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Forms of Bias and Their Impact on
Disproportionality in School Discipline

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Abstract

Initially, this paper explores **fifteen** published articles that report on the disproportionate amount of disciplinary actions handed out along racial lines in U.S. public schools. Additionally, this paper examines the relationship between the number of students affected by said disciplinary actions and the loss of what is called “seat time” within certain minority groups. Finally, it considers the reasons for disproportionate disciplinary actions and how those reasons impact minority ethnicities throughout our education system. Complicating the exploration and explanation of the relationship between disproportionate disciplinary actions and minorities is the fact that the articles consulted in the research vary in their definitions and uses of the term cultural mismatch. Staats (2014) suggested that cultural mismatch between teachers and students can activate implicit racial bias and limits what constitutes a true definition. DeMatthews (2016), on the other hand, referred to this same topic as critical race theory (CRT), broadening the definition of the term by implying that the nature of white dominance generally in U.S. education is responsible for the unseen, covert, and less obvious acts of racism that are present and persistent in U.S. schools. Gregory, Skiba and Noguera (2010) used two different terms to describe this phenomenon. The first term is differentiated selection, which refers to the “selection at the classroom level that contributes in some way to racial/ethnic disproportionality in school discipline outcomes” (p. 62). The second term is differential processing, which refers to a hypothesis that “discrimination occurs in courts and correctional systems, which leads to a disproportionate arrest and incarceration rate of minorities” (p. 63). The authors expanded this notion to include the school setting and its racial/ethnic disproportionality in application of disciplinary procedures.

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Forms of Bias and Their Impact on
Disproportionality in School Discipline

Chapter 1: Statement of Problem

In January 2014, Arne Duncan of the U.S. Department of Education issued *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline*. The reason for its release was to address the equitableness and effectiveness of school discipline in the nation's schools. For example, nationwide data collected by the Office for Civil Rights has shown that youths of color and youths with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions, causing them to lose what was termed "seat time." Indeed, the total number of students suspended from school in the 2009-2010 academic year would fill every seat in every major-league baseball park and every NFL stadium in America combined (Losen & Gillespie, 2012, as cited in Staats, 2014). Disproportionality in application of school discipline is evident and wide spread in every state, rural/urban county, and small/large school district in the U.S., and some sort of bias is evident in almost every aspect of school discipline, which is costing students valuable time away from their learning environments.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the reasons for bias in school discipline. Almost every study since 1995 has concluded that school discipline is applied disproportionately to minority students; however, rarely have any of these same studies explored the reasons for same. This study will focus on three main questions that explore areas within school discipline where bias might affect the severity of punishment and the recipients of same. The following research questions will be addressed during this study:

- Are there racial disparities evident in school discipline at our public charter school?

- Does “cultural mismatch” play a role in school discipline at our public charter school?
- Do socio-economic and/or socio-demographic factors influence bias in school discipline at our public charter school?

Preview of Literature

When I originally began my research, I was primarily looking for information relating to the disproportionality of the application of school discipline and how the application of disciplinary policies affected minority students as compared with non-minority students. Consequently, my searches in library databases and peer-reviewed articles focused on using these two phrases: “disproportionality in school discipline” and “effects of disproportionality in school discipline on minority students.” As I narrowed my research to explaining how bias in school discipline was affecting minority students, I began to search library databases and scholarly articles that explored bias in school discipline. I was no longer in doubt that there was disproportionality in school discipline; I wanted to know the underlying reasons for it. In order to do this, I needed to discover where, why and how bias was affecting the manner in which discipline is meted out in our schools today. The following review of literature assisted me in narrowing my research objective and refining both my search and the questions that I would use to further my research.

Staats (2014), in her article “Implicit Racial Bias and School Discipline Disparities,” gave me the first indication of a new direction for my research when she categorized bias into several key points. First, she noted that there is a subjective component. That is, school employees interpret situations subjectively and this interpretation plays a role in whether, or to what extent, discipline is warranted. Second, she stated that the predominantly white workforce in schools contrasts with the increasingly diversified student population. Third, she discussed

the associations with societal stereotypes made by school staff towards students of color or any minority ethnic group.

Kupchik and Ellis (2008) suggested four questions regarding school discipline and student perceptions of safety and fairness, three of which directly pertain to this study and one which pertains indirectly. Are school rules fair? Does everyone know what the school rules are? If a school rule is broken, do you know the punishment that will follow? Is the punishment for breaking a school rule the same no matter who you are? These were important questions to ask as they encourage the students to speak out and relate their interpretation of school discipline to their perceptions about school punishment. These questions also gave me additional ideas for both interview and survey questions that will be used in both student and parent group surveys.

Smolkowski, Girvan, McIntosh, Nese, and Horner (2016) analyzed terminology and definitions that affect subjective competence in disciplinary decisions. The authors noted that in psychological research there are two distinct types of bias--explicit and implicit. They provided examples of what each type of bias looks like and related each to realistic situations. Additionally, the authors discussed vulnerable decision points (VDRs) in schools and indicated specific situations, including times of day, where these instances of increased disproportionality tend to occur. It seemed logical that examining explicit and implicit bias would help to explain why disproportionality is a problem in school disciplinary decisions.

Skiba, Shure, and Williams (2011b) referenced the societal correlation among race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status regarding severe and consistent inequities demonstrated in school suspensions and expulsions. Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, and Tobin (2011a) later examined socio-demographics and the impact of these factors on disproportionality in school discipline. Though the connection to socio-economic status (SES) has been more difficult

to establish, Skiba, et al. (2011a) still hypothesized that poverty and low SES, rates of inappropriate or disruptive behavior, and racial stereotyping have a direct effect on disproportionality in school discipline.

Preview of Methodology

The methodology that I will use consists of both quantitative and qualitative information, making this a mixed research project. The combination of both research methodologies will prove most beneficial as I plan to undertake areas within my research that will provide numerical as well as expository data. The case study plan will focus on upper elementary (grades 4-6), middle school (grades 7-8) and high school freshman and seniors (grades 9 and 12) along with office personnel, teacher aides, grade-coordinated teachers, resource personnel, physical education teachers, and parents. I will primarily utilize research questions that have been designed to provide qualitative data. I will conduct both small group and individual interviews with various students and parents from various ethnic backgrounds, and I will do the same with teachers, office personnel, and other school staff. I will also undertake to conduct informal interviews when this option is available. Data from informal interviews will also be qualitative. I will design and utilize surveys targeting select groups of students, parents, and staff from established target groups with questions intended to elicit qualitative answers. I will review personnel notes from disciplinary files along with written records on the school database and review available district data online, both of which should be quantitative. Once data have been collected and analyzed, numerical data will be graphed wherever possible and displayed along with written analysis in Chapter Four.

Significance of Study

In 1975, the Children's Defense Fund concluded that rates of suspension and expulsion for African American students were between two to three times higher than those of white students. Costenbader and Markson (1998); Glackman, Martin, Hyman, McDowell, Berv and Spino (1978); Kaiser (1979); and Lietz and Gregory (1978) have all determined that racial disproportionality in school discipline practices is a major problem. Though these studies are not current, it is clear from data supplied by the U.S. Department of Education (2014) that it is an ongoing problem. Of all the studies done, very few have looked to explain why this disproportionality exists and why it is so prevalent. This research seeks to answer why there is bias and disproportionality in school discipline. This information can be used to design successful student interventions, effective teacher courses and professional development programs, and essential school policies that take into account the demographic shift that many districts are undergoing. In turn, these changes will help keep students in school and in their seats, where they can learn and develop positive academic and social skills necessary to be productive participants in society. Change will be accomplished by instructing and assisting teachers, teacher aides, counselors, principals, office staff, and all other school staff in identifying and overcoming the influence of implicit bias and in employing strategies designed to improve interactions with students of diverse backgrounds and ethnicities.

Conclusion

This research asks the questions that may help explain why there is bias in school discipline. It seeks to answer the question of why there is a disproportionate amount of discipline handed out to minority students, which is causing empty seats in classrooms that should be teeming with activity. It looks to these same answers to help design better teacher courses, better professional development, and better principal-preparedness classes to assist

educational personnel in keeping students in school. The research will be both qualitative and quantitative, making this a mixed-method research project that will incorporate interviews and surveys of students, teachers, office staff, principals and everyone who is employed in the educational field. These interviews and surveys will be designed to discover why there is bias in school discipline, not merely whether there is bias. Examining studies, data, peer-reviewed articles and other information that will assist in finding the answer to why there is bias in school discipline will help to achieve the goal of this research, which is to determine why bias persists in school discipline and to communicate how to minimize or eliminate the impact of the factors that contribute to this persistent bias.

Definition of Terms

Case Study is an in-depth investigation of an individual, group, or institution to determine the variables, and relationship among the variables, influencing the current behavior or status of the subject of the study.

Cultural mismatch is the increased adherence to peer groups' norms, rather than the aspirational or mainstream norms of their organization, thus creating a pattern of behavior that is likely to exacerbate and maintain the negative consequences of said mismatch.

Differentiated selection refers to a selection or choice at the classroom level that contributes in some way to racial/ethnic disproportionality in school discipline.

Disproportionality refers to the over-or-underrepresentation of a given population group.

Empirically-based means verifiable by means of observation or experiment.

Hypothesis is a tentative, reasonable, testable assertion regarding the occurrence of certain behaviors, phenomena, or events; a prediction of study outcomes.

Qualitative data characterizes or describes information but does not measure its attributes. It is data that is observed subjectively.

Qualitative research study is research in which the investigator attempts to study naturally-occurring phenomena in all their complexity with the purpose of developing insights, ideas and hypotheses.

Quantitative data is information that can be measured and written in numbers or an amount or range.

Questionnaire is a list of questions that the participant answers in writing or by marking answers on an answer sheet.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Why Is There Bias in School Discipline?

Why is there racial bias in school discipline, and what factors promote bias in our educational system in this day and age of heightened consciousness and political correctness? Losen and Gillespie (2012) stated that over three million children K-12 are estimated to have lost instructional “seat time” between 2009-2010 because they were suspended from school at least once. To provide perspective, Losen and Gillespie (2012) noted that “the students suspended from school in 2009-10 was the number of individual children it would take to fill every seat in every major league baseball park and every NFL stadium in America, combined” (as cited in Staats, 2014, p. 3). Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, and Belway (2015) revealed that in the 2011-2012 school year, nearly 3.5 million public school students were suspended out-of-school at least once, observing that the number of students suspended in just one school year could fill all the stadium seats for the first forty-five Super Bowls, nearly all the games ever played. With the average suspension lasting 3.5 days, U.S. public school children lost nearly 18 million days of instruction in just one school year because of exclusionary discipline (Losen et al., 2015). Clearly, a lot of students are losing a lot of seat time.

Furthermore, there is a disproportionate amount of disciplinary actions among specific racial groups. A study done by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University found that in K-12 schools nationally, one out of every six African American school children, one out of every thirteen Native American school children, and one out of every fourteen Latino school children (17%, 8%, and 7%, respectively) were suspended. During the same time period, one in twenty white school children and one in fifty Asian American school children (5% and 2%, respectively) were suspended (Staats, 2014). The statistics plainly show

disproportionality. The task is to determine the underlying reasons for this disproportionality when it comes to school discipline.

To begin understanding these reasons, I had to ask several distinct questions relating to discipline disproportionality. First: Are there racial disparities evident in school punishment such that consequences are not handed out evenly among the diverse groups in the student population, causing unfair conditions in the eyes of one or more ethnic groups? Second: Is there cultural mismatch such that particular ethnic groups are perceived in a particular way or racially stereotyped due to the ethnic makeup of school staff? Third: Are social issues a factor? That is, what is the impact of socio-demographic elements such as where students live, what language is spoken in the home, the socio-economic status of students and their families, the presence of both parents in the home, the parent(s') occupation(s), the number of siblings in the family, and the number of other people living in the house? All of these elements could potentially influence a staff member's opinion of how and/or how much discipline should be applied.

When I started my search, I had originally been looking just at the disproportionality within school discipline, but as I read the articles I discovered that there were sections explaining why the disproportionality might exist. It was not until I read "Implicit Racial Bias and School Discipline Disparities," the 2014 Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity by Cheryl Staats, that I discovered the terminology I was looking for. Staats (2014) categorized bias into several key points. First, there is a subjective component wherein a school employee's interpretation of a situation plays a role in judging whether, and to what extent, discipline is merited. Second, the "predominantly white teacher workforce contrasts with an increasingly diversified student population" (Staats, 2014, p. 2). Though Staats (2014) labeled this phenomenon a cultural mismatch between teachers and students, I believe that this circumstance

can affect all staff members within schools, including the secretaries, attendance clerks, deans, registrars, and anyone else who might see or hear students and form an opinion about them, resulting in the unconscious creation of ideas about students based on preconceptions. Third, Staats (2014) discussed the notion of “societal implicit associations” (p. 3), relating the notion only to implications of blackness (e.g. being dangerous, criminal, or aggressive). Expanding these same societal associations to all minority ethnicities obtains a similar result.

