2012

The Relationship Among Student Demographic Variables And Reported Discipline Referral Categories

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THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND REPORTED DISCIPLINE REFERRAL CATEGORIES

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership
in the College of Education
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term
2012

Major Professor: Kenneth Murray

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate the disproportional distribution of subjective and objective discipline referrals to the different student groups' gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity for the 6th through 12th grade students in a central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010. The relationship of the disproportional distribution of subjective and objective discipline referrals between gender and socioeconomic status was analyzed. In addition, the relationship of the disproportional distribution of subjective and objective discipline referrals between ethnicity and socioeconomic status was analyzed.

Analysis of the discipline referral data from the central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010 led to the following findings: (a) males, blacks, and students with low socioeconomic status, were over represented with student discipline referrals of all types; (b) males, blacks, and students with low socioeconomic status, were over represented with subjective discipline referrals; (c) low socioeconomic status males were the major contributors to disproportional distribution for males within the gender group variable, and low socioeconomic blacks were the major contributors to disproportional distribution within the black ethnicity group variable.

Dedicated to my wife, Cheryl Lynn Bair

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank all my committee members and especially my committee chair and advisor, Dr. Kenneth Murray. With his candor and humor, Dr. Kenneth Murray has kept me focused on completing my program of study and this dissertation. I am grateful for the encouragement and suggestions from my committee members, Dr. Kenneth Murray, Dr. Barbara Murray, Dr. Rose Taylor, Dr. Walter Doherty, and Dr. Stephen Sivo. I have benefitted greatly from their leadership and advice as a student and as a professional.

My friend and professional colleague of many years, Mr. John Wheaton, encouraged and mentored me as a teacher and as an administrator. It was with his encouragement that I continued my educational pursuits to this level. I also want to thank my friends and colleagues from Lawton Chiles and Rock Lake for their support and understanding as I completed this process.

To the teachers in my family that came before me; my grandmother Florence Noel Bair and my mother Norma Neiswanger Bair, thanks for passing on the passion for teaching.

Finally, without the support and understanding of my wonderful wife, Cheryl, I never could have reached this milestone. For all the lost evenings, weekends, and vacations, this is for you. I love you very much.

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THE PROBLEM AND ITS CLARIFYING COMPONENTS

Introduction

School discipline has been a topic of discussion in schools for centuries (Travers, 1980) and appears to be a major concern in recent years. (Fields, 2000) A part of the discussion has been the disparity in the administration, or enforcement of discipline procedures for different student groups. The problem of disparity in school discipline for different student groups has been well documented (Brantlinger, 1991, McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). The subjectivity of discipline for different student groups has been a part of that discussion (Brown & Beckett, 2006; Fenning & Rose, 2007, Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Skiba et al., 2002). Studies show that students perceive there is disparity (Brantlinger, 1991; Ruck & Wortley, 2002). Despite the discussions concerning the subjectivity of discipline for different student groups, there have been few studies to determine the actual relationship between subjective or objective discipline referrals and gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. At the time of this study, there was insufficient information about the relationship between the subjectivity of discipline referrals and student group variables. In this research, the relationships among the different types of reported discipline incidents and the students' groups that received them were investigated.

John Dewey, an education thought leader at the beginning of the 20th century, said, "The ideal aim of education is creation of the power of self-control" (Dewey, 1938, p. 5). The purpose of education and the means by which those purposes have been

accomplished have a rich and sometimes violent history. Throughout the history of education, the teachers and administrators who were in charge of providing the education and the students who were the recipients of that education have often been in conflict. Horace Mann, an educational thought leader in the United States during the early 1800s, believed "the object of school is to prepare for the duties of afterlife, (and) it follows that the school is made for the world and not the world for the school" (Burton, 1988, p. 3).

The policies and discipline practice of most schools of that time period reflected the philosophy that children needed to be kept on the straight and narrow path. "The prevailing belief was that education, like baptism, marriage, the sacraments, and burial, was in the hands of the church. It was normal to associate corporal punishment with God's will. Punishments, consequently, were meted out with few reservations" (Travers, 1980, p. 185).

As the philosophy and purposes of education slowly evolved, so did the corresponding discipline practices. Dewey believed that if a teacher wanted to teach a child the teacher "must first understand the nature of human experience" (Neil, 2005, p. 1). He also believed that "cooperation and community should be the aim of school discipline. The methods of school discipline had to be related to this purpose" (Burton, 1988, p. 7).

The literature on school discipline during the mid-20th century "consistently emphasized that self-discipline for democratic citizenship was the undisputed goal of the classroom disciplinary process" (Burton, 1988, p. 9). To this end school leaders

developed goals and policies that fostered the self-discipline necessary for a successful democratic society.

As society and schools headed into the last half of the 20th century, the societal goals continued to change. These changing goals brought about increasing tension as educational philosophy and policies were not always compatible with the changing societal goals and philosophy.

> Two major social changes occurred which directly affected both the methods and the purpose of school discipline in the period after 1960. There were, 1.) a new recognition of social diversity and individual rights; and 2.) a shift from a producer to a consumer society. (Burton, 1988, p. 11)

The increased number of students from diverse backgrounds created its own set of problems. Before this time many of those most likely to disrupt public law and order were not included in the school system. As schools sought to serve those children most likely to be societal problems, the schools became the settings for more and more delinquent acts. (Newman, 1980) "History has shown that school disorder and violence have often increased when education has been extended to many children who for a variety of reasons, did not or could not share the goals of the school" (Newman, 1980, p. 10).

Not only were schools coping with an ever increasing diverse student population, they were also dealing with philosophical changes in society as a whole. The shift from a producer society to a consumer society created a schism between the unspoken goals of society and the established and accepted goals of education.

> The characteristics of a producer society--efficiency, thrift, sobriety, and delayed gratification are not the characteristics needed to sustain a consumer society. . . . most important to our interest in school discipline, members of a consumer society, as opposed to those of a producer society, are not rewarded for self-denial or self-discipline. (Burton, 1988, p. 14)

The new cultural norms did not mesh with the self-discipline paradigm under which most schools operated. Schools and educational leaders ceased addressing the long term goals of school discipline and concentrated on addressing the more pressing concerns of creating a safe environment. A normal response of society to increase problematic behavior has been to increase the number and severity of rules addressing those behaviors (Duke, 1980, p. 24). Duke predicted the response of society and education to the increase concern for school safety.

> I speculate that most policymaking related to school discipline will revolve primarily around five options: more rules, and harsher punishments, more teacher training in classroom management, relaxation of student suspension guidelines, more campus security personnel and equipment, and changes in the juvenile justice system. (p. 24)

Thirty years removed from Duke's 1980 predictions show that he was correct on most of his predictions. The one prediction he miscalculated was his prediction about the "relaxation of student suspension guidelines" (p. 24). As problems continued to escalate in schools, schools responded by implementing policies to maintain control. "Increased levels of student violence, which accompanied the transition from a producer society to a

consumer society, contributed to the need of direct immediate control to maintain discipline stability" (Johnson, 2001, p. 20).

The literature from the late 20th century into the first decade of the 21st century has revealed that educators are attempting to recapture some of the long term discipline goals while at the same time addressing the immediate concerns of day to day discipline problems.

> The creation of socially just and caring learning communities in the classroom in which students' and teachers' voices, experiences, and perspectives are recognized, respected, and incorporated benefits everyone and everything. (Sheets & Gay, 1996, p. 93)

The statement from Sheets & Gay (1996) addresses the issue of long term goals for school discipline that demonstrates concern for the individual students, the teachers and the community as a whole. The report from the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) demonstrates the effort to balance long term goals with immediate concerns for classroom control.

> The duty of schools is to preserve the safety and integrity of the learning environment is incontrovertible: to preserve a safe climate, to encourage a positive and productive learning climate, to teach students the personal and interpersonal skills they will need to be successful in school and society, and to reduce the likelihood of future disruption. (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 859)

One of the major concerns at the end of the 20th century and into the beginning of the 21st century was the increasing use of zero tolerance policies as a way to address the issue of school safety. There is some evidence that zero tolerance policies are not only ineffective but may even be counterproductive in providing a safer school environment.

> At first glance, it seems that we need a strong zero-tolerance policy for our schools, and advocates of these policies are justified. However, after inspecting the effect of these policies on our schools, it becomes apparent that there is more evidence that they do more harm than good. (Martinez, 2009, p. 153)

One of the concerns raised is that schools are no longer helping students learn how to behave but are simply identifying, labeling, and dismissing from the education process those behaviors seen as unacceptable. Hirschfield refers to this increasing use of zero tolerance policies as the criminalization of school discipline.

> The management of student deviance, divested of its broader social aims, is prone to redefinition and reappropriation for other ends. Especially in schools that face very real problems of gangs and violence, rule-breaking and trouble-making students are more likely to be defined as criminals--symbolically if not legally--and treated as such in policy and practice. In short, the problems that once invoked the idea and apparatus of student discipline have increasingly become criminalized. (Hirschfield, 2008, p. 80)

Many educators are concerned that the implementation of zero tolerance policies are not only ineffective in addressing the school safety issue but they are also concerned that the policies may have a detrimental effect in terms of psychological development for

students. An important question was asked, "To what extent are zero tolerance policies developmentally appropriate as a psychological intervention, taking into account the developmental level of children and youth" American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 855).

With the growing evidence of the immaturity of adolescence and the supporting evidence from developmental neurosciences that indicate the brains of adolescences are less well-developed than previously thought, the question must be asked, Are zero tolerance policies the way to help students learn from their mistakes? There are those who think zero tolerance policies do not teach and discipline in the manner that schools once did when working with students who were still growing up. Many feel that zero tolerance policies are merely punitive.

> There can be no doubt that many incidents that result in disciplinary infractions at the secondary level are due to poor judgment on the part of the adolescent involved. But if that judgment is the result of developmental or neurological immaturity and if the resulting behavior does not pose a threat to safety, weighing the importance of a particular consequence against the long-term negative consequences of zero tolerance policies must be viewed as a complex decision. (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 855)

One of the rationales used for the implementation of zero tolerance policies is that the policies will take the human bias out of the disciplinary process and all students will be treated, and disciplined, equally. "The evidence, however, does not support such an assumption. Rather, the disproportionate discipline of students of color continues to be a

concern; overrepresentation in suspension and expulsion has been found consistently for African American Students" (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 854).

The discussion on the disproportional representation of different student groups in the administration of school discipline is another part of the larger discussion concerning school discipline. Over the last 30 years there have been numerous studies that documented the disproportionate representation of different student groups when it comes to the administration of school discipline (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Costenbader & Markson, 1994, Gregory, 1997; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; McCarthy and Hoge, 1987; Sheets & Gay, 1996; Skiba et al., 2002). Even though the problem has consistently been reported for the past 30 years, the disproportional representation of different student groups in the administration of school discipline, is not improving (Fenning & Rose, 2007).

Dehlinger (2008) discussed the overrepresentation of black students in school discipline and the issue of school personnel's ignorance concerning the disparity in the administration of school discipline.

> The overrepresentation of Black students in the administration of school discipline persists regardless of how student groups were defined…In conversations with colleagues regarding student discipline, school administrators consistently endorse the idea that all students are disciplined fairly and receive appropriate consequences for disruptive and/or dangerous behavior. . . Few administrators are knowledgeable of the research regarding attitudes, cultural

> bias, and disparity in discipline that exist for Black students. Thus administrators rely on following policies and procedures designed to be racially neutral when, in fact, the policies continue to have an adverse impact on Black students. (p. 92)

That black students are disproportionately represented in school discipline referrals is well-documented (Brantlinger, 1991; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Monroe, 2006; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). Whether disparity shows bias or discrimination is the larger question. Skiba et al. (2002) attempted to answer this question. These authors offered three alternative explanations of disproportionality in discipline data for African American students. The first explanation suggested that disproportionality could be a result of "statistical artifact," which the article defined as a "product of the particular method of reporting the data" (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 321). Skiba et al. (2002) did not find this to be a viable explanation. "All group differences met the disproportionality criteria for all three disciplinary consequences (referral, suspension, and expulsion), regardless of the method of analysis" (p. 333).

Another alternative explanation of disproportionality in discipline data for African American students presented in the Skiba et al. (2002) study included the possibility that "higher rates of exclusion and punishment . . . are due to higher rates of disruptive behavior" (p. 322). If this were the case, the higher rates would represent an appropriate response to behavior and not a bias or prejudice. "Although there have been no studies directly investigating this hypothesis, investigations of behavior, race, and discipline have yet to provide evidence that African-American students misbehave at a significantly higher rate than other students" (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 322). The Skiba et al. (2002) study

yielded similar conclusions. "Similar discriminant analyses by race revealed no evidence that racial disparities in school punishment could be explained by higher rates of African American misbehavior" (p. 334).

Researchers have indicated that males have a higher rate of punishment due to the higher rate of misbehavior. Skiba et al. (2002) came to the same conclusion in his study.

> Discriminant analysis revealed that boys in this sample were more likely than girls to be referred to the office for a host of misbehaviors ranging from minor offenses and throwing objects, to fighting and threats, to sexual offenses. These findings are consistent with higher prevalence rates for boys across a range of externalizing behaviors and syndromes, including aggression (Parke and Slaby, 1983), bullying (Boulton and Underwood, 1992), school violence (Walker, Ramsey, and Colvin, 1995), theft and lying (Keltikangas and Lindeman, 1997), conduct disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), and delinquency (Mears, Ploeger, and Warr, 1998). (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 334)

Two studies have shown that boys are four times as likely to be referred as girls (Bain & MacPherson, 1990; Sheets & Gay, 1996). It is believed that there is a corresponding higher incident of male misbehavior, thereby justifying the disproportionate numbers.

Of interest are the findings in several studies that white students have been most often referred for behaviors that were objective in nature such as truancy and vandalism. In contrast, black students have been referred most often for offenses that were subjective in nature such as disrespect and aggressive behaviors (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008;

McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden et al., 1992; Skiba et al., 2002). Though there appears to be a bias, there is some question as to whether that bias is related to ethnic/racial bias and prejudice, or socioeconomic status.

The third alternative explanation of disproportionality in discipline data for African American students presented in the Skiba et al. study (2002) included the possibility that the disproportionate number of black students referred for discipline was related to the higher number of black students who came from lower socioeconomic status (SES) homes. It was concluded that "the large and consistent black overrepresentation in office referral and school suspension was not explainable by either SES or racial differences in behavior" (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 335).

Although Skiba et al. (2002), concluded that "the large and consistent black overrepresentation in office referral and school suspension was not explainable by either SES", there was no indication that SES does not affect student discipline. Socioeconomic status can have a profound effect on how a student is disciplined. According to Skiba et al. (2002), students who receive free or reduced lunch are more likely to receive discipline consequences than those students who do not. In interviews with students from both high and low income residential areas, Brantlinger (1991) found that students believed that students from low income families would receive harsher discipline than those from higher income families. "Teachers frequently view low income students as having the highest potential for behavior problems. Consequently, students from low-income homes, regardless of ethnicity, are disciplined more often by teachers than middle-class white students" (Walker-Dalhouse, 2005, p. 25).

Payne (1996) suggested that one of the reasons students from economically disadvantaged homes find themselves in trouble more often than students who are not from low SES homes is because they do not understand the hidden rules and language of the middle class teachers and administrators who run the schools. Payne (1996) expressed the belief that many discipline problems with low economic students are a result of misunderstanding and miscommunication because of the use of language register differences between mostly middle class teachers and their low SES students.

> Discipline that occurs when a student uses the inappropriate register should be a time for instruction in the appropriate register. Casual register needs to be recognized as the primary discourse for many students. Discourse patterns… and formal register needs to be directly taught. (Payne, 1996, p 35)

The concepts put forth by Payne (1996) have come under much scrutiny and condemnation (Bomer, Dworin, May & Semingson, 2008; Gorski, 2008). The two main objections to Payne's work are (a) that it is not research based and (b) "her work represents a classic example of what has been identified as deficit thinking" (Bomer et al., 2008, p. 2522). The simple definition of deficit thinking is the belief that "students who struggle in school do so because of their own internal deficits or deficiencies" (Bomer et al., 2008, p. 2523) which is a way of blaming the victim.

Payne (1996) posited that there is a culture of poverty that carries over into the classroom, and this makes it more difficult for students from that culture to be successful in the school environment. She expressed the belief that one of the areas where this culture manifests its self is in the area of discipline. A close analysis and comparison, of

the beliefs of Payne and her critics shows that the two sides actually identify similar problems but have widely different views on the cause of those problems and how to address them. Both sides in the heated debate agree that students from homes with low socioeconomic status do not, as a group, perform well in school, and they find themselves in trouble more often than other students. Both sides also agree that one of the reasons students from homes of low SES perform poorly is that many times there is a cultural misunderstanding between the students and those in charge of running the schools.

School discipline is a major concern for educators and parents alike. School stakeholders want students to not only learn important academic curriculum, but they also want their students to learn the necessary skills of self discipline. As the students go through the process and learn these self discipline skills, it is important for them to have a safe environment. If students do not have a safe school, it is very difficult for effective learning to take place.

