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DISPARITIES WITHIN SCHOOL DISCIPLINE: AN EXAMINATION OF RACE, ENGLISH
LANGUAGE LEARNER STATUS, & SUSPENSION

By

Serena Boyce

A Thesis Submitted

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This Thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

Dr. Vicki Hunter

Advisor/Co-Chair of Committee

Dr. Tyler Vaughan

Advisor/Co-Chair of Committee

Dr. Carol Glasser

Third Committee Member

Dr. Timothy Berry

Fourth Committee Member

ABSTRACT

Disparities Within School Discipline: An Examination of Race, English Language Learner Status, & Suspension

Serena Boyce, Master of Science
Minnesota State University, Mankato
2020

There is much discussion in the United States about how in-school and out of school suspension negatively impacts students who are subjected to this form of exclusionary discipline. There is concern about whether there are disparities in school suspension rates between students from different subgroups and their peers. Research in this area has shown that racial/ethnic minority students, as well as students with the factors of having a low socio-economic status and being male, make some schools more likely to use school discipline than others. A question to be answered in the area of school discipline is related to if English Language Learner Status is a factor that contributes to exclusionary school discipline. This study examines whether disproportionalities exist within school suspension for English Language Learners (ELL students) as compared to non-ELL students. Findings show that ELL status does have an effect on the risk of a student being suspended from school. The risk of suspension for a student with ELL status is 20% higher than a non-ELL student. ELL Students show more disadvantages in other demographics such as low socioeconomic status. ELL students have two times the risk of living in poverty when compared to non-ELL students. Analysis of the relationship between poverty status and suspension show that students who are living in poverty have a risk of suspension that is 2.4 times the risk of suspension for students not living in poverty. A primary goal for this study was to lay groundwork for future studies exploring the relationship between suspension and ELL status. Currently, few studies correlate English learner students to the

exclusionary discipline they receive. This study is important and timely because it describes discipline rates and puts forth reasons as to why ELL students are subjected to school suspension.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

School discipline, along with classroom management, has been a primary focus in education in the United States (Kennedy-Lewis 2013; Gregory et al. 2010; Hemphill et al. 2014). As a way to keep discipline in schools, U.S. schools have found in exclusionary discipline a strategy that has been used to control classrooms and exclude students that they may consider disruptive to perform their job (Kennedy-Lewis 2013; Gregory et al. 2010; Hemphill et al. 2014). Out of school suspension as a punishment strategy is a practice used to prohibit students from being in the school building, and to participate in any school related activity, while in-school suspension is a form of punishment that keeps students in school and doing work, but isolates them from the rest of the student body (Kinsler 2011; Hemphill et al. 2014).

Exclusionary discipline is a temporary solution to a behavior problem, which can result in life-long, negative effects measured through the student's low academic performance and involvement with the juvenile justice system (Ryan & Goodram 2013). Exclusionary discipline removes what students need for their positive development, and instead puts them closer to other risk factors present in their environment (Casella 2001). Ryan and Goodram (2013) considered how exclusionary discipline place the needs of the students outside of the school context, meaning that their emotional, academic, intellectual, and personal needs might be satisfied by an environment that could be considered more of a risk factor than a protector factor. At first, the main goal of exclusionary discipline in U.S. schools was to prevent dangerous situation where students

represent a risk to themselves or others (Marshall 2005; Maag 2012). However, over time exclusionary discipline has developed different negative outcomes that not only interfere with students' academic performance, but also develops feelings of anger, frustration, and resentment towards education (Ryan & Goodram 2013, Skiba et al. 2014). Through exclusionary discipline, the interruption of students' academic activities has been correlated with low academic performance and negative student perception about education and school (Jones 2010; Ryan & Goodram 2013).

The approach to discipline and punishment, coupled with pressure on schools to increase student test scores, has given school administrators an excuse and legal means to get rid of what could be perceived as undesirable students (Bireda 2010). English Language Learners (ELL) have historically been identified as underperforming students with higher dropout rates and more school disciplinary problems when compared to non-ELL students (Howard et al. 2003; Losen & Martinez 2013). In addition, limited English proficiency is a source of stress for some, especially if they experience stigma or discrimination associated with their lower proficiency levels (Dobbins & Rodriguez 2013). ELL students are also at risk of social isolation and discrimination in school, as a result of their English Language Learner status (Suarez-Orozco 2001). They may cope with this stress by externalizing behaviors such as aggression and fighting.

Students that are being suspended are those who need the most school support to succeed academically (Bireda 2010). This issue raises a critical question regarding the rationale for suspending students from school. Suspensions inevitably result in the loss of instructional time and disconnection with school, as well as grade retention, juvenile court involvement, and dropping out of school (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational

Fund, INC 2005; Heitzeg 2009; Fabelo et al. 2011; Barile et al. 2012; Palardy et al. 2015; Konold et al. 2017). Previous research documents a number of specific factors that are related to students who exhibit inappropriate behavior in school. Racial/ethnic minority students, male students, and students living below the poverty line are overrepresented among the students punished for exhibiting inappropriate behavior (Wallace Jr. et al. 2008; Blake et al. 2010; Moore and Padavic 2010; Skiba et al. 2011; Anderson and Ritter 2017; Blake et al. 2017). Minority overrepresentation in suspension is by no means a new finding in school discipline research. As previously stated, investigations of a variety of school punishments over the years have consistently found evidence of socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disproportionality in the administration of school discipline.

Despite the regularity with which racial/ethnic disparities and racism in school discipline have been documented, there are few studies that have focused primarily on English Language Learner status to analyze the potential gaps in school suspension. The current study disentangled race and ethnicity from ELL status, and analyzed the implications of each factor on exclusionary discipline actions towards students. Specifically, I have analyzed data from the High School Longitudinal Study, 2009-2013 [United States] dataset to analyze whether ELL status and/or racial/ethnic minority students have a higher likelihood, compared to their White counterparts, of receiving a form of suspension in response to rule violations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 STARTS WITH SCHOOL DISCIPLINE, ENDS WITH PRISON

Discipline has been considered an essential element of the public school system for the United States (Mayworm & Sharkey 2014; Mowen 2014). School discipline is meant to address school, classroom, and student needs through broad prevention, targeted intervention, and the development of a student's self-discipline (Osher et al. 2010). Disciplinary measures, especially exclusionary discipline techniques, such as in-school and out of school suspension, have not shown substantial improvements in school safety; however, they have increased the discipline and the achievement gap between students of certain races and ethnicities, and those with low socioeconomic status (Gregory et al. 2010). Furthermore, exclusionary discipline in schools has increased the involvement of minority students in the juvenile justice system (Ryan & Goodram 2013; Skiba et al. 2014).

Any discussion about disproportionality in disciplinary outcomes among schools must address the disciplinary gap. This concept rests on the over-representation of minority students, specifically Black students, in U.S. school disciplinary systems and the concern it has generated in both the public mind and academia (Gregory & Mosely 2004). Schools in the United States, specifically low-income and highly diverse schools, often respond to problematic students with exclusionary discipline (Wallace Jr. et al. 2008; Heitzeg 2009; Blake et al. 2010; Farmer 2010; Osher et al. 2010; Skiba et al. 2011; Busby et al. 2013; NCES 2016; Blake et al. 2016; Reyes and Villarreal 2016; Anderson and Ritter 2017; Blake et al. 2017). Disciplinary practices in low-income, urban schools

negatively affect the learning environment and the ability of students to achieve the academic and social gains that are noted to be essential for society (Skiba et al. 2011). A narrow approach to the student behavior and lack of communication between teachers and students has led to disproportionate suspension rates, and to the criminalization of students based on their race or ethnicity (Bireda 2010; Gregory & Fan 2011). This distance between teachers and students reflects a lack of closeness and trust between them, which develops less cooperation from minority students with teachers who do not get to know them personally (Gregory & Fan 2011).

Students that are being suspended are those whom need the most school support to succeed academically (Bireda 2010). Findings suggest that disciplinary practices, specifically suspension, is associated with negative student outcomes such as lower academic performances, higher rates of dropout, failures to graduate on time, decreased academic engagement, and future disciplinary exclusion (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, INC 2005; Heitzeg 2009; Barile et al. 2012; Palardy et al. 2015; Konold et al. 2017). The population of English Language Learners needs continued special attention. In general, ELL students' performance on standardized tests is significantly lower than that of non-ELL students, especially in the content areas and language-related subtests such as reading where the linguistic demand is higher (Samson & Collins 2012). When ELL students attend school in the United States, they need to learn English in order to perform well in academic tasks in content area classes while keeping up with grade-level curriculum. This challenge is compounded by having to adjust to a new sociocultural context that is different from the one they experienced in their home country, and many of these students find it difficult to make the transition (De

Souza 2017). Not only do ELL students need to acclimate to the dominant culture, but they also must adjust to the particular culture of the school they attend (De Souza 2017). ELL students tend to feel alienated and cognitively overloaded, which in turn may result in them shutting down, acting out, and withdrawing from the realities of the classroom as a way to cope with their culture shock, negatively impacting their learning (McLaughlin et al. 2002).