After learning about the role of bias in the disproportionality of discipline, I reformulated my areas of concentration as follows: First, do racial disparities exist in disciplinary action, as evidenced by school punishment such as office referrals, in-school and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, and can it be discerned whether uneven application of discipline among students causes an unfair condition among one or more ethnic groups? Second, does cultural mismatch (ethnic groups being perceived in a particular way or racially stereotyped due to the ethnic makeup of the school staff) play a role in disciplinary action, as evidenced by the rate of differentiated judgments about achievement and behavior aligning with socially-conditioned responses to racial characteristics? This may include subjective competence by school personnel. Subjective competence can best be explained as the ability of an individual to make a decision about whether an action or behavior violates a policy or rule. Such a decision often requires a subjective judgment. For example, a staff member making a judgment about the severity of a violation and whether that violation warrants further action is using some subjectivity in making that determination. Third, does societal influence (socio-demographic elements such as where students live, living situations, socio-economic status, etc.) play a role in disciplinary action? Answers to these questions may help illuminate the reasons for disciplinary disproportionality.

All stakeholders in education know that teachers can't teach students who are not in their seats, but it must also be emphasized that teachers can't teach when a disruptive force exists in the classroom. Though many school districts have implemented a no-suspension policy for students, which can often mean keeping a disruptive student in the classroom, recent articles in print, on social media and on television have shown that this is not the answer. One reason is that many educators feel that a no-suspension policy is unfair to the students who want to learn and are impeded by the presence of disruptive students in the classroom. As schools become more ethnically and racially diverse, it is imperative that we get to the root of the problem, come up with reasonable and relevant solutions, and implement those solutions. Does it mean that more effective professional development for teachers, administrators and all support staff will be required? Does it mean that schools will need to create outreach programs to involve more parents? Does it mean that teacher training might need to be re-evaluated to include classes on understanding ethnic diversity and overcoming personal bias? All of these possibilities and more may be necessary. Without doubt, however, we must identify the underlying problems and design effective solutions. No individual's potential should be stifled because of lack of education, and we can all agree that an uneducated population is a no-win scenario for everyone.

Literature Review

Racial disparities. Regarding the first theme or area of research, Losen et.al. (2015) brought some interesting points to the forefront. This report analyzed racial and ethnic disparities in suspensions nationwide. One of the first studies focused on elementary and secondary suspension rates for 2011-12. At the elementary level, 7.6% of black students were suspended while 2.1% of Latino students and 1.6% of white students were suspended. The gap increased by a staggering amount in secondary schools with 23.2% of black students receiving suspensions while suspension of Latino students increased to 10.8% and suspensions of white students increased to 6.7%. Notably, two other sub-groups showed marked increases in suspensions in secondary school: 11.9% of American Indian students were suspended and 18.1% of students with disabilities were suspended. These suspension rates clearly show racial disparity. Though the report indicates that the gap in suspension rates between black students and white students and between Latino students and white students narrowed slightly between 2009 and 2012, this narrowing was attributed to a small increase in suspensions of white students, not as the result of a proactive effort to reduce the gap.

Besides a clear pattern of racial disparity nationwide, Losen et al. (2015) found other disturbing statewide trends. Florida suspends 19% of all its secondary students; North Carolina suspends 21% of American Indian secondary students. Missouri suspends over 14% of black elementary students and is the state with the largest gap between black student suspensions and white student suspensions at the elementary level. Further, Montana suspends 19% of secondary-level English-learners. Arizona, Massachusetts and California were among the twenty states with the highest rate of English-learner suspensions when those states had English-only instruction policies. Interestingly, most large districts show a great deal of variation in

suspension rates from one school to the next. This variation is attributed to school-level factors such as the principals' attitudes toward the use of harsh discipline (Losen et al., 2015). These trends demonstrate that in addition to race, ethnicity and disability play a role in disciplinary disproportionality.

Kupchik and Ellis (2008) also analyzed racial disparities in discipline. Focused on three major groups, white, black, and Latino, the study sought answers to four questions. The goal was to determine the perceptions of each group regarding disciplinary issues and to discern whether members of each group felt that their group received inequitable treatment with regard to discipline. The first question asked was: Are school rules fair? This question attempted to measure student perceptions of the appropriateness of school rules under the hypothesis that since African American students are punished at a higher rate these students would find that school rules are not fair. The second question asked was: Does everyone know what the school rules are? This question attempted to measure students' knowledge of the rules. The third question asked was: If a school rule is broken, do students know what kind of punishment will follow? This question was designed to determine students' understanding of the consequences for breaking the rules. The fourth question asked was: Is the punishment for breaking school rules the same no matter who the person is? This question was designed to determine whether the group members' experiences with the disciplinary system felt inequitable or aligned with their understanding of the consequences for breaking rules. Together, the answers to these four questions were meant to offer an overview of students' perceptions of school rules and punishments, including whether the rules were well-communicated, fair, and evenly and consistently applied. Initial findings indicated that "other than the punishment knowledge

question, there were statistically significant differences across racial and ethnic groups” (Kupchik & Ellis, 2008, p. 561).

Data showed that African American students gave significantly lower ratings than white students on the fairness of school rules and rule enforcement. Surprisingly, however, the answers from Latino students on these questions were not significantly different from the answers of white students. Although the African American students’ answers were of no real surprise considering the research showing that school punishments are disproportionately directed at this group, the researchers were surprised to see no significant differences between the Latino student group perceptions and the white student group perceptions. Additionally, the study revealed that students who participated in extracurricular activities and students with high grade-point averages felt they were treated more fairly relative to other students. Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the study found that more advanced students perceived less overall fairness in discipline than younger, less-advanced students did. Overall, the findings of Kupchik and Ellis (2008) lead to an important supplementary question: Putting aside consideration of race or ethnicity, how does social class in particular affect the application of school rules across groups of students and shape those students’ perceptions of equitable application of discipline?

Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) conducted research using the three most commonly offered factors for disproportionate discipline--gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Though the findings showed that race and gender did play a significant role in school discipline, including office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions, meaningful connections to socioeconomic differences were not found. Skiba et al. (2002) indicated that fifteen studies concerning school suspensions done since the 1975 Children’s Defense Fund study demonstrated that racial disproportionality in the use of school suspensions has been a highly consistent

finding. To determine a reason for this disproportionality, Skiba et al. (2002) explored the types of behaviors for which different groups of students are referred to the office. Because boys and African American students are suspended at a higher rate than female students and students of other races, the expectation was that boys and African American students engaged in correspondingly higher rates of more serious infractions. The results, however, indicated that male students and black students were overrepresented on all measures of school discipline when compared to female students and white students. This disproportionality in referrals and consequences obtained whether the infractions were serious or not. Skiba et al. (2002) also examined the impact of cultural mismatch and socioeconomic influences, both of which will be discussed further in the relevant sections of this Literature Review.

Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman (2008) explored patterns and trends in school discipline relative to racial, ethnic and gender differences. As with most studies, Wallace et al. (2008) found that black, Hispanic, and Native American students are more likely to be sent to the office, and twice as likely to be suspended or expelled, than white or Asian American students. Notably, though black students comprise only 17% of public school students, this group has a suspension rate of 32%. Further, Wallace, et al. (2008) found that black students were twice as likely as members of other racial/ethnic groups to be suspended or expelled in urban areas, and from three to twenty-two times more likely than members of other groups to be suspended or expelled in rural areas. Interestingly, there is also disproportionality in the reasons students are sent out of the classroom. Black students were sent to the office for subjective reasons, including disrespect and perceived threat, while white students were sent to the office for objective reasons such as smoking, vandalism, or truancy. Using information from parents, it was determined that among 7th to 12th graders suspension and expulsion rates were highest for American Indian

students (38%) and black students (35%) followed by Hispanic students (20%), white students (15%) and Asian American students (13%) (Wallace, et al., 2008). Until this time, no other study had examined racial disciplinary disproportionality among varied ethnic groups. Additionally, the term socio-demographic variable was introduced for the first time.

Nichols (2004) studied a Midwestern school district that comprised eleven middle schools, six high schools, and thirty-five elementary campuses in a large metropolitan city. Total student enrollment for the entire district was 37,000 categorized as follows: 72% white, 23% black, 5% Hispanic/Latino, and less than 1% Asian American or Native American. Of the 37,000 students, 4,100 received free or reduced lunch and the overall dropout rate for the district was approximately 6%. The number of disciplinary incidents reported for the 1996-97 school year totaled 65,507 (15,491 elementary incidents; 17,288 middle school incidents; and 32,728 high school incidents). Of the 65,507 incidents, 26,920 or 40% involved minority students. This is a startling percentage given that minority students made up less than 29% of the total student population. In this same district, there were 9,559 out-of-school suspensions (5,238 at the high school level; 3,362 at the middle school level; and 959 at the elementary level). Of these suspensions, 3,342 or 35% were attributed to minority students. Given that minority students comprised less than one-third of the student population in the district, these statistics demonstrate plainly that minority students received a markedly higher amount of disciplinary referrals and suspensions.

Ogbu (2003) observed that there are three reasons that a greater number of black students are disciplined for inappropriate behavior than are white students in public schools (as cited in Nichols, 2004). Cultural expectations and perceptions, stereotypes and cultural expectations, and cross-cultural misunderstandings are the terms used to describe the reasons. For example,

Nichols (2004) reported that 75% of the minority population in the district described above qualified for free or reduced lunch. This data coupled with the disciplinary data could suggest that cultural expectations and perceptions are somehow at work in the application of discipline. Though the terminology used in Nichols (2004) is different, I don't believe that it represents a new gap in my research.

Cultural mismatch. Theme two focuses on cultural mismatch, a circumstance in which certain student ethnic groups are perceived in a particular way or racially stereotyped due to the ethnic makeup of school staff. This area of research also examines how differentiated judgments about achievement and behavior are based on preconceived and/or racially-conditioned characteristics and the identification of subjective competence by school personnel. DeMatthews (2016) discussed the influence on discipline of the biases of school leaders and encouraged a move away from traditional leadership approaches. Recognizing that both districts and states have formalized policies to classify student misconduct and prescribe what is deemed appropriate punishment, the fact remains that student discipline can be challenging because of the “discretion that it involves” (DeMatthews, 2016, p. 7). While acknowledging that the racial discipline gap and the overrepresentation of African American students in school discipline have been well-documented, DeMatthews (2016) points out that principal preparation programs fail to properly prepare and develop administrative candidates by failing to even have conversations pertaining to race and racial inequalities. Using the term critical race theory (CRT), DeMatthews (2016) offered current and future school leaders a new way to reflect on the nature of white dominance and the covert, less obvious acts of racism in U.S. schools. Assuming that “racism is normal and unquestioned in U.S. society and institutions,” the nature of educational policies and color-blind leadership practices are at fault for the racism and racial discipline gap that exist today

(DeMatthews, 2016, p. 8). School leaders must acknowledge racism and marginalization in order to move forward. The implementation of social justice leadership, a program that has assisted in creating inclusive and culturally relevant reforms, is a way to do just that (DeMatthews, 2016). Though the term CRT is different from cultural mismatch, I interpret the concept to be the same.

Smolkowski, et al. (2016) discussed the reasons for subjective competence in disciplinary decisions. Psychological research suggests that there are two distinct types of bias, explicit and implicit. Explicit bias is what we think of as prejudice-- ethnocentrism, racism and other consciously-endorsed attitudes or beliefs. One example of explicit bias is believing that African Americans are all criminals and lazy. Implicit bias is the automatic, often times unconscious impact that stereotypic associations with racial and other groups can have on perceptions, judgments, decision-making, and behavior. It has its roots in generalized associations formed from systematically repetitious or unique and limited experience or exposure, such as assuming that an area heavily populated by African Americans must have a crime problem. Noting that levels of explicit and implicit bias are relatively independent of each other, Smolkowski et al. (2016) asserted that one can be truly prejudiced or one can be truly non-prejudiced. A person who shows both explicit and implicit bias is said to be truly prejudiced. In contrast, a person who believes in diversity and equity but still appears to favor white students over African American students is truly non-prejudiced although demonstrating implicit bias.

Beyond the notion of the impact of explicit and implicit bias on disciplinary decisions, Smolkowski et al. (2016) claimed that there are situations in which increased disproportionality tends to occur. Known as vulnerable decision points (VDRs), these situations contain contextual events or elements that increase the likelihood of implicit bias affecting disciplinary decisions.

VDRs may include a teacher's decision to issue an office referral or a principal's decision to suspend a student. Noting that gender differences may impact disciplinary decisions, which I include as a gap issue, and that potential interactions based on the gender or race of the teacher or administrator may impact disciplinary decisions, which represents another gap issue, Smolkowski et al. (2016) maintained that disproportionality can be exacerbated by factors that are not consciously considered. Smolkowski et al. (2016) posits additional factors that have not been addressed, including time of day and types of classes, both of which I have not covered, and the subjectivity of Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs), which I have addressed.

