the elementary level, but by high school, “Hispanic students are significantly more likely than White students to be suspended out of school or expelled,” (Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, p. 2). Conversely, years earlier, researchers reported that out-of-school suspension rates for Hispanic/ Latino students did not radically differ from the White student's rates except at the elementary school level (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2011).

Implicit Bias as a Factor of Discipline Disproportionality

Subjective racial biases are pervasive and add to the difficulties in identifying and eradicating discipline disproportionality. White teachers with different cultural experiences from their students are not the only bearers of racially-tinged stereotypes or biases. Carter, Skiba, Arrendondo, and Pollock surmised middle-class teachers of color also held prejudices of students, not unlike those of White teachers but that White and Black teachers from, "working class backgrounds are less likely to evaluate their racial and ethnic minority and poor students negatively," (2017, p. 211). Black and Hispanic students are disciplined at a higher rate than their White classmates, which may be due to school staffs', "subjective interpretation of student behavior," (Voight, Hanson, O'Malley, & Adekanye, 2015, p. 253; Skiba et al, 2011; Jones, et. al., 2012; Anyon, et.al., 2014). Compared to White students, Black and Hispanic youth are readily viewed as aggressive,

and hostile, whereas many "expect Asian American youth to be anxious, perfectionistic and timid," (Anyon, Jenson, Farrar, McQueen, Greer, Downing, & Simmons, 2014, p. 380; Skiba et al., 2011; Jones, et al., 2012).

Receiving punishment for not following school rules is common, but not all students meet an equal risk of being suspended - this was "discipline disproportionality" (Brown & Steele, 2015, p. 14). Research shows inconsistent applications of suspensions and expulsions of Black students (whether male or female) across schools, districts, and schools within the same districts because of several factors related to this subjectivity (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009; Martin & Smith, 2017). In 2003 "almost 1 in 5 Black students (19.6%) were suspended, compared with fewer than 1 in 10 White students (8.8%)" across the country (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010, p. 59).

Nearly a decade later, Black males still experienced the highest levels of discipline disproportionality as they were "referred, suspended, and expelled at rates two to three times higher" than their respective White classmates (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010, p. 59; Brown & Steele, 2015, p. 14) without any evidence that supported these students misbehaved more (Brown & Steele, 2015). Black students were also more likely to be disciplined for subjective interpretations of offenses that relied on the judgment and emotions of teachers and administrators, like defiance or disrespect versus concrete infractions like vandalism, theft, or fighting (Brown & Steele, 2015). Parents, education reformers, researchers and the like expressed various concerns with suspensions as students lost valuable instructional time and suspensions provoked students' continued misbehavior or the teachers' perception of misconduct.

In attempts to pinpoint the causes of discipline disproportionality nearly ten years after their initial report, Skiba and Associates compiled data on possible factors (2011). A recurring hypothesis suggested Black students' behavioral styles are too different from mainstream expectations (2011) or that a "cultural mismatch" led to the overt racial stereotyping because an overwhelming majority of teachers are White females (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May & Tobin, 2011, p. 87). In 2000, Townsend asserted, "the unfamiliarity of White teachers with the interactional patterns that characterize many African American males may cause these teachers to interpret impassioned or emotive interactions as combative or argumentative," (in Skiba et al., 2011, p. 87). In two studies, one from 1995 and another from 2000, the researchers surveyed teachers to identify biases (Skiba et al., 2011). The results from both studies showed that not only did the predominantly White teachers perceive Black students to be more problematic but also that the teachers held strong racial stereotypes regarding their Black students (Skiba et al., 2011). Similar findings were published in a 2012 report from the American Psychological Association's Task Force on Preventing Discrimination and Promoting Diversity, as researchers discussed implicit biases, specifically associations between race and the perceived threats of aggression, were pervasive in people and organizations. They asserted the subconscious biases against race and gender biases could significantly influence how people and behaviors are perceived and how behaviors are addressed (Jones, Cochran, Fine, Gaertner, Mendoza-Denton, Shih, & Sue, 2012). These findings were reminiscent of Ferguson's ethnography published in 2000.

Ferguson focused on how Black male students' "transgressions are made to take on a sinister, intentional, fully conscious tone that is stripped of any element of childish

naïveté” (Ferguson, 2000, p 83). In her research she found that Black boys did not benefit from the “boys will be boys” folkways often used to casually excuse White boys’ more socially undesirable behavior (Ferguson, 2000; Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). Instead, researchers concluded the wild variations in “school policies and practices more than differences in behaviors, predict higher suspension rates,” (Losen et al., 2015, p. 19).

Nearly 15 years after Townsend's hypothesis on race and discipline, researchers surveyed police officers and other professionals for a study representing the American Psychological Association to determine racial bias and found that Black children nine and under were viewed as innocent but that changed after age 10 (Goff, Jackson, Allison, Di Leone, Culotta, & DiTomasso, 2014). They were viewed as more aggressive and adult than they were. This supposition has been connected to findings in other implicit bias studies, like the one conducted by the Yale Child Study Center for the National Pre-kindergarten Study. In *Pre-kindergartners Left Behind: Expulsion Rates in State Prekindergarten Systems*, researchers Gilliam and Marchesseault concluded that pre-Kindergarteners were suspended (and even expelled) at a higher rate than students in Kindergarten through the 12th grade (Peart, 2005). When the study was conducted, 40 states funded preschool programs in public schools, federally managed programs, for-profit daycares, faith-based child care programs, and other private providers (Peart, 2005). The highest number of children suspended in those programs were 4-year-olds and boys (Peart, 2005). Black children attending state-funded preschools were about “twice as likely to be expelled as Latino and Caucasian children, and over five times as likely to be expelled as Asian–American children,” (Peart, 2005, para. 5). The 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection survey results highlighted the suspension rates of preschool-

aged children were still high nearly a decade after Gilliam and Marchesseault's study. Before they entered Kindergarten, Black preschoolers' national suspension rates nearly mirrored their K-12 Black counterparts as they were 3.6 times as likely to receive one or more suspensions (US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016).

In a study comprised of 364 schools (elementary and secondary), Skiba et al. found that Black students were, "twice as likely to receive office disciplinary referrals at the elementary level and up to four times as likely in middle school," (in Skiba, Shure, & Williams, 2011, p. 10), typically due to violating "implicit interactional codes" (Skiba, Shure, & Williams, 2011, p. 10). Gregory and Weinstein (in Skiba, Shure, & Williams, 2011) reported that Black students referred to the office for discipline, "reported feeling less fairly treated by a teacher were more likely to be perceived by the teacher as defiant, more likely to receive a referral from the teacher, and less likely to be perceived as cooperative by that teacher," (p. 10). In a similar study in implicit biases, gender, and race, researchers found Black children were rated as being less innocent, even when being shown pictures of a five-year-old boy (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016). Implicitly seeing Black children as more adult leads to them not being viewed as innocent children but rather, more responsible for their actions and according to the American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri, "less in need of protection," (2017, p. 18).

In a joint report on a study conducted years after Skiba's groundbreaking studies, researchers from Johns Hopkins and American University found that White teachers in the study showed a definitive bias against their Black students. Gershenson, Holt, and Papageorge reviewed math and reading teacher survey data from a 2002 longitudinal study, which included information on more than 8,000 high school sophomores (2015).

They believed the students of color, particularly Black male students, were less likely to graduate from high school (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2015). Nothing in the study showed causation – the teachers’ perceptions of students could not be conclusively linked to student outcomes, but that bias was present, evident, and still had some influence on how those teachers communicated with and connected to those Black students (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2015). According to Gershenson, Holt, and Papageorge, "limited information, incorrect beliefs, and biased expectations comprise another potentially important, but relatively understudied, source of sociodemographic gaps in educational attainment” (2015, p. 1) as enough research to determine causality between teacher expectations and student outcomes has yet to be conducted.