The behaviors of the groups being stereotyped and criminalized are an expected response to an oppressive school system where students tend to defy, ignore, or resist disciplinary rules and authority figures in order to defend themselves against not just what is happening within the school, but also what may be happening in their families or communities (Gregory & Mosely 2004). There is no evidence to suggest that disciplinary practices that remove students from class, such as suspension and expulsions, help to improve student behavior or school climate (Skiba et al. 2011).

According to Giroux (2009) the punishment disproportionality starts with a criminalization process that originates in false perceptions about students based on their appearance or their socio-economic status. This process of youth criminalization has produced fictitious ideas about what young people do and how even nonviolent behaviors and misbehaviors become criminalized in the name of safety. This approach toward the maintenance of safety and discipline in schools has widened the disciplinary gap among different groups of students divided not just by socio-demographic characteristics, but by the characteristics related to the schools as well (Bireda 2010).

There has been a growing convergence between United States K-12 schools and legal systems (Heitzeg 2009). Farmer (2010) argues that school is supposed to be a place

that provides a context for youth to develop their identity as well as learn. However, with racist ideologies and stigmatizing language (i.e., “at-risk”, “criminal”, “delinquent”), criminalized schools become a racialized, classed, and gendered space that bolsters the “school-to-prison pipeline”. The criminalization of schools refers to a combination of disciplinary policies, surveillance, metal detectors, unwarranted searching and lockdowns that reflect the contemporary criminal justice system within the school environment. The combination of policies sends youth, particularly minority youth, on a trajectory that leads to prison.

The “school-to-prison pipeline” refers to the process by which kindergarten through 12th grade students are pushed out of school classrooms and into juvenile and criminal justice systems (Welch 2017). Historical inequities, such as racially segregated education, concentrated poverty, and racial disparities in law enforcement are factors that maintain the pipeline (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, INC 2005). The school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon stems from underfunded public institutions, where overcrowded classrooms, ineffective teachers and administrators, and punitive disciplinary policies result in disengaged and alienated students (Welch 2017).

Another factor that plays an important role in discipline and disproportionality is how teachers handle discipline, especially of minority students. A misunderstanding of cultural patterns of minority students can lead to unnecessary and excessive disciplinary outcomes (Bireda 2010). Wildhagen (2012) exemplified further how teachers’ own behavior and academic standards can lead them to misinterpret students’ behaviors, which can end up with a different range of punishments from warnings to suspensions.

Wildhagen (2012) illustrated how holding all students to the same standards overlooks and misinterprets the cultural diversity in their schools and classrooms.

School engagement is key to a student's likelihood of dropping out of school or being pushed out with the use of exclusionary discipline (Morrison et al. 2003; Barile et al. 2012; Palardy et al. 2015; Bottiani et al. 2016; Welch 2017). School engagement refers to the extent to which students participate in the academic and nonacademic activities of school, feel connected at school, and value the goals of education (Glanville & Wildhagen 2007). Evidence shows that some schools are falsely boosting their overall test scores in reading, writing, math, and science by using harsh discipline to discourage lower-achieving youth from continuing to attend (Welch 2017). Excluding low-achieving students from testing results in better overall average test scores. When students are no longer in school, the likelihood of involvement in the justice system increases, a consequence that is most common among minority and low-income youth, including those with special learning needs, such as ELL students (Welch 2017).

The school-to-prison pipeline is facilitated by a number of trends in school policies. Specifically, this phenomenon is most directly attributable to the expansion of "zero tolerance" policies throughout schools across the country (Heitzeg 2009).

2.2 ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICIES

"Zero-tolerance" refers to the exclusionary, state-mandated school discipline policies that gained national popularity for their "get-tough" approach to student misconduct (Reyes 2006). Zero-tolerance policies were initially aimed at creating safe environments in public schools. The policies grew out of an increasing fear of the violence and juvenile delinquency that appeared to skyrocket coming out of the 1980s

(Dohrn 2001), and the federal government mandated the zero-tolerance program through the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (Skiba & Peterson 1999). Some experts trace the formation of zero-tolerance policies in schools specifically to the 1999 shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado (Shah 2011). Reyes (2006) contends that zero-tolerance policies may threaten educational opportunity, universal education, and school desegregation (Reyes 2006). At first, zero-tolerance policies seemed to a logical response that would address violent behaviors in schools. However, studies began to arise that suggested racial discrimination in the use of these policies by school administrators (Wallace Jr. et al. 2008; Blake et al. 2010; Moore and Padavic 2010; Skiba et al. 2011; Anderson and Ritter 2017; Blake et al. 2017).

Zero-tolerance policy enforcement has contributed significantly to rising rates of suspension and expulsion from schools (Jones 2010). Zero tolerance policies require school officials to hand down specific, consistent, and harsh punishments when students break certain rules (Gjelten 2018). Punishments are assigned based on the offense regardless of the circumstances, the reasons for the behavior (i.e., self-defense), or the student's history of discipline problems (Gjelten 2018). These policies have no measurable impact on school safety, nor have they been shown to improve student behavior or school climate (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, INC 2005; Heitzeg 2009; Skiba et al. 2011). Despite indicators showing that violence among youth is continuously decreasing across the country, the perception persists among the public that school violence is a growing problem (NCES 2016). In response to fears the public has of school violence, school administrators have developed a variety of harsh policies that removed students deemed to be "problem children" from their schools (NAACP

Legal Defense and Educational Fund, INC 2005). It has been suggested that many teachers, especially White teachers, may be unfamiliar and even uncomfortable with the cultural differences of minority students, specifically immigrant students (Townsend 2000). Fear may play a role in contributing to over referral. Teachers who are prone to accepting stereotypes of minority students as threatening or dangerous may react more quickly to relatively minor threats to authority, especially if such fear is paired with a misunderstanding of cultural norms of social interaction (Townsend 2000).

Taking students out of school, even for a few days, disrupts their education and often escalates poor behavior by removing them from a structured environment and giving them increased time and opportunity to get into trouble (Morrison et al. 2003; NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, INC 2005; Skiba et al. 2011; Barile et al. 2012; Palardy et al. 2015; Bottiani et al. 2016; Welch 2017). Although concerns about school violence are used to justify these disciplinary policies, many suspensions, expulsions, and even arrests are punishments for minor offenses that can be seen as typical adolescent behavior (NAACP Legal Defence and Educational Fund, INC 2005; NCES 2016). During the 2011-2012 school year, 3.4 million public school students in the United States received in-school suspension, and 3.2 million students received out-of-school suspension (NCES 2016). During the 2013-2014 school year, an estimated 1.3 million reports of disciplinary incidents in the United States were filed for reasons related to alcohol, drugs, violence, or weapons possession that resulted in a student being removed from the educational setting for at least an entire school day (NCES 2016).

2.3 TYPES OF SUSPENSION

In-school suspension is a disciplinary program which functions during the day and serves as a less severe disciplinary consequence than out-of-school suspension. Students are assigned to the program for a fixed period of time; typically it provides a supervised classroom environment that allows students to do school work, while providing an educational environment, supervision by school personnel, and isolation from the general student population (Pemberton 1985). This form of suspension authorizes teachers to remove disruptive students from classrooms, and may include time limits, parental notification requirements, and procedures for the student's return to the classroom, such as the student writing an apology letter to the teacher (Darling-Churchill et al. 2013). Kula (2012) argues that in-school suspensions are less detrimental to students' academic progress than out-of-school suspensions due to a number of factors. One factor is that students still attend school. Therefore, students do not receive a "vacation" from school, which could reinforce the problematic behavior. In addition, in-school suspension lowers the possibility for students to engage in criminal behaviors out in the community.

Despite these perceived benefits of in-school suspension, there are still many shortcomings. For example, students lose motivation to complete their work and instead make use of their time by sleeping, doodling, or daydreaming (Delisio 2003; Blake et al. 2017). Others are unable to complete their assigned schoolwork because they lack understanding that they would have gained if they had been present for class instruction. This negatively affects their overall academic achievement, which creates stress and the potential for behavioral problems that can lead to the student reentering the classroom

with the same or worse behaviors only to receive additional suspensions (Delisio 2003; Blake et al. 2017).