Lindsey and Hart (2017) investigated whether having a teacher of the same race makes it more or less likely that students are subject to exclusionary school discipline. Researchers found conclusive evidence that students were less likely to be removed from school when their teachers were of the same race. The outcome was “driven almost entirely by black students, especially black boys, who are markedly less likely to be subjected to exclusionary discipline when taught by black teachers” (Lindsey & Hart, 2017, p. 74). A handful of studies have shown that black and Latino students are less likely to receive exclusionary discipline in schools with higher concentrations of black and Latino teachers, supporting the notion that teacher-student race parity is a factor in disciplinary decisions. Though these studies looked at aggregate relationships at the school level, the possibility that schools with more teachers of color have different disciplinary practices could not be ruled out. Lindsey and Hart (2017) discovered that there was no variance in outcomes across grade levels or in rural versus urban schools in student-teacher race match. There was, however, variance in outcomes within charter schools, leading to speculation about discipline dynamics in various school settings.

Gregory, et al. (2010) described cultural mismatch in terms of two sub-categories. First, there is substantial research suggesting that “differential selection at the classroom level contributes in some way to racial/ethnic disproportionality in school disciplinary outcomes” (Gregory et al., 2011, p. 61). Further, Vavrus and Cole (2002) observed that in an ethnographic observational study of urban classrooms, it was discovered that many office referrals leading to school suspensions were due to what the authors described as a student’s “violation of implicit interactional codes” most often calling into question established classroom practices or the teacher’s authority (as cited in Gregory et al., 2011, p. 62). “Students singled out in this way were disproportionately students of color” (Gregory et al., 2011, p. 62). In addition, other scholars have focused on ways in which negative teacher beliefs and expectations contribute to racially-related authority conflicts. Ferguson (2003) pointed out that negative teacher-student interactions observed were attributed to white teachers overreacting and relying on stereotypes to interpret black students’ language and physical expressions. White teachers may have been responding to stereotypes and media portrayals of black youth as dangerous and aggressive. It was further suggested that the above reasons were used as justification for whether these students were selected for disciplinary sanctions.

An additional factor could be differential processing, which is a hypothesis-based assertion that discrimination starts in the courts and correctional system, leading to a disproportionate arrest and incarceration rate among minorities. Adapting this hypothesis to the classroom/school setting simply replaces the arrests and incarcerations with suspensions and expulsions. Multiple studies cited in Gregory et al. (2010) found that black students reported harsher punishments than white students even when the behavior was deemed less serious. This

finding suggests harsher sanctions issued to black students may contribute to their overrepresentation in discipline data.

Social issues. Theme three deals with social issues. More precisely, it is an attempt to answer the question: Were social issues a factor in bias against students in disciplinary decisions? The topic of social issues includes a variety of elements such as where students live, the socio-economic level that they and their families live in, whether both parents live at home, the parent(s) occupation(s), the number of kids in the family, the number of people living in the house and the home language. These are all areas that could potentially influence a staff member's mind in how and/or how much discipline is handed out to a student.

Although this first article could have been used in the section on cultural mismatch, I thought it more appropriate to include here. Van Kleeck (2007) suggested that home talk versus school talk can be a defining factor in how discipline is handed out or in how the perception of a child/student is established in the classroom setting. European-American students are often considered well-rehearsed in school talk long before they reach formal schooling. The values and beliefs of other cultural groups and those from poor or working-class backgrounds (Hispanic, African American, Asian American, and Native American families), may result in family practices and child behaviors that are not consistent with school talk. For example, in some Latino cultures, preschoolers are not expected "to think out loud or talk about stories," and we must understand that it is these values, beliefs and practices that often define the child or inform the child's behavior (Van Kleeck, 2007, p. 23). If teachers are to see a child's full potential, it is important to understand the entire child. Van Kleeck (2007) described how the home life, language, customs or traditions of students of different cultures are sometimes used against them and viewed as willful disobedience.

Skiba, et al. (2011a) hypothesized that there are a number of possible reasons to account for rates of disciplinary disparity by race. These include poverty, rates of inappropriate or disruptive behavior, and racial stereotyping. Socioeconomic status (SES) is highly connected to American society, which raises the possibility that racial disparities in school discipline are disproportionately associated with SES. The connection between SES and school suspensions is well-established, yet the connection between race, SES and disproportionality in discipline has been harder to establish. Further, Skiba, et al. (2011a) proposed that the connection between students of color and exposure to a variety of stressors associated with poverty may teach students to exhibit behaviors so far from mainstream expectations that these behaviors put this group at risk for increased disciplinary instances.

Skiba, et al. (2011b) argued that correlations in American society between race and/or ethnicity and SES raise the possibility that any finding of disproportionality due to race is a by-product of disproportionality associated with SES, and, in any case, this relationship cannot be described in such a linear manner. Studies of school suspension have consistently documented overrepresentation of low income students in the use of that disciplinary consequence. Hinojosa (2008) reported that a variety of variables, including presence of mother or father in the home, number of siblings, and the quality of home resources, were all predictors of the likelihood of suspension. Noltemeyer, Mujic, and McLoughlin (2012) reported that poverty was a significant predictor of a school's rate of suspension but not of disproportionality in suspension. Additionally, studies have consistently found that, with the exception of rural high schools, socio-demographic variables are in no way sufficient to account for the overrepresentation of students of color in school suspensions and expulsions.

Conclusion

It is quite clear that disproportionality in school discipline is a major problem. In recent years, nearly 3.5 million public school students were suspended and out of school at least once. It is a known fact that there is a disproportionate amount of discipline handed out along racial lines. Nationally, 17% (one out of every six) of black school children, 8% (one out of thirteen) of Native American school children, and 7% (one in fourteen) of Latino school children attending K-12 schools were suspended, as compared to 5% (one in twenty) of white school children and 2% (one in fifty) of Asian American school children (Staats, 2014). But to understand the problem, we must explore the reasons behind it. There are three underlying reasons that are cited in this paper: racial disparities, cultural mismatch and societal implicit associations.

As proven in multiple studies, racial disparities are prevalent nationwide. Black students from elementary school through high school are being suspended and/or expelled at a much greater rate than Hispanic or white students. Though Hispanic students do not outnumber black students in student populations, disproportionate discipline data show that they come in numerically just below African American students and are followed by American Indian/Native American students. Students with disabilities, if tracked in this study, would be just below African American students and just above Hispanic students as a percentage. Another factor that was not tracked but would have minimally changed the numbers would be gender. The numbers of male students suspended and/or expelled as compared to the number of female students suspended and/or expelled increases steadily from elementary through high school where the rates gradually level off. Rates of suspension/expulsion among states with rural areas that have an African American and/or Hispanic population are also different. A greater percentage of

African American and Hispanic students are suspended or expelled in comparison to white students when analyzing overall school enrollment.

Another interesting fact was that Arizona, California and Massachusetts had the highest number of English learners being suspended when all three of these states had English-only instruction policies. Further, larger districts show a great deal of variation in suspension rates though much of this can be attributed to principal attitudes and school-level variations. Data show that black students are sent to the office for subjective reasons while white students are sent for objective reasons. Lastly, and it was repeated in almost every study, article or publication I read, there is a very strong correlation between suspensions, expulsions, school dropout numbers, and the jail and prison pathway. Obviously, factors beyond racial disparity influence discipline decisions.

Cultural mismatch identifies a variety of areas where bias can occur and some of the reasons for this bias. I found it important to first understand the classifications of bias. Explicit bias is what we like to think of as prejudice--ethnocentrism, racism and other consciously-endorsed attitudes or beliefs. Implicit bias is usually automatic, usually unconscious, and is based on perceptions and judgments. Levels of explicit and implicit bias can be independent of each other, but a person who shows both explicit and implicit bias is said to be truly prejudiced. There is also reference made to VDRs, times when the greatest disproportionality tends to happen. These are the situations when implicit bias is most likely to affect discipline. Examples include when a teacher has to make a decision whether or not to issue an office referral or when a principal has to decide whether or not to suspend.

Another interesting discussion centers on whether or not having a teacher or an administrator of the same color has an effect on disproportionate discipline. According to

studies there is a very strong connection between these two. It seems that black students in general are less likely to be subjected to disproportionate discipline if the teacher or administrator is also black. There is a stronger correlation if the teacher or administrator and the student are both male. This same connection does not appear to relate to white or Hispanic students. Cultural mismatch is present in many classroom situations often times when a student questions established classroom practices and/or teacher authority. Additionally, instances of white teachers overreacting when interpreting the body language or physical expressions of black students is commonplace. Differential processing is a hypothesis based on the assumption that discrimination starts in the courts and the correctional system, but it has been adapted to the educational field to show that discrimination exists in schools as well.

Social issues can also create bias. Even though the effects of socioeconomic status are well-ingrained in American society, the connection between SES and disproportionality in discipline is a bit harder to make. There is a distinct connection between SES and school suspension, but that is about as far as it can go. There is also a distinct connection between students of color and a variety of stressors associated with poverty that have the potential to lead the child/student into a group where instances of increased discipline are more frequent. A variety of studies show that with the exception of rural high schools, socio-demographic variables cannot be connected to overrepresentation in school suspensions and expulsions. One study hypothesized that the correlations between race and ethnicity and socioeconomic status do raise the possibility that disproportionality due to race is in fact a by-product of socioeconomics. Clearly, many factors are at work in the disproportional application of discipline in public schools.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Racial disproportionality in school disciplinary practices has a long history and still continues today (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Glackman et al., 1978; Gregory, 1978; Kaeser, 1979; Lietz & McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Skiba et al., 2002; Townsend, 2002). In one of the earliest investigations of school disciplinary practices, the Children's Defense Fund (1975) found that suspension rates for African American students were between two to three times higher than those for white students. Over the 11-plus years that I have been employed at my current job, I have watched as our school demographics have changed. Along with the changes in demographics, I've heard from teachers, parents, students, administrators and the entire school community how discipline that includes suspensions and expulsions has changed. Similarly, this has been the case nationwide as more and more schools and districts around the country have undergone changes demographically. My research focused on bias in school discipline and how this creates the racial disproportionality seen in the statistical numbers related to this subject. As a parent of a student who has progressed through the public school system, as an educator in both large public school districts and smaller public charter schools, and as a dean of students, I have had the opportunity to observe firsthand instances of bias and the effect such bias has had on schools and on the field of education.

Using the mixed methodology of research, I conducted one-to-one interviews with students of various races and ethnicities, along with parents and school staff, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. I am currently employed at a school that has two campuses. Through the use of Proposition 39 requirements, one campus is co-located on an existing district high school campus (grades K-6) while the second campus is located on the site of a Jewish synagogue and day school (grades 7-12). Utilizing both school campuses, I distributed surveys

to a select group of students, parents, and school faculty and then compiled the data that I received from the surveys. I was also able to solicit a select group of parents, students, and school staff to participate in interviews. The questions for both the surveys and interviews were the same, but I wanted to identify the participants' perceptions about the effects of bias on school discipline in open-ended interviews. Open-ended interviews were conducted because they allow for the use of ideas, thoughts, and memories in a participants' own words rather than words of the researcher, a practice suggested by Reinharz (1992). I analyzed our school disciplinary data along with the data that I had compiled through my research and triangulated this data wherever possible. I felt that this was a critical area of research as so many of the peer-reviewed articles and research that I had read and analyzed discussed the bigger problem of racial disproportionality in school discipline but omitted the reasons that underlay the problem. I believe that if we are going to address the problem of racial disproportionality, and we are obliged to given that more and more schools and districts are experiencing it, we need to understand the underlying reasons that cause it.

Research Questions

- Are there racial disparities evident in school discipline at our public charter school?
- Does “cultural mismatch” play a role in school discipline at our public charter school?
- Do socio-economic and/or socio-demographic factors influence bias in school discipline at our public charter school?

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify the underlying causes of bias that affect school discipline, which in turn is a contributing factor to the disproportionate amount of discipline handed out along racial/ethnic lines in one public charter school. Chapter 1 introduced the study,

the rationale, and the background information on the subject. Chapter 2 provided a review of relevant literature as it related to the overall topic and the subsections created by the research questions.

Chapter 3 looks to introduce the methodology and justify why it was selected to assist in the collection and analysis of data. The methodology for this research included both quantitative and qualitative research, making it a mixed methods research project. Teachers, students, and parents were selected from the accessible population that comprises the K-12 public charter school where I am employed, and these individuals make up a population of subjects that would either be subject to bias, have opportunity to be influenced by bias, or have a family member at the school who could be subject to bias. This chapter will explore in detail the design of the methodology, the participants in the study, the settings or locations where the study took place, instruments utilized in the study, the procedures, and the analysis of data derived from this study.

Design

The design of this study is one that follows a mixed methodology as it utilizes both quantitative and qualitative research. Multi-strategy research articles nearly always entail the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data (Niglas, 2004). The interview questions were designed to elicit qualitative data, including personal opinions based on acts of bias that have been inflicted upon the participant, witnessed by the participant, or inflicted by the participant of the interview. The mixed methodology allows for the triangulation of data using different measures of the same concept to provide a more detailed read of the overall measure, separate data analysis, and integrate databases as the interpretation or discussion stages of the report further warrant. In coding triangulation, the emphasis is placed on corroboration between quantitative and qualitative data (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989).