The scope of implicit bias would be the focus of research published in the *Economics of Education Review*. The damaging effects of when teachers and students did not simply have cultural differences but rather have a cultural disconnection or "cultural mismatch" (Skiba et al., 2011, p. 87) were found in the Yale Child Study Center. Researchers again attempted to detect and understand implicit bias and focused attention on the race/ethnicity of preschool teachers and staff to determine if the educator’s race was related to student’s race and suspension rates. The study did not explore differences in attitudes or behaviors between White and Black preschool teachers or staff as they disciplined students, but the researchers hypothesized the White teachers stereotyped the Black students and assumed they were more likely to misbehave than White children (Hathaway, 2016).

One hundred thirty-five respondents with an average of 11 years of teaching experience across public and private educational settings participated in one of the Yale

Child Study Center's 2016 studies. A majority of teachers identified as White, not of Hispanic origin, and female were given fictitious but identical school discipline records labeled with stereotypically Black and White children's names. Respondents reported being more "troubled" by the offenses of the perceived Black students and "were more likely to recommend severe punishment for the Black student after the second infraction, including suspension, compared to the White student with the same record," (Gilliam et al., 2016, p. 3). In another part of that study, researchers used sophisticated eye-tracking technology and found that preschool teachers "show a tendency to more closely observe Black students, and especially boys, when challenging behaviors are expected," (Hathaway, 2016, para. 3; Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016). Regardless of the field of study or profession, results of surveys, controlled observations, and social experiments detail the pervasiveness of implicit bias.

Suspended students lose access to educational opportunities and have higher rates of entry into the criminal justice system, as teens and later as adults (Tefera, Siegel-Hawley, & Levy, 2017). In 2010, Theriot and Dupper published a report that explored suspension rates between elementary and middle school. The data showed suspensions given in the 6th grade (for schools where the 6th grade is still in elementary school) were the best future predictors for middle school suspensions and "suspensions have been shown to be a moderate to strong predictor of dropping out of school" (Theriot & Dupper, 2010, p. 207). The results, while not entirely conclusive, may show a sampling of the consequences connected to educator bias. As students age, bias suggests they look more mature, less innocent, and are more likely to continue to get into "trouble," which leads to more instructional loss, fewer academic opportunities, and a further disconnect to

education - which could lead to more infractions and eventually contact with the criminal justice system. As long as teachers write referrals based on subjective infractions, there will always be a question about whether the student's behavior earned said disciplinary action or if a teacher is less tolerant of certain behaviors or if a teacher is abusing authority to arbitrarily punish a particular group of students.

Zero Tolerance Policies as a Factor of Discipline Disproportionality

Some of the earliest investigations into school disciplinary methodology came from the Children's Defense Fund. In 1975, that research found "suspension rates for African American students were between two and three times higher than those for White students," (Drakeford, 2004, p. 3). For twenty years, educational researchers and social scientists found the higher suspension rates for Black students remained consistent (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000; Drakeford, 2004; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010; Brown & Steele, 2015; Klein, 2015; Losen, et al, 2015; US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016). Once unevenly enacted in districts across the country, zero tolerance policies would cause a notable shift in suspension rates (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009).

Zero tolerance policies were policies and procedures created in the 1990s as measures against a "seemingly overwhelming tide of violence," (Skiba & Knesting, 2001, p. 17). Sensationalized events like the 1999 Columbine High School shooting prompted school officials across the country to enact hardline policies and procedures to manage negative, violent, or disruptive behaviors like gang activity, drug possession or distribution, and weapons on campus (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Implementation and enforcement of the policies resulted in disproportionate numbers of Black and Hispanic

students being suspended or expelled from school, even for nonviolent offenses (Mitchell, 2014). In *African American Disproportionality in School Discipline: The Divide Between Best Evidence and Legal Remedy*, professors Skiba, Eckes, and Brown discussed the types of zero tolerance policies that caused the most controversy as Black students were disproportionately suspended or expelled for violating them. They were policies that suspended (or expelled) students for infractions like making paper guns or playing with objects as guns (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009). They explained the results of Donald Stone's survey in which Stone reviewed thirty-five schools which represented over 1.3 million students; 46% of the students included in the survey were White, 44% were Black, and 10% were students of other races/ethnicities (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009). Stone found that although the student populations of White and Black students were nearly identical except when accounting for suspensions 71.5% of the suspended students were Black and 28.5% were White (in Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009, p. 1086). With this empirical data, Stone hypothesized that Black students were dismissed from school at a rate 250% higher than their White counterparts (in Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009, p. 1086). Another study attempted to replicate Stone's findings and concluded that Black students were disciplined at higher rates than White students, regardless of socioeconomic status or offenses committed (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009). Students' general behaviors were never addressed through suspensions, and many became repeat offenders (Allman & Slate, 2011).

Drakeford discussed how research from the past 40 years focused on zero tolerance policies, the purpose of said policies, and the groups most affected by them. Zero-tolerance policies were enacted to curb real violence caused by primarily White

students in rural and suburban America, while disproportionate disciplinary practices were focused on perceived violence caused by urban Black teens (2004). He also found that said zero-tolerance policies had minimal to zero desired effects as "empirical evidence to support their usefulness," (Drakeford, 2004). The execution of zero tolerance policies created a pathway from the school to the justice system by-way of the proverbial school-to-prison pipeline (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011; Martin & Smith, 2017), which has increasingly become the focus for educational reform as traditionally, students who have missed school due to suspension or expulsion are more likely to experience being held back a grade, drop out of school, or become involved in the juvenile criminal justice system (Anyon, Jensen, Altschul, Farrar, McQueen, Greer, & Downing, 2014).

An estimated 12 million school days of instruction is lost each year as students are suspended (Tefera, Siegel-Hawley, & Levy, 2017). In the early 1980s, Wu, Pink, Crain, and Moles analyzed suspension data and found that suspended students may become uninterested in school because they are academically behind (in Rocque & Paternoster, 2011) and missing homework can lead to failing grades and retention. Black students are associated with higher rates of dropping out of school and having more contact with the criminal justice system (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009). In a 2011 study, Rocque and Paternoster analyzed data from reports published by the US Department Education's trends in academic progress. The researchers asserted cultural conflicts between predominately White teaching staff and Black students and ethnic/racial stereotyping lead to receiving harsher punishment for even basic or perceived infractions, independent of actual student behavior (Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). A lack of strong social bonds and

interest, coupled with inconsistently applied zero tolerance policies, Black students were more likely to be relegated to special education, made to repeat the school year, repeatedly suspended, sent to an alternative school setting, or simply pushed out/ dropped out (Wald & Losen, 2003; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011).

These ideas were expanded upon in a writing from Carter, Skiba, Arrendondo, and Pollock. They noted increased safety and security measures in place, like the heightened presence of school resource officers (especially in urban schools), increased, “the likelihood that young Black people are not just suspended, but ejected into the justice system through school arrest, particularly for subjective offenses such as disorderly conduct,” (Carter, Skiba, Arrendondo, & Pollock, 2017, p. 210). Belief in racialized perceptions of student behavior more than likely contribute to differential selection for discipline referrals and subsequent punishments (Anyon, Jensen, Altschul, Farrar, McQueen, Greer, Downing, & Simmons, 2014).

Rocque and Paternoster suggested that school systems might be blamed for creating hostile learning environments for Black children due to, “feelings of racial hostility or disparate treatment by teachers, particularly disciplinary treatment,” (2011, p. 635). Black students could internalize perceived negative feelings and reactions, then disengage from school and any other academic pursuits because of those actions (Rocque and Paternoster, 2011). Without an education, students are more likely to drop out of school and end up involved in the criminal justice system (Wald and Losen, 2003; Rocque and Paternoster, 2011).

It is wholly possible bias coupled with extraneous factors like poverty create school disengagement for many Black students. According to Rocque and Paternoster's

conclusions regarding the school-to-prison pipeline, Black students may be less interested or connected to school as they are, "more likely to be held back, more likely to be in lower academic tracks, more likely to be in special education, more likely to drop out before graduating, and less likely to go to college, (2011, p. 634). Less interest and action in school activities could potentially decrease the value placed on following a socially acceptable method of success, attachment to school or other social bonds, and strengthen the likelihood of criminal activities. The connection between the academic failure of Black students and crime has been the topic of significant debate and research as the prevailing theory is, "schooling reduces criminal activity," (Rocque & Paternoster, 2011, p. 634).