Skiba and Peterson (1999) determined that the practice of in-school suspension was ineffective as a deterrent and unproductive in helping to teach appropriate behavior. The Minnesota Department of Education (2010) also reported that suspension, as an intervention, is inadequate as a means of changing behavior. Similarly, Flanagain (2007) identified a correlation between in-school suspension and high recidivism rates.

Recidivism is the tendency to lapse into a previous behavior, or, in this particular case, the continual referral of individual students to in-school suspension. In-school suspension may become a regular part of the school day to students with high recidivism rates (Trojan 2003).

Out-of-school suspension prohibits students from attending school as a punishment for an infraction (Kula 2012). This form of suspension authorizes teachers, the principle, superintendent, or other authority figures to remove disruptive students from school grounds for an established period of time. Out-of-school suspension was designed to be given to students who have committed more serious offenses such as violence against staff, possession of a firearm, or selling of narcotics, as well as frequent offenders of minor violations (Darling-Churchill et al. 2013). However, research shows that most out-of-school suspensions are assigned for accumulating non-violent, non-criminal acts such as skipping class, making threats, and talking back to teachers (Skiba et al. 2011). Research shows that students who are suspended tend to repeat the same offense more than their peers who are not suspended (Skiba et al. 2011; Anderson &

Ritter 2017). In addition, past suspension is a predictor of a future suspension (Brown 2007).

Students who are suspended have more negative attitudes towards adults (Kula 2012). These students feel stigmatized by school staff, which in turn creates an overall negative school experience. Therefore, both in and out-of-school suspensions have negative outcomes for both the students and the school. When students are suspended, they miss instruction, and because students who are suspended are likely to be suspended again, these students can miss a substantial amount of class instruction and assignments. Due to this, students who are suspended have difficulty catching up with schoolwork, which often causes students to have low academic achievement. Students who are suspended continue to have discipline problems because underlying issues, such as dysfunctional home life or learning disabilities, are not addressed, which further supports the idea that out-of-school and in-school suspensions are not an effective way to solve behavioral problems of students.

2.4 RACIAL INEQUALITIES WITHIN SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

According to a 2014 report from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, Black students represent 15% of students, but 44% of students suspended more than once, and 36% of expelled students (Anderson and Ritter 2017). Previous research shows that racially marginalized students are more likely to receive exclusionary discipline when compared to White students (Wallace Jr. et al. 2008; Blake et al. 2010; Moore and Padavic 2010; Skiba et al. 2011; Anderson and Ritter 2017; Blake et al. 2017). Black, Hispanic, and American Indian youth are more likely than White and Asian American youth to be sent to the principle's office, and two to five times more likely than

Whites to be suspended (Wallace Jr. et al. 2008). During the 2013-2014 school year in the United States the percentage of Black students receiving out-of-school suspension was higher than the percentages for students of all other racial groups, while Asian students receiving out-of-school suspension was lower compared to all other racial groups (NCES 2016). The pattern of greater percentages of Black males and females receiving exclusionary disciplinary actions than males and females of any other race/ethnicity was also evident for student expulsions (NCES 2016).

The majority of English Language Learner students in the United States attend highly diverse and low-income schools (De Souza 2017). Race/ethnicity and poverty level are closely connected in the United States, which raises the possibility that any finding of racial disparities in school discipline can be accounted for by socio-economic status (Skiba et al. 2011). The percentage of children under the age of 18 living in poverty, based on the official poverty measure, varies across racial/ethnic groups. 39% of Black children, 30% of Hispanic children, 10% of White children, and 10% of Asian children were living in poverty. In total, 14.1 million children under the age of 18 were living below the poverty line in 2013 (NCES 2016). Scholars have noted that it might be that marginalized students of color, because they have a higher chance of being subjected to a variety of stressors associated with poverty, may learn and exhibit behavioral styles that are discrepant from mainstream expectations in school settings as to put them at risk for increased disciplinary contact (Peguero 2008; Skiba et al. 2011; Hong et al. 2016). For example, minority youth are disproportionately exposed to community violence, which increases their risk for emotional and behavioral symptoms that can detract from learning and undermine academic outcomes (Busby et al. 2013). Busby (2013) found that

student aggression towards others in the 7th grade mediated the association between exposure to community violence in the 6th grade, and academic functioning in the 8th grade.

The decade of 1985-1994 marked a period of increased juvenile homicides, which led to increased media coverage, in particular, of Black youth in inner cities (Farmer 2010). Media produces a negative perception of Black youth violence. Harsh disciplinary practices in schools are a response to the panic many people have around minority youth. Once media draws a line connecting crime with race, that connection becomes an assumed reality (Welch et al. 2002). Race-inflated language that is used by media to describe Black criminality, such as the terms ‘criminals’ and ‘evil-doers’, support a racist ideology in which racial groups are defined as ‘immoral’ and needing to be ‘moralized’ (Farmer 2010). The media leaves a false and negative perception of Black and other minority youth that follows them into the classroom (Emdin 2012). The misrepresentation of crime in media has contributed to the disciplinary policies that now exist (Schiraldi and Ziedenberg 2001). The criminal justice system, and now the United States education system, equates minority youth with grounds that justify arrests, unwarranted searches, surveillance, and similar activities (Farmer 2010). Metal detectors in schools teach Black and Latino youth that society expects them to use violence and participate in criminal acts. Zero-tolerance policies show that second chances are not deemed appropriate for them. Surveillance in schools teaches youth that society does not trust them, and security guards being placed in schools teach youth that society fears them (Blake et al. 2010; Farmer 2010; Reyes and Villarreal 2016; Anderson and Ritter 2017; Blake et al. 2017).

With a fundamental understanding of discipline and the causes of delinquent behavior, teachers can begin to reflect on how their classroom management practices promote, or obstruct, equal access to learning (Weinstein et al. 2003). Educating educators on the relationships between race/ethnicity and rates of suspension will provide additional insights into the factors leading up to disciplinary action (Robertson 2014). Most school administrators, when confronted with data showing disparate rates of discipline for minority students, react by strenuously denying accusations of racial discrimination (Witt 2007). Across the United States, there is some indication that educators do make differential judgments about achievement and behavior based on the student's race, poverty level, perceived educational ability, and English-language proficiency (Skiba et al. 2011; Annamma et al. 2013). The disparity in suspension rates raises civil rights concerns. Children of color, and those from other historically disadvantaged groups, are far more likely than White children to be suspended (Losen and Martinez 2013). Educators must be able to explore options for providing students with environments conducive to learning, especially in light of state examinations, including benchmarks described in the federal government's Every Student Succeeds Act (Department of Education 2017).

The U.S. Department of Education website (www.ed.gov) states that the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a bipartisan measure that reauthorizes the 50 year old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which is the national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students (Department of Education 2017). ESSA includes provisions that help to ensure success for students and schools. The law:

- *“Advances equity by upholding critical protections for the United States’ disadvantaged and high-need students.*
- *Requires—for the first time—that all students in America be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers.*
- *Ensures that vital information is provided to educators, families, students, and communities through annual statewide assessments that measure students’ progress toward those high standards.*
- *Helps to support and grow local innovations—including evidence-based and place-based interventions developed by local leaders and educators—consistent with our Investing in Innovation and Promise Neighborhoods*
- *Maintains an expectation that there will be accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest-performing schools, where groups of students are not making progress, and where graduation rates are low over extended periods of time.”*

Students’ experiences with teachers help to explain some of the discrepancies with disciplinary actions. Classroom management policies and processes have traditionally been established as instruments of control rather than as instruments that promote or are conducive to learning. Demographic shifts in the United States have resulted in similar demographic shifts between K-12 teachers and their students, resulting in important implications for the educational outcomes of traditionally marginalized students and educators’ cultural awareness required in teaching diverse classrooms (Duhita et al. 2016). Since many school experiences occur during class, teachers can influence students’ school engagement through their relationships with and support of students, or

through creating an orderly classroom disciplinary climate (Chiu et al. 2012). Research has found that teachers were more likely to have lower performance expectations of educational attainment for minority students, whom they deemed to have low school engagement compared to their White counterparts (Mahatmya et al. 2016). When in high school, Black students are shown to perceive that they receive less caring and equity from teachers and school administrators relative to White students overall (Bottiani et al. 2016). Black and Hispanic students are more likely than White and Asian students to believe they are working hard in school when their teacher disagrees. Also, White and Asian students seem to benefit from positive teacher bias, while Hispanic and Black students are negatively impacted by teacher bias (Kozlowski 2015). Supportive relationships with adults at school are critical to student engagement in adolescence (Bottiani et al. 2016).