Participants

Students were selected based on race and ethnicity, including African American, Hispanic, Native American, Pan Asian and Caucasian. Students were selected from 4th through 6th grades, representing our elementary students; 7th and 8th grades, representing our middle school students; and 9th and 12th grades, representing our high school students. Eight students represented each age group in the interview or survey process, including two African American students, two Hispanic students, one Native American student, one Pan-Asian student, and two Caucasian students. The total number of student participants either interviewed or surveyed was twenty-six. I anticipated some attrition in the 12th grade subjects as our school suffers a large decline in high school enrollment starting in 9th grade due to our minimal athletic program, limited electives, and limited AP course offerings, which was the reason for adding two additional students. I chose the grade levels based on the criteria of my research. Fourth through sixth grades were selected as those students are beginning to understand when they are being subjected to racial comments or judgments. Seventh and eighth grades were selected as they have a clear understanding of bias, are reaching new levels of maturity, and are more likely to speak out about instances of bias. Ninth and twelfth grades were selected as they represent the first and last years of the high school experience and could be expected to provide a beginning and ending perspective. Also, it was expected that as maturity levels increased, students would become more attuned to racial instances and acts of prejudice.

In addition to the student numbers listed previously, there are thirteen teachers of mixed ethnicity who were involved in the study, representing the same age groups delineated above. These teachers were selected based on the perception that they were likely to want to be part of a conversation about bias and/or because students would be more likely to confide in them. I also

utilized physical education teachers from both campuses as they appear to have a unique and distinctive relationship with students, making students more likely to be forthcoming in their conversations. Teachers were offered the option to participate in either the interview or the survey portion of the research project.

Three office personnel, two from our elementary and middle/high school sites and one from the school's business office, represented the site locations. Four teacher aides from elementary, middle and high school were also asked to participate as they are often witnesses to daily activities and off-topic conversations that students, office personnel and administration personnel often have. Twelve parents were selected based on their race, ethnicity, relations to students, and willingness to participate.

Setting

The research took place at two locations of a K-12 public charter school authorized by Los Angeles Unified School District. The school has been in operation for 12 years and opened as an entrepreneurial charter, quickly attracting a large Russian student population as the founders were of Russian descent. Changes in demographics and the replacement of the original founders have left the school in its current state. The school has a student population that is 57% free and reduced lunch and is comprised of approximately 63% Hispanic students, 16% white students, 13% Pan-Asian/Filipino students, and 8% African American students. Due to lease and financial issues, the school has moved locations several times. By utilizing the statutory requirements of Proposition 39 requiring that public school facilities be shared fairly among all public school pupils, the K-6 facility is co-located on the campus of a district high school in the San Fernando Valley. The K-6 campus is located behind the high school in the school's old agricultural buildings that were built in the late 1960's. It is a closed campus and very secure.

Classrooms are quite sizable, and technology has been updated. Students at this campus have minimal playground equipment although space is more than adequate as they share some of the paved area with the high school. Students from the two schools do not intermix.

The middle school/high school campus is located on the border of Los Angeles and Ventura County on the campus of a Jewish temple and day school situated approximately 20 minutes from the elementary school site. The middle school/high school campus is shared with the business offices of the temple, a Jewish day school, and a synagogue that houses several smaller temples. Classrooms are very small although technology has been updated and is usually adequate. There is no gym and all outside activity is done on a sloped, blacktop parking lot. Students eat in the main building, which houses the synagogue, and since it is a conservative temple all tables are required to be covered as most school food is not kosher. Both these locations worked well for most of the interviews as they are both secluded and out of the way. Additionally, I was able to invite students, faculty or parents to my office and not arouse suspicion regarding the content of our conversations as my office is always a hub of activity. This also proved beneficial to those who were nervous about their confidentiality as no one questions why students, parents, or faculty are in my office.

Instruments and Materials

Research included a survey crafted from information obtained through peer-reviewed research articles and surveys discovered through Google searches. Chromebooks were used to participate in the survey and a recording device was used to record interviews. Both survey and interview included twenty-five questions. Both began with questions that identified whether the participant was a student, parent, teacher, support staff member, or administration member and then sought to identify the participant by gender and ethnicity. Both sought to determine primary

language spoken at home and the relationship between the parents, i.e. living together, divorced, etc. Both instruments asked about parents' highest level of education and whether the home where families lived was owned, rented or otherwise obtained. Additionally, both the survey and the interview looked to discover the number of people living in the household and whether those living in the house brought in some type of income. (See Appendix A for the entire survey.)

Although the interview has the same questions as the survey, the data collected through the open-ended question and answer process of an interview were reported in the participants' own words through audiotaped recordings and subsequent transcription. The text of the interview and questions served as a primary source for interpreting and analyzing data. The interview is more than a mere series of questions asked by the interviewer and responded to by the interviewees. The role of the interviewer is vital and makes it possible for the person being interviewed to bring the interviewer into his or her world. The quality of the information obtained during the interview is largely dependent on the interviewer. How the interviewer sees his or her role and the participant's role and how the interviewer constructs questions and conducts the interview make the interviewer the most crucial tool in the research process (Patton, 1990). (See Appendix B for the entire set of interview questions.)

Questions on the survey utilized the Likert scale using numbers one through five to allow participants the opportunity to express to what degree they agreed or disagreed with the statements. Participants who did not have computers were encouraged to utilize the interview rather than the survey. Those who still opted for the survey were supplied with the computer equipment to participate. Survey questions were designed to utilize quantitative answers, whereas interview questions were designed to elicit qualitative answers, both of which were then triangulated and graphed using the Excel program. All data were stored on a secured flash drive

and locked in a secured lockbox while not being used. No names or identifiable pieces of information were attached to the data stream and all information remained anonymous. All data were destroyed at the end of this research project.

Procedures

All students filled out and completed consent forms. Students under 18 were required to have signed parental consent forms previous to participation. Parents and students over 18 had an adult consent form and employees of School X Charter School had a separate consent form. Additionally, permission for all employees to participate in this research project was granted by the Executive Director of School X Charter School. The consent forms outlined participants' responsibilities, authorized the researcher to compile, analyze and publish data obtained through surveys and interviews, and further provided that all participants would hold the researcher harmless for using information derived from interviews and surveys. These steps were taken to ensure transparency, fulfill any legal obligations, and allow for all data that were obtained to be triangulated, graphed, and published. (See Appendix C for a sample consent form.)

Data were analyzed using a procedure known as inductive analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All data obtained would become the sole possession of the researcher. Participants of interviews and surveys were notified of this via email addresses supplied to the research coordinator. Surveys were mailed or emailed to participants with a request for return by a specified date. Those that were mailed included a stamped, return-addressed envelope. Participants in the interview process were notified via email of times and locations of interviews agreed upon by both the participant and the research coordinator. Participants were selected from upper-elementary grades 4th through 6th, middle grades 7th and 8th, and high school freshman (9th) and seniors (12th). Office personnel, teacher aides, grade-coordinated teachers,

resource personnel, physical education teachers, and parents were included as these stakeholder subgroups offered the best opportunity to obtain information pertaining to bias in the school setting.

I personally conducted individual interviews and distributed surveys to select participants of various ethnic and racial backgrounds and did the same with teachers, office personnel, and additional school staff members. I reviewed my personal notes from disciplinary files and written school records on school databases, and I also reviewed district data available from online databases. The qualitative method of gathering rich description of school discipline practices afforded me the opportunity to look at similarities, differences, and points of uniqueness as the data were collected. I am an insider because I have been around so many of these situations but never reacted to them. I was a teacher. Now that I have a clearer picture of the biases that are evident in the school setting, I believe that I may have been guilty of exhibiting bias at one point in time. I don't feel that I would have ever done something like this on purpose, but I do suspect it may have occurred unwittingly. I am an outsider because I am not a member of one of the groups that these biases have been directed at. I am also an outsider because I am sure there are certain points I do not understand about certain ethnicities and races since I am not a member of any of the affected groups. I am an outsider, but I am trying to better understand how to correct this problem.

Analysis

After the study, all data were compiled, logged, and indexed. This was done using notes, recordings or, where applicable, both. Responses were categorized and/or triangulated after determining which of the three research areas the information most pertained to--Racial Disparities, Cultural Mismatch, or Social Issues. Responses that pertained to multiple research

areas were documented in all areas where the data were deemed relevant. Narratives were introduced on all bar graphs that were used to display information received through both the interview and survey processes of the study. Qualitative answers were scanned for key words, which allowed for categorization. Quantitative data were numerically analyzed and used to create charts and graphs depicting frequency of responses. Interview and survey participants encompassed a wide range of ages, races, ethnicities, demographics, socio-economic levels, and varied socio-demographic factors to ensure the study was not biased in itself.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to discover why there is bias in school discipline that leads to the disproportionate amount of discipline handed out along racial/ethnic lines in one public charter school located in Los Angeles, California. To answer why there is bias in school discipline, this study looked at three principal areas that needed to be addressed. These areas included racial disparities responsible for bias in school discipline; the influence of cultural mismatch in school discipline; and the influence of socio-economic or socio-demographic factors in school discipline. To accomplish this undertaking, the study needed to utilize mixed methodology of research. Interviews were conducted with select students, parents, and school staff that provided the qualitative data to be analyzed and evaluated. Surveys provided to a select group of students, parents, and school staff provided the quantitative data that was evaluated, analyzed and graphed. Data from all surveys, interviews, both formal and informal, naturalistic observations, and notes were then combined, triangulated and categorized, and then analyzed.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Racial disproportionality in school punishment is a well-documented issue in the United States. It has been reviewed by scholars, students and even the government of the United States in *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline* (Department of Education, 2014). School districts--large and small, urban and rural--have data that show this problem is evident regardless of where students attend school. However, the important piece of information that is consistently missing from all these studies, including peer-reviewed articles, is why this disproportionality in punishment is happening. Where does the bias originate that perpetuates this problem? My research looked to answer this question. Research area one asks: Are there racial disparities evident in school discipline at our public charter school? Does it originate in racial disparities where implicit and explicit biases affect the judgment of the people who are indirectly or directly responsible for the discipline our students receive in school? Research area two asks: Does cultural mismatch play a role in school discipline at our public charter school? Do the people in charge just not understand certain nuances that pertain to minorities? Research area three asks: Do socio-economic or socio-demographic factors influence bias in school discipline at our public charter school? These are the questions that this research will seek to answer to discover if bias in discipline is an issue at one K-12 California public entrepreneurial charter school.

In Chapter 4, this researcher explained how the data were presented and described the setting where the research took place. The researcher presented some of the data, how such data were analyzed, and then summarized the findings for the reader. Additionally, the data were interpreted as they related to the research questions and educational practices. The conclusion summarized what key concepts the research questions indicated were operating.

Data Presentation

The first piece of data that the researcher presents came from Losen et al. (2015) and illustrates the disproportionality of black student and Latino student suspensions versus white or Caucasian student suspensions. Nationally, black students represented 7.6% of all elementary student suspensions, Latino students represented 2.1% of all elementary student suspensions, and white/Caucasian students represented 1.6% of all student suspensions. This was very significant because when the researcher compared these data to the 2015-16 suspension data collected from the charter school of this study, the numbers were similar. Taking into account that our school has approximately 13% African American students and approximately 55% Hispanic students and Losen et al. (2015) examined a school district whose student population had almost opposite percentages, the data look quite similar. The outlier in these data would be represented by the 5% suspension rate for white students in our school while Losen et al. (2015) showed a suspension rate of 1.6% for this subgroup. This can be seen in Figure 1. These data sparked this researcher's interest in the subject of bias in discipline.