Several researchers have analyzed the perceptions of students and teachers concerning discipline in the school setting (Brantlinger, 1991; Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Kokkinos, Panayiotou, & Davazoglou, 2004; Ruck & Wortley, 2002). The work of these researchers has shown that there is a perception among students from low SES homes that they get in trouble more often for incidents that are subjective in nature. There has not been a study that analyzes student discipline data to see if there are actual disproportional subjective discipline incidents for students from low SES homes. The present study was conducted to examine all the discipline referrals given to the students in a central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010. Two main

questions will be researched in the context of gender, economic status, and ethnicity to determine (a) if different student groups receive a disproportionate number of subjective discipline referrals, and (b) is there a relationship between student group variables and discipline referral categories.

Problem Statement

The problem of disparity in school discipline for different student groups has been well documented (Brantlinger, 1991; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba et al., 2002). The subjectivity of discipline for different student groups has been a part of that discussion (Brown & Beckett, 2006; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Skiba et al., 2002). It has been shown that students perceive there is disparity (Brantlinger, 1991; Ruck & Wortley, 2002). Despite the discussions concerning the subjectivity of discipline for different student groups, there have been few studies to determine the actual relationship between subjective or objective discipline referrals and gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. At the time of the present study, there was insufficient information about the relationship between the subjectivity of discipline referrals and student group variables.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent was there a difference in subjective (ambiguous) and objective (exact) discipline referrals in terms of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status for students in a central Florida public school district

for the school year 2009-2010. In addition, the study was conducted to determine to what extent there was a relationship between student group variables and discipline referral categories for students in a central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010. The intent of the researcher was to provide information to the leaders of school districts that would assist in the development of programs and policies to insure that all students in those school districts are treated fairly.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided for terms that are used in this study.

American Indian: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America, and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition (Florida Department of Education, 2010).

Asian: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, the pacific Islands or the Indian subcontinent (Florida Department of Education, 2010).

Black: A person having origins in any of the black racial groups in Africa (Florida Department of Education, 2010).

Discipline referral: The reporting of a student's behavior that is in violation of the central Florida public schools' Student Conduct and Discipline Code (Student Handbook and Discipline code, 2010).

Hispanic: A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban or South or Central American origin or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (Florida Department of Education, 2010).

Multiracial: A person having parents of different racial/ethnic categories (Florida Department of Education, 2010).

Objective discipline referral: A discipline referral for which there is a clear and concise understanding of the infraction and which school personnel apply consistently.

Low socio-economic status: The socio-economic classification of a student based on whether the student receives free or reduced lunch services. A student who qualifies for free or reduced lunch will be classified as low socio-economic status.

Subjective discipline referral: A discipline referral for which there is not a clear and concise understanding of the infraction and which school personnel apply inconsistently.

Unduplicated count: The counting of a student only once for statistical analysis regardless of the number of discipline referrals that student received.

White: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East (Florida Department of Education, 2010).

Delimitations

The population for the study was delimited to all the middle and high schools in a central Florida public school district and to data obtained from that district. Discipline data for the district's elementary schools were not used in the study.

The data were delimited to all the discipline referrals (grades 6-12) for the school year 2009-2010. Only discipline problems that were reported on the central Florida public school district's official discipline referral form were included in the analysis. Discipline problems that were handled within the school (such as morning or lunch detentions) or by the teacher within the individual class rooms were not, and could not, be included in the study.

Limitations

The classification for free or reduced lunch is dependent on a parent or guardian applying for the service. There may have been some students in the study who would have qualified for free or reduced lunch if their parent or guardian applied for those services. If the parent did not make application for the free or reduced lunch services, some students may not have been correctly classified.

Parents self-select the racial/ethnic category for their student(s) during the enrollment process. If a parent made and error in reporting ethnic data, there was no correction process in place.

Student demographic information is collected by each individual school. Although many processes are used to ensure accuracy in reporting the information to the county office, it is possible that errors occurred.

Research Questions

It was the intent of this study to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent is there a difference in objective (exact) and subjective (ambiguous) discipline referrals in terms of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status?
2. To what extent is there a relationship between student groups (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) and discipline referral type?

Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in objective discipline referrals between genders at the .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in objective discipline referrals between different ethnicities at the .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in objective discipline referrals between different socioeconomic groups at the .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 4: There is no difference in subjective discipline referrals between genders at the .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 5: There is no difference in subjective discipline referrals between different ethnicities at the .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 6: There is no difference in subjective discipline referrals between different socioeconomic groups at the .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 7: There is no relationship between students' groups (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) and objective/subjective discipline types at the .05 significance level.

Data Collection, Methodology, and Analysis

Discipline referrals were collected from the central Florida public school district's middle and high schools for the school year 2009-2010 as reported to the central Florida public school district's office. Each discipline referral included the following information: an anonymous student identification number, school, grade, gender, ethnicity, whether or not the student was eligible for free or reduced lunch, and the discipline referral type.

Determination of the subjectivity of different discipline referrals was based on the results of an on-line survey (Appendix A) given to 84 instructional personnel at a middle school in a central Florida public school district. Personnel were asked to rate as subjective or objective each of the 54 different types of discipline referrals (Appendix B) given during the school year 2009-2010. A discipline type was considered as subjective if 70% or more of the survey respondents saw it as such. (Appendix C)

The 84 members of the instructional staff at this school were contacted via email and were invited to participate in an on-line survey (Appendix D) via a link which was placed in the e-mail message. The survey was confidential and anonymous. The participants were allowed to take the survey only once. Reminder e-mails were sent one week and two weeks after the original invitation.

Data analyses procedures required the use of both a duplicated data set and an unduplicated data set. The duplicated data set included each individual discipline referral collected from all the central Florida public school district's middle and high schools for the school year 2009-2010. The unduplicated discipline referral data set included an

average score for the students who had more than one discipline referral. Students who had 10 discipline referrals, six of which were subjective, they were considered to have an average discipline score of 0.6. Students who had only objective discipline referrals had a discipline score of 0.0, and those who had only subjective referrals had discipline scores of 1.0. Each student who received a discipline referral was counted only once regardless of the total number of referrals that student received. The average scores were grouped (Appendix E) to keep the cross tabs analysis of the data to a manageable size. The use of unduplicated referral counts allowed for the analysis of data that were not influenced by "repeat offenders."

The first purpose of the research was to determine to what extent there was a difference in subjective (ambiguous) and objective (exact) discipline referrals in terms of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The second purpose of the research was to determine to what extent there was a relationship between student group variables and discipline referral categories. The analyses used the data set that included all the discipline referrals and the data set that included unduplicated discipline referrals as previously explained.

The analyses that required student population numbers were based on the student count and percentages of each student group (Appendix F) obtained from the Florida Department of Education (Florida Department of Education, 2010). The statistical analysis package PASW Statistics GradPack (18.0.0) was used to analyze the data.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study should allow educational leaders to measure the status of their school districts in terms of equitable student discipline practices. Using the information gathered in this research, districts can focus efforts on programs and policies to correct areas found to be inequitable and to strengthen areas that have been shown to be equitable. The findings of this study can be used as (a) a base for longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of ongoing policy/program changes and implementation and (b) a base for comparative studies in other school districts to determine if their current student discipline policies differ for students on the basics of gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction to the study, a problem statement, the purpose of the study, a definition of terms, delimitations, limitation, research questions and hypotheses, the methodology for data collection and analysis, the significance of the study and finally, the organization of the study. Chapter 2 contains a review of literature on discipline in schools with an emphasis on disproportional application of discipline to different student groups. Chapter 3 describes the collection and transformation of data, the research design, and the statistical methods used to analyze the data. Chapter 4 presents a detailed analysis of the findings of the study. Chapter 5 presents conclusions based on the findings, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this review of literature was to examine information related to school discipline, disparities in discipline, and the types of discipline that have been administered to different student groups. The chapter has been organized to provide a historical overview of school discipline and a discussion of disparities in discipline and their causes. Also reviewed is the literature on the influence of culture on discipline including disparities as a result of culture differences and the culture of poverty. The final section of the literature review is focused on teachers' and students' perceptions of discipline disparities.

Historical Overview of School Discipline

In 1938, John Dewey wrote of the purpose of education: "The ideal aim of education is creation of the power of self-control" (Dewey, 1938, p. 5). The purpose of education and the means by which those purposes have been accomplished have a rich and sometimes violent history. In England, during the 1700s,

> even in the selective and prestigious public schools, conditions were poor, and behavior nothing short of mutinous. It is reported that King George the III asked a group of Eton public school boys, 'Have you had a rebellion lately, eh, eh?' (Newman, 1980, p. 7)

In France, during the same time period, "a large number of students carried arms. Since revolts were common, masters literally feared for their lives; other people were afraid to walk past schools for fear of being attacked" (Newman, 1980, p. 7).

Throughout the history of education, institutions and their students have often been in conflict. To better understand the problems of school discipline facing 21st century educators, it is wise to consider the history of school discipline. "It is hoped that by clarifying past tendencies we will be able to shed light on the likelihood of change in future years" (Newman, 1980, p. 7).

The 1700s

In England, between 1775 and 1836, mutinies, strikes, and violence were so frequent, and sometimes so severe, that the masters had to call upon the military for assistance (Newman, 1980, p. 7). These were not isolated events.

> As one example, in 1797, some boys at Rugby responded with extreme violence to being ordered to pay for damages they had done to a tradesman. They blew up the door of the headmaster's office, set fire to his books and to school desks, and then withdrew to a nearby lake. When the school called in special constables, they read the riot act and finally took the island through force. (Newman, 1980, p. 7)

During this same time period in the New World, schools did not have the same problems with disruptive students. Travers (1980) explained this as being due mostly to the fact that students in the colonial times accepted authority of the school master.

> There is little evidence of serious pupil misbehavior or violence during this early period (1700's). Apparently those children who did attend the schools essentially accepted the moral and social authority imposed upon them: they were subdued by the austere regime and the fear that God … [would] not only punish them with everlasting pain in the Day of Judgment, but he will execute also punishments on their bodies here in this world. (Newman, 1980, p. 8)

This was in line with the thinking of the Puritan settlers who believed schools were necessary so children could learn about God and their community.

The 1800s

As the United States moved into the 19th century, the philosophical underpinnings of education were also changing. "The old discipline, based on fear and force, began to be questioned philosophically, especially from the 1840s on. The idea that children had to be rehabilitated because of their innate depravity lost favor among educational theorists" (Travers, 1980, p. 186). Educators were beginning to see students not as "little devils by nature, but rather, if the learning environment was active and secure, as good children" (Travers, 1980, p. 186).

This philosophical change did not take place overnight. The 19th century had many growing pains. When Horace Mann became the secretary to the Board of Education of Massachusetts in 1837, over 300 of the schools had teachers who had been chased off or locked out. Francis Grund, a European immigrant turned newspaper man, had the following to say about American school children. "There is as little disposition

on the part of the American children to obey the uncontrollable will of their masters as on the part of their fathers to submit to the mandates of kings" (Newman, 1980, p. 8). There was, however, movement towards more student centered school systems during this time period. The 1800s saw the introduction of McGuffey's Readers with their emphasis on moral lessons. "Particularly important among the educational theorists of the nineteenth century were Johann Pestalozzi and Friedrich Froebel. . . .Children were viewed by them as individuals in their own right" (Travers, 1980, p. 186).

A shifting of philosophy did not solve the discipline problems for schools. The changing demographics of the United States and the increasing number of states that were requiring compulsory education had an impact on school discipline.

> Large scale immigration, industrialization, and urbanization made American society more complex and heterogeneous than it had been in the past. Public programs such as formal schooling were increasingly relied upon to combat resultant problems. By 1840 it was no longer the exception for children to have at least normal schooling in New England, and between 1865 and 1918, compulsory education laws were enacted in the various states. (Newman, 1980, p. 8)

With the increasing attendance brought about by compulsory education statutes, schools were serving a broader segment of society. As they sought to serve those children, the schools inevitably became the setting for more and more disciplinary problems. (Newman, 1980)

The Early 1900s

Through the end of the 19th century into the beginning of the 20th century, most schools only enrolled about 50% of the potential student population (Johnson, 2001). Part of the relatively small percentage was due to the fact that schools expelled or discouraged disruptive students from enrollment in their institutions. The beginning of the 20th century brought about even more change in schools' philosophies for dealing with student discipline. Some of this change sprang out of the necessity of dealing with changes in the populations the schools were serving. "By 1918 seventy-five percent of American children aged 5-18 were attending school" (Newman, 1980, p. 9). There was not only an increase in the number of students being served, but they were coming from different backgrounds. "In 1911 . . . half the pupils in the public schools of 37 of the most populous cities in America were children of foreign-born parents" (Travers, 1980, p. 186). Education was being extended to all adolescents, including those "least prepared, least competent, least willing, least tractable, and least sympathetic with the moral and educational philosophy of the schools" (Newman, 1980, p. 9).

History has shown that school disorder and violence have often increased when education has been extended to many children who, for a variety of reasons, did not or could not share the goals of the school (Newman, 1980, p. 10). The increase in numbers of the total student population and the dramatic change in demographics brought increased tension and a renewed examination of the purpose of schools.

Dewey, one of the leading education philosophers of the early 20th century, was very influential in the debate about the approach schools should be using as they

addressed the new problems. He believed that "cooperation and community should be the aim of school discipline. The methods of school discipline had to be related to this purpose" (Burton, 1988, p. 5).

> John Dewey wrote, 'If you have the end in view of forty or fifty children learning certain set lessons, to be recited to a teacher, your discipline must be devoted to securing that result. But if the end in view is the development of a spirit of social co-operation and community life, discipline must grow out of and be relative to this.' (Burton, 1988, p. 1)

Despite all the problems during this time period, education beyond the primary grades was no longer just for the select few. High school enrollment increased 800% and college enrolment increased 500% (Newman, 1980). Throughout the first half of the 20th century, each new generation of Americans was more likely to graduate from high school than the preceding one. Along with the increase in secondary education came increased worker productivity which in turn fueled American economic growth (Heckman, 2008).

The Late 1900s

The professional literature on school discipline (World War II and post war era) consistently emphasized that self-discipline for democratic citizenship was the undisputed goal of the classroom disciplinary process (Burton, 1988, p. 7). Although the post World War II school setting continued to emphasize self discipline, the values that society was emphasizing were not remaining static.

Shortly after the mid century point, disciplinary literature began to fall silent on the long-term social objectives of school discipline. Writers no longer seemed to be concerned about developing the moral values of the student. Rather, they began to emphasize control of students in the here and now. "Rather than developing philosophies of discipline linked to visions of a preferred social order, writers developed systems and models whose only criterion for success is their short-term goal of classroom order" (Johnson, 2001, p. 27).

Burton in her 1988 paper, *School Discipline: Have We Lost Our Sense Of Purpose In Our Search For A Good Method?*, attributed this change in focus to two areas.

> Two major social changes occurred which directly affected both the methods and the purpose of school discipline in the period after 1960. There were, 1) a new recognition of social diversity and individual rights; and 2) a shift from a producer to a consumer society. (Burton, 1988, p. 9)

Though a producer society operates with the paradigm that self control and delayed gratification keep society functioning smoothly, the consumer society depends on just the opposite to succeed and thrive. The unspoken rules of the consumer society have created conflict with the school climate goals that have promoted restraint and self control since colonial times. Burton described how the conflict between these two sets of unmatched goals affects school discipline.

> The characteristics of a producer society--efficiency, thrift, sobriety, and delayed gratification are not the characteristics needed to sustain a consumer society. . .

> .most important to our interest in school discipline, members of a consumer society, as opposed to those of a producer society, are not rewarded for self-denial or self-discipline. (Burton, 1988, p. 12)

This new culture clash between consumer society norms and the traditional producer norms adhered to in most school settings has brought about new expressions of discontent and misbehavior. The rise in the occurrence of problematic behaviors brought with it resurgence in the attempts to control that behavior. "A normal response of society to increase problematical behavior has been to increase the number and severity of rules addressing those behaviors" (Duke, 1980, p. 24). Duke (1980) predicted the response of society and education to the increase concern for school safety.

> I speculate that most policymaking related to school discipline will revolve primarily around five options: more rules, and harsher punishments, more teacher training in classroom management, relaxation of student suspension guidelines, more campus security personnel and equipment, and changes in the juvenile justice system. (Duke, 1980, p. 24)

Some 30 years after Duke's predictions, it appears he was correct in most of his predictions. The one area where it appears he miscalculated was his prediction about the "relaxation of student suspension guidelines" (Duke, 1980, p. 24). As problems continued to escalate in schools, the schools responded by implementing policies to maintain control. "Increased levels of student violence, which accompanied the transition from a producer society to a consumer society, contributed to the need of direct immediate control to maintain discipline stability" (Johnson, 2001, p. 20).

Burton, commenting about school discipline in the 1980s, said, "It is my major thesis that American educators are today experiencing a 'crisis in school discipline' because they are caught between unrecognized, and therefore unaddressed, conflicting social purposes" (Burton, 1988, p. 3). Even though there seemed to be an increase in the attempts by schools to control students' behavior for short term goals of classroom management, the literature from the late 20th century into the first decade of the 21st century shows that education has attempted to recapture some of the long term discipline goals.