2.5 ELL STUDENTS' SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

The racial/ethnic diversity of the United States population is increasing both overall and in public schools (NCES 2016). This diversity is also reflected in participation in English Language Learner (ELL) programs. In 2013, about 4.3 million public school students participated in ELL programs across the United States. Hispanic students made up 78.4% of this population, which is around 3.6 million students. Asian students were the second largest group participating in ELL programs (10.6%), with about 487,000 students. White students accounted for 5.5% (252,000), and Black students represented 3.5% (161,000) of the ELL population. American Indian/Alaska Native students (36,600), students of Two or More races (27,500), and Pacific Islander students (25,100) accounted for less than 1% each of the ELL program population (NCES 2016).

By the year 2025, it is estimated that one in four students will be initially classified as English Language Learners (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition 2007).

In 1990, 1 in 20 U.S. public school students was an ELL participant. Today, this figure is closer to 1 in 9 (Sargrad 2016). While ELL students have become a significant share of the population, their performance lags far behind their native English-speaking peers. Less than 63% of ELL students graduate high school in four years, which is nearly 20 points below the national average (Department of Education 2017). ELL students that start school in the United States in the early grades struggle to make progress in English, and between one-quarter and one-half become long-term English-language learners (Sargrad 2016). With the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), all schools in the United States are required to demonstrate that they are improving the English language proficiency of their English-language learners (Sargrad 2016; Department of Education 2017). Improving English-language proficiency is a required indicator in every state's school accountability system, which will help make sure that the schools where these students are struggling receive the right kind of support (Sargrad 2016).

In the United States, families of immigrant students often live in poorer neighborhoods or in ethnically segregated areas (Iceland 2009; Pong 2009). Due to this, immigrant youth tend to be concentrated in schools with fewer resources, less skilled staff, higher rates of suspension, more safety concerns, and poorer school climate (Pong and Hao 2007). In turn, school climate can influence students' school engagement (Chiu et al. 2012). School climate refers to the environment that a school provides, including factors such as safety, relationships, and the schools' mission (Cohen et al. 2009).

Attitude toward school is a cognitive aspect of school engagement that represents students' thoughts on the values and purposes of their schools (Fredricks et al. 2004). Students with more positive attitudes toward school typically have higher intrinsic motivation towards academic achievement. Immigrant students tend to face more cultural barriers, such as racial discrimination or language barriers, and have fewer cultural resources in the form of knowledge, skills, and values (Chiu et al. 2012). Native English-speaking students tend to learn their schools' values and norms more quickly, behave more appropriately in school, and build better relationships with their teachers and schoolmates compared to immigrant students (Chiu and Chow 2010; Chiu et al. 2012).

Teachers tend to form closer relationships with native students and are more supportive of them in comparison to immigrant students (Bernhard et al. 2004; Peguero 2008; Barile et al. 2012; Chiu et al. 2012; Hong et al. 2016). Central to student learning and academic success, the school engagement of immigrant children also reflects their adaptation to their new school in the United States (Chiu et al. 2012). In one study of 4th grade ELL students, Morrison (2003) found that school engagement is associated with teachers' perceptions of them. However, as ELL students move to higher grades, data indicates the association of school engagement with teacher perceptions, as well as peer perceptions of them. Research indicates that teachers and school administrators are biased against students in an ELL program, perceiving them to have lower academic ability compared to native-English speaking students (Chiu et al. 2012). Some minority students, especially ELL students, actively fight to eradicate negative racial and cultural stereotypes by not dropping out of school or being suspended, by achieving academically, and graduating (Howard 2008; Foiles Sifuentes 2015; Mahatmya et al. 2016).

Immigrant students are more likely to report being victims of school violence in comparison to native English speakers (Peguero 2008). Third-generation immigrant students are more likely than first and second-generation students to be victimized while at school, as well as to receive a formal disciplinary school sanction; however, first-generation students are the most likely to feel unsafe at school. Native English-speaking students tend to have a greater sense of belonging at school compared to immigrant students who speak a foreign language at home (Chiu et al. 2012). According to data collected in 2013, 12% of students in the United States reported that gangs were present at their school during the school year (NCES 2016). The percentages of students who reported the presence of gangs at their school were higher for Hispanic (20%) and Black students (19%) than for Asian (9%) and White students (7%). Three percent of students reported in 2013 that they feared being attacked at school during the school year, with higher percentages of Black and Hispanic students (5% each) than of White students (3%) reporting this concern. Additionally, approximately 4% of students reported in 2013 that they avoided one or more places in school because of fear of attack or harm during the school year, with a higher percentage of Hispanic students (5%) than of White students (3%) reporting to do so.

Educators need to understand the backgrounds and needs of ELL students in order to understand their struggles in school and in the classroom, and not be so quick to subject the student to suspension due to problematic behavior (Watkins 2015). Not only do ELL students have to learn a new language, they also have to learn the U.S. system of education and culture, while trying to remain true to their own cultural identities (Jones & Estell 2008). English proficiency is an important and needed skill for students to be

successful in school, and it also helps students interact with their teachers and peers, which develops their sense of school engagement (Han 2010). However, with low English-language proficiency, students may display a variety of emotional and behavioral responses in the classroom that can negatively influence their academic achievement, limit their social interactions, and place them at higher risk for school suspension (Dobbins & Rodriguez 2013). The way the school responds to such behavior has serious implications for students' abilities to correct behavior and become more engaged in the schooling environment. Disciplinary actions were designed to exclude all students who engaged in delinquent behaviors in school. However, the disciplinary actions of in-school and out-of-school suspension are of particular concern for racial minority and ELL students, as they appear to be at greater risk for suspension than their White and non-ELL counterparts.

When talking about school suspensions and the criminalization of poor, minority students, two aspects become clear; the first is related to the consequences both students and society face when a student is excluded from the educational system, putting them at risk for the development of negative feelings toward education and the likelihood of joining the school-to-prison pipeline (Farmer 2010; Fenning et al. 2012; Monahan et al. 2014). The second aspect is the punishment that minority students, especially Black students, disproportionately face, resulting in no proven improvement in school safety and a loss of the educational opportunities that at-risk students need to succeed (Gregory et al. 2010; González 2012; Gibson & Haight 2013).

While there are findings about the impact of race in the disproportionality of school suspension among White and minority students, no research was found that

focuses on the variable or risks related to school suspensions among students with English Language Learner status. In order to focus on the variable of ELL status, this study disentangled race and ethnicity from ELL status, and analyzed the implications of each factor on exclusionary discipline actions towards students.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical race theory (CRT) is a useful tool in that it centers the historical and contextual experiences of marginalized people while also interrogating policies that perpetuate and reinforce social inequities. CRT has its origins in Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which is predominantly a legal practice that has challenged the legitimacy of oppressive structures in United States society (Ladson-Billings 1998). A negative aspect of CLS is that it has some racial blind spots. Marginalized people and women working within the CLS field became increasingly dissatisfied with the pace and progress of racial and gender equity within the United States. They felt that their experiences could not be authentically explained through a Black vs. White understanding of race relations, one that ignored the lived experiences of all marginalized groups (Yosso 2005; Aleman 2007; Castagno & Lee 2007). Because of this, many women and people of color broke away from CLS and shifted the focus to race and racism (Yosso 2005). Since then, critical race analysis has expanded to include intersections with gender, sexuality, language, immigrant experiences, and even education.

In the education field, CRT challenges the ways race, racism, class and gender impact educational structures, practices, and discourses that subordinate students of color (Delgado Bernal 2002; Yosso 2005). Critical Race Theory is a propitious framework for this study as it helps expose how mainstream schools promote racism through teaching practices, class curriculum, and school designs that privilege those of the dominant race by ignoring and denying how racism shapes the lives of marginalized students (Knaus

2009). Solórzano and Yosso (2001) compiled themes that form the basic pedagogical practices of CRT in education. These include:

1. *The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of subordination.* CRT is intentional about identifying the various dimensions of race and racism, and how they intersect with all other forms of subordination such as poverty level, ethnicity, and language.
2. *The commitment to social justice.* CRT maintains a commitment to social justice and the elimination of racism and other forms of subordination (Solórzano 1997).
3. *The interdisciplinary perspective.* An assumption of CRT that to truly understand race, racism, and other forms of subordination, these must be contextualized within a historical and contemporary context using transdisciplinary methods (Solórzano 1997).

3.2 CENTRALITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY OF RACE AND RACISM

CRT begins with the proposition that race and racism are entrenched and enduring in U.S. society (Valencia 2015). CRT calls for an examination of how race has come to be socially constructed and how the systemic nature of racism serves to oppress people of color while it protects White privilege. Although CRT in education focuses on race and racism, it also seeks to investigate how racism intersects with other manifestations of oppression, such as English-language status. Intersectionality supports the notion that ELL students of different racial groups may be treated more unfairly than others.