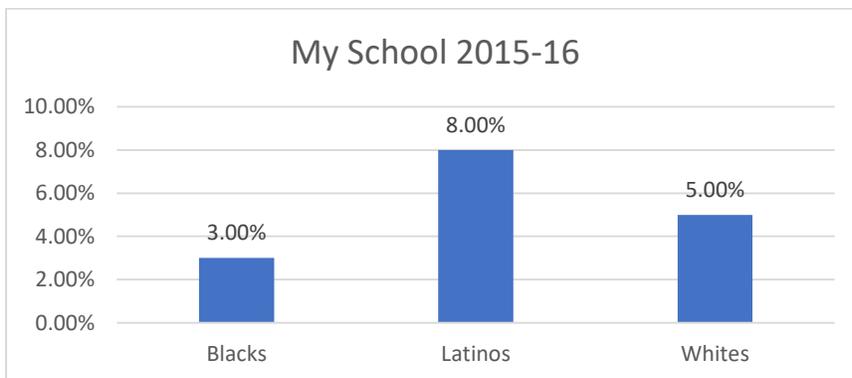
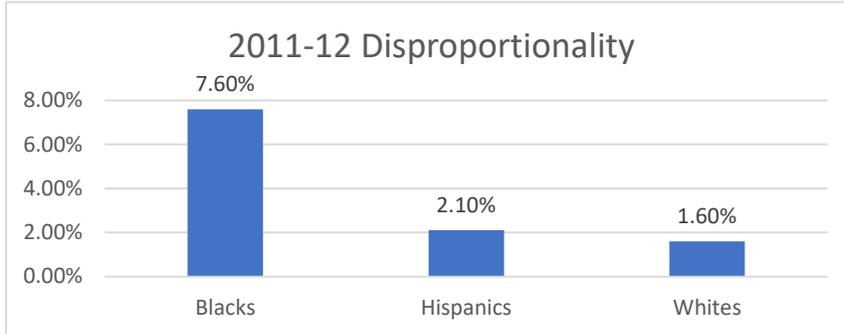
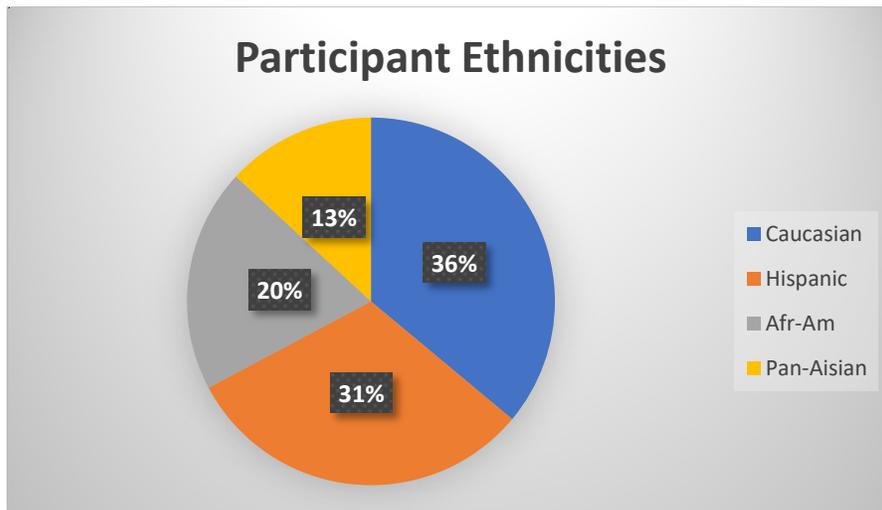


Figure 1: Shows suspension/expulsion data from 2011-12 vs. 2015-16



Interviews and surveys were conducted with 61 participants representing four ethnic groups as shown in Figure 2. There were 30 male and 30 female participants and one participant who identified himself/herself as other. Of those participants who were identified as non-students, more than half had college degrees and nearly 80% were married. Of the participants, approximately 71% spoke English at home, 25% spoke Spanish at home and the remaining 4% spoke Persian, Tagalog and Cebuano. Interviews and surveys had twenty-five questions each. Questions 1-10 focused on personal identifiers, socio-economic, and socio-demographic information; questions 11-12 focused on accessibility of rules and consequences; and questions 13-25 focused on bias and perceptions of bias.

Figure 2. Participant Ethnicities



The first research question that the researcher attempted to answer was the following: Are there racial disparities evident in school discipline at our public charter school? After explaining to participants that bias is defined as prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair, the researcher posed the following question to both students and adults: Do you believe that bias plays a part in discipline at your school? Using the Likert scale, participants were encouraged to first answer using strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree, and then elaborate if they felt inclined to do so. Students clearly had the strongest feeling of bias, followed by parents and then school staff, which was comprised of teachers, support staff and administrators as shown in Figures 3a, 3b, and 3c, respectively.

Figure 3a. Shows Student responses-Bias in school discipline

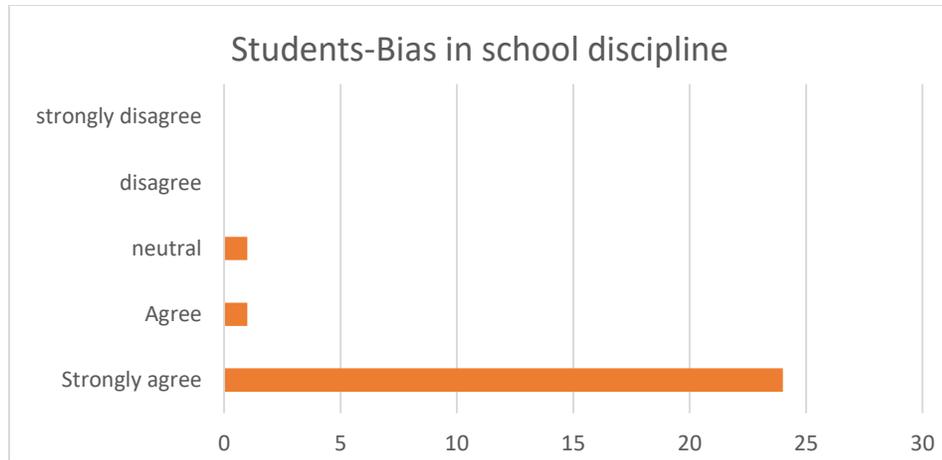


Figure 3b. Shows Parent responses-Bias in school discipline

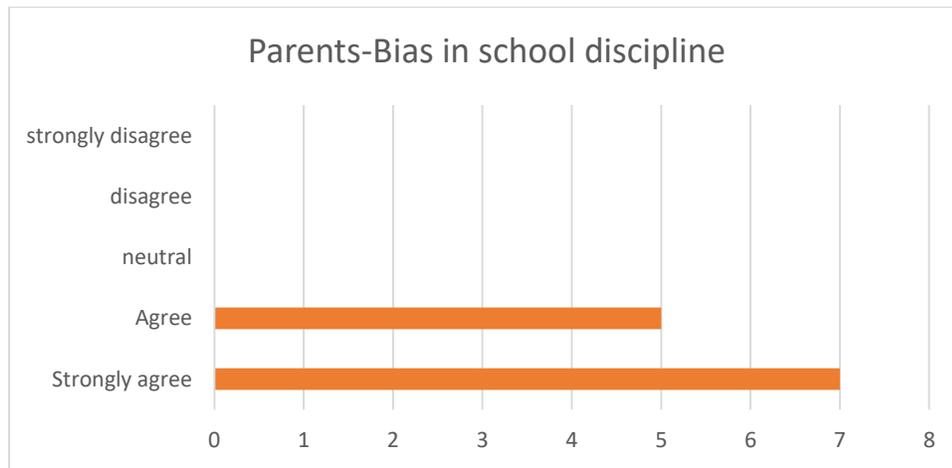
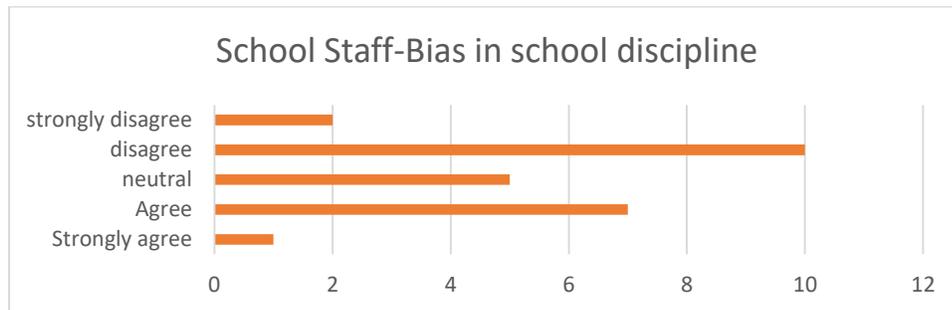


Figure 3c. Shows School Staff responses-Bias in school discipline



The researcher then asked the following questions: Are there racial disparities evident in school discipline? Do you believe that bias plays a role in the way teachers discipline students?

Once again students had the strongest feeling of bias, whereas parents and school staff were not as strongly opinionated. See Figures 4a, 4b, and 4c.

Figure 4a. Shows Student responses-Bias in classroom discipline

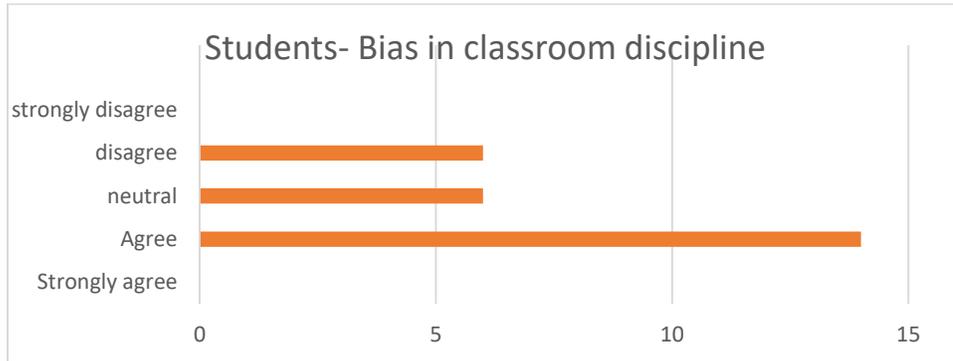


Figure 4b. Shows Parent responses-Bias in classroom discipline

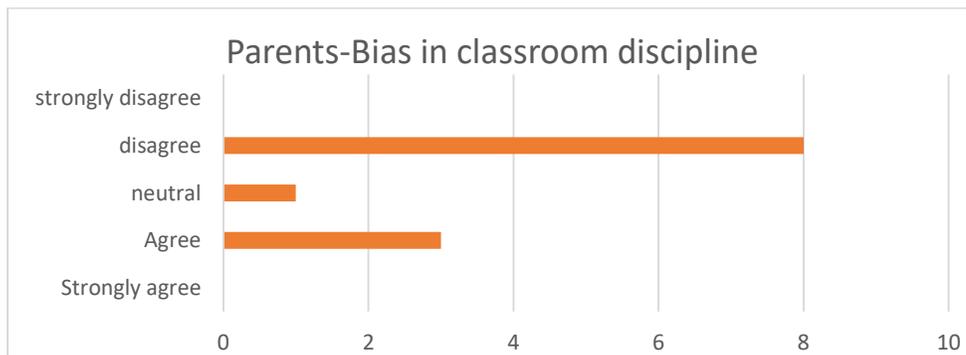
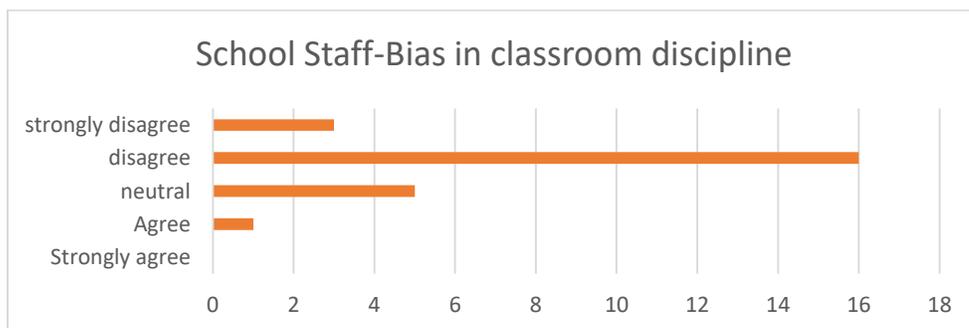


Figure 4c. Shows Staff responses-Bias in classroom discipline



Staats (2014) first coined the phrase “cultural mismatch,” using it only to describe the concept with respect to students and teachers. This researcher expanded on the terminology to include all school employees that interact with students. Smolkowski et al. (2016) discusses the two distinct types of bias, explicit and implicit, and how these play into the concept of cultural mismatch. Explicit bias was explained as what we think of as prejudice, consciously-endorsed attitudes and beliefs. Implicit bias is the automatic unconscious impact that stereotypic associations with racial or other groups have on perceptions. As the second research question seeks to answer whether “cultural mismatch” plays a role in school discipline at our public charter school, the questions utilized for data collection reflect this subject. The first question was: Do you believe that bias plays a role in the way students are treated by office personnel? See Figures 5a, 5b, and 5c for results.