In the mid 1990s, Sheets and Gay (1996) wrote, "The creation of socially just and caring learning communities in the classroom in which students' and teachers' voices, experiences, and perspectives are recognized, respected, and incorporated benefits everyone and everything" (p. 93). Moving into the 21st century, a report on discipline from the American Psychological Association (2008) suggested the following:

> The duty of schools to preserve the safety and integrity of the learning environment is incontrovertible: to preserve a safe climate, to encourage a positive and productive learning climate, to teach students the personal and interpersonal skills they will need to be successful in school and society, and to reduce the likelihood of future disruption. (p. 859)

The debate on school discipline has centered on increased problems with student behavior and the safety of students, but it appears to have been blown out of proportion by the media. The incidents of extreme violence have garnered front page headlines and

remain prominent in the discussions regarding school discipline, but it is questionable as to whether the level of concern is supported by the data.

> Reports of disciplinary problems and sweeping statements on school crime and violence in the news media imply that most student misbehaviour is severe. These contentions are not supported by research. Initially, most disciplinary problems are relatively minor disruptions, originate in classrooms, and are interpersonal in nature…. the nine most common disciplinary referrals involved such communication behaviors as challenging teacher authority, interrupting, talking out of turn, responding loudly, arguing, not walking away from an altercation, becoming emotional during a confrontation, and socializing in class. (Sheets & Gay, 1996, p. 86)

Disparity in Discipline

With increasing emphasis on student control, a disturbing trend began to emerge in the last half on the 20th century. Educators began to notice that the school discipline process was not distributed evenly among all student groups. According to Skiba et al., 1997),

> Over-representation by race, socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and disability label has been among the most consistent findings in studies of school discipline (Brantlinger, 1991; Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Edelman et al, 1975; NCAS, 1986; Panko-Stilmock, 1996; Rose, 1988; Wu et al, 1982)

Monroe (2006) concurred in the prevalence of overrepresentation issues, "Such patterns of disproportionality--a problem referred to as the *discipline* gap--are documented in most major school districts throughout the United States" (p. 163).

Several patterns of disparity emerged. "One pattern is that African American students are over-represented in disciplinary referrals" (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008, p. 459). Skiba et al. (1997) found in their study of office referrals for middle schools in a large, urban Midwestern public school district, that it was not just African American students who were overrepresented in discipline referrals. The study was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of the following:

> . . . a one-way analysis of variance used to test for differences in the dependent variables of either number of referrals or number of suspensions by four independent variables drawn from the demographic data: gender, ethnic status, disability label, and eligibility for free or reduced cost lunch. (Skiba et al., 1997, p. 296)

The second part of the study was a more detailed examination of the comments on the office referrals for one of the middle schools included in the first part of the study.

> Both of the current studies found over-representation of low SES students, males, and special education students in terms of both school referrals and rate of suspension. Study I found that, even in a district with a high proportion of African-American students, African-Americans were referred to the office significantly more frequently than other ethnic groups. (Skiba et al., 1997, p. 300)

In the study by Skiba et al. (1997), overrepresentation was found in different student groups but was not linked as an indicator of bias. In this particular study, the disparity was not found to be dependent on socioeconomic status.

> While the data reported here does not permit a judgment of whether minority over-representation is an indicator of bias, previous studies (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Wu et al., 1982) have indicated that minority over-representation in school discipline appears to be independent of both student behavior and SES. (Skiba et al., 1997, p. 300)

In Skiba's 1997 study, as in other studies, socioeconomic status was determined by qualification for the free or reduced lunch program offered by the school district. "Information on socio-economic status for this sample was represented by qualification status for free or reduced cost lunch" (Skiba et al., 1997, p. 295).

Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron (2002), in a longitudinal study investigating disproportionate suspensions of minority students and students with disabilities in the state of Maryland from 1995 to 2003, found results similar to those of Skiba et al. (1997). This study however, identified an additional relationship between suspension (discipline) and SES. The study also included mobility as a factoring influence. The Maryland study used odds ratios for analysis. "The odds ratio for each group represents the ratio of the odds for that group to the odds for the White group" (Mendez et al., 2002, p. 220).

> The correlational analyses conducted as part of this study were quite clear in showing that demographic variables (in particular, SES, race, and mobility rate) tend to show the strongest positive relationships with suspension rates at

> individual schools. This was particularly true at the elementary level. Thus, schools that serve high percentages of poor minority children (particularly those who change schools frequently) are more likely to have a higher rate of suspensions than schools that serve higher SES White students and have low mobility rates. (Mendez et al., 2002, p. 273)

Krezmien, Leone, and Achilles (2006), in their study, found not only disproportionality in different student groups. They examined and found changes in the odds ratios for the different student groups over the duration of the study.

> The odds ratios for African American students increased during the 9-year period, whereas the odds of being suspended for White students, Hispanic students, and Asian students remained relatively stable. Although we did not find significant differences between the odds ratios for American Indian students and White students in our initial analysis, American Indian students experienced a dramatic change in the risk of being suspended. In 1995 they were less likely to be suspended than any racial group except the Asian group. By 2003, however, the odds ratio for the American Indian group was larger than for any racial group except for the African American group. (Krezmien et al., 2006, p. 222)

Dehlinger (2008) discussed the overrepresentation of African American students in school discipline and the issue of school personnel's ignorance concerning the disparity in the administration of school discipline.

> The over-representation of Black students in the administration of school discipline persists regardless of how student groups were defined. . . In

> conversations with colleagues regarding student discipline, school administrators consistently endorse the idea that all students are disciplined fairly and receive appropriate consequences for disruptive and/or dangerous behavior. . . Few administrators are knowledgeable of the research regarding attitudes, cultural bias, and disparity in discipline that exists for Black students. Thus administrators rely on following policies and procedures designed to be racially neutral when, in fact, the policies continue to have an adverse impact on Black students. (p. 92)

That there is disparity in the administration of school discipline is well-documented. Thus, the larger question within the issue is related to the contributing factors for this disparity.

Zero Tolerance Policies and Discipline Disparity

The concern for the apparent rise in student misbehavior, coupled with a rise in the disparity of the administration of school discipline, ushered in the era of zero tolerance policies during the 1980s and 1990s. Concern over the increase in crime and how that affects school safety is a concern for all families. "Regardless of race, family income, or region of the country, no child in America today is immune from the fear of violence. School violence . . . is neither an urban problem, nor exclusively a public school problem" (Johnson, 2001, p. 36). None would argue the importance of keeping school children safe from the violence that seems to be so prevalent in the world beyond the school campuses. "School safety is important. The failure to remove a dangerous student from a school is a great risk to students and faculty" (Stader, 2004, p. 65). The

debate is not on the importance of keeping children safe but how to keep them safe while ensuring that the "how" is a process that is fair to all.

Perception appears to be part of the problem driving the implementation of zero tolerance policies. Johnson (2001) discussed the problem of fact versus perception and the underlying belief that though total juvenile arrests have actually decreased in recent years, the impression for many has been precisely the opposite.

> Crime in America seems much more prevalent now than during the past 2 decades, when experts say the latest wave of mayhem began with the appearance of crack cocaine and kids with guns. FBI arrest figures dispute the public perception that more young people are in trouble with the law than ever before . . . . The FBI acknowledged, however, that the kinds of crimes young people commit today are more serious than in the past, and youthful criminals are becoming younger and younger. (Johnson, 2001, p. 35)

Despite the reported decrease in the overall numbers of young people in trouble with the law, perceptions have moved in the opposite direction. This perception may be a result of the increase in violent crimes committed even though the total number of incidents has decreased. In 2001, Johnson reported the trend showed an increase of violent crimes. The good news was that Billitteri reported in 2008 that the trend was reversing with a decrease in the number of violent crimes for the academic year 2005-06.

> Fourteen homicides were reported among students ages 5 to 18 in the 2005-06 academic year, 20 less than in 1992-93. Homicides dropped significantly following the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado.

> Similarly, rates of non-fatal crimes against students decreased to about one-third of 1992-93 levels. (Billitteri, 2008, p. 148)

Zero tolerance policies first gained attention in 1986 when, under President Reagan, they were used by the US attorney's office in San Diego to fight the war on drugs. "Zero tolerance policies took hold quickly and within months were being applied to issues as diverse as environmental pollution, trespassing, skateboarding, racial intolerance, homelessness, sexual harassment, and boom boxes" (Johnson, 2001, p. 50).

Schools started adopting zero tolerance policies in the late 1980s. De facto federal sanction for their use was received by schools with the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) in 1994 by then President Clinton. This law mandated a full one-calendar-year expulsion for the possession of guns. The law also required the referral of students in violation of the law to the criminal or juvenile justice system.

Even though zero tolerance policies were originally evoked exclusively for fighting the war on drugs, they were quickly expanded to include other less pressing societal issues. With the perception of the positive effect these policies had when applied to other areas, the same transition of adopting zero tolerance policies for a narrow range of dangerous student behaviors spread to less pressing school issues. "Beginning in 1999, some schools included swearing, truancy, insubordination, disrespect, and dress-code violation in their zero tolerance policies" (Martinez, 2009, p. 154). It was hoped that zero tolerance policies in schools would help address the serious issues of weapons and drugs and at the same time insure that all students were treated the same regardless of race, gender or socioeconomic status.

> At first glance, it seems that we need a strong zero-tolerance policy for our schools, and advocates of these policies are justified. However, after inspecting the effect of these policies on our schools, it becomes apparent that there is more evidence that they do more harm than good. (Martinez, 2009, p. 153)

One of the unintended effects of zero tolerance has been the movement by schools away from helping students learn from the discipline process. Zero tolerance became the method by which schools could justify punishing those who did not conform quickly enough. "As a result, the zero-tolerance policy moved beyond its original intent and school administrators were using it as a method to relinquish responsibility for students with behavioral problems" (Martinez, 2009, p. 154).

Although there has been concern that zero tolerance policies were being used to avoid the personal side of student discipline, there has also been concern that schools and administrators have been using the policies to rid themselves of students who bring down the school test scores. As high stakes tests have become more prevalent, teachers and administrators have been less willing to put up with disruptive students.

> In the 2000s, according to some critics of zero tolerance, administrators have used stiff disciplinary penalties to winnow out low-achievers because schools are under intense pressure to get their students to pass standards-based achievement tests . . . . Facing sanctions for poor student performance, administrators have less and less patience with students who create disruptions that jeopardize classroom learning or drag down test scores. (Billitteri, 2008, p. 158)

There is also concern that zero tolerance policies do not create an appropriate school environment for all students, including those who never get in trouble.

> Adolescents have developmental needs for both structure and support, albeit in a balanced and moderated form that still permits them a degree of independence and autonomy that reflects their emerging sense of adult identity. High schools that pursue a zero tolerance approach run the risk of creating a highly structured environment that seems overly restrictive and ignores needs for support. (Gregory & Cornell, 2009, p. 111)

In reality most zero tolerance policies result in suspension and/or expulsion from school. With the broadening application of zero tolerance policies to a wide range of student behaviors, schools suspend and expel students who do not represent a safety risk. "The misapplication of suspension/expulsion authority carries significant consequences for some students who pose little threat to school safety" (Stader, 2004, p. 65).

> Students who are suspended suffer academically. In most instances they receive failing grades or do not have opportunities to make up missed schoolwork. They fall irretrievably behind, and there is a moderate to strong indication that they will eventually drop out of school. (Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2000, p. vii)

"Part of the appeal of zero tolerance policies has been the expectation that by removing subjective influences or contextual factors from disciplinary decisions, such policies would be fairer to students traditionally over-represented in school disciplinary consequences" (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 854). An examination of the application of zero tolerance policies in the school

environment, however, does not demonstrate that these expectations are being met. Johnson (2001) found that though males and females received consistent consequences, other student groups did not.

> Further analysis of consistency (Zero Tolerance Policies) revealed that males and females receive equally harsh consequences. African American and Hispanic students tended to receive harsher consequences than white students and students classified as "other". Interestingly, juniors and seniors received less harsh consequences than freshmen and sophomores. This may be associated with the pressure placed upon administrators to continuously improve the high school graduation rate. (p. 147)

Addressing the question as to whether zero tolerance policies decreased subjectivity and reduced disparity in school discipline, the 2008 Zero Tolerance Task Force report of the American Psychological Association (2008) concluded: "The evidence… does not support such an assumption. Rather, the disproportionate discipline of students of color continues to be a concern; over-representation in suspension and expulsion has been found consistently for African American Students" (p 854).

Not only have zero tolerance policies in schools failed to reduce disparity in disciplinary consequences, they also have not provided a framework for reducing or removing subjectivity from the process. Addressing the subjectivity and unwise misuse of zero tolerance policies in schools, Johnson (2001) concluded:

> As a result, in a zero tolerance America, every conceivable indiscretion or violation is viewed as posing an equivalent danger or risk, requiring the same

> level of response. Results are especially pronounced when small children are held to the same absolute standard as older adolescents. Overly simplistic zero tolerance policies have become an issue which must be addressed at all levels of policy making to ensure that equity in the administration of consequences precludes standardized dissemination of punishments. (p. 64)

Despite intentions to the contrary, it appears that zero tolerance policies have actually contributed to the disparity in the administration of school discipline. Though designed to address the growing concern for student safety and to be neutral in application of discipline for different student groups, zero tolerance policies have not solved the problem of discipline disparity.

Causes of Disparity

The question remains as to the root cause or causes of disparity in the administration of school discipline. There are four possible explanations for racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). The first is simply that different student groups engage in disproportionate numbers of behaviors that warrant the disproportionate number of discipline consequences. If this explanation were accepted as true, the disparity in discipline consequences would not indicate a bias but merely a cause and effect relationship.

A second explanation may be a result of the difference in the way data are reported. "Some research presents discipline data in terms of the percent of students within a particular group who have experienced school disciplinary actions while other

research presents racial and ethnic differences in disproportionality" (Wallace et al., 2008, p. 58). This second explanation may have some merit according to Skiba et al. (2002) but does not contribute significantly to the discussion regarding the root causes for disparities in school discipline. More specifically, it does not take into account "large and consistent disparities in the discipline of black and white students" (p. 338).

Wallace et al. (2008) and Skiba et al. (2002) identified socioeconomic status as the third possible explanation for discipline disproportionality. "Race and socioeconomic status (SES) are unfortunately highly connected in American society increasing the possibility that any finding of disproportionality in race . . . is a by-product of disproportionality associated with SES" (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 321).

The fourth and final possible explanation for differences in school discipline is the teacher and administrator bias demonstrated by teachers and administrators in the ways they perceive and respond to different student groups (Wallace et al., 2008). This is also identified as a cultural bias by different researchers (Gorski, 2010; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). "Overuse of any disciplinary procedure that is not based on a corresponding over-representation of behavior may be an indicator of discriminatory treatment at some point in the disciplinary process" (Skiba et al., 1997, p. 300).

Wallace et al. (2008), recognized the need for further understanding of the causes of disparity in discipline. These authors believed further research was needed to understand the roles played by ethnicity, misbehavior vs. teacher bias, and socioeconomics in determining student discipline.

Disparity as a Result of Behavior

The first explanation of disparity in discipline rests on the assumption that those who misbehave more often receive more discipline consequences. That African American students have been disproportionately represented in school discipline referrals is well-documented. Whether that disparity represents a disparity in behavior or a bias in the administration of discipline is the larger question. Skiba et al. (2002) attempted to answer this question in *The Color of Discipline: Sources of Racial and Gender Disproportional in School Punishment*. These authors offered three alternative explanations of disproportionality in discipline data for African American students. The first explanation suggests that disproportionality could be the result of "statistical artifact" which was defined as a "product of the particular method of reporting the data" (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 321). The Skiba et al. (2002) study did not find this to be a viable explanation. "All group differences met the disproportionality criteria for all three disciplinary consequences (referral, suspension, and expulsion), regardless of the method of analysis" (p. 333).

Another alternative explanation of disproportionality in discipline data for African American students presented in the Skiba et al. (2002) study included the possibility that "higher rates of exclusion and punishment . . . are due to higher rates of disruptive behavior" (p. 322). If this were the case, the higher rates would represent an appropriate response to behavior and not a bias or prejudice. "Although there have been no studies directly investigating this hypothesis, investigations of behavior, race, and discipline have yet to provide evidence that African-American students misbehave at a significantly

higher rate than other students" (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 322). The authors shared this view. "Similar discriminant analyses by race revealed no evidence that racial disparities in school punishment could be explained by higher rates of African American misbehavior" (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 334).

Researchers have also indicated that males have a higher rate of punishment due to a higher rate of misbehavior, and Skiba et al. (2002) concurred:

> Discriminant analysis revealed that boys in this sample were more likely than girls to be referred to the office for a host of misbehaviors ranging from minor offenses and throwing objects, to fighting and threats, to sexual offenses. These findings are consistent with higher prevalence rates for boys across a range of externalizing behaviors and syndromes, including aggression (Parke and Slaby, 1983), bullying (Boulton and Underwood, 1992), school violence (Walker, Ramsey, and Colvin, 1995), theft and lying (Keltikangas and Lindeman, 1997), conduct disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), and delinquency (Mears, Ploeger, and Warr, 1998). (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 334)

Two studies have shown that boys are four times as likely to be referred as girls (Bain & MacPherson, 1990; Sheets & Gay, 1996). In contrast to a lack of corresponding incidents of misbehavior justifying the higher rates of referrals for minority students, it is believed that there is a corresponding higher incidence of male misbehavior which justifies the disproportionate number of referrals that males receive.