As families of immigrant students often live in poorer neighborhoods, immigrant youth tend to be concentrated in schools with fewer resources, less skilled staff, higher

rates of suspension, more safety concerns, and poorer school climate (Pong and Hao 2007; Iceland 2009). In turn, school climate can influence students' school engagement (Chiu et al. 2012). Students with more positive attitudes toward school typically have higher intrinsic motivation towards academic achievement. Immigrant students tend to face more cultural barriers, such as racial discrimination or language barriers, and have fewer cultural resources in the form of knowledge, skills, and values (Chiu et al. 2012). Native English-speaking students tend to learn their schools' values and norms more quickly, behave more appropriately in school, and build better relationships with their teachers and schoolmates compared to immigrant students (Chiu and Chow 2010; Chiu et al. 2012).

3.3 THE COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

CRT addresses the racially oppressive practices that are prevalent in the U.S. education system, and is unapologetic about advancing fairness (Ladson-Billings 1997). Critical Race theorists posit that schools are political institutions, and therefore view education as a vehicle to end various forms of subordination, such as racism, class, and language discrimination (Valencia 2015).

Across the United States, there is indication that educators do make differential judgments about achievement and behavior based on the student's race, poverty level, perceived educational ability, and English-language proficiency (Skiba et al. 2011; Annamma et al. 2013). The disparity in suspension rates raises civil rights concerns. Students of color, and those from other historically disadvantaged groups, are far more likely than White students to be suspended (Losen and Martinez 2013). Educators must

be able to explore options for providing students with environments conducive to learning.

3.4 THE INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

CRT in education challenges the ahistorical and unidisciplinary preoccupation of most analyses, and argues that one can best understand race and racism in education by incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives. CRT is a combination of concepts that have been derived from the Civil Rights and ethnic studies discourses. Scholars saw the work of the Civil Rights as being stalled and in many instances negated. Therefore, Critical Race theorists in education work across disciplinary borders to provide a sharper eye on the role of race and racism.

A CRT framework for this study, and studies similar to this, have the potential to uncover the hidden agenda of the schooling of minority youth in order to transform and employ a more equitable system in the United States.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 CURRENT STUDY

Suspensions inevitably result in many negative outcomes for students. Some outcomes being the loss of instructional time and disconnection with school, as well as grade retention, juvenile court involvement, and dropping out of school (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, INC 2005; Heitzeg 2009; Barile et al. 2012; Palardy et al. 2015; Konold et al. 2017). Previous research documents a number of specific factors that are related to students who exhibit inappropriate behavior in school. Racial/ethnic minority students, male students, and students living below the poverty line are overrepresented among the students punished for exhibiting inappropriate behavior (Wallace Jr. et al. 2008; Blake et al. 2010; Moore and Padavic 2010; Skiba et al. 2011; Anderson and Ritter 2017; Blake et al. 2017). Investigations of a variety of school punishments over the years have consistently found evidence of socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disproportionality in the administration of school discipline. Researchers have suggested that the variables of ELL status and race are associated with student suspension. Furthermore, research consistently finds that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be disciplined than White students, and that students in an ELL program are at a higher risk for engaging in aggressive behavior towards others in school compared to their non-ELL counterparts. As such, this analysis examines race and ELL status separately and in conjunction with one another to assess the differential impact of each on students receiving school suspension.

CRT's principles would predict minority students would be more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts. As well as, students in an ELL program will be more likely to be suspended than non-ELL students. In 1990, 1 in 20 U.S. public school students was an ELL participant. Today, this figure is closer to 1 in 9 (Sargrad 2016). While ELL students have become a significant share of the population, their performance lags far behind their native English-speaking peers. Less than 63% of ELL students graduate high school in four years, which is nearly 20 points below the national average (Department of Education 2016). CRT's principles would also predict that the intersectionality of race and ELL status would show that ELL students of different racial groups might be treated more unfairly than others.

Despite the regularity with which racial/ethnic disparities and racism in school discipline have been documented, there are few studies that have focused primarily on English Language Learner status to analyze the potential gaps in school suspension. This quantitative study attempts to add to and extend the literature addressing disparities in student experiences of suspension by disentangling race and ethnicity from ELL status, and analyze the implications of each factor on exclusionary discipline actions towards students.

For this study, I have three hypotheses. The first two hypotheses disentangle race and ethnicity from English Language Learner status. I hypothesize that racial and ethnic minority students have a higher likelihood and risk of being subjected to school suspension when compared to their White counterparts. Furthermore, I hypothesize that the factor of ELL status heightens a student's risk and likelihood of being suspended from school. For my third hypothesis, I intersect race/ethnicity with ELL status. I predict

that the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and ELL status will show that ELL students of different races and ethnicities might be treated more unfairly than others and will be suspended at different rates.

4.2 SAMPLE

The data set being utilized is the *High School Longitudinal Study, 2009-2013 [United States]*. The United States Department of Education, the Institute of Education Sciences, and the National Center for Education Statistics established this dataset. The data collection for the base year took place in the 2009-10 school year, with a randomly selected sample of students in more than 900 high schools in the United States that included a 9th and 11th grade levels, which came to a total of 23,503 respondents. Stratified random sampling and school recruitment resulted in the identification of 1,889 eligible schools. A total of 944 of these schools participated in the study. Students completed a survey online. Students' parents, principals, and mathematics and science teachers, and the school's lead counselor completed surveys on the phone or on the Internet. This study will focus on respondents in the 11th grade level, which is a total of 19,063 respondents. The majority of the data utilized will be from the follow-up year dataset, which was collected during the 2011-2012 school year. The base year dataset was utilized when analyzing data about the 11th grade respondents when they were in the 9th grade level.

4.3 DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Exclusionary discipline, for this study, is defined as whether a student received any form of suspension, in-school suspension or out of school suspension, in response to truancy or other disciplinary violations. While these types of exclusionary discipline

differ in severity, collectively they are important for providing a full understanding of how discipline varies.

In-school suspension is the removal from the standard classroom setting, not necessarily the school itself, for a set period of time. In-school suspension is recorded as a numerical variable with five categories (Never, 1-2 times, 3-6 times, 7-9 times, and 10 or more times). One is coded as “Never”, 2 is “1-2 times”, 3 is “3-6 times”, 4 is coded as “7-9 times”, and 5 is coded as “10 or more times”. This variable’s five categories were collapsed into a dichotomous variable measuring in-school suspension in the past 6 months, where 1 was coded as “yes” meaning the student had been subjected to in-school suspension, and 0 was coded as “no” meaning the student had not been given in-school suspension.

Any suspension during high school is the combination of responses to in-school suspension during high school and out-of-school suspension during high school. I combined responses from these two variables because too few people responded to the latter indicator. The variable asking the respondents whether they had been given out-of-school suspension in the past six months had too few responses answering, “Yes” or “No”. In part, this happened because people were skipped into this question from another broader question about suspension. The base question was only answered by 29% of the respondents. That is insufficient to be used for this analysis.

4.4 PREDICTOR VARIABLES

Individual student characteristics include race/ethnicity, gender, ELL status, and whether or not a student is economically disadvantaged.

4.5 RACE

Race is one of the factors central to this study of unfair and unequal discipline. The utilized dataset provides a race variable with eight categories (American Indian, Black, Asian, Hispanic: No Race Specified, Hispanic: Race Specified, More Than One Race, Pacific Islander, and White) in it, which was recoded to include only five. Those participants who responded that they were American Indian or Native Alaskan, Pacific Islander, and those participants who responded that they were more than one race were combined because of their small numbers and coded as “Other Race”. There were two Hispanic options, “Hispanic, no race specified” and “Hispanic, race specified”. These were combined to create a response category coded “Hispanic”. This was done under the belief that “Hispanic” was the lens through which many would interact with the student and therefore inform their odds of suspension. The remaining three variable values are coded “Asian”, “Black”, and “White”.

4.6 ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER STATUS

ELL status is the second factor central to this study. The ELL variable asks the respondent whether they have ever been in an ELL program prior to High School. This variable's, five categories (Yes, No, Missing Responses, Unit Non-Response, Do Not Know) were recoded to include only three precisely as it was for the ELL variable above. Again, those respondents who answered, “Do not know” were removed from the analysis, as a “Yes” or “No” response is needed to contribute to the analysis. One is coded as “Yes” meaning that the respondent was in an ELL program at a time, 0 is coded as “No” meaning that the respondent was never in an ELL program. The category of

“System Missing” includes the missing responses, unit non-responses, and response not needed.