Figure 5a. Shows Student responses-bias by office personnel

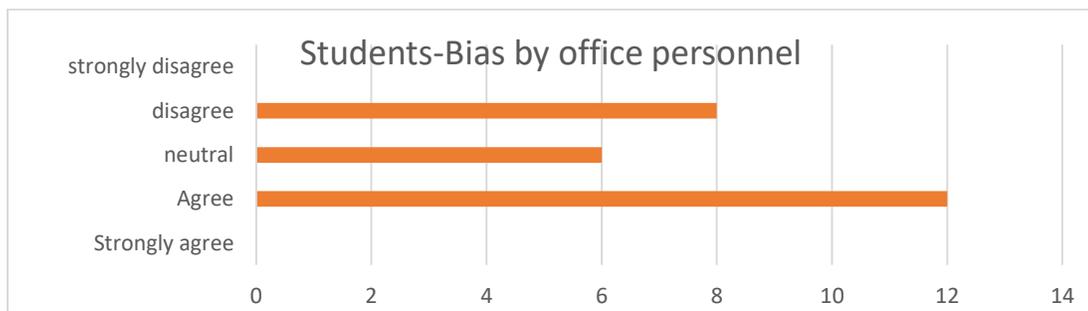


Figure 5b. Shows Parent responses-Bias by office personnel

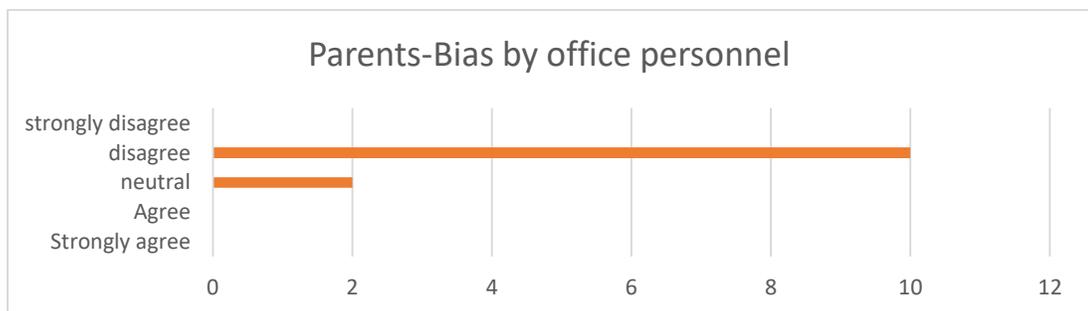
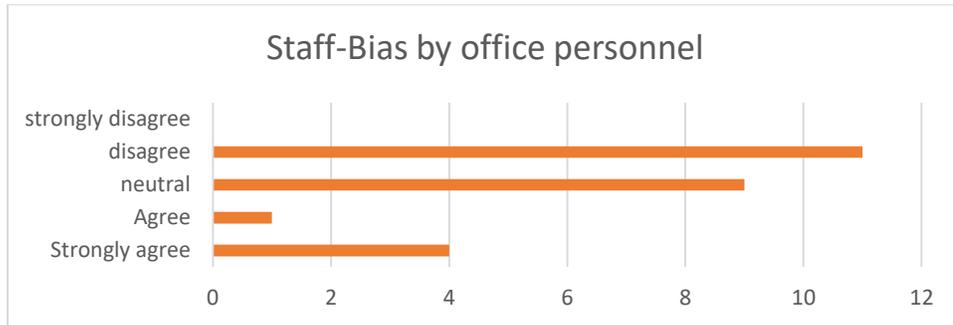


Figure 5c. Shows Staff responses-Bias by office personnel



Still looking at the aspect of cultural mismatch, the second interview question was: Do you believe that bias plays a role in the way that teachers talk to you? Though most of the responses to this question were to be expected, one parent commented that “there best not be, or I would go off,” which had to be further clarified to find where it fit on the Likert scale. Results are displayed in Figures 6a, 6b, and 6c.

Figure 6a. Shows results for bias in the way that teachers talk to students

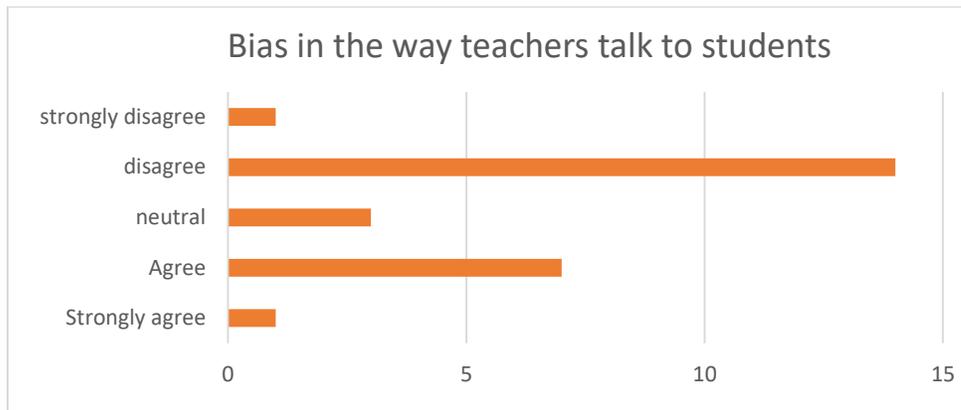


Figure 6b. Shows results for bias in the way teachers talk to parents

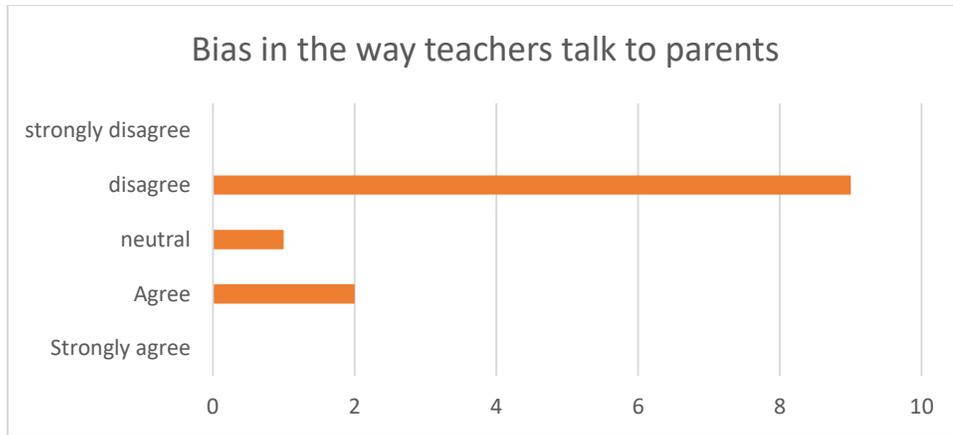
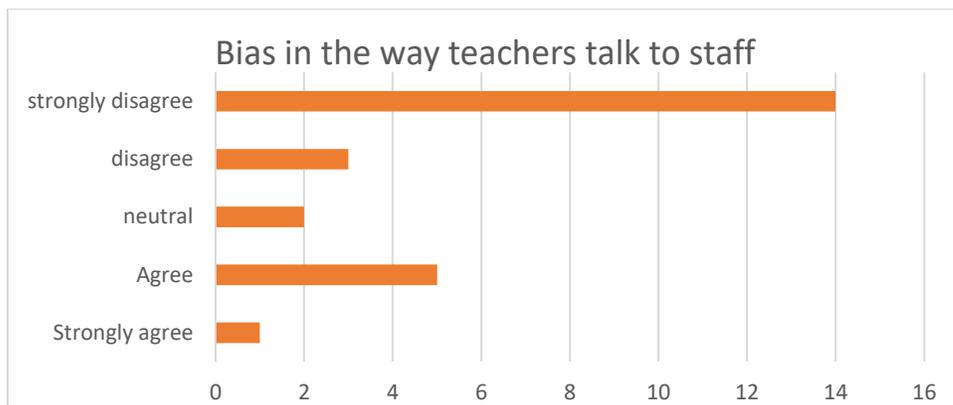


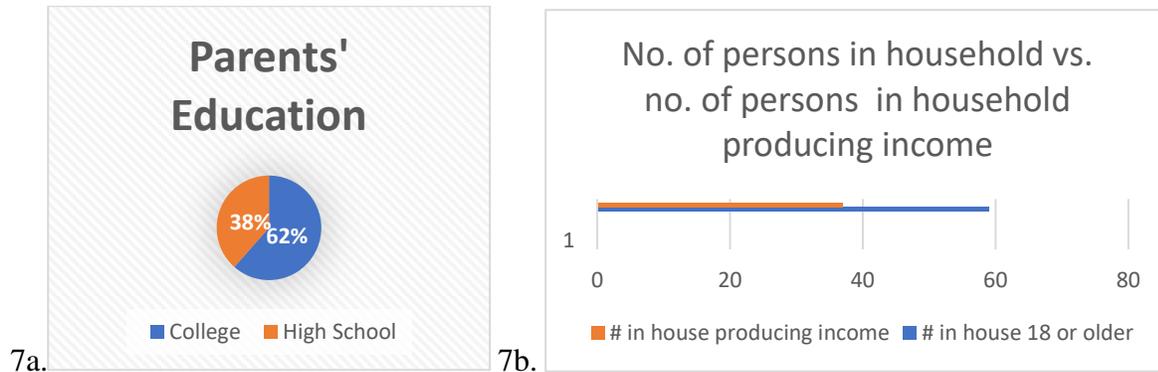
Figure 6c. Shows results for bias in the way that teachers talk to staff



Skiba et al. (2011b) stated that the correlation in American society between race and/or ethnicity and socioeconomic status raises the possibility that any finding of disproportionality due to race is the by-product of disproportionality with socio-economic status (SES). This concept connects to research question three, which asked: Do socio-economic and socio-demographic factors influence bias in school discipline? This researcher looked at two factors. First, the researcher determined the parents' highest level of education. Second, the researcher determined how many people brought income into the household. The following results only reflect the 26 students interviewed or surveyed. Results are displayed in Figures 7a and 7b.

7a shows educational level of parent participants

7b shows the number of people in household vs. number of persons in household producing income.



Data Analysis

There were three main research areas that the information from the interviews and the surveys generated. These areas included racial disparities, cultural mismatch, and social issues. The questions used in both the interviews and the surveys were developed to ensure that the data obtained through these questions had legitimate value in this research. Some questions were used to ensure that the answer to a previous question was not randomly given, thus seeking validity in the data. Following the completion of all interviews and the collection of all surveys, all data were compiled, logged, and indexed. Information derived from formal and informal conversations with students, parents, teachers and other school staff, as well as information from notes and recordings, was combined with indexed data from the surveys and interviews. The data was then triangulated and categorized into one of the three main research areas. If responses pertained to multiple research areas, data were documented in both applicable areas. Narratives were created to describe the graphs that were used to display information that was received in both the interviews and survey segments of the research.

Interpretation

After reviewing numerous conversations and interviews and studying returned surveys, it was quite clear to this researcher that the data clearly pointed to multiple areas where bias was affecting discipline in our school. In the area of racial disparities, it was clear that both parents and students felt that racial biases played a part in the discipline that was given out to students at the school location. It was equally clear that many of the school staff, especially office personnel, had either developed tunnel blindness or did not want to acknowledge that these biases existed. In the interviews and surveys, questions 18-25 related specifically to racial disparities in school discipline at our public charter school. As stated earlier, students, parents, and teacher aides clearly felt that bias played a part in discipline at the school. Office personnel and administration both disagreed or strongly disagreed that bias played any part in discipline at school.

When it came to bias affecting classroom discipline, students again felt that bias affected how the teachers disciplined students. When pressed for clarification, many of the students stated that if certain students engaged in specific behaviors, the teacher might just verbally reprimand them or shrug it off completely. If students of color or differing ethnicities engaged in the same behavior, the teacher might react by suspending their nutritional period, limiting lunch and/or free time, calling home, or even sending students to the office. When asked if some of these students of color or different ethnicities had been in previous confrontations with the teacher or had issues in the classroom, the students almost always replied yes. When asked about how teachers talked to students, most of the students felt that the majority of teachers were not biased; however, there were several exceptions and these teachers' names were repeated by multiple students and other teachers.

When it came to the question about bias playing a role in the way that students are treated by office personnel, a little less than half of the students agreed that there was bias by office personnel. When pressed during interviews, one name in the secretarial pool continued to emerge. This same name was also mentioned by several sources during interviews with office personnel with one source feeling bad after blurting out this person's name.

I was surprised when I asked in several of the interviews that students clarify whether they believed that bias plays a role in the way students talk to each other. They all said yes. Several even preceded their answers with an expletive and then corrected to a "really strongly agree." African American students comprise approximately 13% of our school population, yet, in almost every interview, when clarifying belief in student-to-student bias, this was the first group that the students focused on. When discussing the way students talk to each other, almost all students stated that comments were going back and forth between the African American students. I don't know whether many of the Hispanic and white students have spent much time with African American students, but I remember going to an inner-city school as a youngster and the banter and comments among the African American students some 50 years ago would have been confusing to me. I'm not sure I would have considered it bias then, but I strongly believe that it is bias today.

This researcher has been with this school since a year after it opened, 12 years now. I have watched as the demographics have changed and the school's ranking has continually decreased. Regardless of this, I am well-respected by students, parents, faculty and administration. Students, parents, and all others affiliated with the school never hesitated for a moment when asked to participate in this research. I am both an insider and an outsider but am equally respected as both. Everyone knew that they could be honest and forthright in their

answers and they would never be judged for doing so. I gained the knowledge that all the students feel that athletes and students who work in the office as teacher aides are treated on a different level than “ordinary students” as they call themselves. I learned that small comments made in the office reverberate throughout the student population. I learned that one person’s joke can be devastating to someone else.

One inconsistency I encountered was the difficulty in connecting SES and socio-demographics to disproportionality in discipline. When I began my research, I strongly believed that socio-economic status and socio-demographics played a role in school bias and that the disproportionality that comes from these two factors affects school discipline. One of the leading researchers in the field of disproportionality in school discipline has made repeated reference to this same issue and the difficulty of connecting disproportionality and bias in discipline to socio-economic or socio-demographic factors. I, too, was unable to truly connect this research to either socio-economic or socio-demographic realities when it came to show how bias affects discipline at our school or the disproportionality in discipline that stems from this bias.