Socioeconomic Status as a Factor of Discipline Disproportionality

The National Center for Educational Statistics, part of the U.S. Department of Education, defined Title 1 as additional federal monies allocated to districts with high numbers of poor students (n.d.). The funds traditionally pay for academic support for reading and math, before or after school activities, and summer programs - one goal of Title 1 programming was to offer academic support to students without ready access to services or resources typically associated with academic success. The potential for outbursts, behavioral incidents, juvenile delinquency, or even dropping out of school could be avoided if students, particularly Black students, already identified by Skiba and others (2011) or Rocque and Paternoster (2011) as being culturally disconnected, had what high-achieving schools had. Most notably, scholars noted differences in how students of varied social classes were treated; socioeconomic status (SES) or even the administrators' or teachers' perceptions of financial status, was a potential factor in

meting out discipline. A large-scale study on student discipline in the entire state of Louisiana yielded this information: Black students were suspended at a higher rate than White and Hispanic students, poor students were suspended at a higher rate, and that data was valid across schools all over the state, not just one or few districts (Barrett, McEachin, Mills, & Valant, 2017). Although smaller in scale than research conducted on the Civil Rights Data Collection survey data, these examples highlight discipline disparities for poor, Black students.

Black students disproportionately attend large, urban, comprehensive schools that have a high concentration of poor and low-income students (Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). Researchers noted that poor students, of which there are a disproportionate number of racial minorities, have access to fewer resources and must overcome greater academic and environmental barriers (Voight, Hanson, O'Malley, & Adekanye, 2015). Research conducted in 2011 found that suspension rates were extremely high in urban school districts, but rates were also high in suburban districts where Black students were a smaller percentage of the total student population (Skiba, Shure, & Williams, 2011). In 2014, researchers asserted that no evidence could be found to prove disciplinary disparities are due to poverty (Skiba, Arrendondo, & Rausch, 2014). These findings directly connect to the purpose of this study in that the schools where Black students are not the poorest or even in the school population's majority, they are regularly, disproportionately suspended at rates higher than their White classmates.

In his 2004 report, *Racial Disproportionality in School Disciplinary Practices*, William Drakeford noted, “while high-income students more often reported receiving mild and moderate consequences (e.g., teacher reprimand, seat reassignment), low-

income students reported receiving more severe consequences, sometimes delivered in a less than professional manner (e.g., yelled at in front of class, made to stand in hall all day, search of personal belongings).” In Allman and Slate’s 2011 review, *School Discipline in Public Education: A Brief Review of Current Practices*, school administrators surveyed used out-of-school suspensions more, especially when dealing with poor to lower-middle-class children of color. This information rang true a decade after Drakeford's work. Low-income children and Black boys (including those in special education) were among the few subgroups that were more likely to receive an office referral, then, "receive out-of-school suspension, expulsion, or a referral to law enforcement as punishment," (Anyon et. al, 2014, p. 379) – that pattern caused great concern for reformers, especially as these students are punished for the same offenses committed by their more affluent, White counterparts. Black students were not more prone to misbehavior than any other racial/ethnic group but continued to feel the brunt of discipline disproportionality (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008; Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009; Skiba et al., 2011; Anyon et. al, 2014).

Gender and Discipline Disproportionality

The US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights collected data for the 2009-2010 school term and found that information primarily reported issues of gender equity (number of girls enrolled in sports, advanced science and math classes, gifted and talented programs, and degree programs in post-secondary educational institutions); however, data analysis highlighted a disparity in suspensions - disproportionality in discipline exists across gender, not just race. Black girls are more likely to be suspended from school when compared with White and Hispanic girls (Blake, Butler, Lewis, &

Darensbourg, 2011). Black girls were suspended (out-of-school) at a higher rate than their White, Latino, and Asian/ Pacific Islander male counterparts (Office for Civil Rights, 2012). Recent studies found the discrepancy in the suspension rate between Black and White girls is greater than the gap between Black and White boys (Carter, Fine, & Russell, 2014), but "there has been little systematic exploration of possible explanations for the disproportionality," (Skiba, Michael, & Nardo, 2000, p. 1).

Although suspension for girls - Black, White and Hispanic - all decline from middle school to high school, Black girls are suspended from school at a higher rate beginning in elementary school (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011). These findings were replicated from a study of girls' suspension rates conducted in the 1980s. In 1986, Taylor and Foster found that Black girls received higher suspension rates than White girls in elementary, junior high, and high school (in Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011, p. 92) and that nearly 20 years later those statistics were still true based on data collected by Raffaele, Mendez, and Knoff in 2003. The researchers noted Black girls were more likely to be suspended and they were traditionally referred for subjective offenses like defiance, disruptive behavior, disrespect as well as fighting (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Skiba et al, 2011; Jones, et. al., 2012; Anyon, et. al., 2014; Voight, Hanson, O'Malley, & Adekanye, 2015) relative to their racial representation in the student population of school districts across the country.

In *Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Differences in School Discipline among U.S. High School Students: 1991-2005*, researchers reviewed the findings of related research and noted that being suspended or expelled in middle school was a predictor of being arrested in adolescence (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2008). They did not

differentiate between racial or ethnic groups, but current research supported the assertion that Black girls would be more likely to be adversely affected in the school-to-prison pipeline. As recent as 2015, the African American Policy Forum and several educators, authors, and social scientists called for a greater examination of how discipline policies affect Black girls because most attention focused on Black boys (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011). In *Unmasking the Inequitable Discipline Experiences of Urban Black Girls: Implications for Urban Educational Stakeholders*, researchers discussed the results of a study conducted on one urban district (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011). They reported that Black girls are overrepresented in school discipline practices, more than White and Hispanic girls (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011). These results were similar to conclusions that historically, Black girls have been more likely to receive harsh discipline.

In her book, "Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools," Monique W. Morris noted that although Black boys received two out of three suspensions, Black girls were suspended at higher rates, even more than girls of any other race (2016). In looking at the infractions for which Black girls were disciplined, Morris noted that their office referrals and suspensions highlighted "insidious and subversive" (2016; Martin & Smith, 2017) patterns as discipline focused on control and appearance, "often done in informal ways, but with the result being the punishment of Black girl aesthetics, such as natural hair, dreadlocks, or braids, being deemed as disruptive," (Martin & Smith, 2017). Epstein, Blake, and Gonzalez found that "Black girls were five times more likely to be suspended as White girls and twice as likely to be suspended as White boys," (2017, p. 2).

Discipline Disproportionality in Missouri

According to a Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) 2005-2011 Performance Plan with data specifically reported from the 2004-2005 school term, White students made up approximately 77% of Missouri's student population and 46% of students suspended for that year (2007). Hispanic students made up almost 3% of Missouri's student population and slightly more than 2% of students suspended for the 2004-2005 school year (MODESE, 2007). Black students made up 18% of Missouri's student population and 51% of students suspended for the 2004-2005 school year (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2007).

For the 2009-2010 school year, one Missouri school district that included several schools for special needs students was the sixth highest suspending district of Black children (Carrino, 2016). During that same school term, Missouri ranked as the second worst state in the Black-White percentage gap of suspensions - meaning there was a large discrepancy between the numbers of Black and White students suspended in kindergarten to the 12th grade, especially when Black students were less than 20% of Missouri's student population (Carrino, 2016). In a 2016 regional publication, University of Kansas Professor Don Haider-Markel noted that majority-Black schools were more likely to focus on disciplinary infractions and have higher incidence of punishment and suspensions (Moxley, 2016). He also noted that the four high-suspending districts discussed in the 2015 *Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?* report were majority-Black schools (Losen et al., 2015), but discipline disproportionality was problematic in Missouri schools and districts that were not identified as "high suspending," (Losen et al., 2015). Schools or districts in small Missouri towns without a large Black population also

had high rates of Black student suspensions. In 2014, Black students made up 20% of the student population in a mid-sized semi-rural school district in Missouri but accounted for nearly 60% of the students suspended (McKinney, 2014).