4.7 POVERTY

The dataset provides two variables indicating whether the respondent’s family was at/above or below the 2008 and 2011 poverty threshold as set forth by the U.S. Census Bureau. Family income and household size were considered when calculating whether a family is at/above or below the poverty threshold. The two variables were combined into one variable, which indicates whether the respondents have ever been below the poverty threshold during their time in high school. The variable has three categories (At or Above Poverty Threshold, Below Poverty Threshold, and Unit Non-Response). One is coded as “At or above poverty threshold”, and 0 is coded as “Below poverty threshold”. “System Missing” includes the unit non-response category.

4.8 GENDER

A variable provided by the dataset indicates the gender of the respondents. The variable includes two categories. One is coded as “Females” and 0 is coded as “Males”. There is no missing data as the variable is based on student questionnaire, parent questionnaire, and/or school-provided sampling roster.

4.9 ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Due to the dependent variables in all models being dichotomous, I used logistic regression to conduct my analysis. Model one tests my first and second hypotheses. The first hypothesis being that racial and ethnic minority students have a higher likelihood and risk of suspension when compared to their White counterparts, and my second hypothesis being that any student with ELL status have a higher likelihood and risk of

being suspended when compared to non-ELL students. To test the first model, I regress race on the suspension variable. Then, I controlled for gender and poverty status. I then regress ELL on the suspension variable, and control for gender and poverty status.

Afterwards, I regress the interaction of ELL status and race on suspension and control for gender and poverty status. Model two tests my third hypothesis, being that when intersecting race/ethnicity with ELL status, ELL students of different racial and ethnic groups might be treated more unfairly than others and suspended at different rates. To test Model two, I followed a similar procedure as in Model one. I regress the variable that combined race and ELL status on the suspension variable, and then I controlled for gender and poverty status.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND SAMPLE COMPARISONS

Table 1 shows the variation in suspension rates across the factors of gender, race, ELL status, and poverty. By conducting a simple analysis, results show that a total of 1,554 students, or 10.8%, were subjected to a form of school suspension. When separating by gender, male students' risk of suspension is 80% higher than female students' risk of suspension.

Within the five racial and ethnic groups, Black students were found to have 2.2 times the risk of suspension when compared to White students' risk of suspension. Hispanic students' risk of suspension is 1.58 times the risk of suspension for White students. Students in the "Other" racial/ethnic group have a risk of suspension that is 1.4 times the risk of suspension for White students. When compared to all of the racial and ethnic groups, students in the Asian racial group have the least risk of suspension. White students are three times as likely as Asian students to be suspended.

ELL status does have an effect on the risk of a student being suspended from school. The risk of suspension for a student with ELL status is 20% higher than a non-ELL student. Students in the Asian, White, and Hispanic racial and ethnic groups have an increased risk of being suspended if they have ELL status. As previously stated, students in the Asian racial group have the least risk to be suspended when compared to all other racial and ethnic groups. However, when separating the Asian racial group by ELL status, analysis show that the risk of suspension for Asian students with ELL status is 2.5 times the risk of suspension for non-ELL Asian students. White ELL students' risk of

suspension is 1.5 times the risk of suspension for White non-ELL students. Within the Hispanic ethnic group, ELL students' risk of suspension is 1.1 times the risk of suspension for non-ELL Hispanic students. When focusing solely on a student's race or ethnicity, Black students have the greatest risk of suspension compared to all other racial and ethnic groups. By separating students in the racial and ethnic groups by ELL status, analysis shows that the risk of suspension lessens slightly for Black students with ELL status. Black non-ELL students' risk of suspension is 2% higher than Black ELL students. Students in the "Other" racial group have the same likelihood of being suspended regardless of ELL status.

Analysis of the relationship between poverty status and suspension show that students who are below the poverty line have a risk of suspension that is 2.4 times the risk of suspension for students at or above the poverty line. Furthermore, the risk of a student living in poverty is greater for all minority racial and ethnic groups compared to the White students. Students in the Hispanic ethnic group were found to have the greatest risk of living below the poverty line amongst the other racial groups when compared to the risk of living below the poverty line for White students. Hispanic students' risk of living in poverty is 2.7 times the risk of living in poverty for White students.

At first glance, Table 1 shows that race/ethnicity, ELL status, gender, and poverty effect suspension rates. In order to analyze whether these effects on suspension rates are statistically significant, and to control for the impacts of poverty on suspension I conducted a logistic regression analysis using the two models.

5.2 LOGISTIC REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Model one analyzes the associations between the probability of suspension and race while controlling the factors of ELL status, gender, and poverty status. Then, in Model two, race is modelled to interact with ELL status in order to analyze whether the effects of race vary by the effect ELL status has. Model one tests my first and second hypotheses. The first hypothesis being that racial and ethnic minority students have a higher likelihood and risk of suspension when compared to their White counterparts, and my second hypothesis being that any student with ELL status have a higher likelihood and risk of being suspended when compared to non-ELL students. Model two tests my third hypothesis, being that when intersecting race and ethnicity with ELL status, ELL students of different racial and ethnic groups might be treated more unfairly than others and suspended at different rates.

On the probability of being suspended, Model One suggests that all variables, except for ELL status, are significantly related to the rate of suspension for the cases in this study (p values $< .05$). When conducting a test of significance, both gender and poverty status are statistically significant, as the p values are less than 0.05 ($p < 0.001$). However, ELL status has a p value that is greater than 0.05 (0.334). Due to this, I have failed to reject the null hypothesis, meaning there is not a statistically significant relationship between ELL status and the probability of suspension. This could be because the effect of ELL status on suspension varies across racial and ethnic groups, but in examination of the full sample, there is no effect.

In Model One, there are statistically significant differences between racial groups in suspension. The reference group for race in this model is White students. It has been

examined in prior studies that race has an effect on the probability of a students being suspended from school. Therefore, it is important to analyze the effect race has on suspensions separately from the factors of ELL status, gender, and poverty status. To analyze these differences, I converted the coefficients in the logistic regression of Model One to odds ratios through exponentiation ($\exp[b]$). The odds ratio (OR) represents the factor change in odds of suspension for students in each racial group compared to the reference group (Szumilas 2010). For instance, an odds ratio would indicate the odds of suspension for that racial group are two times the odds of suspension for the reference group. To interpret the odds ratio, I found the percent change in odds with the following equation: $(OR - 1)/1 \times 100$, which describe Black students have the highest odds of suspension when compared to all other racial and ethnic groups. In other words, Black students have the highest odds of being suspended out of the other racial/ethnic groups when compared to White students. For Black students, the odds of suspension is 117% higher when compared to White students ($z=9.70, p < .05$). In other words, the odds of suspension for Black students are more than double the odds of suspension for white students. There is a 37% increase in odds of suspension for students in the Hispanic ethnic group ($z=4.59, p < .05$), and a 36% increase in odds of suspension for students in the “Other” racial category ($z=3.52, p < .05$) when compared to the odds of suspension for White students. Asian students have the lowest odds of being subjected to school suspension compared to all racial and ethnic groups. In fact, the odds of suspension have a decrease of 17% for Asian students ($z= -6.14, p < .05$) when compared to White students.

To further analyze the independent effects of race on suspension, I utilized the regression equation to estimate predicted probabilities of suspensions for students in each racial group and ELL status (see Table 3). For Model One, I analyzed the probability of suspension across the racial and ethnic groups, but importantly, Model One does not allow race and ELL status to interact. However, in Model Two, this interaction is permitted and I analyzed the probability of suspension across the racial and ethnic groups while allowing there to be an additional the ELL penalty (i.e., race and ELL status interact).

The probabilities found in Model One show that when focusing on non-ELL students, the probability of being suspended is still the highest for students in the Black racial group, and students in the Asian racial group have the lowest probability of being suspended. Black students have a probability of suspension equal to .39, meaning that 39 of 100 Black students were suspended. Students in the Hispanic and “Other” racial group have similar probabilities of being suspended. Hispanic students have probability of suspension equal to .29, while students in the “Other” racial group have a probability of suspension equal to .28. The two groups to have the lowest probability of being suspended are the White and Asian racial groups. White students have a probability of suspension equal to .22, and for Asian students, the probability of suspension is equal to .06.

Model Two allows for ELL status and race to interact, meaning the effect of ELL status on suspension rates depends on race (and vice versa). In Model One, when ELL was not interacting with race, analysis shows that ELL status does not have a statistically significant effect on suspension rates. However, when examining the effect of ELL status

across racial groups, ELL status does have influence on the rate of suspension for students of certain racial groups. To analyze whether the influence ELL status has on suspension rates across the racial and ethnic groups is statistically significant, I added product term variables to Model Two. The race/ethnicity coefficients in Model Two represent the differences between each racial/ethnic group, and White students for non-ELL students only. The ELL coefficient represents the ELL penalty, only for White students. Then, the product term coefficients allow the ELL penalty to vary for each racial and ethnic group. These coefficients quantify the difference in the ELL penalty for each racial/ethnic group compared to the White racial group ELL penalty.