Conclusion

The key concept of the research questions was to discover not only if there is bias that plays a part in school discipline but to identify and describe the type of bias which causes racial and ethnic disproportionality in school discipline. Could it be that racial disparities might explain why discipline is not handed out evenly among different ethnic groups? Is what we call cultural mismatch a circumstance in which ethnic groups are perceived in a particular way as the result of either implicit or explicit biases? Alternatively, are social issues (either socio-economic or socio-demographic) factors that influence these biases? By identifying these biases,

professional developments, along with classes for teachers and administrators, can be developed, and programs for students and the school community as a whole can be better designed. Maybe, just maybe, some of the empty seats can remain filled, failing grades can be alleviated, and frustrated teachers, students, and parents can better understand each other, making a change for themselves and a difference in the field of education.

Chapter 5- Findings and Recommendations

It appears that, in general, people are subject to bias, especially implicit bias, as evidenced by the results of a recent experiment. Researchers found that when pre-school teachers were primed to look for behavioral problems while watching a classroom video with black and white children (none of whom were misbehaving), teachers gazed much longer at black children than white children, as if anticipating that behavioral problems would come from the black children. Is this an example of implicit bias? Because implicit bias is a behavior that arises from subconscious associations, it may even contradict someone's explicit, consciously-held values. It seems then that implicit racial bias plays a role in many classrooms and schools with potentially devastating effects, and it appears to be difficult to combat. (Suttie, 2016).

There are several types of bias and an undetermined number of places where bias can rear its ugly head. My research focused on three questions used in determining whether bias was a factor in school discipline at my site. Research question one asked: Are there racial disparities evident in school discipline at our public charter school? Research question two asked: Does cultural mismatch play a role in school discipline at our public charter school? Research question three asked: Do socio-economic or socio-demographic factors influence bias in school discipline at our public charter school?

In Chapter 5 this researcher will examine the mixed method research results established through the collection of data in "Findings Summary." The original hypothesis will be discussed and supported with data collected from conversations, interviews, and surveys, and any fortuitous findings will be disclosed. In "Findings Interpretation" this researcher will explore the connections between independent and dependent variables and interpret any alternative findings. "Findings in Context" will look to make connections to peer-reviewed articles and research

results contained in the Literature Review. In “Recommendations” the researcher will explain what this research adds to previous research and the potential it holds in the field of education. This chapter will also reflect on the limitations and shortcomings of the research and the data it supplied. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a brief summary, quickly re-articulate the research questions, and summarize key concepts.

Findings Summary

My original hypothesis has always been that one type of bias or another was responsible for the disproportionality that we see in school discipline nationwide and that bias affected how discipline was handed out at our school location. The high percentage of African American and Hispanic students, along with other minorities, being disciplined in proportion to white students could be explained no other way.

To determine if there are racial disparities evident in school discipline at our school, the researcher utilized three questions to help deduce if this were the case. The first question that was used to collect data to determine whether racial disparity in discipline exists was: Do you believe that bias plays a part in discipline at our school? Ninety-nine percent of the students agreed that bias did play a part in discipline at our school, with ninety-seven percent strongly agreeing. One hundred percent of the parents also agreed with this statement, with sixty percent strongly agreeing. Only the school staff disagreed or strongly disagreed that there was bias in school discipline. I can only speculate that most of the aides stayed neutral on answering this question.

Looking to discover where the main source of bias originated, I discovered that slightly more than 50% of the students felt that bias originated in the classroom, while 30% of the parents felt the bias originated in the classroom, and less than 1% of school staff felt that there was bias

in the classroom. In further clarification discussions with students, the consensus was that there were a couple of teachers that displayed bias in the classroom and in how they handled discipline with some of their students.

In attempting to determine if there was bias in the school's office area, 48% of the students agreed there was, while no parents agreed with or felt there was, but 20% of the staff strongly agreed that there was bias by office personnel. Several staff members mentioned two allegedly biased staff members by name. Several parents clarified their responses by noting that if the special treatment of athletes, TAs and other groups were considered, they would have changed their answer to agreed. The one area that resulted in almost total agreement was that bias played a role in the way that the students talked to each other. One hundred percent of students and eighty percent of parents and staff felt that bias played a role in the way that students talked to each other, noting that African American students demonstrated the most bias, followed by Hispanics, and then white students. I clearly feel these results substantiated my original hypothesis that bias affected how discipline was handed out at our school location. Though the results were not as strongly indicative as anticipated, they still supported the original hypothesis.

In trying to determine if the bias was a case of cultural mismatch, the researcher used three questions from the interview and survey. The first question was: Do you believe that bias plays a role in how teachers talk to students? Twenty percent of the students felt that there was bias in the way that teachers talked to students. Later conversations to clarify responses indicated that this perception applied to a limited number of teachers. Less than 1% of parents and less than 1% of school staff agreed that bias played a role in how teachers talked to students. The second question, which was only asked during the interviews, reversed the first question and

asked: Do you believe that bias plays a role in the way that students talk to the teachers? Van Kleeck (2007) articulated that part of what was identified as cultural mismatch had to do with home talk versus school talk. That is, teachers often interpreted home talk as rude or disrespectful, resulting in the students being punished or receiving an office referral, when really it was a cultural issue where the teacher misunderstood the conversation or the manner in which the student was speaking. Roughly 30% of the students agreed that there was “some sort of bias” when certain groups of Hispanic and African American students talked to teachers. They said it was more of an issue with students who had previous classroom conflicts that included talking out, failing to complete assignments, and coming to class ill-prepared, all minor but repeated problems. Once again, parents and office staff did not see this as an issue and only 10% of each group agreed with this statement.

Question three asked: Do you believe that bias played a role in the way students talked to you? In the surveys, students disagreed or strongly disagreed that this was taking place. In the interviews, students answered this question with another question prior to committing to an answer. Students wanted clarification of which group of students the question was asking about. I suggested that they answer the question exactly as it was asked. Once this was done, 20% of the students agreed and another 10% strongly agreed. Some of the students did go on to clarify that it did not usually happen in class or with a friend but was more likely to occur during passing periods, nutrition, lunch and physical education classes. Less than 10% of parents and school staff agreed that this was an issue. This substantiated the notion that cultural mismatch is another type of bias influencing the way that students were treated in relation to classroom discipline at our school location.

Six questions were designed to assess whether socio-economic or socio-demographics were a source of bias in determining if and how much discipline was given out to students at our school location. The first three questions on both the survey and interview sought general information about the participant, but questions 4-10 were designed to illicit socio-economic and socio-demographic information to determine if these two factors influenced bias in discipline at our school location. Statistically, 70% of the students' parents were married, 15% separated, and 15% divorced. Sixty-two percent of the parents had a college education with several holding masters or doctoral degrees, and sixty-three percent of the households had more than one person over the age of 18 producing income. None of the data obtained led the researcher to believe that socio-economic or socio-demographic factors contributed to bias in relation to discipline at our school location; therefore, this data did not support the original hypothesis.

Findings Interpretation

One of the most surprising findings to come out of my research was that school staff failed to acknowledge concern in areas where both students and parents agreed or strongly agreed there was bias. One of the factors that I feel was relevant to this finding was my failure to consider that our support staff and office personnel are "at will" employees. This means that they can be fired at any given moment without justification. Though this is speculation, I feel that a concern for job security may have played a part in the support staff remaining neutral on several of the questions. From informal discussions, I believe that these staff members actually felt differently from the way they responded to the questions. Fear that honesty would be construed as disloyalty may have driven their neutral responses.

Regarding research question three, I still feel very strongly that socio-economic and socio-demographic factors influence bias in school discipline though that belief is contrary to

what my research data disclosed. Perhaps it is the case that at other schools in less affluent locations with more students of low socio-economic status the expected results might have obtained. Apparently, these are not significant factors at our school at this time. I believe that to obtain this information both survey and interview questions would need to be developed differently. I also feel that much of the information needed to substantiate that socio-economic and socio-demographics influence bias could come directly from school records though confidentiality issues would most certainly arise.

Findings in Context

Both striking similarities and glaring contradictions were evident when comparing and contrasting the data obtained by this research with the results and conclusions found in the Literature Review.

Utilizing standards of perception gleaned from Kupchik and Ellis (2008), I formulated several of the interview and survey questions based on whether rules and punishments were fairly communicated and consistently applied. Kupchik and Ellis (2008) noted that there were “statistically significant differences” in the answers of different ethnic groups as to whether rules were clearly communicated, evenly and consistently applied, and considered fair. All the students interviewed as part of my research felt that rules were clearly explained, were fair, and were easily located as long as computer access was available. This seems to be a notable contradiction. However, both sets of data showed that student athletes and honor students are treated differently than regular students, indicating some sort of bias is at work (Kupchik & Ellis, 2008).

Skiba et al. (2002) posited that there were connections between disproportionate discipline based on gender, race and socioeconomic status. Although my research did not look

to establish the link between bias in discipline and gender, both sets of data did result in findings that race and bias in discipline are linked. Similar to the findings of Skiba et al. (2002), this researcher failed to make meaningful connections between bias in discipline and socioeconomic status.

Wallace et al. (2008) concluded that black, Hispanic and Native American students were more likely to be sent to the school office, and twice as likely to be suspended or expelled, than white or Asian students. My research study did not focus on which ethnic group was sent to the office more, or which group was suspended or expelled more, yet my research study was motivated by statistics that mirror the findings of Wallace et al. Additionally, that study referred to socio-demographics as a contributing factor in increased suspensions/expulsions for specific ethnic groups, whereas my research did not find any justifiable connections.

Primarily a statistical study, Nichols (2004) focused on out-of-school suspension rates among minority students. Although my research briefly covered suspensions at our school, the comparisons in this area were limited. Nichols did mention cultural expectations, perceptions, stereotypes, and cross-cultural misunderstandings, all of which are areas that my research covered while exploring cultural mismatch in research question number two.

DeMatthews (2016) examined how school leaders' biases influence discipline and discussed how principal preparation programs fail to prepare and develop administrative candidates. Using the term critical race theory rather than cultural mismatch, DeMatthews (2016) recommended implementation of social justice leadership so that school leaders can acknowledge racism, deal with it, and move forward. My research was comparable as both studies explored how bias influences discipline. My research also explored critical race theory although my research categorized the concept as cultural mismatch. DeMatthews (2016) made

several recommendations to help address and alleviate biases, and though those recommendations represent similarities between the two studies, at this point they have yet to be discussed.

Smolkowski et.al. (2016) discussed psychological research that suggests there are two distinct types of bias, explicit and implicit. Both types of bias are explained and explored in this research while exploring cultural mismatch. Smolkowski, et al. (2016) also examined vulnerable decision points, which are contextual events or elements that increase the likelihood of implicit bias affecting discipline. Though my research did not explore or examine this area, it will be included in Future Directions as I feel that it is another area that could assist in learning how bias affects disciplinary decisions.

Lindsey and Hart (2017) explored whether having a teacher of the same race makes it more or less likely that students would be subject to exclusionary school discipline. Although there was no variance discovered in district public schools, regardless of grade level or urban/rural setting, it was noted that there was a variance in charter schools. Because this research involved a charter school, this area of study was not explored by this researcher. A notation will be placed in Future Directions to see if further studies seem prudent.

Van Kleeck (2007) suggested that home talk versus school talk could be a defining factor in how discipline is handled or how the perception of the student is established in the classroom setting. This issue was addressed in several of the questions used on the surveys and interviews that sought to discover how students conversed with teachers, how teachers conversed with students, and how students conversed with each other, focusing on several different ethnic groups. These questions also tried to establish whether any of the conversations, through misinterpretation or misreading the tone, could have led to bias in decisions related to discipline.

Both Skiba et al. (2011a) and Skiba et al. (2001b), focused on socioeconomic status. Even though this was a focus of this researcher's study and one of the main research questions directly addressed this topic, my research data was unable to make any substantial connections to socio-economic or socio-demographic factors affecting school discipline. This is an area that this researcher still has strong opinions about. Research to confirm the connection between socio-economic and socio-demographic factors will be conducted in future.

All the articles in the Review of Literature had information relevant to this research. The idea that the disproportionality in discipline was being caused by unnamed factors and potential solutions to deal with it were all discussed. In this researcher's opinion, it was some type of bias. The ideas and directions, questions and hypotheses, suggestions and terminology were all present, but there was little evidence identifying the underlying reasons for this disproportionality. If we are to say that the disproportionality is caused by bias, then where was the bias originating from? My research clearly acknowledges that bias is a cause of disproportionality, and statistics show that bias resulting in disproportionality in school discipline is causing a national educational problem. Research confirms that students of color are disciplined, suspended, and expelled from schools at rates that are staggeringly higher than those of white students.

Does this research on the topic of bias in discipline contribute to existing literature? I believe it does. I also believe it complements and substantiates the existing data while adding a component to existing literature, making readers aware of the root causes of disproportionality, not merely its existence. The fact that this research discusses a crucial factor that for too long has been ignored is a good thing, I acknowledge that bias is part of the problem and feel it should be part of the conversation going forward.