Wallace et al. (2008) found results that suggested there were "relatively small but statistically significant racial and ethnic differences in these (behaviors addressed by Zero

tolerance policies)" (p. 58) and that these differences could account for the differences in the number of discipline incidents. Though there was a statistically significant difference, according to Wallace et al. (2008), the difference was "insufficient to account for the relatively large racial and ethnic differences in school discipline" (p. 58). If the disproportionate discipline data is not a result of significantly higher rates of misbehavior, one must look further to identify contributing factor(s) to the apparent bias.

Disparity as a Result of Culture and Cultural Differences

Wallace's third (socioeconomic status) and fourth (teacher/administrator bias) explanations for discipline disparity can be grouped together under the heading of culture. "Culture is nothing, more nor less, than the shared ways that groups of people have created to use and define their environment. These collective tendencies generally include alternative behavioral norms and interpretations of personal conduct" (Monroe, 2006, p 163).

With the increasing diversity of schools, understanding the varied cultures of the students within those schools takes on added significance. Culture is influenced by "variables such as gender, education, social class, and degrees of cultural affiliation" (Weinstein et al., 2004, p. 30). Understanding culture includes "understanding the institutional relationships and patterns" (Monroe, 2005, p 155). Teachers need to understand that cultures differ in "terms of their emphasis on the collective or the individual" (Weinstein et al., 2004, p. 30).

Sheets and Gay (1996) emphasized the need for understanding the totality of the student and the culture they leave behind when they enter a teacher's classroom.

> Teachers need to understand the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, how they sanction behavior and celebrate accomplishments, and their rules of decorum, deference, and etiquette. They need to understand the value orientations, standards for achievements, asocial taboos, relational patterns, communication styles, motivational systems, and learning styles of different ethnic groups. These should then be employed in managing the behavior of students, as well as teaching them. (p. 92)

Getting to know students and their backgrounds has long been a tool teachers use to better understand their students and create the best possible learning environment. This is even more important when the teacher and student(s) come from different cultural backgrounds. "Relationship building may earn the trust of students, who are socially distanced from their teachers in terms of race and social class" (Gregory & Ripski, 2008, p. 348). Gregory and Ripski expressed the belief that this "lowers the cultural discontinuity between teachers and students." (p. 348). If this discontinuity is not addressed, an atmosphere for misunderstanding is created that can provide "fertile ground for school failure" (Monroe, 2005, p 158). More importantly, it can create an atmosphere of misunderstanding that translates into discipline problems.

How and in what way culture affects discipline in a school setting has been a widely discussed topic. Whether it is labeled the "the social curriculum," the "social

habitus," or just simply "culture," all research points to the significant impact of culture in the classroom and, more specifically, discipline in the classroom.

> In every school and classroom, there is a social curriculum that acts as a guide for student behavior throughout the school day. Though rarely as explicit as the written materials that constitute the academic curriculum, it is no less important in determining whether a student succeeds. (Skiba & Peterson, 2003, p. 67)

If students do not understand the social curriculum they can find it difficult to negotiate the expectations in a school setting without making mistakes that in some cases may be misinterpreted as misbehaviors. "Often, children from minority and low-income homes are socialized with different expectations for social and interpersonal interactions at school than are children from the dominant culture" (Thompson & Webber, 2010, p. 72).

What may be acceptable and humorous in one culture may be deemed unacceptable and downright disrespectful in a different culture. "Specific verbal patterns and vocabulary choices may be offered and received humorously within a student peer group. . . . The same actions witnessed by teachers may be perceived as unacceptable conduct requiring some form of reprimand" (Monroe, 2005, p. 156).

"Researchers have identified differences in middle-class and working-class speech to children. Snow (1976), for example, reported that working-class mothers use more directives with their children than do middle-and upper-class parents" (Delpit, 1988, p. 288). A teacher from a middle class background may deliver a directive by expressing herself in indirect terms as a way of reducing an exhibition of power. For

example, a teacher may ask a student “Would you like to sit down?” A student from a similar background will most likely recognize the implied command, but a student from a different cultural background may misunderstand and regard the request literally as a presentation of options.

> Both White and Black working-class children in the communities Heath studied "had difficulty interpreting these indirect requests for adherence to an unstated set of rules" (p. 280). But those veiled commands are commands nonetheless, representing true power, and with true consequences for disobedience. If veiled commands are ignored, the child will be labeled a behavior problem and possibly officially classified as behavior disordered. In other words, the attempt by the teacher to reduce an exhibition of power by expressing herself in indirect terms may remove the very explicitness that the child needs to understand the rules of the new classroom culture. (Delpit, 1988, p. 289)

The need to study the extent to which cultural differences translate to disparities in discipline persists. “Walter Mischel (1973) suggested that most of us have a very finely developed sense of how unstated social rules change from situation to situation, and we can make the subtle shifts necessary to match our responses to those changes” (Skiba & Peterson, 2003, p. 68). That said, it remains the responsibility of those in positions of authority to teach the stated and unstated social curriculum so as to reduce the misinterpretation of rules due to cultural differences.

> Clearly, every case of classroom disruption is not attributable to cultural misunderstandings. Yet, the regularity of the discipline gap compels educators to

> seek out additional explanations for racial disparities--particularly given the inaccuracy and lack of support for deficit-based arguments. A closer look at the lack of cultural synchronization between teachers and students may reveal that many disciplinary sanctions emanate from misinterpretations of student behavior. (Monroe, 2006, p 165)

The Culture of Poverty

The phrase, culture of poverty, was first used in 1961 by Lewis in *The Children of Sanchez*. Lewis suggested approximately 50 characteristics that were universal within communities of poverty (Gorski, 2008). He based his suggestions on his study of small Mexican communities in the late 1950s and coined the phrase, culture of poverty.

The term, poverty, is generally understood and in some cases is clearly defined as related specifically to income. In other instances, it is used as a broad and general comparison. "The term *socioeconomic status* (SES) is also commonly used (but not consistently defined) and refers generally to one's relative standing in regards to income, level of education, employment, health, and access to resources" (Burney & Beilke, 2008, p. 297). Burney & Beilke wrote that the level of income was not the only factor to consider when defining poverty. They cited influential factors for children living in poverty as "the length of time the family has been in poverty, other family assets such as home ownership or a college savings account, and the poverty level of the family when the child was younger than age 5" (p. 297).

At the time of this study, there remained much debate about the nature of and even the existence of the culture of poverty. "Lewis ignited a debate about the nature of poverty that continues today. But just as important--especially in the age of data-driven decision making--he inspired a flood of research" (Gorski, 2008, p 33). Gorski preferred to identify the characteristics observed in the different socioeconomic groups as classes. "The myth of a "culture of poverty" distracts us from a dangerous culture that does exist- the culture of classism (Gorski, 2008, p 34).

Rodman, in 1977, was less concerned about which term sociologists used to describe those living in poverty than he was with studying the actual impact poverty has on this group.

> We need to point out the distortions that have entered the literature both through the use of the 'culture of poverty' concept and through the critiques made of that use. . . (but) we need some terms that describe the process and the result. Whether these terms are the 'culture' or 'subculture' of poverty, or 'lower-class culture', or the 'lower-class value stretch' or the 'range of values' or the 'duality of values', or 'biculturality', is of less consequence. (Rodman, 1977, p. 874)

Rodman further explained that a term such as the culture of poverty does not need to be cast aside just because it is misused but can still be used to study the role poverty plays in the larger society.

There are not only different definitions for poverty but there are diverse explanations for the cause(s) of poverty. "Previous studies have identified three primary types of attributions for poverty: individualistic, structural, and fatalistic" (Bullock,

1999, p. 2060). An individualistic viewpoint gives emphasis to personal choice and responsibility as the main factors influencing the condition of poverty. The structuralist believes the main contributing factors to poverty are social conditions such as low wages, discrimination and inadequate schools. Fatalistic attributions are conditions beyond anyone's control such as sickness and bad luck.

The attributes an individual assigns to poverty strongly influence that individual's beliefs about public assistance. Those who believe poverty is mainly a result of individual choices are not as supportive of public assistance programs. Those who believe poverty is mainly a result of structural and fatalistic explanations, such as social conditions and bad luck, are more likely to support and fight for public assistance programs (Bullock, 1999). The beliefs an individual has concerning the attributes of poverty are correlated to a number of different personal descriptors. Not surprisingly, a person's beliefs about the causes of poverty are influenced by many variables.

> Attributions for poverty have been found to be related to social class (Furnham, 1982a), educational attainment (Feagin, 1975; Guimond & Palmer, 1990), political affiliation/ideology (Feagin, 1975; Zucker & Weiner, 1993), belief in the Protestant work ethic (Feather, 1984; Furnham, 1984; Furnham, 1985a; Wagstaff, 1983), and belief in a just world. (Furnham, 1985b; Harper, Wagstaff, Newton, & Harrison, 1990). (Bullock, 1999, p. 2061)

Overall, Bullock (1999) found that the middle class favored individualist explanations for poverty. By comparison "low-income participants were more likely, than were middle-class respondents, to endorse structural attributions for poverty and to

perceive the welfare system as legitimate, but they were also more likely to perceive welfare recipients as dishonest" (Bullock, 1999, p. 2079).

African Americans and Latinos have a larger percentage of their respective populations that are considered to be under-privileged. When race or ethnicity is examined, however, African Americans and Latinos "show greater support for both structural and individualistic thinking in comparison with whites" (Hunt, 1996, p. 314).

Regardless of what people believe about the cause(s) of poverty, there is much common ground concerning the effect of poverty on students. All along the political spectrum most seem to agree that educational inequities represent a significant problem for those students residing in poverty. "Poor nutrition and illness cause students (a) to miss school more often and (b) to be less prepared to learn when they attend. Within the disadvantaged home, parents often have relationships with their children that are, emotionally and physically, less healthy" (Harris, 2006, p. 1). Harris elaborated, stating that the longer a student remains in these conditions the more detrimental the effects (p. 1).

There has been growing discussion about the effects of poverty from the standpoint of "group beliefs." Abelev (2009) addressed poverty in terms of social class worldview and resilience. She referenced Bourdieu's description of habitus and described the implications for the school setting.

> "Bourdieu describes differences between the worldview of groups, especially social classes, as habitus. The concept encompasses the norms, beliefs, speech patterns and interactional style that members of a group internalize and accept as

> doxa, or Truth, and then view as common sense, or the way things should be done. (Abelev, 2009, p. 134)

Abelev (2009) also explained that "people who have a different habitus are seen not just as doing things differently, but instead lacking common sense and going against Truth, which, in turn, leads people with differing habitus to question others' morality, intellect, common sense, and worth" (p. 119). The implications for schools in this understanding is that a student, or group of students, who have a different habitus than the teachers or administrators run the risk of being judged as inferior. When students act in a way that is not acceptable within the middle class habitus of the school they attend, most likely they will be judged as either misbehaving or not having the intellect to "get it".

Another hotly debated assumption concerning characteristics of the under-privileged is that they have inferior work habits. This assumption has ties to the individualistic viewpoint as a possible explanation for poverty. In his description of the myth associated with the culture of poverty, Gorski (2008) took issue with this assumption. "Poor people do not have weaker work ethics or lower levels of motivation than wealthier people (Iversen & Farber, 1996; Wilson, 1997). Although poor people are often stereotyped as lazy, 83 percent of children from low income families have at least one employed parent" (p. 33).

To address this assumption of inferior work ethic or laziness as the cause of poverty, recent studies are concentrating on the non-cognitive aspects of habitus.

Researchers have started looking at other skills beyond intelligence and actual knowledge which could predict success in the society of the 21st century.

O'Connell & Sheikh (2008) looked at the role of ARAs (achievement-related attitudes) for an individual's success within the labour market. ARAs can be summarized in six basic categories: work ethic, internal locus-of-control, well-socialized (willingness to help others, family planning and how one socializes), belief in the potential of education, deferring current consumption for future reward, and finally, materialistic-/prospect-oriented view on work. O'Connell and Sheikh found that these non-cognitive traits were very important to the success of students not only in school but in the workplace. Even more importantly, O'Connell and Sheikh found that although ARAs were important for all workers, "ARAs matter much more for people who are at risk of becoming poor" (p. 511).

Other studies have also focused on some of the attributes of achievement-related attitudes. In a longitudinal study of eighth graders, Duckworth and Seligman (2005) found that self-discipline was more important in predicting academic success than IQ. Their findings suggested that the major reason students do not reach their intellectual potential is their failure to exercise self-discipline.

> We suggest another reason for students falling short of their intellectual potential: their failure to exercise self-discipline. As McClure (1986) has speculated, "Our society's emphasis on instant gratification may mean that young students are unable to delay gratification long enough to achieve academic competence" (p. 20). We believe that many of America's children have trouble making choices

> that require them to sacrifice short-term pleasure for long-term gain, and that programs that build self-discipline may be the royal road to building academic achievement (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005, p. 944).

Heckman, Stixrud and Urzua (2006) advanced the discussion in their examination of the role non-cognitive skills have on the labor market and behavioral outcomes. They found that the improvement of "non-cognitive skills from the lowest to the highest level has an effect on behavior comparable to or greater than a corresponding change in cognitive skills" (p. 413). They also discussed the contradictory nature of their findings to the "theory . . . that focuses on the primacy of cognitive skills in explaining socioeconomic outcomes" (p. 414). This highlights the importance of childhood programs such as Headstart and the Perry Preschool Program and the part they play in teaching non-cognitive skills like self discipline.

> Our demonstration that non-cognitive skills are important in explaining a diverse array of behaviors helps to explain why early childhood programs . . . are effective. The evidence from these programs indicates that they do not boost IQ, but they raise non-cognitive skills and therefore promote success in social and economic life. (Heckman et al., 2006, p. 478)

Another appealing aspect of emphasizing the non-cognitive approach is that "acquisition of these abilities is a great deal more flexible and malleable, and with a wider window of influence than the development of intelligence" (O'Connell & Sheikh, 2008, p. 510).

> Given the evidence on the quantitative importance of non-cognitive traits, social policy should be more active in attempting to alter them, especially for children from disadvantaged environments who receive poor discipline and encouragement at home. This would include mentoring programs and stricter enforcement of discipline in the schools. Such interventions will benefit the child and the larger society but at the same time may conflict with the liberal value of the sanctity of families that undervalue self-discipline and motivation and resent the imposition of middle-class values on their children. (Heckman, & Rubinstein, 2001, p. 148)

Datcher-Loury (1989) studied a group of low-income African American children from three sites to determine if differences in academic performance were attributable "to differences in behavior and attitudes among the families" (p. 529). Based on the results of the students' achievement on reading and math tests and on interviews with and observations of the children's mothers, Datcher-Loury concluded that differences in family behavior and attitudes did have "large and important long-term effects on children's academic performance" (p. 539). Given these results, Datcher-Loury suggested that "programs aimed at altering parental behavior may be useful in helping to overcome the effects of economic disadvantage on children's scholastic achievement" (p. 543).

> Thus, the attitudes and behaviors necessary to overcome handicaps of limited financial resources are within the realm of possibility for some of these parents. It also is consistent with the contention that differences in family behavior and attitudes have large and important long-term effects on children's academic performance. (Datcher-Loury, 1989, p. 543)

The Influence of Low Socioeconomic Status on Disparity

Socioeconomic status (SES) can have a profound effect on how a student is disciplined. Students who receive free or reduced lunch are more likely to receive discipline consequences than those students who do not (Skiba et al., 2002). It is also believed low SES students will receive harsher discipline as found by Brantlinger (1991) in interviews with students from both high and low income residential areas. "Teachers frequently view low income students as having the highest potential for behavior problems. Consequently, students from low-income homes, regardless of ethnicity, are disciplined more often by teachers than are middle-class white students" (Walker-Dalhouse, 2005, p. 25).

One of the questions Skiba et al. (2002) addressed was whether the disproportionate number of African American students referred for discipline was related to the higher number of African American students who come from low socioeconomic status homes. In a statistical analysis of disciplined African American students and their corresponding socioeconomic status, there was shown to be no reduction in the disproportional ratios (Skiba et al., 2002). This would seem to indicate that there is no correlation between the high number of African American students referred for discipline and the correspondingly high number of African American students who are from low SES families.

Ruby Payne, in her 1996 work directed at understanding poverty, suggested that one of the reasons students from economically disadvantaged homes find themselves in trouble at school more often than students who are not from low socioeconomic status

homes is because they do not understand the hidden rules and language of their middle class teachers and administrators who run their schools. Payne expressed the belief that many discipline problems involving low economic students resulted from misunderstanding and miscommunication due to the use of language register differences between mostly middle class teachers and their low socioeconomic status students.

> It is important to note that the approach to discipline advocated in this book is to teach a separate set of behaviors. Many of the behaviors that students bring to school are necessary to help them survive outside of school. Just as students learn to use various rules, depending on the computer game they're playing, they also need to learn to use certain rules to be successful in school settings and circumstances. (Payne, 1996, p. 77)

The concepts put forth by Payne have come under much scrutiny and condemnation (Bomer et al., 2008; Gorski, 2008). The two main objections to Payne's work were concerned with the fact that it was not research-based. Secondly, according to Bomer et al., "her work represents a classic example of what has been identified as deficit thinking" (p. 2522). The simple definition of deficit thinking is the belief that "students who struggle in school do so because of their own internal deficits or deficiencies" (Bomer et al., 2008, p. 2523) which is a way of blaming the victim.