Like Model One, the effects of race and ELL status were examined using predicted probabilities. Among White students, non-ELL students have a 22% chance of being suspended, while White ELL students have a 31% chance of being suspended. With that being said, the ELL penalty for White students is statistically significant and increases the probability of suspension by 0.9 ($b=.46$, $z=2.17$, $p<.05$). Students in the Asian racial group have the second highest ELL penalty. Asian non-ELL students have a 6% chance of being suspended, whereas Asian ELL students have a 12% chance of being suspended. Though ELL status increases the probability of suspension by 0.06, this was not statistically significant ($b=.32$, $z=.76$, $p>.05$). When focusing on Black students, there is no ELL penalty. Black non-ELL students have a 39% chance of being suspended, and Black ELL students have a 38% chance ($b=-.49$, $z=-1.33$, $p>.05$). The same result applies to students in the Hispanic and “Other” racial/ethnic group. For Hispanic students, the ELL penalty is 2% ($b=-.55$, $z=-2.16$, $p<.05$, statistically significant). Then, for students in the “Other” racial/ethnic group, the ELL penalty is 0.5% ($b=-.48$, $z=-$

1.08, $p > .05$, not statistically significant). The ELL penalty applies only to Asian and White students.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

Across the United States, students are being denied the opportunity to attend school through the application of suspension. Many studies focus on what types of students are being suspended the most. Data from such studies indicates that there are disproportionate numbers of students from low-socioeconomic status, male students, and racial/ethnic minority students that are receiving school suspension (Skiba et al. 2011; Heitzeg 2009; Barile et al. 2012). The perception exists that students from certain racial and ethnic backgrounds misbehave disproportionately to White students, and contribute in creating an unsafe school environments (Skiba et al. 2011).

When examining the effect of ELL status across racial groups, ELL status does have influence on the rate of suspension for students of the White and Asian racial groups. For Black students, the rate of suspension is nearly the same despite ELL status. *Antiblackness* is the socially constructed rendering of Black people as being inhuman, disposable, and problematic, which endures in U.S. K-12 schools, colleges, universities, and in the general United States society (Warren and Coles 2020). Critical Race Theory describes from multiple perspectives the ways that racism is premised upon keeping Black people at the bottom of the racial order (Bell 1992). Sustaining the United State's racial order can help explain why there is not an ELL penalty for Black students. The racial order is set to hold Black people at the bottom. If an individual's skin color is Black, U.S. society will group them together in the Black racial category, and no other factor such as ELL status matters, only skin color (Bell 1992; Coles & Warren 2020).

The literature referenced school factors that mitigate the impact of negative student behaviors. When comparing schools with high and low suspension rates, Skiba and Knesting (2002) found low-suspension schools were more effectively able to monitor school climate, attend to a high level of academic quality, promote teacher-student relationships, and spend less time on disciplinary issues than high suspension schools. Research further notes school characteristics, including teacher attitude, teacher perception of student achievement, and the racial/ethnic composition of the school as stronger predictors of school suspension rates when compared with student attitudes and student behavior (Skiba & Knesting 2002).

In summary, the literature supported this study's conceptual framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT). Although CRT in education focuses on race and racism, it also seeks to investigate how racism intersects with other manifestations of oppression, such as English-language status. CRT combined with Intersectionality supports the notion that ELL students of different racial and ethnic groups may be treated more unfairly than others. When focusing on school suspension, CRT suggests that suspension as a school discipline help expose how mainstream schools in the United States promote racism through certain school designs that privilege those of the dominant race by ignoring and denying how racism shapes the lives of marginalized students (Knaus 2009).

This study, like previous studies, examined what types of students were being suspended. A student's race and/or ethnicity does seem to be a factor that leads to suspension. However, this study went one step further by also investigating whether English Language Learner (ELL) status effect suspension rates. The following research question was addressed:

1. How does the use of disciplinary action vary by student characteristics (e.g. race, gender, poverty status, and English Language Learner status)?

This research question relied on descriptive statistics that explored the demographics of students that are suspended, and logistic regression analysis to find how the predictor variables may predict the odds that a student will be subjected to suspension. The conceptual framework of this study suggested a relationship between ELL status and suspension rates. The data analysis yielded information that did support this study's framework.

After conducting a simple analysis and logistic regression analysis, data from this study are consistent with earlier studies, and indicates that the practice of school suspension may widen the racial/ethnic and economic barriers that already exist in United States society. When analyzing the descriptive statistics, logistic regression, and conducting a test of significance, it was found that the variables of race/ethnicity, gender, and poverty have an effect on the risk and odds of suspension and was statistically significant predictors of the dependent variable. Black students were found to have the greatest risk and odds of suspension compared to the other racial/ethnic groups. Black students have 2.2 times the risk of suspension when compared to White students' risk of suspension. The odds of suspension for Black students are 117% higher when compared to White students. When compared to all of the racial and ethnic groups, students in the Asian racial group have the least risk and odds of suspension. White students are three times as likely as Asian students to be suspended. The odds of suspension have a decrease of 17% for Asian students. Additionally, male students' risk of suspension is 80% higher than female students' risk of suspension, and students from low

socioeconomic backgrounds have a risk of suspension that is 2.4 times the risk of suspension for students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

When conducting a simple analysis, descriptive statistics for the ELL variable show that ELL status does have an effect on the risk of a student being suspended from school. The risk of suspension for a student with ELL status is 20% higher than a non-ELL student. When interacting the variables of ELL and race/ethnicity, analysis show that students in the Asian, White, and Hispanic racial and ethnic groups have an increased risk of being suspended if they have ELL status. Students in the Asian racial group have the least risk to be suspended when compared to all other racial and ethnic groups. However, when separating the Asian racial group by ELL status, analysis show that the risk of suspension for Asian students with ELL status is 2.5 times the risk of suspension for non-ELL Asian students. White ELL students' risk of suspension is 1.5 times the risk of suspension for White non-ELL students.

When interacting ELL status and race/ethnicity in Model Two an ELL penalty is created. An ELL penalty is the increase in the probability of suspension, and it is significant for the White and Asian racial groups. The ELL penalty increases the probability of suspension for White students by 9%, and 6% for Asian students.

6.1 LIMITATIONS

By incorporating data from *High School Longitudinal Study, 2009-2013 [United States]* (HSL:09), a number of advantages have come from it, the greatest being the use of a large, nationally representative sample. Nonetheless, there are important study limitations. Speculations can be made as to what may have contributed to the lack of statistically significant findings concerning suspension rates. The lack of meaningful

findings may have been a result of methodological limitations, including, the limited number of students who answered the survey questions found in the *High School Longitudinal Study, 2009-2013 [United States]*, and the variability in how schools reported discipline offenses. As schools are mandated to report out-of-school suspension data, this study relied on the discipline data found in the HSLs:09 study.

As schools are mandated to report out-of-school suspension data, this study relied on the discipline data in the HSLs:09 database as accurate and did not take measures to question the data's reliability. While schools are mandated to report suspensions for certain offenses, schools have discretion in how they define student behaviors that result in suspensions and in how they report these offenses. Furthermore, schools have discretion in determining sanctions for offenses. Accordingly, one school may render a consequence of out-of-school suspension for a defiant behavior while another may opt for multiple days of in-school suspension. In-school suspensions are not required to be reported, and therefore, in-school suspension data is more difficult to access to the public.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Though there are many studies that analyze the racial/ethnic disparities and racism in school discipline, there are few studies that have focused primarily on English Language Learner status to analyze the potential gaps in school suspension. The current study added to this literature by disentangling race and ethnicity from ELL status, and analyzing the implications of each factor on exclusionary discipline actions towards students.

Critical Race Theory describes from multiple perspectives the ways that racism is premised upon keeping people of minority races and ethnicities at the bottom of the racial order (Bell 1992). This study found that ELL status across racial groups does have influence on the rate of suspension for students. Sustaining the United States' racial order can help explain why there is not an ELL penalty for Black students, as well as students in the Hispanic and Other racial/ethnic group, but there is an ELL penalty for students of the Asian and White racial group. The racial order is set to hold minority people below the dominant White race. If an individual's skin color is a darker shade than White, if they are living in poverty, or if an individual speaks a language other than English, U.S. society will group them together in a category other than White, and they will face discrimination in different aspects in life (Bell 1992; Wallace Jr. et al. 2008; Heitzeg 2009; Blake et al. 2010; Farmer 2010; Osher et al. 2010; Skiba et al. 2011; Busby et al. 2013; Blake et al. 2016; Reyes and Villarreal 2016; Anderson and Ritter 2017; Blake et al. 2017, Coles & Warren 2020).