Recommendations

There are many ways to reduce the disproportionality of discipline handed out along racial and ethnic lines. We currently understand that there are also a variety of distinct types of biases in play that affect everyday decisions when it comes to who is disciplined and what types of disciplinary actions are going to be used. These biases are part of the disproportionality equation. To alleviate bias in school discipline and the disproportionality associated with it, we first must address the issue of equity among all stakeholders. It is imperative that we address all stakeholders when addressing these two issues. If we address them only in the classroom, lunchroom, physical education classes, and hallways and fail to see it in the car lines waiting to drop off or pick up, we are missing critical areas where bias might continue to thrive, providing a poor or ineffective solution to the problem.

This research adds to previous research by identifying that bias is the reason why racial disproportionality has become a national educational issue. Whether it is implicit or explicit, coming from the school secretary, assistant principal, teacher or a classmate, the reason for the racial and ethnic disproportionality all starts with one word. In order to deal with the disproportionality, we have to deal with the bias. In order to deal with bias, we need to address equity. To deal with equity, we need to develop programs that address bias as the root cause of the bigger problem. Bias is the gene that causes the cancer.

Based on the evidence in this report, along with the additional research that has been conducted by multiple other sources addressing disproportionality in discipline, there are a variety of recommendations to make. First, the school that I am currently employed at uses a program called Capturing Kids' Hearts, which is a program designed to increase equity to all stakeholders of the school. Introduced to our school a little over two years ago, the program

seeks to reduce disciplinary instances in the school setting by strengthening student connections, creating healthy bonds with teachers, and helping students create collaborative agreements of acceptable behavior. I would recommend the school continue with the Capturing Kids' Hearts program and attempt to expand its use.

Restorative Justice is another program designed to increase equity among stakeholders within a school. It too seeks to build relationships and a sense of community while preventing conflict and attempting to repair damage after instances of wrongdoing. Skiba and Williams (2014) noted the following:

A recent literature review on the effectiveness of Restorative Practice (RP) in school reports that the evidence based on RP is still not expansive, but there are some state and district examples suggesting that RP may be linked to reduced numbers of suspensions and expulsions, decreased disciplinary referrals and improved academic achievement, and two recent studies also showed RP's promise for reducing the racial discipline gap." (p. 4)

I also recommend that additional programs like this be explored and utilized as needed.

Additionally, Losen et al. (2015) asserted that

Support should be given to districts and schools along with the resources needed to provide effective training and professional development for teachers and school personnel. Educators need adequate training to ensure that they can fulfill their legal and professional responsibility to avoid unjustifiable use of disciplinary exclusion.

This should include providing access to information and training on implementing practical alternative strategies." (p.32)

Other recommendations that conflict resolution research suggests include:

- Supportive relationships forging authentic connections to students
- Academic rigor that promotes the potential for all students, holds high expectations and provides a high level of learning opportunities
- Culturally relevant and responsive teaching that responds respectfully to students' real lives
- Bias-free classrooms and respectful school environments that create inclusive, positive classrooms in which students feel fairly treated.

Additional recommendations include engaging in equity-driven inquiries when issues arise, utilizing problem-solving approaches, recognizing the student or his/her family's voice, and making sure reintegration to the classroom is handled properly. These are the recommendations that this researcher feels would benefit the institution of education the most. I am sure there are other programs that have not been mentioned in this research. The most important recommendation to provide is to acknowledge where the problem starts and seek to address that issue first. It is this researcher's belief that racial and ethnic disproportionality in school discipline starts with bias, and bias is caused by a lack of equity among the members of a group. This belief gives this researcher the starting point at which to begin interventions.

Limitations

This researcher feels that the design of the study could have been improved by supplying more detailed directions for the questions on the survey. It was easy to explain directions during interviews as the participants could simply ask. In retrospect, if I were to redesign the survey and the interview I would have added additional questions that were directly tied to the three

categories or research questions. I would also conduct further research to determine if there were better questions or better means to determine students' socio-economic and socio-demographic status. Looking back at the literature I read and reviewed, there were ample warnings that tying socio-economic or socio-demographics to bias would be challenging. In multiple articles, more experienced researchers had a difficult time finding a relationship between disproportionality in discipline and either socio-economic or socio-demographic factors.

Future Directions

Understanding bias in discipline and acknowledging that bias is the underlying reason for the racial and ethnic disproportionality in discipline is such an important topic. Research goes back to 1975 on the subject of disproportionality in discipline, but the topic of bias has rarely been included in the conversation. I would like to see more research done on bias in discipline and on vulnerable decision points so that teacher and administrative preparation classes can address this subject before teachers and administrators are already in the trenches. School demographics in large parts of this country are going through profound changes, and until the educational community learns to deal with bias and disproportionality effectively, the state of education is in peril. Using the knowledge gained from this and other studies, more focused professional developments should be created that not only target teachers, but target everyone who works in the educational field. This study discovered that two of the biggest sources of bias at our school came from the school's office, and neither of the parties mentioned were ever required to attend professional developments that addressed bias and encouraged equity throughout the school community. In my paper entitled Best Practices, I recommended that the entire school community attend the assemblies on equity. It is imperative that everyone who has

anything to do with the school receives the message. If even one stakeholder group is left out, the path to a permanent solution is lost. Bias is not inherited it is learned!

Conclusion

For over 40 years the topic of disproportionality in school discipline has been researched. In 1975, the Children's Defense Fund concluded that rates of suspension and expulsions for African American students were between two to three times higher than those of white students. Multiple studies have all determined that racial disproportionality in school discipline is a major problem, but there is very little mention of bias. When medical researchers try to find a cure for a disease, they look for the cause of that disease. When educational researchers look at disproportionality, they just keep looking at the number of students removed from classes, suspended from school, or eventually expelled. I find it perplexing that after so many years of studies naming the problem so few looked for the underlying reason, bias. When Losen and Gillespie (2012) revealed that "well over three million children are estimated to have lost instructional 'seat time' and to have been suspended from school, often with no guarantee of adult supervision, in 2009-2010" (p.10), I would have thought educators and civic-minded people would have jumped into action. This study revealed that bias is a problem in our school, and though I can only speculate, I must assume that it is a problem in every school. I hope to discuss my findings with our Executive Director and the school board, my colleagues, and key students and make recommendations on how to eliminate the bias that perpetuates racial disproportionality in school discipline.

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Appendix A

Master's Survey

Bias in Discipline

Survey # _____

Directions: Please either put a check to identify the selected answer or fill in your response to the question.

1) Please identify yourself:

___ Student ___ Parent ___ Educator ___ Support Staff ___ Administrator

2) Please identify your gender:

___ Female ___ Male ___ other

3) Please identify your ethnicity:

___ Caucasian ___ Hispanic ___ African American

___ Pan Asian ___ Native American

4) Please write on the line the primary language spoken at home. _____

5) Please identify the relationship between your parents.

___ married ___ divorced ___ separated

6) Please identify what your parent's highest level of education is?

___ graduate school ___ college ___ high school

7) Please select if the home where you live is:

___ owned ___ rented ___ other

8) Please fill in the correct number to answer the questions below:

How many people are currently living in your household, including yourself?

a) total number _____

b) how many are under 18 _____

c) how many over 18 _____

d) Of the adults, how many bring income into the household _____

9) Please check which of the following best describes your parents' current, main, daily activities and/or responsibilities.

___ working full-time ___ working part-time ___ unemployed/laid off

___ looking for employment ___ keeping house/raising kids ___ retired

10) Please write how many siblings live in your household? _____

***For the following questions please insert one of the following answers using the letter representation that best applies**

SD =strongly disagree D=disagree N=neutral A=Agree SA=strongly agree

11) At school, are rules and consequences clearly stated and easily accessible for everyone? _____

12) Do you believe the consequences posted are appropriate for the infraction described in the rules? _____

13) Have you ever been disciplined at school? _____

14) Do you believe that race or ethnicity played a role in the amount of discipline you received? _____

15) Have you ever witnessed a fellow student being disciplined in the school setting? _____

16) Do you believe that race or ethnicity played a role in the amount of discipline they received? _____

**17) Do you believe special groups of people get special treatment when it comes to discipline?
_____athletes _____honor students _____TA's _____cheerleaders**

Bias is defined as prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. Using this definition and the following answers please identify which you feel best applies.

SD =strongly disagree D=disagree N=neutral A=Agree SA=strongly agree

18) Do you believe that bias plays a part in discipline at your school? _____

19) Do you believe that bias plays a role in the way students are treated by office personnel? _____

20) Do you believe that bias plays a role in the way teachers discipline students? _____

21) Do you believe that bias plays a role in the way teachers discipline you? _____

22) Do you believe that bias plays a role in the way teachers talk to students? _____

23) Do you believe that bias plays a role in the way teachers talk to you? _____

Appendix B
Bias in Discipline

Master's Interview

Directions: Please either put a check to identify the selected answer or fill in your response to the question.

1) Please identify yourself:

Student Parent Educator Support Staff Administrator

2) Please identify your gender:

Female Male other

3) Please identify your ethnicity:

Caucasian Hispanic African American
 Pan Asian American Indian

4) Please write on the line the primary language spoken at home. _____

5) Please identify the relationship between your parents.

married divorced separated

6) Please identify what your parent's highest level of education is.

Graduate school College High School

7) Please select if the home where you live is:

owned rented other

8) Please fill in the correct number to answer the questions below:

How many people are currently living in your household, including yourself?

a) total number _____

b) how many are under 18 _____

c) how many over 18 _____

d) Of the adults, how many bring income into the household _____

9) Please check which of the following best describes your parents' current, main, daily activities and/or responsibilities.

working full-time working part-time unemployed/laid off
 looking for employment keeping house/raising kids retired

10) Please write how many siblings live in your household? _____

*Please answer the following questions in your own words.

11) At school, are rules and consequences clearly stated and easily accessible for everyone?

12) Do you believe the consequences posted are appropriate for the infraction described in the rules?

13) Have you ever been disciplined at school?

14) Do you believe that race or ethnicity played a role in the amount of discipline you received?

15) Have you ever witnessed a fellow student being disciplined in the school setting?

16) Do you believe that race or ethnicity played a role in the amount of discipline they received?

17) Do you believe special groups of people get special treatment when it comes to discipline?

athletes honor students TA's cheerleaders

Bias is defined as prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. Using this definition please answer the following questions in your own words

18) Do you believe that bias plays a part in discipline at your school?

19) Do you believe that bias plays a role in the way students are treated by office personnel?

20) Do you believe that bias plays a role in the way teachers discipline students?

Appendix C
Sample Consent Form

Bias in Discipline

Invitation to Participate/Employee of Ivy Academia Charter School

Dear **Employee of Ivy Academia Charter School**:

My name is Thomas Kuhny and I am a Master's degree student in the College of Education at California State University San Marcos. The Executive Director of Ivy Academia Charter School has given me permission to invite you to participate in a research study to determine if bias is affecting discipline at our particular public school. You were selected as a possible participant because in your job capacity you have possibly shown bias to a student, been told by a student or parent of such an incident, or witnessed firsthand an incident where a student has been exposed to bias at school. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

STUDY PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to determine if bias affects student disciplinary decisions at our school.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:

If you agree to participate, you will be one of 12 teachers, 8 office personnel, and 6 teacher aides who are participating in this research. Additionally, there are 24 students and 9 parents participating in this research.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:

If you agree to be in the study, you will either complete an anonymous survey or interview that should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. If you are a participant in the survey, you will be able to complete the survey in a place of your choosing. If you participate in the interview process, a location deemed appropriate to both interviewer and interviewee shall be determined by both parties.

RISKS AND INCONVENIENCES:

There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. These may include the time needed to complete the survey or interview, or the possibility of confidentiality issues.

SAFEGUARDS:

To minimize these risks and inconveniences, the following measures will be taken: surveys, interviews and/or observations may be scheduled at a time that is convenient to you in a place that is convenient to you. Additionally, all data will be stored in a password-protected computer, where I, as the researcher, will have sole access to said data. All data will be retained until completion of the project, and data will be disposed of (e.g. the paper records will be shredded, digital files will be erased) when the project is completed.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your responses will be kept anonymous and any personal information will only be accessible to the researcher or the research team that will conduct the survey. Results will only be shared in aggregate form and your personal information will not be identifiable.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Ivy Academia Charter School.

BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:

The benefits of participating in this study are the potential to develop professional development programs to address bias in schools. There are no direct benefits to participation in this study; however, your participation could help eliminate acts of bias in both education and public schools.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION:

You will not receive payment for taking part in this study and again participation is completely voluntary.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND SIGNATURES:

If you have questions about the study, please call me at 818 523-2451 or e-mail me at Kuhny001@CSUSM.edu. You will be given a copy of this form for your records. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at irb@csusm.edu or (760) 750-4029.

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT:

By signing below, you are giving consent to participate in the study. Please check the option that applies to you before signing:

- I give permission to be audiotaped during interview.
- I do not give permission to be audiotaped during interview.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print name: _____