Black students in Missouri were still more likely to be suspended than their White or Hispanic counterparts (Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010; Losen and Gillespie, 2012; Losen et al., 2015). There has not been large-scale empirical data gathered to definitively explain the racial, gender, or class-based disparities in discipline (Skiba, Michael, & Nardo, 2000; Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009; Goff, Jackson, Allison, Di Leone, Culotta, & DiTomasso, 2014; Skiba, Arrendondo, & Rausch, 2014), but in the 2015 *Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?* report, Losen and associates noted that racial disparities in Missouri were not a cause of biased codes of conduct.

Whether codified from federal or state laws or born from a mix of board and individual district policies, codes of conduct outline rights and responsibilities and expectations from administrators to teachers to staff to students and all other school stakeholders (Fenning & Bohanon, 2006). The same expectations exist in the state of Missouri. Missouri statute Section 160.261.1 required local school districts to, “establish written disciplinary policy and to disseminate that policy to each student and student’s parent or guardian at the beginning of each school year,” (Carrino, 2016, p. 179). In 1996, the Missouri Legislature enacted the Missouri Safe Schools Act as part of a response to the brutal murder of a high school student at school to “send the message to every classroom and every school that Missouri is not going to tolerate violent and disruptive students,” (Kraetzer, 2002, p. 124). One provision of the Missouri Safe Schools Act gave schools the power to suspend or expel students for disruptive behavior

(Kraetzer, 2002). Section 167.161 permitted districts to suspend and expel students for behavior, "which is prejudicial to good order and discipline in the schools or which tends to impair the morale or good conduct of the pupils." (Carrino, 2016, p.180).

One affluent school district located in a suburb of Kansas City, Missouri, "expanded the definition of prohibited weapons for disciplinary policies well beyond that provided by federal or state legislation," (Quinn, 2013, p. 1213). As an example, the district banned anything that a reasonable person would construe as threatening. Under the district's code of conduct, a student found playing with a toy gun could face a one-year expulsion (Quinn, 2013). Instead of using suspension or expulsion to punish students accused of committing severe offenses, schools could provide alternatives like home placement (homebound) or placement in an alternative school, but that pushout could lead to entry into the criminal justice system as part of a school-to-prison pipeline (Quinn, 2013; Carrino 2016). Although the legislature directed districts to create and disseminate a code of conduct, the State did not dictate how discipline should be handled; Missouri school districts could create their own.

Even when considering serious but lesser offenses like vandalism or fighting, the consequences were specific for specific wrongdoings. The consequences for carrying weapons or drugs onto school premises were specific, significant, and directly connected to the offense. Not following the teacher's directives, speaking out of turn, or arguing with the teacher fall under a "disruptive" or "disrespect" classification in most school codes of conduct (Fenning & Bohanon, 2006). Out-of-school suspensions have been utilized as redress for minor offenses or subjective problems like class disruptions or general disrespect (Allman & Slate, 2011). Several subjective behaviors fall under this

category and although the sanctions for “disrespect” are specific, an administrator or teacher’s perception of what constitutes said behaviors are not (Fenning & Bohanon, 2006). Implementation and enforcement of the policies resulted in disproportionate numbers of Black and Hispanic students being suspended or expelled from school, even for nonviolent offenses (Mitchell, 2014). In 2011-2012, Missouri landed in the top five regarding suspension disparities for students in middle and high school (Klein, 2015). During the 2013-2014 school year, Black students in Missouri represented approximately 17-18% of school-related arrests and general referrals to law enforcement but made up 14 percent of the total student population (American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri, 2017). The discipline disproportionality occurred across the state as Black students were suspended or expelled at higher rates.

Researchers Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, and Valentine from the University of Missouri studied 2005-2006 discipline data from schools in 53 Missouri counties and juvenile justice records for youths aged 10-17 to determine if out-of-school suspensions contributed to racial disproportionality in the criminal justice system (2009). Data obtained from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), referral and incarceration data from the Missouri Division of Youth Services (DYS), and county demographics (among other information) were cross-compared and analyzed. Data showed that Black youths were disproportionately incarcerated at rates that mirrored suspensions and expulsion from schools (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, and Valentine, 2009). The researchers found the disparities created more negative attitudes among and opportunities for misbehavior for students relative to their White peers (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009). They offered an alternative explanation for the

data; they opined that Black students were not treated unfairly but rather were more likely to commit criminal offenses (Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009) but that theory has repeatedly been disavowed and disproven (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008; Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009; Skiba et al., 2011; Anyon, et al., 2014).

Skiba and Williams noted that despite higher rates of school suspensions for Black as well as Latino and Native American students, there were few racial differences in serious offenses or those most likely to violate zero-tolerance policies (e.g., drugs, alcohol, weapons) (2014). Black students are not predisposed to bad behavior (Rocque, 2010; Losen, 2011; Skiba & Williams, 2014). Several different methods tested notions of differential punishment due to ranges of school misbehavior, but Skiba and Williams noted that regardless of the method used, no conclusive evidence supported ideas that Black students' collective behaviors warranted "higher rates of exclusion or punishment" (2014, p. 3). It is possible that Black students in schools with a significant discipline disproportionately could perceive injustice, that they and their Black peers are not afforded the same fair treatment as their White counterparts. As discussed by Bottiani, Bradshaw, and Mendelson, "this, in turn, could have an impact on how welcome Black students feel at the school, and their sense of belonging there," (2017, p. 85; Rocque, 2010). Repeated and disproportionate school punishment can place youth, especially Black students, on the road to disengagement and failure as those students are more prone to dropping out of school and not attaining any more education (Peguero & Shekarkhar, 2011).

Nearly a decade after Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, and Valentine's 2009 study, the ACLU of Missouri compiled information from the Missouri Department of

Elementary and Secondary Education and studies by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights. Between 2011 and 2014, the rate of Missouri students expelled from school doubled. Black students were suspended 4.5 times more than White students - which surpassed the national average, (American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri, 2017).

A joint study conducted by a nonprofit organization, the Kansas City, Missouri mayor's office, and the Kansas City Health Department used 2011-2012 Civil Rights Collection Data survey information collected by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to study discipline disproportionality in Kansas City Missouri classrooms. The analysis included more than 40,000 pre-Kindergarten through eighth-grade public school students (City of Kansas City Health Department, 2017; Moxley, 2017). Young Black students were more likely to be disciplined and received longer suspensions (both in-school and out-of-school suspensions) than White and Hispanic students (City of Kansas City Health Department, 2017; Moxley, 2017). Data also showed that in-school suspensions rose about 40 percent for elementary students (City of Kansas City Health Department, 2017; Moxley, 2017). In 2015, Missouri's Black children were "twice as likely to be expelled from school," (American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri, 2017, p. 7). According to the ACLU of Missouri (2017):

- "41 percent of the 43,000 out-of-school suspensions were given to Black students," (p. 26),
- "Black girls were six times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than White girls," (p. 26) and,
- "28 percent of the reported 960 instances of physical restraint was against Black

students," (p. 34).

This pattern continued as during the 2015-2016 school year; Black students were 35 percent of the suspensions lasting 11-89 days and 38 percent of the suspensions lasting more than three months (ACLU of Missouri, 2017).

Conclusions

From the era of utilizing dunce caps to corporal punishment, discipline methods used to control or punish wayward students faced more public scrutiny (Pioneer Sholes School, 1998). In the 1960s, corporal punishment was the most widely used consequence (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009) but more administrators nationwide used out-of-school suspension as a method of reducing student misbehavior (Adams, 2000 in Allman & Slate, 2011). As the use of corporal punishment declined, school officials used suspension or expulsion as sanctions for negative behaviors, but those actions lead to significant consequences. Receiving just one day of out-of-school suspension "increases students' risk of dropping out of school up to 42%, increases student absences from school, and is negatively correlated with academic success," (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox in Gullo, 2017, p. 4).