In the field of education, Critical Race Theory challenges the ways race, racism, class and gender impact educational structures, practices, and discourses that subordinate students of color (Delgado Bernal 2002; Yosso 2005). For future purposes, school administrators should examine the consistency of discipline practices within their school to ensure their policies around student behavior are consistently addressed. Educational practitioners, including teachers, school administrators, and school division administrators might consider professional development that helps to align behaviors that promote variability in response to student behaviors. The collective understanding of experiences that inform teacher's beliefs and perceptions of students might mitigate variability in staff behavior. Professional development that helps to promote the disabling of personal biases and perceptions teacher's have might aid in explicating the decision-making process and factors that lead to variability in decision-making relative to student behaviors. A staff's awareness of their collective beliefs and personal biases, along with literature that explains the impact collective teacher biases have on student achievement, may help educational practitioners to make decisions about how to organize their resources to make a positive impact on their students.

Teachers' beliefs and perceptions around their students should be known by the school in order to develop strategies to prevent biased exclusionary practices. This practice will try to prevent the criminalization of students based on the way they look. Teachers, counselors, and other school administrators should be trained not only to identify special needs in the students, but to address them in order to avoid the misunderstanding of actions that can be related to the limitations of the student and not to an action of misconduct.

Disciplinary issues in schools should be observed by a race-conscious approach, but also a socioeconomic-conscious approach. This approach encourage us to not think about race/ethnicity as the only way to explain all the inequalities happening around minority students, and moves us to a level of thinking where race/ethnicity, along with other aspects in their lives (i.e. poverty, ELL status), need to be addressed in order to understand the way students behave and how schools respond to certain behaviors.

Suspending students in response to misbehavior is a common consequence in public schools (Skiba & Knesting 2002). A socioeconomic and race-conscious approach could be a step in the right direction to stop the criminalization of minority students in schools, and the perpetuation of a cycle of failure for those who are more likely to be suspended in virtue of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, or for the case of this research, their English Language Learner status.

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LIST OF TABLES

| TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND SAMPLE COMPARISONS | | | | |
|--|----------|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Total Sample Size = 14,328 | | | | |
| Variable <i>Category</i> | N | Percentage of total sample | Number within category Suspended | Percentage within category suspended |
| Race | | | | $\chi^2 = 244.78, p < 0.001$ |
| <i>White</i> | 8,288 | 57.8% | 758 | 9.1% |
| <i>Black</i> | 1,359 | 9.5% | 271 | 29.9% |
| <i>Hispanic</i> | 2,216 | 15.5% | 319 | 14.4% |
| <i>Asian</i> | 1,088 | 7.6% | 32 | 2.9% |
| <i>Other</i> | 1,377 | 9.6% | 174 | 12.6% |
| ELL Status | | | | $\chi^2 = 3.98, p < 0.05$ |
| <i>ELL</i> | 1,125 | 7.8% | 142 | 12.6% |
| <i>Non-ELL</i> | 13,203 | 92.2% | 1,412 | 10.7% |
| Gender | | | | $\chi^2 = 128.06, p < 0.001$ |
| <i>Male</i> | 7,140 | 49.8% | 985 | 13.8% |
| <i>Female</i> | 7,188 | 50.2% | 569 | 7.9% |
| Economically disadvantaged? | | | | $\chi^2 = 290.07, p < 0.001$ |
| <i>Yes</i> | 2,133 | 14.9% | 457 | 21.4% |
| <i>No</i> | 12,195 | 85.1% | 1,097 | 9.0% |

TABLE 2: LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL PREDICTING LOG ODDS OF IN-SCHOOL & OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPENSION—ADDITIVE EFFECTS OF RACE & ELL STATUS
Total Sample Size = 14,328

| Variable <i>Category</i> | Coefficient | Standard Error | z-statistic | p-value |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Race | | | | |
| <i>White</i> | ^a | - | - | - |
| <i>Black</i> | 0.777 | 0.079 | 9.72 | <0.001 |
| <i>Hispanic</i> | 0.316 | 0.077 | 4.06 | <0.001 |
| <i>Asian</i> | -1.25 | 0.186 | -6.75 | <0.001 |
| <i>Other</i> | 0.310 | 0.090 | 3.41 | 0.001 |
| ELL Status | | | | |
| <i>Non-ELL Student</i> | ^a | - | - | - |
| <i>ELL student</i> | 0.100 | 0.103 | 0.97 | 0.334 |
| Gender | | | | |
| <i>Male</i> | ^a | - | - | - |
| <i>Female</i> | -0.642 | 0.056 | -11.36 | <0.001 |
| Economic Disadvantage | | | | |
| <i>Above poverty line</i> | ^a | - | - | - |
| <i>Below poverty line</i> | 0.923 | 0.064 | 14.37 | <0.001 |
| Constant | -2.149 | 0.045 | -47.46 | <0.001 |

Note: *High School Longitudinal Study, 2009-2013 [United States] (HSL:09)*

^a Reference Group for the variable

Model Fit Statistics: Likelihood Ratio $\chi^2 = 571.33$, $p < 0.001$, Pseudo $R^2 = 0.0581$

TABLE 3: PREDICTED PROBABILITIES OF
SUSPENSION BASED ON MODEL ONE

Total sample size = 14,328

| Group | Probability |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| White, Non-ELL | 22.7 |
| White, ELL | 24.5 |
| Black, Non-ELL | 38.9 |
| Black, ELL | 41.4 |
| Hispanic, Non-ELL | 28.7 |
| Hispanic, ELL | 30.8 |
| Asian, Non-ELL | 7.7 |
| Asian, ELL | 8.4 |
| Other, Non-ELL | 28.6 |
| Other, ELL | 30.7 |

TABLE 4: LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL PREDICTING LOG ODDS OF IN-SCHOOL & OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPENSION—INTERACTIVE EFFECTS OF RACE & ELL STATUS

Total Sample Size = 14,328

| Variable <i>Category</i> | Coefficient | Standard Error | z-statistic | p-value |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Race | | | | |
| <i>Black</i> | 0.795 | 0.081 | 9.70 | <0.001 |
| <i>Hispanic</i> | 0.375 | 0.081 | 4.59 | <0.001 |
| <i>Asian</i> | -1.486 | 0.242 | -6.14 | <0.001 |
| <i>Other</i> | 0.327 | 0.092 | 3.52 | <0.001 |
| ELL Status | | | | |
| <i>ELL Student</i> | 0.456 | 0.210 | 2.17 | 0.030 |
| Product Term Coefficients | | | | |
| <i>Black x ELL</i> | -0.491 | 0.369 | -1.33 | 0.183 |
| <i>Hispanic x ELL</i> | -0.550 | 0.255 | -2.16 | 0.031 |
| <i>Asian x ELL</i> | 0.321 | 0.421 | 0.76 | 0.446 |
| <i>Other x ELL</i> | -0.482 | 0.447 | -1.08 | 0.280 |
| Gender | | | | |
| <i>Female</i> | -0.642 | 0.056 | -11.36 | <0.001 |
| Economic Disadvantage | | | | |
| Constant | 0.924 | 0.064 | 14.39 | <0.001 |
| Constant | -2.160 | 0.045 | -47.16 | <0.001 |

Note: *High School Longitudinal Study, 2009-2013 [United States]* (HSLs:09)

^a Reference group for the variable

Race coefficients represent difference between each racial group and white students for non-ELL students.

ELL coefficient represents difference between ELL & Non-ELL students for white students only.

Product term coefficients represent the difference in the ELL status coefficient for each racial group (Effect of ELL varies by racial group as = ELL status + product term coefficient for each racial group).

Model Fit Statistics: Likelihood Ratio $\chi^2 = 579.44$, $p < 0.001$, Pseudo $R^2 = 0.0589$

TABLE 5: PREDICTED PROBABILITIES
OF SUSPENSION BASED ON MODEL
TWO

Total sample size = 14,328

| Group | Probability |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| White, Non-ELL | 22.5 |
| White, ELL | 31.4 |
| Black, Non-ELL | 39.2 |
| Black, ELL | 38.3 |
| Hispanic, Non-ELL | 29.7 |
| Hispanic, ELL | 27.8 |
| Asian, Non-ELL | 6.2 |
| Asian, ELL | 12.5 |
| Other, Non-ELL | 28.7 |
| Other, ELL | 28.2 |