Payne posited that there is a culture of poverty that carries over into the classroom and makes it more difficult for under-privileged students to be successful in the school environment. She identified one of the areas where this culture manifests itself as being that of discipline. A close analysis and comparison of Payne's beliefs with those who

disagree with her shows that the two sides have actually identified similar problems but have expressed widely differing views as to the cause and methods of addressing the problems. Both sides have agreed that students from homes with low socioeconomic status do not, as a group, perform well in school and they find themselves in trouble more often than other students. Both sides also agree that one of the reasons students from lower socioeconomic homes perform poorly is that there is a cultural misunderstanding between the students and those teaching in and managing the schools.

Delpit (1988) also called for educators to teach students the "hidden rules". She differed from Payne, however, as to why students should learn these rules. Payne believed that these hidden rules were what make individuals successful, believing these rules differentiate socioeconomic groups regardless of ethnicity or race. In contrast, Delpit believed these rules were just the tools of oppression by those having power and that "even while students are assisted in learning the culture of power, they must also be helped to learn about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relationships they represent" (Delpit, 1988, p. 296).

Redeaux (2011) contrasted the differences between Payne's approach to poverty and Delpit's approach to poverty in *The Culture of Poverty Reloaded.*

> The key distinction between Delpit and Payne is the reason *why* they believe students should be taught the 'hidden rules.' Payne argues that their educational and economic success depend on their being able to conform to the rules of the middle/upper class. While Delpit, too, makes this argument, she does not believe that students should passively adopt an alternate code simply because it is the

> 'way things are,' especially if they want to achieve a particular economic status. Instead, Delpit asserts that students need to know and understand the power realities of this country *with the purpose of changing these realities*. (p. 100)

Often students from families of low socioeconomic status are not only working with fewer resources and support than students from families of higher socioeconomic status, but they often view the school environment from a different "habitus" with different rules and codes. As summarized by Abelev (2009), they not only need to be taught the achievement-related attitudes (ARAs), but they also need to be taught the "hidden codes" operating within their school environments:.

> The policy implications of this study are that those programs that do not address habitus are missing a critical component of resilience. . . .Thus, while building children's personal characteristics is important, as is developing the protective factors in the family, community and school, they will not be sufficient if they are not also coupled with an understanding of how to operate within differing social milieus and what the expectations for interactional patterns are in powerful institutions. (p. 135)

Disparity in Types of Discipline

Not only is the total number of discipline referrals disproportionate for different student groups, particularly African American students, but there is also a disparity in the type of discipline referrals. "One pattern is that African American students are over-represented in disciplinary referrals. The other pattern is that discipline for defiance is

the most frequent reason for sanctioning adolescents" (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008, p. 459).

Of interest, are the findings in several studies that white students are most often referred for behaviors that are "objective" in nature, like truancy and vandalism. By contrast, African American students are most often referred for offenses that are "subjective" in nature, such as disrespectful and aggressive behaviors. There seems to be a cultural bias (Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008, p. 293), but the question remains as to whether that bias is related to ethnic/racial bias and prejudice, or rather a socioeconomic status bias

Researchers have not found a disparity in the number of discipline referrals for serious behaviors for different student groups, but Gṛegory et al. (2010) determined that white students were referred more often for causes that were "objectively observable," and African American students were referred far more often for behaviors that were "subjective in nature" (p. 62).

The Influence of Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Discipline Disparities

McCarthy and Hoge (1987) considered the cause of the disparity for different student groups and concluded that the teacher's knowledge of the student's discipline history had a significant impact on the teacher's perception of the student's demeanor.

> We see that the disproportionate punishment received by the black students in our second wave of data collection occurs because of the teacher's evaluation of the student's demeanor, the student's grades in the previous semester, and the

> student's punishment history in the previous year. There is no significant direct effect of race once these effects of additional information are included in the model. (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987, p. 1114)

McCarthy and Hoge also speculated that "since socially disadvantaged persons are likely to be found deficient in perceived demeanor, academic performance, and punishment history, the result is a system which perpetuates social disadvantage" (p. 1117).

The perceptions influencing the relationship between behavior and disciplinary action have not been limited to those involving teacher perceptions about students, but also student perceptions about teachers and administrators. "The importance of examining student's perceptions or view should not be underestimated. How an individual perceives his or her environment may be more important than "objective reality," in that one's' perceptions will influence how one responds to the environment" (Ruck & Wortley, 2002, p. 186).

In a study of minority students in a Canadian high school, Ruck and Wortley (2002) reported some interesting findings regarding students' perceptions concerning discipline and authority. They found that minority students were more likely to perceive discriminatory treatment towards their minority group than whites, and lower socioeconomic status students were even more likely to perceive bias toward their particular minority in the treatment they received from both police and school officials. Of interest was the finding that students who believed in more severe punishment for misbehavior were "less likely to perceive that students from their racial/ethnic group

would be discriminated against in terms of teacher treatment, school suspension, police contact, and police treatment" (Ruck & Wortley, 2002, p. 192).

There are several studies that have been conducted in which the perceptions of students and teachers concerning discipline in the school setting were analyzed (Brantlinger, 1991; Ruck & Wortley, 2002). These studies have shown that there is a perception among students from low socioeconomic status homes that they get in trouble more often for incidents that are subjective in nature. There has not been a study that focused on student discipline data to see if there are actual disproportional subjective discipline incidents for students from low socioeconomic status homes.

Summary

This chapter has provided a review of the literature related to the problem of this study. The review began with a historical overview of school discipline. A second major section addressed several aspects of disparity in discipline. Included were zero tolerance policies as they relate to disparities, causes of disparity as both a result of behavior and as a result of culture and cultural differences. Literature related to the culture of poverty and the influences of low socioeconomic status on disparity were also reviewed. Finally literature and research on the disparity in types of discipline, objective and subjective, as well as the influence of teachers' and students' perceptions of discipline disparities was reviewed.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study will examine all the discipline referrals given to the students in the middle and high schools in one central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010. Two main questions will be asked. Do different student groups receive a disproportionate number of subjective discipline referrals? What is the relationship between subjective discipline referrals and a student's racial, ethnic and/or socioeconomic background?

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methods and procedures used in the collection and analysis of data for this study. The sections of this chapter are organized as follows: (a) statement of the problem, (b) research questions, (c) methodology, (d) data collection and analysis of data.

Problem Statement

The problem of disparity in school discipline for different student groups has been well documented (Brantlinger, 1991; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba et al., 2002). The subjectivity of discipline for different student groups has been a part of that discussion (Brown & Beckett, 2006; Fenning & Rose, 2007, Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Skiba et al., 2002). Researchers have shown that students perceive there is disparity (Brantlinger, 1991; Ruck & Wortley, 2002). Despite the discussions concerning the subjectivity of discipline for different student groups, there have been few studies to determine the

actual relationship between subjective or objective discipline referrals and gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. To date there is insufficient information about the relationship between the subjectivity of discipline referrals and student group variables.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions and hypotheses:

1. To what extent is there a difference in objective (exact) and subjective (ambiguous) discipline referrals in terms of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status?
2. To what extent is there a relationship between student groups (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) and discipline referral type?

Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in objective discipline referrals between genders at the .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in objective discipline referrals between different ethnicities at the .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in objective discipline referrals between different socioeconomic groups at the .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 4: There is no difference in subjective discipline referrals between genders at the .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 5: There is no difference in subjective discipline referrals between different ethnicities at the .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 6: There is no difference in subjective discipline referrals between different socioeconomic groups at the .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 7: There is no relationship between student groups (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) when considering objective/subjective discipline types at the .05 significance level.

Methodology

Discipline referrals were collected from all the middle and high schools in a central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010. Each discipline referral included the following information: an anonymous student identification number, school, grade, gender, ethnicity, whether or not the student was eligible for free or reduced lunch, and the discipline referral type.

To test the hypotheses, the 54 different discipline types found in the data were classified as either subjective or objective. The objective or subjective discipline categories became the discipline type variable. A discipline referral for which there is a clear and concise understanding of the infraction and which school personnel apply discipline consistently was considered an objective discipline referral. A discipline referral for which there is not a clear and concise understanding of the infraction and which school personnel apply discipline inconsistently was considered a subjective discipline referral.

Determination of the subjectivity or objectivity of different discipline referrals was based on the results of an on-line survey (Appendix A) given to 84 instructional

personnel at a central Florida middle school. They were asked to rate as subjective or objective each of the 54 different types of discipline referrals (Appendix B) given during the school year 2009-2010. A discipline type is considered subjective if 70% or more of the survey respondents considered it so. (Appendix C)

The 84 members of the instructional staff at the central Florida middle school were contacted via email and invited to participate in an on-line survey (Appendix D) via a web-link which was placed in the e-mail message. The survey was confidential and anonymous. The participants were allowed to take the survey only once. Reminder e-mails were sent one week and then again two weeks after the original invitation. A total of 61 instructional staff members responded. The discipline types considered subjective are noted in Appendix C. The data set was re-coded to reflect this analysis.

Data analysis used both a duplicated data set and an unduplicated data set. The duplicated data set included each individual discipline referral collected from all the middle and high schools for the school year 2009-2010 in the central Florida public school district. The unduplicated discipline referral data set counted each student only once by using an average score for the students who had more than one discipline referral. If students had 10 discipline referrals and six of them were subjective, they received an average discipline score of 0.6. Students who had only objective discipline referrals received a discipline score of 0.0, and those who had only subjective referrals received a discipline score of 1.0. For the unduplicated data set, each student who received a discipline referral was counted only once regardless of the total number of referrals that student received. For the unduplicated data set, the scores calculated from

the average of the combined subjective and objective discipline referrals for a single student became the discipline type variable. The average scores were grouped and re-coded (Appendix E) to keep the cross tabs analysis of this data at a manageable size. The use of unduplicated referral counts allowed for the analysis of data that was not influenced by repeat offenders.

The gender variable was coded as male or female. The ethnicity variable was coded into the six subgroups reported by the Florida Department of Education; American Indian, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Multiracial and White. The classification for the socioeconomic status variable was determined by free or reduced lunch classification (Harris, 2006). Students who received free or reduced lunch were determined to have low socioeconomic status. Those who did not receive free or reduce lunch were classified middle/high socioeconomic status.

The first purpose of the research was to determine to what extent there was a difference in objective (exact) and subjective (ambiguous) discipline referrals in terms of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The analysis required the use of the data set that included all the discipline referrals and the data set that included unduplicated discipline referrals as explained above. Second the research determined to what extent there is a relationship between student groups (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) and discipline referral types. The analysis also utilized the duplicated and unduplicated data sets.

Before the hypotheses were tested, simple non-parametric Chi-Squared Frequency Tests were applied to each category of student groups to determine if the data set used in

this research contained disproportionate administration of discipline referrals. The projection of expected referral frequencies for the Chi-squared frequency tests were based on the student population counts and percentages for each student group (Appendix F) as obtained from the Florida Department of Education (Florida Department of Education, 2010).

To test the hypothesis to determine if there was a difference in objective or subjective discipline referrals for different student groups, a cross tabs analysis was performed. The student group variables, (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) were each compared separately to the subjective/objective discipline type variable. This analysis produced a Pearson Chi-Square Test of Independence score. The Phi and Cramer's V test were performed to determine effect size.

To test the hypothesis regarding the relationship between student groups (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) and discipline referral type, a layered, cross tabs analysis was performed. The layered cross tabs analysis again produced a Pearson Chi-Square Test of Independence score and a Phi and Cramer's V effect size score.

Data Collection and Analysis

The statistical analysis package PASW Statistics GradPack (18.0.0) was used to analyze the data collected from a central Florida public school district. The data consisted of 42,441 discipline referrals from nine high schools, 12 middle schools and eight special education centers. The 42,441 discipline referrals were administered to

11,223 students. There were 35,881 students enrolled in the 29 schools during the 2009-2010 school year.

The first purpose of the research was to determine to what extent there was a difference in objective (exact) and subjective (ambiguous) discipline referrals in terms of gender. First the researcher determined the difference for objective and subjective discipline referrals, by gender, with duplicated data (all the referrals) and with unduplicated data. Second the researcher determined the difference for objective and subjective discipline referrals, by ethnicity, with duplicated and unduplicated data. Third the researcher determined the difference for objective and subjective discipline referrals, by socioeconomic status, with duplicated and unduplicated data.

The second purpose of the research was to determine to what extent there was a relationship between student groups (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) and discipline referral type. The researcher determined if there was a relationship between student groups by using a layered crosstabs analysis for gender and socioeconomic status compared to objective and subjective referrals. The layered crosstabs analysis was repeated using ethnicity and socioeconomic status in comparison to objective and subjective referrals.

The first hypothesis was that there is no difference in objective discipline referrals between genders as measured in a central Florida public school system at the .05 significance level. The second hypothesis was that there is no difference in objective discipline referrals between different ethnic groups as measured in a central Florida public school system at the .05 significance level. The third hypothesis was that there is

no difference in objective discipline referrals between different socioeconomic status groups as measured in a central Florida public school system at the .05 significance level.

The fourth hypothesis was that there is no difference in subjective discipline referrals between genders as measured in a central Florida public school system at the .05 significance level. The fifth hypothesis was that there is no difference in subjective discipline referrals between different ethnic groups as measured in a central Florida public school system at the .05 significance level. The sixth hypothesis was that there is no difference in subjective discipline referrals between different socioeconomic status groups as measured in a central Florida public school system at the .05 significance level.

The seventh hypothesis was that there is no relationship between student groups (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) when considering objective/subjective discipline types at the .05 significance level.

Summary

The methodology used in the collection of data for this study has been explained in Chapter 3. The population was described, and the design for research and the methods of analysis were also presented. Chapter 4 contains the results of the data analysis. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the findings, conclusions, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The problem of disparity in school discipline for different student groups has been well documented (Brantlinger, 1991; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba et al., 2002). The data for this research study also confirmed that trend. The subjectivity of discipline for different student groups has been a part of the disparity discussion (Brown & Beckett, 2006; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Skiba et al., 2002). Researchers have shown that students perceive there is disparity (Brantlinger, 1991; Ruck & Wortley, 2002). Despite the discussions concerning the subjectivity of discipline for different student groups, there have been few studies to determine the actual relationship between subjective or objective discipline referrals and gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

This study was conducted to examine the extent to which there was a difference in objective or subjective discipline referrals among different student groups for the middle and high school students in a central Florida Public School District for the school year 2009-2010. The study was also focused on the relationship between student groups when considering subjective and objective discipline referrals. The analyses of the discipline data obtained from the central Florida Public School District, which was the target of this research, are presented in this chapter.

Description of the Discipline Data

Analysis of the discipline data from the middle and high schools in a central Florida Public School District revealed interesting results concerning the numbers of subjective and objective discipline referrals for different student groups. The data for student population numbers and percentages for the different student groups for the school year 2009-2010 are presented in Appendix F. During the 2009-2010 school year, there were 35,881 students enrolled in grades 6-12 in the school district being examined in this study. The data revealed 42,441 discipline referrals given to 11,223 different students.

There were 54 different referral types (Appendix B) represented in the data. The frequency of the discipline types are presented in Appendix G. For the purposes of this study, the 42,441 discipline referrals were categorized as either subjective or objective as determined by the survey (Appendix A). There were 13,875 (32.7%) subjective and 28,566 (67.3%) objective discipline referrals in the data.

The purposes of the research questions were to determine if there were relationships between certain variables in student discipline data. Simple one-sample chi-square tests were performed to assess the data and to determine if the student groups were disproportionally represented with discipline referrals.

For the gender defined student groups 14,514 referrals were administered to females and 27,927 referrals were administered to males. A one-sample chi-square test was performed to assess whether boys or girls were disproportionally represented in discipline referrals. The results for the test were significant, χ^2 (1, N = 42441) = 3671.17,

$p < .01$. The proportion for boys, ($p = .658$) was much greater than the expected proportion of .511. Conversely, the proportion for girls ($p = .342$) was much less than the expected proportion of .489. Table 1 shows the frequencies, actual percentages found in the study, and the expected percentages.

Table 1

Discipline Referral Frequencies and Percentages as Determined by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage of Total Referrals	Percentage of Total Student Population
Female	14,541	34.2	48.9
Male	27,927	65.8	51.1
Total	*42,441*	*100.0*	*100.0*

The distribution of discipline referrals for ethnic groups indicated 560 referrals for Asians, 12,764 referrals for Blacks, 8,515 referrals for Hispanics, 102 referrals for American Indians, 2,490 referrals for Multiracial, and 18,010 referrals for Whites.

A one-sample chi-square test was performed to assess whether ethnicity was disproportionally represented in discipline referrals. The results for the test were significant, χ^2 (5, N = 42441) = 11539.88, $p < .01$. The proportion for Whites, ($P = .424$) was less than the expected proportion of .589. The proportion for African Americans, ($p = .301$) was greater than the expected proportion of .134. The proportion for Hispanics, ($p = .201$) was slightly greater than the expected proportion of .184. The proportion for Asians, ($p = .013$) was slightly less than the expected proportion of .038. The proportion for American Indians, ($p = .002$) was equal to the expected proportion of .002. The

proportion for Multiracial, (p = .059) was slightly higher than the expected proportion of .053. Table 2 shows the frequencies, actual percentages found in the study, and the expected percentages.