Furthermore, getting suspended often leads to more juvenile delinquency and entry into the School-to-Prison Pipeline (Mallet in Gullo, 2017). According to Skiba, Eckes, and Brown, 1970s national school attendance data estimated at least one million students missed a minimum of one day of school because of out-of-school suspension or expulsion (2009). Twenty years after the 1970s discipline analysis, a review of attendance data showed that approximately 3.1 million American students missed school due to out-of-school suspensions (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009). The loss of instruction

due to suspension, the disparities in identifying negative behaviors, then meting out consequences for said behaviors, the dropout risk, and possible future involvement in crime disproportionately affects Black students more than any other racial or ethnic group.

The US Department of Education has collected school data since 1968, but the compilation, analysis, and public dissemination of said data (plus the inclusion of the information from all public school districts) made this information accessible. The CRDC data were collected to ensure districts were following federal laws. In 2014, after the release of the 2011-2012 school discipline data showing an upwardly mobile trend for racial disparities in discipline, the Obama Administration released a Dear Colleague Letter to districts co-authored by both the US Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division and the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. The letter was issued as a reminder not to create said disparities in discipline based on race and other factors and as guidance to identify, avoid, and remedy discriminatory discipline [practices]," (Lhamon & Samuels, 2014), but out-of-school suspension is still one of the most commonly used sanctions.

Summary

This chapter interspersed the history of discipline in American public schools within a review of the literature focused on the disparities in discipline – Black students, particularly Black males, face harsher discipline (out-of-school suspension to expulsion) at higher rates than their White peers. This chapter also reviewed the research on the extent to which teachers' implicit biases, respective students' socioeconomic statuses, and

zero tolerance policies influenced said discipline rates. Chapter 3 follows with an explanation of the methodology used in the study.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine 2011-2012 school year out-of-school suspension (OSS) data to examine if suspension rates differed for Black elementary school students (male and female) compared to White and Hispanic students in five suburban districts near a large, urban district. The primary focus of this study was on the suspension rates of Black students. Historically, Black students have had higher suspension rates than their White and Hispanic classmates (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway, 2015). The secondary focus of this study was on gender as Black males and females have higher rates of suspensions than their White and Hispanic counterparts as well (Losen et al, 2015). This chapter is an explanation of the methodology including an explanation of the research design, a description of the selection of participants, and a description of measurement and data collection procedures, and study limitations.

Research Design

This study is a quantitative analysis of archival data from the 2011-2012 Civil Rights Collection Data online data tool. A non-experimental, comparative design was used to examine the differences that may exist between the predetermined groups (White, Black, and Hispanic male and female elementary students) in terms of suspensions rates. The members of the groups were not randomly assigned, meaning the White, Black, and Hispanic male and female students were not randomly assigned to groups by chance or any other selection method. In this study, the dependent variable is the rate of suspension and the independent variables are race and gender.

Selection of Participants

Purposive sampling is used when the sample is chosen “based on the researcher’s experience or knowledge of the group sampled” (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 175). The sample chosen for study were Black, Hispanic, and White elementary school students enrolled in Districts A, B, C, D, and E during the 2011-2012 school year. In a total of 78 elementary schools included in this research, there were 33,985 students. The racial and gender makeup was as follows: 4,215 Black students (2,155 males and 2,060 females), 3,380 Hispanic students (1,720 males and 1,660 females), and 26,390 White students (13,565 males and 12,825 females).

Those districts are all in close proximity to Large Urban District, a district identified in the *Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?* report as a high suspending school district. Those districts were also chosen because all five school districts saw increases in Black student populations, especially over the past ten years. According to current research, predominantly Black schools are more likely to focus on discipline and have high rates of suspension (Moxley, 2016), but discipline disproportionality was found in several Missouri schools without majority Black populations (Losen et al, 2015). Given the sensitivity of this issue, no students, schools, or districts were identified in order to maintain confidentiality of all students and school staff.

Measurement

As determined by law in 1968, the Office of Civil Rights required public schools (and other public educational agencies) to complete the Civil Rights Data Collection biennial survey which collected data to ensure that recipients of federal monies did not discriminate on the basis of race, nationality, gender, and disability (Office of Civil

Rights, 2018; United States Department of Education, 2015). The Civil Rights Data Collection survey was used to poll a cross-section of public schools to determine if access to academic resources was equitably distributed (Civil Rights Project, 2010b). The 2015 *Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap?* report (Losen, et al, 2015) detailed the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) discipline survey data from the 2011-2012 school year, which included discipline data from all U.S. public schools (Civil Rights Project, 2010b). The survey's inclusion of discipline-related questions was the second major national endeavor to interpret school suspension data but the first to poll all public educational programs that serviced children in preschool to 12th grade (Losen and Gillespie, 2012).

The survey tool used was divided into two parts. The first part of the data collection tool was focused on enrollment and placement data and contained tiered yes/no questions, check boxes, and tables that asked questions like: grades served, type of school, student enrollment, and discipline-related questions which included: in school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, contact with law enforcement, and disability status (Office of Civil Rights, n.d.). The second part organized cumulative and end-of-year information.

After receiving the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) surveys from all Pre-K to 12th grade public school entities, researchers for The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project at the University of California, Los Angeles coded and classified the school-level discipline data. The suspension rates were calculated by dividing the number of suspended students by the total number of students enrolled to find the percentage of students suspended. Only students identified as “not having a disability/ no 504” and out-of-school suspended (OSS) at least once were included in the

data compilation; no data regarding In-School Suspensions (ISS) or expulsions were included. The researchers also noted that some schools might have failed to report data as required by the federal government, over-reported suspensions, or under-reported information posted to state educational websites. In following the Institute of Education Science requirements for research, suspension and enrollment numbers analyzed in the *Are We Closing the Discipline Gap?* report (2015) by The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project were rounded to protect the identity of individual students.

Data Collection Procedures

A request to conduct research was submitted to the Baker University Institutional Review Board (IRB) on October 28, 2018 (see Appendix A). Baker's IRB granted permission to conduct this study on November 2, 2018 (see Appendix B). Data collection began upon approval.

Archival data from 2011-2012 were collected from the Civil Rights Data Collection online data tool maintained by the Office of Civil Rights. For the purposes of this study, each district name was typed into the School/District/State Comparison Report, then each elementary school was isolated and compared to others in the district by clicking the appropriate checkboxes in the database. Once all elementary schools in a given district were chosen, the tool produced the rates of suspension for male and female students as compared to the school's entire student body. The data tool also detailed information disaggregated by racial group: Black, White, and Hispanic students. The rates of suspension for each racial subgroup were shown and the tool produced the suspension rates for each racial subgroup by gender grouping. The data were used to

compare discipline rates (i.e., out-of-school suspension rates) per each elementary school selected. The data were compared to the same data found in the Outcome Rate Calculator tool to ensure accuracy.

The Outcome Rate Calculator automatically generated a Microsoft Excel file with each district's elementary school data tabulated. The final spreadsheet also included a section that determined the likelihood Black and Hispanic students would receive an out-of-school suspension versus White students at each school identified. All data was saved on a password-protected personal computer under the new district name: A, B, C, D, or E and all 78 elementary schools' names were numbered and changed to letters that corresponded with the district letter identified, i.e. District A contained schools named: A1, A2, A3, etc. to ensure that student data would remain confidential.

Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

The research questions, hypotheses, and data analyses summarized below guided this quantitative study. Additionally, the corresponding hypothesis testing follows each hypothesis.

RQ1. In using the 2011-2012 CRDC survey data, would Black students enrolled in 78 elementary schools located in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E, have a different suspension rate than White and Hispanic students?

H1. Black students enrolled in 78 elementary schools located in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E, would have a different suspension rate than White and Hispanic students in the same districts.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test H1. The categorical variable used to group the dependent variable, suspension rate, was ethnicity (i.e., Black, White, and Hispanic). The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ2. Would Black male students' suspension rates in 78 elementary schools in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E, differ from White and Hispanic male students' suspension rates?

H2. Black male students enrolled in 78 elementary schools located in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E, would have a different suspension rate than White and Hispanic male students in the same districts.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test H2. The categorical variable used to group the dependent variable, male students' suspension rate, was ethnicity (i.e., Black, White, and Hispanic). The level of significance was set at .05.