Table 2

Discipline Referral Frequencies and Percentages as Determined by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage of Total Referrals	Percentage of Total Student Population
Asian	560	1.3	3.8
Black	12,764	30.1	13.4
Hispanic	8,515	20.1	18.4
American Indian	102	0.2	0.2
Multiracial	2,490	5.9	5.3
White	18,010	42.4	58.9
Total	*42,441*	*100.0*	*100.0*

For the socioeconomic status student groups, those who were classified as low socioeconomic status received 25,743 discipline referrals, and those students classified as middle/upper socioeconomic status received 16,698 discipline referrals. A one-sample chi-square test was performed to assess whether socioeconomic status was disproportionally represented in discipline referrals. The results for the test were significant, χ^2 (1, N = 42,441) = 7002.97, P < .01. The proportion for low SES, (p = .607) was much greater than the expected proportion of .407. Conversely, the proportion for higher SES (p = .393 was much less than the expected proportion of .593. Table 3 shows the frequencies, actual percentages found in the study, and the expected percentages.

Table 3

Discipline Referral Frequencies and Percentages as Determined by Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic Status	Frequency	Percentage of Total Referrals	Percentage of Total Student Population
Upper/Middle SES	16,698	39.3	59.3
Low SES	25,743	60.7	40.7
Total	*42,441*	*100.0*	*100.0*

These tests demonstrated that the data from the targeted central Florida public school district revealed disproportional representation for the student groups by gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

Research Question 1

To what extent is there a difference in objective or subjective discipline referrals among different student groups (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) for the middle and high school students in a central Florida Public School District for the school year 2009-2010.

To analyze the difference in subjective and objective discipline referrals among student groups, a separate two-way contingency table analysis was performed for each of the three student groups: gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The two-way contingency table analyses produced Pearson chi-square test of homogeneity scores and Phi and Cramér's V effect size scores. If a variable in a two-way contingency table analysis has more than two levels, additional analyses were necessary to establish exactly

where differences occurred. Two of the variables, gender and socioeconomic status, had only two sub-levels; thus, no further analysis was necessary to draw conclusions from the results. The student group variable, ethnicity, had six sublevels and further analysis was necessary to draw conclusions from the results for that variable. Further analysis of the ethnicity variable is explained in the differences for ethnicity section.

Relationship of Subjective and Objective Discipline Differences for Gender

A two-way contingency table analysis was performed to evaluate to what extent there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals in terms of gender. Gender and discipline referral type proportions were found to be significantly different, Person χ^2 (1, N = 42,441) = 190.05, $p < .01$, Cramér's V = .067. For female students the proportion was .283 to .717 for subjective and objective discipline referrals respectively. The proportion for males was .350 to .650 for subjective and objective discipline referrals respectively. Table 4 reports the discipline referral subjective and objective frequencies and percentages for gender.

Table 4

Subjective and Objective Discipline Referral Frequencies and Percentages by Gender

Gender	Subjective Frequency	Subjective Percentage	Objective Frequency	Objective Percentage
Male	9,762	35.0	18,165	65.0
Female	4,113	28.3	10,401	71.7
Total Population	*13,875*	*32.7*	*28,566*	*67.3*

Note. Total Population Percentages Also Represent the Expected Percentages

The Cramér's V score showed a small effect size. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 4 were rejected. It was concluded that there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals between genders at the .05 significance level.

Relationship of Subjective and Objective Discipline Differences for Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status for this study was determined by whether a student qualified for free or reduced lunch. Those who qualified for free or reduced lunch were classified with low socioeconomic status. Those who did not qualify for free or reduced lunch were classified as middle/upper socioeconomic status.

A two-way contingency table analysis was performed to evaluate to what extent there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals as related to socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status and discipline type proportions were also found to be significantly different, Person χ^2 (1, N = 42,441) = 280.73, $p < .01$, Cramér's V = .071. For low socioeconomic students, the proportion was .358 to .642 for subjective and objective discipline referrals respectively. The proportion for middle/upper socioeconomic students was .280 to .720 for subjective and objective discipline referrals respectively. Table 5 reports the discipline referral subjective and objective frequencies and percentages for socioeconomic status.

Table 5

Subjective and Objective Discipline Referral Frequencies and Percentages by Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic Status (SES)	Subjective Frequency	Subjective Percentage	Objective Frequency	Objective Percentage
Low SES	9,207	35.8	16,536	64.2
Mid/High SES	4,668	28.0	12,030	72.0
Total Population	*13,875*	*32.7*	*28,566*	*67.3*

Note. Total Population Percentages Also Represent the Expected Percentages

The Cramér's V score showed a small effect size. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 6 were rejected. It was concluded that there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals between socioeconomic groups at the .05 significance level.

Relationship of Subjective and Objective Discipline Differences for Ethnicity

A two-way contingency table analysis was performed to evaluate the extent to which there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals in terms of ethnicity. Ethnicity and discipline type proportions were also found to be significantly different, Person χ^2 (5, N = 42,441) = 311.24, $p < .01$, Cramér's V = .086. The Cramér's V score showed a small effect size. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 5 were rejected. It was concluded that there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals for ethnic groups at the .05 significance level. Further analysis was necessary to determine the source of the proportional differences. The percentages of subjective and objective referrals for each ethnic group are reported in Table 6.

Table 6

Subjective and Objective Discipline Referral Frequencies and Percentages by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Subjective Frequency	Subjective Percentage	Objective Frequency	Objective Percentage
Asian	97	17.3	463	82.7
Black	4,891	38.3	7,883	61.7
Hispanic	2,569	30.2	5,946	69.8
American Indian	29	28.4	73	71.6
Multiracial	809	32.5	1,681	67.5
White	5,480	30.4	12,530	69.6
Total Population	*13,875*	*32.7*	*28,566*	*67.3*

Note. Total Population Percentages also Represent the Expected Percentages

To determine the source of the proportional differences within the six ethnicity groups, each group was compared individually to the other five groups. This resulted in 15 pairwise comparisons which in turn created multiple hypotheses. Controlling for a Type I error when multiple hypotheses are present can be accounted for by using the Bonferroni method (Green & Salkind, 2008, p. 418). The Bonferroni method uses a smaller *p* or alpha value (α) for each comparison between levels. The smaller alpha value (α_{pc}) is determined by taking the group alpha value and dividing it by the number of pair wise comparison. The Bonferroni method was used for this study. The α_{pc} for the ethnicity pairwise comparisons was determined with the equation $.05(\alpha) /15 = .003(\alpha_{pc})$.

A closer examination and analysis of the fifteen possible pair wise comparisons generated the results displayed in Table 7. The pairs that have a *p* value less than .003 were considered to have significantly different proportions.

Table 7

Pairwise Comparisons of Ethnic Groups to Determine Significant Difference Using Chi-Square by Chi-Square Score

Ethnic Groups Compared	Pearson Chi-square (χ^2)	*p* value(α)	Cramér's V
White – Black[a]	208.19	0.000	0.082
Black – Hispanic[a]	148.96	0.000	0.084
Black – Asian[a]	100.98	0.000	0.087
Asian – Multiracial[a]	50.38	0.000	0.129
White – Asian[a]	44.40	0.000	0.049
Hispanic – Asian[a]	41.81	0.000	0.068
Black to Multiracial[a]	30.25	0.000	0.045
Asian – American Indian	6.91	0.009	0.102
Hispanic – Multiracial	4.87	0.027	0.021
White – Multiracial	4.38	0.036	0.015
Black – American Indian	4.19	0.041	0.018
American Indian – Multiracial	0.74	0.390	0.017
White – American Indian	0.19	0.662	0.003
White – Hispanic	0.18	0.670	0.003
Hispanic – American Indian	0.15	0.704	0.004

[a] significant with $\alpha < .003$

Eight of the 15 comparisons were not considered to have statistically different proportions for subjective and objective discipline referrals. Of the eight, five involved comparisons with the American Indian student group. The American Indian group only represented 0.2 percent of the total student population and in the total discipline referral sample. The small sample size of this group may have influenced the results for those comparisons. The three remaining comparisons that were not significantly different were the White – Multiracial comparison, the White – Hispanic comparison and the Hispanic – Multiracial comparison. The seven pairwise comparisons that were considered

significantly different involved either the Asian student group or the Black student group. Table 6 indicated that the Asian and Black student group percentages had a greater variation from the expected proportions then did the other ethnic groups. Although both the Asian and Black groups showed a greater variation away from the expected proportions, they were different in that the Asian student group referrals were skewed towards the objective referral types and the black student group referrals were skewed towards the subjective referral types.

Thus, although Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 5 could be rejected in general terms, the rejection was qualified by differentiating the rejection for certain groups and not others. It was concluded that there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals at the .003 significance level for the Black and Asian ethnic groups when compared with other groups. When, however, the ethnic groups of Hispanic, American Indian, Multiracial and White were compared to each other, there was not a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals at the .003 significance level.

Consideration of Unduplicated Data

Also considered in this study was the impact multiple referrals given to a single student would have on data analysis. This consideration was accomplished by using unduplicated data. The unduplicated data contained one average score for each student who received one or more discipline referrals for the school year 2009-2010. The average discipline referral scores for each student were calculated by taking the average of all the referrals a single student received. An objective discipline referral received a

score of 0.0 and a subjective referral received a score of 1.0. The average scores were grouped (Appendix E) to keep the average score variable levels to a manageable number. The Frequency Table for grouped average scores can be viewed in Appendix H.

A two-way contingency table analysis was performed to evaluate to what extent there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals in terms of gender for unduplicated data. Gender and subjective /objective discipline referral proportions for unduplicated data were found to be significantly different, Person χ^2 (10, N = 11,223) = 197.65, $p < .01$, Cramér's V = .133. It was concluded that there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals between genders at the .05 significance level. The Cramér's V score showed a small effect size. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 4 were rejected for the unduplicated data.

Socioeconomic Status and subjective/objective discipline referral proportions were also found to be significantly different, Person χ^2 (10, N = 11,223) = 361.78, $p < .01$, Cramér's V = .180. It was concluded that there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals between socioeconomic groups at the .05 significance level. The Cramér's V score showed a small effect size. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 6 were rejected for the unduplicated data.

The cross tabs analysis of ethnicity and subjective/objective discipline referral proportions showed significant differences, Person χ^2 (50, N = 11,223) = 421.74, $p < .01$, Cramér's V = .087. It was concluded that there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals between ethnic groups at the .05 significance level. The

Cramér's V score showed a small effect size. Thus, Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 5 were rejected for the unduplicated data.

Table 8 displays the results of the analysis of duplicated and unduplicated data when considering objective and subjective discipline referrals for the student groups of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Analysis of the unduplicated data showed that an even stronger statistically significant difference was found in the unduplicated data than was found in the duplicated data. For that reason, additional analysis of unduplicated data was not considered necessary to answer Research Question 2.

Table 8

Comparison of Duplicated and Unduplicated Student Discipline Referral Data Analysis for Gender, Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic Status

Test Measure	Duplicated Data N = 42,441	Unduplicated Data N = 11,223
Gender		
Pearson Chi-square (χ^2)	190.05	197.65
Cramér's V	.067	.133
Ethnicity		
Pearson Chi-square (χ^2)	311.24	421.74
Cramér's V	.086	.087
Socioeconomic Status		
Pearson Chi-square (χ^2)	280.73	361.78
Cramér's V	.081	.180

Note. Alpha value (α) was < .01 for all analysis.

Research Question 2

To what extent is there a relationship between student groups (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) when considering subjective and objective discipline referrals for the middle and high school students in a central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010?

To determine the relationship between student groups, in regard to subjective and objective discipline referrals, layered, two-way contingency table analyses were performed. The layered, two-way contingency table analyses produced Pearson chi-square test of homogeneity scores and Phi and Cramér's V effect size scores. First a layered, two-way contingency table analysis using the variables, gender and socioeconomic status, was performed. Next a layered, two-way contingency table analysis using the variables, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, was performed. Because the ethnicity variable had six sublevels, additional analysis was necessary to draw conclusions from the initial results. Further explanation of the layered, two-way contingency table analysis of ethnicity and socioeconomic status is provided as part of the data analysis summary ethnicity and socioeconomic section.

Relationship of Subjective and Objective Discipline for Gender and Socioeconomic Status

The analysis of subjective and objective discipline referral proportions, when accounting for gender and socioeconomic status, resulted in a significant difference for both genders. For females, there was a significant proportional difference between low and middle/upper socioeconomic students, Pearson χ^2 (1, N = 42441) = 221.28, $p < .01$,

Cramér's V = .123. The analysis for males also showed a significant proportional difference between low and middle/upper socioeconomic students, Pearson χ^2 (1, N = 42441) = 104.80, $p < .01$, Cramér's V = .061. The analysis for both the male and female sub groups showed a small effect size. Therefore, Hypothesis 7 was rejected for gender and socioeconomic status. It was concluded that there was a relationship between the student groups' gender and socioeconomic status when observing objective/subjective discipline types at the .05 significance level. Data for gender and socioeconomic status has consistently shown statistically significant differences throughout this research study.

Relationship of Subjective and Objective Discipline for Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status

A layered, two-way contingency table analysis using the variables ethnicity and socioeconomic status was performed. An alpha value of .0083 was established using the Bonferroni method to control for type I error in multiple pairwise comparisons. Table 9 shows the results of the analysis and indicates that there was a relationship when analyzing the proportions of subjective and objective discipline referrals for the ethnic groups, White, Black, Hispanic and American Indian, when layered with socioeconomic status. Table 9 also shows that there was no relationship between ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and discipline referral type for Multiracial and Asian Ethnic groups. Therefore, Hypothesis 7 was partially rejected for ethnicity and socioeconomic status. It was concluded that there was a relationship between some of the ethnic student groups and socioeconomic status.

Table 9

Layered Analysis of Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status: Subjective and Objective Discipline Referral Types by Chi-Square Scores

Layered Comparison for Referral Types	Pearson Chi-square ($\chi 2$)	p value (α)	Cramér's V
White - socioeconomic status[a]	97.41	0.000	0.074
Black - socioeconomic status[a]	41.40	0.000	0.057
Hispanic - socioeconomic status[a]	21.07	0.000	0.050
American Indian - socioeconomic status[a]	8.97	0.003	0.297
Multiracial - socioeconomic status	4.13	0.042	0.041
Asian - socioeconomic status	2.87	0.090	0.072

[a] significant with $\alpha < .008$

Relationship of Subjective and Objective Discipline for Ethnicity and Low Socioeconomic Status

Further analysis was accomplished by examining multiple pairwise comparisons for ethnicity and socioeconomic status. A new variable was established that further sorted ethnicity by lower and middle/upper socioeconomic status. This resulted in two levels (lower and middle/upper socioeconomic status) for each of the six ethnic groups represented in the data, and this created a total of 12 levels within the variable.

The six different ethnic sub-groups classified as low socioeconomic status were found to have significantly different subjective and objective discipline referral proportions, Pearson χ^2 (5, N = 25,743) = 141.27, $p < .01$, Cramér's V = .074.

Further analysis with pairwise comparisons between the six groups for subjective and objective discipline referrals resulted in 15 data sets. The results from the 15 comparisons are displayed in Table 10. The pairwise comparisons that showed a

significant relationship (significant when $\alpha < .003$) are listed in order of Pearson chi-squared score (highest to lowest) in the table.

Table 10

Pairwise Comparisons Between Low Socioeconomic Status (SES), Ethnic Groups: Subjective and Objective Discipline Referral Types by Chi-Square Scores

Layered Comparison	Pearson Chi-square ($\chi 2$)	p value (α)	Cramér's V
Black - Hispanic - Low SES [a]	113.62	0.000	0.082
White - Black - Low SES [a]	42.77	0.000	0.049
Black - Asian - Low SES [a]	25.62	0.000	0.049
Black - Multiracial - Low SES [a]	16.84	0.000	0.037
White - Hispanic - Low SES [a]	15.68	0.000	0.034
White - Asian - Low SES [a]	14.47	0.000	0.045
Asian - Multiracial - Low SES [a]	12.31	0.000	0.086
Hispanic - Asian - Low SES [a]	8.79	0.003	0.036
Asian - American Indian - Low SES	7.14	0.008	0.168
Hispanic - Multiracial - Low SES	3.72	0.054	0.022
Hispanic - American Indian - Low SES	1.22	0.269	0.014
American Indian - Multiracial - Low SES	0.39	0.534	0.016
White - American Indian - Low SES	0.27	0.603	0.006
White - Multiracial - Low SES	0.22	0.637	0.005
Black – American Indian - Low SES	0.10	0.748	0.003

[a] significant with $\alpha < .003$

Relationship of Subjective and Objective Discipline for Ethnicity and Middle/Upper Socioeconomic Status

The same analysis was performed for the six different ethnic groups of students who were classified middle/upper socioeconomic status. The ethnic sub groups classified middle/upper socioeconomic status were also found to have significantly different

subjective and objective discipline referral proportions, Pearson χ^2 (5, N = 16,698) = 60.79, $p < .01$, Cramér's V = .060. Pairwise comparisons between the six groups resulted in 15 data sets. The results from the 15 comparisons are found in Table 11.