RQ3. Would Black female students' suspension rates in 78 elementary schools in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E, differ from White and Hispanic female students' suspension rates?

H3. Black female students enrolled in 78 elementary schools located in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E, would have a different suspension rate than White and Hispanic female students in the same districts.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test H3. The categorical variable used to group the dependent variable, female students' suspension rate, was ethnicity (i.e., Black, White, and Hispanic). The level of significance was set at .05.

Limitations

Lunenberg and Irby (2008) identified limitations as external factors that are out of control of the researcher. Limitations for the current study included the following:

- This research will only focus on 78 schools in one state. The sample size may be too small to generalize the results to other districts in the same state or other states.
- Only White, Black, and Hispanic students are included in the study.
- The data did not include students separately identified as having a disability or 504 plan.
- The suspension rates used for this study refer to out-of-school suspension tallied from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) survey data. Other suspension data was collected using the CRDC survey but will not be included in the focus of this research.
- This study will not address the causes of discipline proportionality.

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine 2011-2012 school year discipline data to examine if suspension rates differed for Black male and female elementary school students compared to White and Hispanic students in 5 predominately White, suburban districts near a large, urban district. Chapter 3 provided an overview of the quantitative non-experimental, comparative design to study this issue. This chapter also provided details about the population to be sampled, the collection of data, a description of the Civil Rights Data Collection data tool, and the limitations of the study. Results of the quantitative analysis for this study are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Results

This study was a quantitative design using archival out-of-school suspension (OSS) data from the 2011-2012 Civil Rights Collection Data online tool. The purpose was to examine if suspension rates differed for Black elementary school students (male and female) compared to White and Hispanic students in five suburban districts. The primary focus of this study was students' rates of suspension. In Chapter 4, the descriptive analysis and the results of the hypothesis testing are presented.

Descriptive Statistics

A simple comparative research design was used to examine if differences existed between suspension rates of predetermined groups at the schools identified for this study. The sample chosen were students enrolled in Districts A, B, C, D, and E during the 2011-2012 school year. There were 33,985 general education students included in the study of 78 suburban elementary schools. See Table 3 for the racial and gender makeup of the students included in the study:

Table 3

Comparison of Elementary School Student Populations, 2011-2012

	District A	District B	District C	District D	District E	Totals
Black Males	525	390	620	385	235	2,155
Hispanic Males	610	220	235	445	210	1,720
White Males	3,080	2,790	3,670	2,330	1,695	13,565
Black Females	490	350	575	390	255	2,060
Hispanic Females	595	180	250	445	190	1,660
White Females	2,800	2,645	3,570	2,235	1,575	12,825
Totals	8,100	6,575	8,920	6,230	4,160	33,985

Note: All data was compiled via the Civil Rights Data Collection survey using the Outcome Rate Calculator at <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/DataAnalysisTools/DataSetBuilder?Report=4>

Hypothesis Testing

This section includes the results of the hypothesis testing. Three research questions and their corresponding hypotheses guided the study. An analysis of the hypothesis testing is presented here:

RQ1. In using the 2011-2012 CRDC survey data, would Black students enrolled in 78 elementary schools located in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E, have a different suspension rate than White and Hispanic students?

H1. Black students enrolled in 78 elementary schools located in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E would have a different suspension rate than White and Hispanic students in the same districts.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test H1. The Levene's test of homogeneity of variances yielded a statistically significant result ($p < .001$); since the assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated, a Welch test was conducted. The results of the Welch test indicated a statistically significant difference between at least one pair of means, $F = 4.564$, $df = 2, 145.272$, $p = .012$. A follow-up post hoc was conducted to determine which pairs of means were different. The Games-Howell post hoc was conducted at $\alpha = .05$. Two of the differences were statistically significant. The mean for Black students' suspension rates ($M = .0285$) was significantly higher than the mean for White students' suspension rates ($M = .0148$) and the mean for Hispanic students' suspension rates ($M = .0154$). Therefore, Black students were suspended at higher rates than both White and Hispanic students included in the study. See table 4 for the means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for the variables.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for the Variables of H1

OSS Rate	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Black Students OSS Rate	78	.0285	.0361
Hispanic Students OSS Rate	78	.0154	.0271
White Students OSS Rate	78	.0148	.0195

Note: OSS means out-of-school suspension. Students in this study had been suspended at least once.

RQ2. Would Black male students' suspension rates in 78 elementary schools in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E differ from White and Hispanic male students' suspension rates?

H2. Black male students enrolled in 78 elementary schools located in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E would have a different suspension rate than White and Hispanic male students in the same districts.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test H2. The Levene's test of homogeneity of variances yielded a statistically significant result ($p < .001$); since the assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated, a Welch test was conducted. The results of the Welch test indicated a statistically significant difference between at least one pair of means, $F = 6.457$, $df = 2, 114.451$, $p = .002$. A follow-up post hoc was conducted to determine which pairs of means were different. The Games-Howell post hoc was conducted at $\alpha = .05$. One of the differences was statistically significant. The mean for Black males' suspension rates ($M = .0579$) was significantly higher than the mean for White males' suspension rates ($M = .0146$). Therefore, the hypothesis was partially supported. Among the schools examined, Black males were suspended at a higher rate than White male students. See table 5 for the means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for the variables.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for the Variables of H2

Male Student OSS Rate	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Black Males OSS Rate	78	.0579	.1232
Hispanic Males OSS Rate	78	.0264	.0493
White Males OSS Rate	78	.0146	.0164

Note: OSS means out-of-school suspension. Students in this study had been suspended at least once.

RQ3. Would Black female students' suspension rates in 78 elementary schools in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E differ from White and Hispanic female students' suspension rates?

H3. Black female students enrolled in 78 elementary schools located in District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E would have a different suspension rate than White and Hispanic female students in the same districts.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test H3. The Levene's test of homogeneity of variances yielded a statistically significant result ($p < .001$); since the assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated, a Welch test was conducted. The results of the Welch indicated no statistically significant difference between any pair of means, $F = 1.966$, $df = 2, 121.139$, $p = .144$. No post hoc was warranted. According to the analysis of the data provided, there were no statistically significant differences in the suspension rates of Black, White, and Hispanic female students. The hypothesis was not supported. See table 6 for the means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for the variables.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for the Variables of H3

Female Student OSS Rate	N	M	SD
Black Females OSS Rate	78	.0130	.0361
Hispanic Females OSS Rate	78	.0047	.0219
White Females OSS Rate	78	.0047	.0087

Note: OSS means out-of-school suspension. Students in this study had been suspended at least once.

Summary

This chapter contained the descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing for each of the research questions and corresponding hypotheses presented in this study. The results of the study showed that a difference existed in some of the students' suspension rates. Consistent with national statistics, Black students included in this study did have a higher rate of suspension than their White and Hispanic counterparts. There was also a difference in the suspension rates of Black and White males. In that comparison, Black male students had a statistically significant higher rate of suspension than White males. Contrary to national statistics discussed in the Literature Review, the Black female students did not have a statistically significant different rate of suspension compared to White and Hispanic female students. In chapter 5, a summary of this study and how the hypothesis testing results connect to findings in current literature are described. Recommendations for further study and implications for the future are included.

Chapter 5

Interpretation and Recommendations

The focus of this quantitative study was an examination of the difference in suspension rates among White, Black, and Hispanic students. The primary purpose of this study was to examine if discipline disproportionality existed. National statistics note Black students, especially Black males, are suspended at higher rates than other ethnic/racial groups (Skiba et al, 2011; Jones, et al, 2012; Anyon, et al, 2014; Goff et al, 2014; Skiba, Arrendondo, & Rausch, 2014; Brown & Steele, 2015; Losen et al., 2015; Voight, Hanson, O'Malley, & Adekanye, 2015). Chapter 5 includes many sections: a synopsis of the study, a review of the research questions that directed this study, major findings of the current study, a review of research literature on the topic of racial disparities in school discipline, conclusions drawn from the research and related issues, implications for action, and recommendations for future research.