Table 11

Pairwise Comparisons Between Middle/Upper Socioeconomic Status Ethnic Groups: Subjective and Objective Discipline Referral Types by Chi-Square Scores

Layer comparison	Pearson Chi-square (χ2)	p value (α)	Cramér's V
Black - Asian - Middle/Upper SES [a]	43.26	0.000	0.130
Asian - Multiracial - Middle/Upper SES [a]	30.67	0.000	0.150
White - Asian - Middle/Upper SES [a]	27.76	0.000	0.049
Hispanic - Asian - Middle/Upper SES [a]	19.77	0.000	0.090
Black - Hispanic - Middle/Upper SES [a]	18.92	0.000	0.067
White - Black - Middle/Upper SES [a]	17.91	0.000	0.037
Black - American Indian - Middle/Upper SES	8.01	0.005	0.060
American Indian - Multiracial - Middle/Upper SES	6.82	0.009	0.081
White - American Indian - Middle/Upper SES	5.72	0.017	0.023
Hispanic - Multiracial - Middle/Upper SES	5.42	0.020	0.042
Hispanic - American Indian - Middle/Upper SES	4.93	0.026	0.048
White - Multiracial - Middle/Upper SES	2.64	0.104	0.015
White - Hispanic - Middle/Upper SES	2.22	0.132	0.013
Black to Multiracial - Middle/Upper SES	1.35	0.245	0.021
Asian - American Indian - Middle/Upper SES	0.96	0.327	0.048

[a] significant with $\alpha < .003$

Table 12 combines the results of the pairwise comparisons for ethnicity (Table 7), the results of the pairwise comparisons for the low socioeconomic status ethnic groups (Table 10) and the results of the pairwise comparisons for the middle/high socioeconomic

status ethnic groups (Table 11). Table 12 presents a side-by-side comparison of the results of the different comparisons for each ethnic group.

Table 12

Comparison of the Significant Difference Results Between Ethnic Groups: Subjective and Objective Referral Types

	Comparisons		
Ethnic Groups	Ethnicity (Table 7)	Low SES (Table 10)	Middle/Upper SES (Table 11)
American Indian - Asian	No Difference	No Difference	No Difference
American Indian - Black	No Difference	No Difference	No Difference
American Indian - Hispanic	No Difference	No Difference	No Difference
American Indian - Multiracial	No Difference	No Difference	No Difference
American Indian - White	No Difference	No Difference	No Difference
Multiracial - Hispanic	No Difference	No Difference	No Difference
Multiracial - White	No Difference	No Difference	No Difference
White - Hispanic	No Difference	Difference	No Difference
Multiracial - Black	Difference	Difference	No Difference
Asian - Black	Difference	Difference	Difference
Asian - Hispanic	Difference	Difference	Difference
Asian - Multiracial	Difference	Difference	Difference
Asian - White	Difference	Difference	Difference
Black - Hispanic	Difference	Difference	Difference
Black - White	Difference	Difference	Difference

Note. SES = Socioeconomic Status.

When comparing the proportional difference for subjective and objective discipline referrals, the American Indian group was not found to have proportional difference with any other groups for any of the three analyses. Also, the Multiracial to Hispanic comparison and Multiracial to White comparison did not indicate a significant

difference in any of the three analyses. Conversely, in the Black and Asian groups proportional differences were found in all three analyses unless paired with the American Indian group. The one exception to this observation occurred when analyzing the middle/upper socioeconomic status pairwise comparison grouping for Multiracial to Black. A significant proportional difference was not found for that comparison. In the pairwise comparison of White to Hispanic for low socioeconomic status (Table 10), a proportional difference was found. No proportional difference, however, was found in the other two analyses of White to Hispanic student groups. Thus, Hypothesis 7 was rejected. It was concluded that when observing the proportions of subjective and objective discipline referrals types, there was a relationship between the student groups' gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status at the .05 significance level.

CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief review of the problem statement, methodology, and data analysis. In addition, a summary and discussion of the findings regarding each research question is included, as well as conclusions drawn from the findings, related implications, recommendations for practice, and suggestions for future research.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, the researcher sought to determine if there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals for the student groups' gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Additionally the study was conducted to investigate the relationship between gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status when considering subjective and objective discipline referral types in a central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010.

Methodology

Data Collection

All the discipline referrals were collected from the middle and high schools in a central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010. The data consisted of 42,441 discipline referrals given to 11,223 different students. There were 54 different referral types (Appendix B) represented in the data. Each discipline referral contained an

anonymous student ID, the referral type, and the student's grade, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, school, and grade level. Of the 42,441 discipline referrals, 13,875 (32.7%) were subjective and 28,566 (67.3%) were objective.

Total enrollment for the 6-12 student population for the central Florida public school district analyzed in this study was 35,881 for the school year 2009-2010. Females comprised 48.9% of the total population and males comprised 51.1%. The percentages for ethnic groups were 58% for Whites, 18.4% for Hispanics, 13.4 % for African Americans, 5.3% for Multiracial, 3.8% for Asians, and 0.2% for American Indians. Students who came from low socioeconomic status homes comprised 40.7% of the population, and students who came from middle or upper socioeconomic status homes comprised 59.3% of the population.

Data Analysis

The data for student population numbers and percentages for the different student groups for the school year 2009-2010 were calculated using standard math procedures with information retrieved from the Florida Department of Education (Florida Department of Education, 2010) and are presented in Appendix F. Student discipline data used in this study included the variables for gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and discipline referral type.

Socioeconomic status was originally reported by qualification for free or reduced lunch. Those students who received free or reduced lunch were classified as low socioeconomic status. Those who did not receive free or reduced lunch were classified as

middle/upper socioeconomic status. In the discipline referral variable, the 54 different discipline types were reclassified as either subjective or objective. The determination of the subjectivity or objectivity of the discipline referrals was based on the result of a survey (Appendix A) administered to the staff of a middle school within the district studied. The data for the gender variable were classified as male or female. The data for the ethnicity variable were classified as Asian, Black, Hispanic, American Indian, Multiracial, and White.

Analyses were completed using one-sample Chi-square tests. Results for the Pearson Chi-square tests were analyzed using two-way contingency tables and layered, two-way contingency tables. Phi and Cramér's V were used to establish effect size. Analyses with multiple hypotheses used the Bonferroni method to establish a smaller alpha value (α_{pc}).

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The purposes of the research questions were to determine if there was a relationship between certain variables in student discipline data. Simple one-sample Chi-square tests were performed to determine if the student groups were disproportionally represented with discipline referrals.

Examination of the gender student group data showed that males, who comprised 51.1% of the population, received 65.8% of the discipline referrals. Females, who comprised 48.9% of the population, received 34.2% of the discipline referrals. Discipline referrals based on gender were clearly disproportionally distributed.

Examination of the ethnic student group data showed that Asians, who comprised 3.8% of the population, received 1.3% of the discipline referrals. African American, who comprised 13.4% of the population, received 30.1% of the discipline referrals. Hispanics, who comprised 18.4% of the population, received 20.1% of the discipline referrals. American Indian, who comprised 0.2% of the population, received 0.2% of the discipline referrals. Multiracial students, who comprised 5.3% of the population, received 5.9% of the discipline referrals. Whites, who comprised 58.9% of the population, received 42.4% of the discipline referrals. Although some of the ethnic groups received discipline referrals approximately equal to their expected percentage, discipline referrals were clearly disproportionally distributed among different ethnic groups.

Examination of the socioeconomic status student group data showed that low socioeconomic status students, who comprised 40.7% of the population, received 60.7% of the discipline referrals. Middle or high socioeconomic status students, who comprised 59.3% of the population, received 39.3% of the discipline referrals. Discipline referrals based on socioeconomic status were clearly disproportionally distributed. All three of the student group variables used in the study showed disproportional distribution.

Research Question 1

To what extent is there a difference in objective or subjective discipline referrals among different student groups (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) for the middle and high school students in a central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010.

The discipline data for the central Florida public school district used in this study contained 42,441 discipline referrals. There were 13,875 (32.7%) subjective and 28,566 (67.3%) objective discipline referrals in the data. Discipline data for each student group was compared to this population norm to determine if there were statistically significant proportional differences.

Subjective/Objective Discipline Differences for Gender

For the student group, gender, both males and females were expected to show a distribution of 32.7% for subjective discipline referrals and 67.3% for objective discipline referrals. Females in the study actually received 28.3% subjective discipline referrals and 71.7% objective discipline referrals. Males in the study actually received 35.0% subjective discipline referrals and 65.0% objective discipline referrals. These data indicated that males received more subjective discipline referrals than expected, and females received fewer than expected. The opposite was true for objective discipline referrals where males received fewer than expected and females received more than expected. The difference was considered to be statistically significant and indicated that males received a disproportionate number of subjective discipline referrals.

Subjective/Objective Discipline Differences for Socioeconomic Status

For the student group, socioeconomic status, both low and middle/high socioeconomically classified student groups were again expected to show a distribution of 32.7% subjective discipline referrals and 67.3% objective discipline referrals. Low socioeconomically classified students in the study actually received 35.8% subjective discipline referrals and 64.2% objective discipline referrals. Middle/high socioeconomically classified students in the study actually received 28.0% subjective discipline referrals and 72.0% objective discipline referrals. These data indicated that low socioeconomically classified students received more subjective discipline referrals than expected, and middle/high socioeconomically classified students received fewer than expected. Again, the opposite was true for objective discipline referrals. Low socioeconomically classified students received fewer objective referrals than expected and middle/high socioeconomically classified students received more objective referrals than expected. The difference was considered statistically significant at the .05 significance level which indicated that low socioeconomically classified students received a disproportionally greater number of subjective discipline referrals than did middle/high socioeconomically classified students.

Subjective/Objective Discipline Differences for Ethnicity

For the student group variable, ethnicity, all 6 ethnicities were expected to show a distribution of 32.7% subjective discipline referrals and 67.3% objective discipline referrals. Table 6, presented in Chapter 4, shows the actual percentages received by each

ethnic group. Only the black ethnic group received a higher than expected percentage of subjective discipline referrals, and the other ethnic groups received an approximately equal or lower than expected percentage of subjective discipline referrals. The opposite was true for objective discipline referrals where the black ethnic group received fewer than expected, and other ethnic groups received approximately equal or more referrals than expected.

A closer examination through pairwise comparisons for the six ethnic groups (Table 7, Chapter 4) reveals that the Asian and Black ethnic groups were considered to have statistically significant disproportional percentages of subjective and objective discipline referrals at the .05 significance level. This disproportionality occurred because the Asian ethnic group had lower than expected percentages of subjective discipline referrals and higher than expected objective discipline referrals. Conversely the Black ethnic group had just the opposite with higher than expected percentages of subjective discipline referrals and lower than expected objective discipline referrals. The data revealed that subjective discipline referrals were overrepresented in their distribution to males, Blacks and students classified with low socioeconomic status.

Research Question 2

To what extent is there a relationship between student groups (gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) when considering subjective and objective discipline referrals for the middle and high school students in a central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010?

Subjective/Objective Discipline for Gender and Socioeconomic Status

The data for gender and socioeconomic status showed that there was a relationship between the student groups, gender and socioeconomic status, when observing objective/subjective discipline types at the .05 significance level. The comparison of the observed percentages for male and female socioeconomic status demonstrated that the greatest difference was between the male low socioeconomic status group and the female middle/high socioeconomic status group (Table 13). The female low SES percentage and the male middle/high SES percentage were approximately equal to the expected percentage based on the total population.

Though there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals for gender and for socioeconomic status groups, further analysis provided a clearer understanding of the source of the disparity. Low SES males received a greater proportion of subjective discipline referrals then the other three groups in this comparison. Though there was a gap between low SES males and low SES Females and middle/upper SES males, the largest gap was between the low SES males and the middle/high SES females.

Table 13

Percentages of Male and Female Subjective and Objective Discipline Referrals: Socioeconomic Status

Gender & SES	Subjective Percentage	Objective Percentage
Male Low SES	37.3	62.7
Female Low SES	32.8	67.2
Expected	*32.7*	*67.3*
Male Middle/High SES	31.3	68.7
Female Middle/High SES	21.4	78.6

Note. The expected percentages were based on sample population totals.

Subjective/Objective Discipline for Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status

The data for ethnicity and socioeconomic status showed that there was a relationship between the student groups, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, when observing objective/subjective discipline types at the .05 significance level. The comparison of the observed percentages of objective and subjective discipline referrals for different ethnic groups demonstrated that the differences found between ethnicities was clarified when also considering socioeconomic status (Table 14). When considering ethnicity alone, only the ethnic groups Black and Asian were found to have statistically significant proportions of objective and subjective discipline referrals. When socioeconomic status was considered along with ethnicity, the areas of disproportional distribution were more clearly defined.

Table 14

Comparison of the Percentage of Subjective and Objective Discipline Referrals Received by Low and Middle/High Socioeconomic Status and Ethnic Groups

Ethnicity & SES	Subjective Percentage	Objective Percentage
Black Low SES	39.6	60.4
American Indian Low SES	37.7	62.3
White Low SES	34.7	63.5
Multiracial Low SES	34.0	66.0
Expected	*32.7*	*67.3*
Black Middle/High SES	32.2	67.8
Hispanic Low SES	31.5	68.5
Multiracial Middle/High SES	30.2	69.9
White Middle/High SES	27.7	72.3
Hispanic Middle/High SES	26.1	73.9
Asian Low SES	21.2	78.8
Asian Middle/High SES	15.4	84.6
American Indian Middle/High SES	9.1	90.9

Note. The expected percentages were based on sample population totals.

One of the conclusions gleaned from Research Question 1 was that the Black ethnic group was disproportionally represented with subjective and objective discipline referral types. When the socioeconomic status was considered, the Black middle/high SES group was not disproportionally overrepresented. It was only the Black low SES group that received a disproportionate percentage of subjective discipline referrals. In considering Research Question 1, the American Indian, Multiracial and White groups were not disproportionally represented as groups, but when considering socioeconomic status, the low SES representatives within those ethnic groups were disproportionally overrepresented with subjective discipline referrals.

In regard to Research Question 1, the Hispanic and Asian ethnic groups were not overrepresented as a group. When considering both low and middle/high SES, the low SES subgroups of the Hispanic and Asian ethnic groups were still not overrepresented. The data indicated that for subjective and objective discipline referral types there was a relationship between student groups when considering socioeconomic status. The data showed that males received a statistically significant greater proportion of subjective discipline referrals. The data also indicated that students, who were classified as low socioeconomic status, received a statistically significant greater proportion of subjective discipline referrals. The data showed that Blacks received a statistically significant greater proportion of subjective discipline referrals, and Asians received a statistically significant lesser proportion of subjective discipline referrals.

The layered data further demonstrated that low SES males received a greater proportion of subjective discipline referrals than did low SES females or middle/high SES males and a much greater proportion than the middle/high SES females. These findings suggest that while there was a difference between males and females in the number of subjective and objective discipline referrals they received, low SES males showed the greatest overrepresentation of subjective discipline referrals.

The layered data also demonstrated that low SES Blacks, low SES American Indians, low SES multiracial students, and low SES Whites received a greater proportion of subjective discipline referrals than did other ethnic groups with either low or middle/high socioeconomic status. These data suggested that although there was a difference between ethnic groups in the number of subjective and objective discipline

referrals they received, the low SES ethnic groups of Black, American Indian, Multiracial and White showed the greatest overrepresentation of subjective discipline referrals.

Conclusions

This research was conducted to determine if there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals for the student groups' gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Additionally the researcher investigated the relationship between gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status when considering subjective and objective discipline referral types in a central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010.

Previous studies have reported on the disproportional representation in the administration of school discipline for gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. Wallace et al. (2008) and Skiba et al. (2002) identified four possible explanations for the disproportional representation in the administration of school discipline. These authors believed further research was needed to understand the roles played by ethnicity, misbehavior vs. teacher bias, and socioeconomics in determining student discipline.

In addition, some of these studies (Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008, Gregory et al., 2010; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008) further identified a potential disproportional representation problem involving the subjective nature in the administration of some school discipline issues. The present study focused on those subjective school discipline issues.

The present study identified eight discipline referral categories (Disrespect, Horseplay, Inattentive Behavior, Classroom Disruption, Confrontation, Harassment/Bullying, Insubordination, and Aggression) that could be considered subjective as defined by this study (see definitions p. 15). It is also interesting to note that these behaviors have been identified as predominately male behaviors.

> Discriminant analysis revealed that boys in this sample were more likely than girls to be referred to the office for a host of misbehaviors ranging from minor offenses and throwing objects, to fighting and threats, to sexual offenses. These findings are consistent with higher prevalence rates for boys across a range of externalizing behaviors and syndromes, including aggression (Parke and Slaby, 1983), bullying (Boulton and Underwood, 1992), school violence (Walker, Ramsey, and Colvin, 1995), theft and lying (Keltikangas and Lindeman, 1997), conduct disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), and delinquency (Mears, Ploeger, and Warr, 1998). (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 334)

The disproportional representation for males in the administration of subjective school discipline found in this study (2.4 times more likely than females) needs to be addressed in light of the apparent bias for typical male behavior as identified in other studies. The researcher is not suggesting that inappropriate behaviors be condoned or even tolerated, but this study certainly identifies the need for more precise definitions and understanding of the specific behaviors identified above. This will probably not completely close the disparity gap but it will give focus and direction to addressing the problem.