Study Summary

This study provided an analysis of elementary student suspension rates. The study utilized archival data collected via the Civil Rights Data Collection survey from all public K-12 schools during the 2011-2012 school year. The research questions compared the suspension rates of Black, Hispanic, and White students. The data were also compared by gender. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test all three hypotheses. Additional testing was needed to ensure the validity of the results.

Overview of the problem. Discipline disproportionality is the overrepresentation of certain groups in negative administrative contacts (Brown & Steele, 2015). Losen and Associates analyzed national survey data from the 2011-2012 school term and found that

Black elementary school students in Missouri had the highest suspension rate in the country (2015). The issue was limited to predominately Black public school districts. Further research highlighted disparities in discipline in Missouri schools and across the United States (Center for Civil Rights Remedies, 2015b; Losen et al., 2015).

Purpose statement and research questions. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine if suspension rates differed for Black elementary school students compared to White and Hispanic students in five suburban districts located near a large, urban district. The primary focus of this study was the suspension rates of Black students. A secondary focus of this study was on gender as Black males and females have higher rates of suspensions than their White and Hispanic classmates (Losen et al, 2015).

Review of the methodology. This study was a quantitative analysis of archival data from the 2011-2012 Civil Rights Collection Data survey. A comparative design was used to examine the possible differences between the predetermined groups in terms of suspensions rates. The dependent variable was the rate of suspension and the independent variables were race and gender. Populations examined were White, Black, and Hispanic male and female students in 78 suburban elementary schools. Students of other ethnicities were not included in this study nor were students identified as having an IEP or 504 plan. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test all three hypotheses connected with each research questions.

Major findings. The first hypothesis test was performed to examine if suspension rates differed for Black students as compared to White and Hispanic students. An analysis of the data showed that the suspension rates of both White and Hispanic students were similar and not significantly different; however, there was a difference between the

suspension rates of White and Black students. The examined data showed a higher suspension rate for Black students. The second hypothesis test was performed to examine if suspension rates differed for Black, Hispanic, and White male students. An analysis of the data showed that the suspension rates of both White and Hispanic male students were not significantly different; however, there was a difference between the suspension rates of White and Black male students. Black male students were suspended at a higher rate. The third hypothesis test was performed to find if suspension rates differed for Black, White, and Hispanic female students. There were no statistically significant differences in the suspension rates of Black, White, and Hispanic female students based on the data provided.

Findings Related to the Literature

Recent national studies indicated mixed results with regard to Hispanic students' suspension rates. Peguero and Shekarkhar found that Hispanic students were suspended out of school more than White students (2011). A 2011 report from Wallace and Associates found that out-of-school suspension rates for Hispanic elementary school students significantly differed from the rate of suspension for White students. Skiba and his colleagues found little to no disproportionality at the elementary level between Hispanic and White students' suspension rates (2014). The data analysis in this study was aligned with Skiba's findings as there was no significant difference in Hispanic and White students' suspension rates.

In an earlier study, Skiba and his colleagues asserted that Black students were disciplined at higher rates than their White and Hispanic classmates (2002); this conclusion is supported by studies conducted over the past 40 years (The Children's

Defense Fund, 1975; Drakeford, 2004; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Anyon et al 2014; Martin & Smith, 2017). Black students, particularly Black males, have been suspended from school at a higher rate than White students (Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010). A data analysis from this study yielded similar results. Within this study, Black elementary school students were suspended at higher rates than White and Hispanic students. These results align with national trends.

Research has shown that Black females have been suspended at higher rates than all other ethnic/racial groups, except Black males (Office for Civil Rights, 2012; Skiba, Arrendondo, & Rausch, 2014; Losen et al., 2015). More recent studies have highlighted the gap between White and Black female students; that gap is now wider than the gap between White and Black male suspension rates (Carter, Fine, & Russell, 2014). The findings of this study showed no statistically different suspension rate between White, Hispanic, and Black female students.

Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg (2011) assert that Black female students receive less attention in the collective works of school discipline because of gender bias and that girls pose less of an overall societal risk, they are not viewed as aggressive or violent as males. According to Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, black girls are more likely to be suspended than White and Hispanic girls, even though a decline in discipline infractions occurs for all female ethnic groups after junior high (2011). These ideas were also supported in studies in research from the past 30 years (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2008; Skiba et al, 2011; Carter, Fine, & Russell, 2014; Martin & Smith, 2017).

In a 2003 study from Raffaele Mendez and Knoff, Black girls were more likely to be disciplined for defiance, use of profanity, disrespect, and fighting (in Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011). Continued research suggests that implicit bias is based on teachers' perceptions of students rather than actual behavior (Carter, Fine, & Russell, 2014). In 2005, Monroe surmised that aggressive and violent caricatures of Black males accounted for why Black male students and discipline dominated the literature and research but that white middle-class ideas of femininity drove the bias on Black girls (in Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011). Traditionally, women and girls are seen as passive and selfless, but teacher frustration may come as black female students in urban settings are more likely to be outspoken and assertive (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011). The cultural clash could lead to teacher bias in working with black girls many deem as loud and defiant (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011). More research on this topic is needed.

Conclusions. This focus of the study was on suspension rates. The study utilized archival suspension data from the CRDC to examine if differences existed between White, Black, and Hispanic elementary school students' suspension rates. The study used the same data to determine if differences existed between male and female students' suspension rates. The following section includes the implications for action that educational leaders should use in evaluating equity in discipline practices regardless of educational setting and student populations. This section concludes with recommendations for future research.

Implications for action. The current quantitative study investigated suspension rates. The results of this research suggest that Black students were suspended at higher

rates than their White and Hispanic classmates using the analyzed data. Numerous underlying reasons have been posited for these trends. The results of both national quantitative and qualitative studies highlight how implicit bias or inconsistently applied zero tolerance policies directly impact students. One study showed that, across the elementary grades, “teachers tend to report less warmth in their relationships with Black students compared to their White students,” (Gregory et. al., 2016, p. 173). The largest discipline gaps between Black and White students occur for reasons related to “defiance,” “disrespect,” and “uncooperative behavior,” (Gregory et. al., 2016, p. 173). Teachers were more likely to perceive Black students as defiant and unwilling to learn (Gregory and Weinstein, 2011; Skiba, Arrendondo, & Rausch, 2014). Those identified students would then be referred to the office and dealt a punishment harsher than a sanction typically given to a White student for the same real or perceived behaviors (Gregory and Weinstein, 2011).

Repeated and disproportionate school punishment can place students on a path of disinterest or failure as those students are more prone to dropping out of school (Peguro & Shekarkhar, 2011; Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014; Losen et al, 2015). Continued discipline problems have also been predictors of school violence, future criminality, and alternative school placements (Mason, 2015). The impact of suspensions with respect to student academic success has also been noted. Discipline disproportionality increases the achievement gap that exists between White and non-White students (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014). Each out-of-school suspension decreases a student’s likelihood of graduating from high school by 20% (Gregory, Hafen, Ruzek, Mikami, Allen, & Pianta, 2016).

School districts across the country are giving serious attention to the prophetic power of suspension (Losen, 2011; Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014; Gregory et. al., 2016). Conducting a discipline review to identify biased discipline practices (Gregory et al, 2016; Mason, 2015), offering research-based professional development for teachers (Owen, Wettach, & Hoffman, 2015; Gregory et. al., 2016), aligning discipline policy with student achievement initiatives (Losen, 2011; Mason, 2015), and finding alternatives to suspensions like restorative justice (Owen, Wettach, & Hoffman, 2015; Gregory et. al., 2016) are recommended to find equitable discipline practices.

Losen suggested that school districts align discipline policy with academic achievement goals (2011). He noted a 2004 Maryland state law that made implementing an intervention program if school discipline reached 10 percent of any elementary school enrollment mandatory (2011). Data-driven policies in finding fair discipline practices may be the reason why this state had an overall suspension rate of 1.7% and a White-Black disparity gap of 2.1% versus Missouri's 12.5% gap between White and Black students' suspension rates for the 2011-2012 school year (Losen et. Al., 2015).