The results of the present study also showed a disproportional representation for students from homes with low SES. It is interesting to note that in this study the student demographic variables, gender and ethnicity, demonstrated disproportional representation in the administration of subjective school discipline. However, when SES was considered, the results of the study indicated that SES was the main contributing factor for the presence of that disproportional representation in both the gender and ethnicity demographic variables.

When considering SES and gender, both the male and female low SES subgroups received higher than expected proportions of subjective discipline referrals (Table 13). When considering both SES and ethnicity, four of the six ethnic subgroups that were classified low SES received higher than expected subjective discipline referrals, but *none* of the middle/high SES ethnic subgroups received higher than expected subjective discipline referrals (Table 14). When considering all three demographic variables (ethnicity, gender and SES), males from middle/upper SES still received fewer than expected subjective discipline referrals for every ethnic group with the exception of the multiracial ethnic group. They had 34.7% as compared to the expected 32.7%. The data indicates that it was the low SES males in almost every consideration that caused the disproportional representation, if it existed, for any student demographic variable or sub-group within a variable.

This would seem to indicate that there is a bias towards low SES subgroups, as both the gender and four of the six ethnic low SES subgroups received higher than expected numbers of subjective discipline referrals. It would be tempting to jump to the

conclusion that there is a "culture of poverty" influencing the disproportional representation in the administration of school discipline.

However, the glaring absence of the low SES Asian and Hispanic sub-groups from the "higher than expected" subjective discipline referral results requires the deeper investigative question as to the differences between those two ethnic subgroups and the other ethnic subgroups so that even the students from low SES Hispanic or Asian homes are not over represented in receiving subjective discipline referrals. What characteristics can be found in the habitus of those cultures that possibly influence the results found in this study?

The researcher believes the disproportional representation of low SES males and low SES Whites, Blacks, American Indians, and multiracial students in the administration of subjective discipline referrals needs to be addressed by clearly stating more precise definitions and developing a better understanding of the specific behaviors identified as subjective. The researcher also believes that habitus of low SES families needs careful study to identify habitus differences especially in light of apparent differences between Asian and Hispanic cultures and the White, Black, American Indian, and multiracial ethnic group cultures. Based on the review of the literature and research findings for the students in Grades 6-12 in a central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010, it was concluded that:

1. Males, Blacks, and students with low socioeconomic status, were overrepresented with student discipline referrals of all types. All three of the

groups mentioned above had statistically significant larger proportions of discipline referrals than their corresponding subgroups.

2. Males, Blacks, and students with low socioeconomic status, were shown to be overrepresented with subjective discipline referrals. All three of the groups mentioned above had statistically significant larger proportions of subjective discipline referrals than their corresponding subgroups.
3. A closer examination of the overrepresentation of males with subjective discipline referrals revealed that the overrepresentation was a result of the overrepresentation of the low socioeconomic status males. When compared to the expected proportion of 32.7%, low SES males received 37.3% subjective discipline referrals, and middle/high SES males received 31.3 % subjective discipline referrals. When considering all three demographic variables (ethnicity, gender, and SES), males from middle/upper SES received fewer than expected subjective discipline referrals for every ethnic group with the exception of the multiracial ethnic group. The male middle/high SES multiracial group had 34.7% as compared to the expected 32.7%. This would indicate that is was the low SES males, in almost every consideration, that caused the disproportional representation, if it existed, for any student demographic variable or sub-group with-in a variable. Clearly, it was the males from low SES homes who created the disproportional overrepresentation that was observed for all males.

4. A closer examination of the overrepresentation of the Black ethnic group with subjective discipline referrals revealed that the overrepresentation was a result of the overrepresentation of the low socioeconomic status Blacks. When compared to the expected proportion of 32.7%, low SES Blacks received 39.6% of the subjective discipline referrals, and middle/high SES Blacks received 32.2 % of the subjective discipline referrals. As with the male overrepresentation, it was the Black students from low SES homes who accounted for the overrepresentation observed for all Black students. The low SES ethnic student groups, American Indian, Whites and multiracial students were also overrepresented by subjective discipline referrals with 37.7%, 34.7%, and 34.0% respectively. The fact that the American Indian, White and Multiracial student groups did not demonstrate overrepresentation as a complete group illustrated that the low SES sections within each of those ethnic groups was balanced by the corresponding middle/high SES sections. None of the middle/high SES subgroups within any of the ethnic groups were overrepresented with subjective discipline referrals when compared to the expected proportions.
5. For the Hispanic and Asian ethnic groups, both the low and middle/high SES subgroups received less than the expected proportion of subjective discipline referrals.
6. Gender and low socioeconomic status had a strong influence in determining whether a student would receive a subjective student discipline referral.

Males received 70.4% of all subjective discipline referrals. This means males were almost two and one half times (2.4) more likely to receive a subjective discipline referral than females. Low SES males received 64.6% of all male subjective discipline referrals. Males from a low SES home were almost two times (1.8) more likely to receive a subjective discipline referral than males from middle/high SES homes. It is clear that male students from a low SES home were much more likely to receive a subjective discipline referral than any other student group combination.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Based on the review of research, the conclusions, and in consideration of the limitations of this study, the following implications and recommendations for practice are offered:

1. Subjective discipline referrals constituted approximately one third (32.7%) of all discipline referrals given to the middle and high schools students in the targeted central Florida public school district. Thus, it is important for school districts to clearly define the definitions used to identify and administer remedies for subjective discipline infractions (disrespect, horseplay, inattentive behavior, classroom/campus disruption, confrontation, harassment/bullying, insubordination and aggression).
2. For this study, male students received 65.8% of all the discipline referrals even though they only represented only 51.1% of the sample. In addition,

male students received 70.4% of all the subjective discipline referrals. Careful consideration should be given to educational practices and discipline procedures that may influence these disproportional representations for male students. For this study, low socioeconomic status students received 60.7% of all the discipline referrals even though they represented only 40.7% of the sample. In addition, low socioeconomic status students received 66.4% of all the subjective discipline referrals. Careful consideration should be given to educational practices and discipline procedures that address these disproportional representations for low socioeconomic status students.

3. The layered comparisons for ethnicity and socioeconomic status, when considering subjective and objective discipline referrals, showed that low socioeconomic status students from the Black, American Indian, Multiracial, and White ethnic groups received a disproportionate number of subjective discipline referrals. However, neither the low nor middle/upper socioeconomic status students from the Hispanic or Asian groups were overrepresented with subjective discipline referrals. These findings highlight the importance of examining the social habitus within Hispanic and Asian cultures to identify markers that correlate to lower than expected proportions of subjective discipline referrals for these student groups.
4. For this study, male and low socioeconomic status students from every ethnic group had higher than expected numbers of subjective discipline referrals.

This finding further highlights the importance of considering the needs that low socioeconomic status male students bring to the school campus.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study sought to determine if there was a difference in objective and subjective discipline referrals for the student groups' gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Additionally the study was conducted to investigate the relationship between gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status when considering subjective and objective discipline referral types in a central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010.

The following are suggested topics for further research:

1. This research should be expanded to include additional school districts in the state of Florida and other sections of the country.
2. Further research should be conducted to investigate disparities in the administration of subjective and objective discipline referrals to determine if they are influenced by other variables such as parental marriage status, level of education, and employment status.
3. Further research should be conducted to investigate if disparity in the administration of subjective and objective discipline referrals is influenced by other student variables such as grade level, academic achievement, and student involvement in extracurricular activities.

4. Further research should be conducted to investigate if disparity in the administration of subjective and objective discipline referrals is influenced by other school variables such as school level, school size, gender makeup of school staff, ethnic makeup of school staff, and racial/ethnic makeup of student body, and urban/suburban/rural setting.
5. Further research should be initiated to investigate how schools can decrease the disparity in the administration of discipline for male students and low socioeconomic status students.
6. Further research should be conducted to investigate the social habitus within Hispanic and Asian cultures to ascertain if there are identifying markers that correlate to lower than expected proportions of subjective discipline referrals for those student groups.
7. Further research should be focused on the debate concerning the "culture of poverty" as it relates to the formation, communication and implementation of school expectations and discipline policies.

APPENDIX A
INTRODUCTION AND DIRECTIONS FOR SUBJECTIVITY SURVEY FOR DISIPLINE REFERRAL TYPES

Introduction Page
Dear Survey Participant,

Thank you very much for participating in this short survey.
My dissertation study is examining the incidents of subjective and objective discipline referrals. One of the ironies of my study is that the simple act of determining which discipline referrals are subjective or objective is, in and of itself, a subjective process. To help with that process I am asking your opinion on which discipline infractions you believe are subjective in nature and which are objective in nature.

For the purpose of this study an objective discipline infraction is one which is pretty clear cut. For example, if a student brings an illegal substance (i.e. alcohol) to school there is no "debate" as to whether the student brought alcohol to school. By contrast, the discipline infraction "horse play" is not as clearly defined. Even though the Student Handbook has a nice definition of "Horse Play", some may consider the interpretation of that definition to be open to debate.

The survey contains a list of all the discipline referrals given to the middle and high school students in a central Florida public school district during the school year 2009-2010. You will be asked to check either the objective or subjective box for each infraction.

Your survey results will remain confidential. I will not know who has or has not taken the survey.

Again, thank you for your help.

Tim Bair

If you would like further information about the specifics of my dissertation study, please email me at tbair3@cfl.rr.com.

Survey Directions Page

The following is a list of the infractions reported by all the high schools and middle schools in a central Florida public school district for the school year 2009-2010.
For each infraction, please check the column you believe BEST applies to that infraction.

Please choose only Objective OR Subjective for each discipline type. (Do not choose both)

APPENDIX B

DISCIPLINE REFERRAL TYPES FOR THE MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN A CENTRAL FLORIDA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT: 2009-2010

Listing of Discipline Referral Types

Discipline Referral Type	Discipline Referral Type
Aggression[S]	Insubordination[S]
Alcohol Violation	Larceny/Theft
Assault	Lying/Misrepresentation
Battery	Medication Policy Violation
Battery of School Employee/Volunteer	Off Camus Felony
Breaking and Entering/Burglary	Offensive Touching
Cell Phone Misuses	Open Defiance
Cheating	Other Major Infraction
Classroom/Campus Disruption[S]	Repeated Misconduct
Computer/Calculator Misuses	Robbery
Confrontation[S]	Sexual Harassment
Contraband	Sexual Misconduct
Disrespect[S]	Sexual Offenses
Dress Code Violation	Skipping Class
Drug Paraphernalia	Skipping School
Drug Violation - not alcohol	Substantial Disruption of School
Failure to Report for Detention	Tardy
False Accusation Against a Staff Member	Threat/Intimidation
False Alarm	Tobacco Products Violation
Fighting	Trespassing
Forgery	Unauthorized Area
Gambling	Unauthorized Assembly
Gang-Related Activity	Unauthorized Items
Harassment/Bullying[S]	Unauthorized Publication
Hate Crime	Unsafe Act
Horseplay[S]	Vandalism
Illegal Organization Violation	Vehicle/Parking Violation
Inappropriate or Obscene Act	Weapons Violation/Possession
Inattentive Behavior[S]	

[S] indicates those discipline referral types determined to be subjective by the survey.

APPENDIX C
SUBJECTIVE REFERALLS LISTED BY SURVEY PERCENTAGES

Subjective Referrals Listed by Percentage as Determined by the Subjectivity Survey

Subjective Discipline Referral Type	**Percentage**
Disrespect	90.0
Horseplay	90.0
Inattentive Behavior	90.0
Classroom/Campus Disruption	83.3
Confrontation	81.7
Harassment/Bullying	75.0
Insubordination	73.3
Aggression	70.5

APPENDIX D
E-MAIL INVITATIONS SENT TO POTENTIAL SURVEY RESPONDENTS REQUESTING PARTICIPATION

Survey Invitation E-mails

1st E-mail message, Sent 1/3/2011

Dear middle school teacher.

I am nearing completion of my doctoral dissertation and as a small part of that process I would like to invite you to take a short survey. The survey asks for your opinion on the objectivity and subjectivity of different discipline referrals. The short survey will not take more than 5-10 minutes of your time.

To participate, just click on the link below and proceed.

Your Input will remain confidential. The survey only gathers the results for me. I will not know who has or has not taken the survey.

Thank You for your input.

Tim Bair ABD

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PDGZF8N

2nd E-mail message, Sent 1/11/2011

Dear middle school teacher.

Just a quick reminder that I would love to have your help with a survey as part of my dissertation process. If you have already taken the survey, thanks so much. If you have not taken the short survey and would like to help, just click on the link below and proceed.

Your Input will remain confidential. The survey only gathers the results. I will not know who has or has not taken the survey.

Thank You for your input.

Tim Bair ABD

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PDGZF8N

3rd and final E-mail message, Sent 1/20/2011

Dear middle school teacher.

This will be the last time I will bother you with this request. I would really appreciate your input on a short survey I am using as part of my dissertation process. If you have already taken the survey, thanks so much. If you have not taken the short survey and would like to help, just click on the link below and proceed.

Your input will remain confidential as I will not even know who has, or has not, participated.

Thank You for your input.

Tim Bair ABD

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PDGZF8N

APPENDIX E
GROUPING TABLE BY AVERAGE SCORE: UNDUPLICATED DISCIPLINE REFERRALS

CONVERSION TABLE FOR THE SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE DISCIPLINE REFERRAL AVERAGE SCORE FOR UNDUPLICATED DATA

Average Score Range	Converted Average Score
0.00 – 0.04	0.00
0.05 – 0.14	0.10
0.15 – 0.24	0.20
0.25 – 0.34	0.30
0.35 – 0.44	0.40
0.45 – 0.54	0.50
0.55 – 0.64	0.60
0.65 – 0.74	0.70
0.75 – 0.84	0.80
0.85 – 0.94	0.90
0.95 – 1.00	1.00

APPENDIX F

GROUP STUDENT COUNT AND PERCENTAGES FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN A CENTRAL FLORIDA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT: 2009-2010

GROUP STUDENT COUNT AND PERCENTAGES FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN A CENTRAL FLORIDA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT FOR 2009-2010

Student Groups	Student Count	Student Percentages
American Indian	85	0.2
Asian	1,370	3.8
Black	4,793	13.4
Hispanic	6,592	18.4
Multiracial	1,911	5.3
White	21,130	58.9
Female	17,537	48.9
Male	18,344	51.1
Free/Reduced Lunch	13,072	36.4
No Free/Reduced Lunch	22,809	63.6
Total Student Population	35,881	100.0

Source: Florida Department of Education 2010

APPENDIX G
DISCIPLINE REFERRAL TYPE BY FREQUENCY

Discipline Referral Type Frequency and Percentages

Discipline type	Frequency	Percentage
Tardy	7,334	17.28
Disruption of Class/Campus[S]	4,126	9.72
Insubordination[S]	3,826	9.01
Failure to Report to Detention	3,415	8.05
Disrespect[S]	3,246	7.65
Skipping Class	2,476	5.83
Inappropriate or Obscene Act	2,230	5.25
Cell Phone Misuse	1,986	4.68
Repeated Misconduct	1,631	3.84
Unsafe Act	1,526	3.60
Open Defiance	1,425	3.36
Dress Code Violation	1,184	2.79
Unauthorized Area	971	2.29
Inattentive Behavior[S]	899	2.12
Fighting	709	1.67
Horseplay[S]	697	1.64
Cheating	690	1.63
Skipping School	548	1.29
Aggression[S]	501	1.18
Confrontation[S]	466	1.10
Unauthorized Item	440	1.04
Theft/Larceny	286	0.67
Drug Violation	242	0.57
Lying/Misrepresentation	215	0.51
Computer/Calculator Misuse	197	0.46
Threat/Intimidation	174	0.41
Vandalism	167	0.39
Tobacco Products Violation	132	0.31
Harassment/Bullying[S]	114	0.27
Contraband	101	0.24
Vehicle/Parking Violation	96	0.23
Forgery	67	0.16
Weapons Violation	57	0.13
Alcohol Violation	35	0.08
Sexual Misconduct	33	0.08
Battery	32	0.08

Discipline type	Frequency	Percentage
Substantial Disruption	31	0.07
Medication Policy Violation	26	0.06
Drug Paraphernalia	16	0.04
Trespassing	10	0.02
Sexual Harassment	9	0.02
False Accusation Against Staff	8	0.02
Gang-Related Activity	8	0.02
Battery of Staff/Volunteer	8	0.02
Illegal Organization Violation	7	0.02
Breaking and Entering/Burglary	7	0.02
Other Major Infractions	7	0.02
Gambling	5	0.01
Offensive Touching	5	0.01
Assault of Staff/Volunteer	5	0.01
Robbery	5	0.01
False Alarm	4	0.01
Unauthorized Publication	3	0.01
Sexual Offenses	2	0.00
Off Campus Felony	1	0.00
Total	42,441	100.00

[S] indicates those discipline referral types determined to be subjective by the survey.

APPENDIX H
FREQUENCY TABLE FOR UNDUPLICATED AVERAGED SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE DISCIPLINE SCORES

Frequency Table for Unduplicated Averaged Subjective and Objective Discipline Scores

Score	Frequency	Percentage
0.00	5,544	49.4
0.10	263	2.3
0.20	397	3.5
0.30	1,032	9.2
0.40	395	3.5
0.50	1,097	9.8
0.60	312	2.8
0.70	395	3.5
0.80	245	2.2
0.90	41	0.4
1.00	1,502	13.4
Totals	11,223	100

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