After reviewing school policy and practices to determine if disparities existed, Gregory and Associates recently conducted a study of the implementation of the My Teaching Partner Secondary (MTPS) system in 86 elementary classrooms (2016). A committee studied discipline data while parents, staff, and students completed school climate surveys to identify problem areas in each of the 86 schools (Gregory et. al., 2016). MTPS offered each teacher extensive professional development on equitable discipline practices, building student relationships, and cultural awareness and communication (Gregory et. al., 2016) . A "coach" was then assigned to each teacher to

observe, evaluate, and provide feedback in observed areas of strength and weakness using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System Secondary (CLASSSS; Gregory et. al., 2016). CLASSSS targets the quality of teacher-student interactions and guides teachers in creating positive classroom environments sensitive to individualized student needs (Gregory et. al., 2016). Within two years of utilizing the program and scoring system, no schools reported any racial disparities in discipline (Gregory et. al., 2016). Black students had a low likelihood of receiving referrals with teachers who increased skills to engage students in high-level analysis and cultural awareness (Owen, Wettach, & Hoffman, 2015; Gregory et. al., 2016). This is not an endorsement of either system but rather an endorsement of schools' attempts at identifying issues and implementing focused interventions.

Recommendations for future research. These are the recommendations for future research based on the results of this study:

1. It is recommended that future researchers replicate the current study with a larger sample size to include all suburban school districts in the metropolitan area examined.
2. It is recommended that future researchers study trends in discipline as the 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 CRDC suspension data are available.
3. It is recommended that future researchers focus on discipline disparities in schools with a focus on black female students. The African American Policy Forum called for a greater focus of how discipline policies affect Black girls because most research details Black boys (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011).

4. It is recommended that future researchers add other ethnic and racial groups to the study to examine if discipline disproportionality exists for any other racial or ethnic groups.
5. It is recommended that future researchers include students identified as having IEPs or 504 plans in the suspension data.
6. It is recommended that future researchers conduct a qualitative study from the teacher's perspective on discipline in the classroom.
7. It is recommended that future researchers conduct a qualitative study from the student's perspective on teacher bias.

Concluding remarks. In search of alternatives to suspension, Owen, Wettach, & Hoffman suggest that schools develop inclusive plans versus exclusionary ones, namely community service and restorative justice (2015). School and district practices vary but instead of shaming a student who has violated less serious school rules, the researchers assert using peer mentorships, restitution, student-driven community service projects, and conflict mediation to better build school communities and culture (Owen, Wettach, & Hoffman, 2015). Some schools or districts in urban Missouri cities revised discipline policies after the 2011-2012 school year discipline data were released to the public. One Missouri district banned suspending preschool to 2nd grade students (We Live Here, 2016) and another school sent disruptive or troubled 3rd graders to yoga or safe rooms instead of utilizing out-of-school suspension (Taketa, 2016). More Missouri schools and districts have created or implemented new strategies in working with students to reduce discipline disproportionality but relatively no data exists on the long-term successes of those programs (We Live Here, 2016).

The current study was a quantitative analysis devoid of a finding of why the disparities in discipline existed. The first and second hypotheses found that a difference in suspension rates existed and that Black students – especially Black males – had higher rates of suspension than the other student groups included in the study. There was no qualitative examination or discussion of common factors related to discipline disproportionality. Continued research on the causes of said disparities and the implications of interventions is warranted.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Proposal for Research to Baker University



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
GRADUATE DEPARTMENT


Date: 10/16/2018
IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER _____
(IRB USE ONLY)

IRB REQUEST
Proposal for Research
Submitted to the Baker University Institutional Review Board

I. Research Investigator(s) (Students must list faculty sponsor first)

Department(s) School of Education Graduate Department

Name	Signature	
1. Dr. James Robins		Major Advisor
2. Dr. Li-Chen-Bouck		Research Analyst
3. Dr. Denis Yoder		University Committee Member
4. Dr. Kerry Dixon		External Committee Member

Principal Investigator: Nicole Blakeney 
Phone: (816) 695-3066
Email: NicoleEBlakeney@stu.bakeru.edu
Mailing address: 4325 Harrison Street
Kansas City, MO 64108

Faculty sponsor: Dr. James Robins
Phone: (913) 344-1222
Email: James.Robins@bakeru.edu

Expected Category of Review: ___Exempt ___X___Expedited ___Full

II: Protocol: (Type the title of your study)

Race, Gender, and OSS: A Quantitative Study of Elementary School Discipline in Missouri

Summary

In a sentence or two, please describe the background and purpose of the research.

The findings in the 2015 *Are We Closing the Discipline Gap?* report based on 2011-2012 school term highlighted that as a state, Missouri had a significantly high rate of suspension for black elementary school students and had the widest elementary school-level black-white discipline gap in the nation. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine 2011-2012 school year suspension rates collected via the Civil Rights Data Collection survey for approximately 80 elementary schools without majority black populations in 5 districts in close proximity to Large Urban District to explore if a difference in suspension rates existed among white, black, and Hispanic students in those schools.

Briefly describe each condition or manipulation to be included within the study.

There are no conditions or manipulations in this study.

What measures or observations will be taken in the study? If any questionnaire or other instruments are used, provide a brief description and attach a copy.

The United States Department of Education mandated all public education organizations to report information about on a range of academic-related topics from school demographics, to access to advanced classes, to discipline, to student contacts with law enforcement, to special education so that educators, researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders could make informed decisions supported by data. This study would analyze archival out-of-school suspension data from the 2011-2012 school year for 80 elementary schools in 5 school districts. A screenshot of the online tool is attached.

Will the subjects encounter the risk of psychological, social, physical, or legal risk? If so, please describe the nature of the risk and any measures designed to mitigate that risk.

There are no psychological, social, physical, or legal risks involved in this study.

Will any stress to subjects be involved? If so, please describe.

There will not be any stress to subjects in this study.

Will the subjects be deceived or misled in any way? If so, include an outline or script of the debriefing.

In this study, no subjects will be deceived or misled.

Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive? If so, please include a description.

For this study, there will be no request for personal or sensitive information from any subject.

Will the subjects be presented with materials which might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading? If so, please describe.

For this study, no subjects will be presented with any offensive, threatening, or degrading materials.

Approximately how much time will be demanded of each subject?

No subject will be under any demands for time to complete this study.

Who will be the subjects in this study? How will they be solicited or contacted? Provide an outline or script of the information which will be provided to subjects prior to their volunteering to participate. Include a copy of any written solicitation as well as an outline of any oral solicitation.

The subjects in this study are archival, out-of-school suspension data on black, white, and Hispanic male and female students in 80 elementary schools in 5 school districts. The districts were chosen because of their close proximity to Large Urban District, one district identified as a high suspending district in the 2015 *Are We Closing the Discipline Gap?* report. No individual student, school, or district will be identified in any written or verbal communication so there was no solicitation or contact with subjects for this study.

What steps will be taken to insure that each subject's participation is voluntary? What if any inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation?

Subject participation will be in the form of confidential archival data, not physical interactions. There was no pursuit of participation or inducement of any kind to participate in this study.

How will you insure that the subjects give their consent prior to participating? Will a written consent form be used? If so, include the form. If not, explain why not.

Since only archival data will be used in the study, no written consent form will be used.

Will any aspect of the data be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject? If so, please explain the necessity.

The archival Civil Rights Collection Data survey information on suspensions collected and analyzed in this study will not be part of any permanent record.

The tool can be found at: <https://oeddata.ed.gov/DataAnalysisTools/DataSetBuilder?Report=4#>

Appendix B: IRB Letter of Approval



Baker University Institutional Review Board

November 2nd, 2018

Dear Nicole ~~Blakeney~~ and Jim Robins,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Expedited Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.

Please inform this Committee or myself when this project is terminated or completed. As noted above, you must also provide IRB with an annual status report and receive approval for maintaining your status. If you have any questions, please contact me at npoell@bakeru.edu or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,

Nathan Poell, MA
Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee
Scott Crenshaw
Jamin Perry, PhD
Susan Rogers, PhD
Joe Watson, PhD